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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE HAMI KINGDOM (cc. 1389-1513)¹

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I

One of the most striking features of Central Asia is the extreme diversity of ethnic groups and the complexity of cultural traits. This phenomenon is not limited only to the present day, but it can also be found throughout the history of this region. As is well known, this region had been inhabited in ancient times by the Indo-European speaking peoples who were the followers of Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Buddhism. Nowadays however, these people no longer seem to exist, except for a small number of groups called the Tajiks. This is because they were swept away, or rather absorbed, by the Turkic peoples.

The Turks were already in the vicinity of the Tian shan and the Altai ranges in the sixth century, but the massive immigration of the Uighurs began from the middle of the 9th century after the fall of their nomadic empire in Mongolia. The Uighurs had adopted Manichaeism as their national religion although it was later suppressed. However, after they moved down to the Hexi corridor and the Turfan basin, they became ardent followers of Buddhism.

Once the Arabs had arrived on the bank of the Amu Darya, their military penetration was quite swift and in the middle of the 8th century, at the Talas River, they defeated the Tang army commanded by GAO Xianzhi, who was of Korean origin. With the shift of political balance, Islam expanded to Western as well as Eastern Turkestan, although not as rapidly as military victory.

During the period of the Qarakhanids we see the strong influence of Islam in the legend of Satuq Boghra Khan's conversion, and in the works of Mahmud Kashghari and Yusuf Khass Hajib. When the Mongols invaded, the sedentary population of Central Asia was mostly Muslim. The conquerors could but recognize religious freedom for the sake of political stability, and finally they themselves became Muslims.

¹ The author was not able to revise this paper for publishing (except for minor changes)

The boundary between the Muslims and the Buddhists in the 13th to 15th centuries was around Turfan and Hami, the principal cities in the so called Uyghur Region (today is officially Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). The travelogues of Marco Polo (latter half of the 13th century) Chen Cheng and Giyath al Din (beginning of the 15th century) confirm this fact. In this sense the Uyghur Region was the last stand of Central Asian Buddhism. However, within a century, i.e. by the early 16th century, this region became the land of Muslims and has remained so up to modern times. This religious change in Uyghur Region was closely related to the destiny of the Hami Kingdom which lasted ca. 1389 to 1513; since with the destruction of the Kingdom there were no grounds for Buddhism to remain in the region.

However, the history of the Hami Kingdom has been very poorly researched; its origin is vague and its political relations with other surrounding countries are confused. Since I only have a limited amount of time, I shall not present the whole development of its history. I will focus on the beginning and the end of this kingdom, and this will throw light on a critical moment in the pre-modern history of Central Asia.

My aim is not limited only to showing you the result of my research on the little known history of the Hami Kingdom. By illustrating the rise and fall of this kingdom I also hope to emphasize the characteristic features of the Central Asian oasis states: the primacy of external forces in their political vicissitudes and the close interrelationship between various aspects of Central Eurasian history.

II

The founder of the Hami Kingdom was a Chinggisid prince named Gunashiri. According to Ming Veritable Records (Ming shi lu) he had been wandering in the west of Karakorum after the murder of a Northern Yuan emperor Tögüs Temür, but he suddenly appeared in Hami in 1389 and claimed himself king. Why and how did he come down to Hami from Mongolia? We have a unique source which can help answer this question, the Sino Barbasian Glossaries (Huaiyiyi) compiled by the order of Hungwu, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty. These contain a letter (Mongolian in Chinese transcription, like the Secret History of the Mongols) sent by two Mongol nobles named Engke Tura and Namun giiregen ("son in law"). In the letter they asked him to help them invite Gunashiri, the future Hami King, to their country by way of Hami, so that they could enthrone him. Now, the question is: Who were they and where was their "country"? Until now scholars have assumed that they

were Mongol nobility from the vicinity of Sha zhou area (present Dunhuang). However I personally doubt this to be true and should like to propose another solution.

It would be too long to present the detailed analysis here, so I will just give you my conclusion and some elements leading up to it. The two famous Timurid sources (Zafar names written in Persian by Shami and Yazdi describing Timur's conquest of Moghulistan) described Engke Tura (in various transcriptions such as Ank Tura, Anke Tura, Anka Tura; etc.) as Timur's arch enemy. In addition, another Persian source; Muntakhab al tavarikh by Mu'in al din Natanzi; lists the names of the two chiefs in the same line of the text. There is no doubt that these two people mentioned in the Persian sources are the same two who sent the letter to the Emperor Hong wu, and that they were Moghul tribal chiefs belonging to the Erkenüt tribe.

The Moghuls were "nomadizing" at that time towards the north of the Tian shan. I was able to locate these chiefs more specifically. Zafar nama by Yazdi writes that Engke Tura's yurt was at Qara Tal to the south of the Balkhash lake (Semisechye) . The above mentioned letter ends with a phrase indicating that it was written when they were at Qaradel. Qara Tal and Qaradel are in fact the same place, but because of the peculiarity of the Uighur scripts "tal" was changed into "del" (like Bagh Temur into Baghdemur). Thus there is no reason for us to believe that they were around Dunhuang.

Now there is another question: Why did Gunashiri stop at Hami, instead of proceeding to Semirechye? The explanation probably comes from events happening on the inviters' side. Indeed, at that time the Moghuls were in great trouble; the Khan had been murdered and Timur had sent armies several times. It was urgent for Moghul chiefs to enthrone a Chinggisid in order to consolidate the tribal people, so they invited Gunashiri, a descendant of Chaghatay, from Mongolia. However, since the northern route, the Steppe route, was closed by the Oirats (the Western Mongols) who occupied the Altai region, Gunashiri could but use the southern route passing through Hami. This route was under the control of the Ming dynasty, so they sent a letter to the emperor asking for his cooperation. Unfortunately, right after they had sent the letter, Timur launched a grand scale campaign against the Moghuls, during which the Erkenut tribe was completely destroyed. As a result there was no need for Gunashiri, who had by this time reached Hami, to continue his journey. All the surrounding external powers were involved in this process, including the Moghuls, the Timurids, the Mongols and the Chinese. It is really remarkable how the histories of all these people of the continent converge into one

single event in the small city of Hami. The fall of the Hami Kingdom later provides a similar example of such an event.

III

In the year 1513, a Moghul khan named Masur stormed into the city of Hami and put an end to the Kingdom. From then on the Ming Dynasty completely lost all control beyond the Jia yu guan pass and Buddhism finally retreated from Uyghur Region. To understand fully how this happened, we should first take into consideration the internal situation of Hami.

The population of Hami, at the end of the 14th century, was divided into three groups: Uighurs (basically Buddhists), Huis (Muslims) and Qaraqoys (originating from the Mongols). Although there were not many Muslims at first, the number gradually increased. I believe that there were three factors contributing to this increase; the active role of Muslims as international merchants and envoys, the activities of Sufi mystics, and finally the increasing pressure from the Islamic Moghuls. It is especially interesting to note that the famous Nagshbandis came to Uyghur Region very late, almost at the end of the 15th century, and that the Yesevis and the Katakis (a local tariqa) were more active before them. With the widening of the internal division, the basis of the king's power became weaker and more and more dependent upon external forces.

It was the Ming dynasty which at first exercised strong influence on the Kingdom. The emperor Yong lo made Hami a "commandant" (wei) and bestowed upon its ruler the title of "Loyal and Obedient King" (zhong shun wang). However, after the death of Yung lo, the Ming could not continue their aggressive policy because this caused too much economic burden on the country. Thus, it was the Oirats who took over the hegemony; they not only took control of the Silk Road, but also invaded China and captured the emperor. However, when Esen, the notorious Oirat chief, was killed by his followers, the Oirat confederation collapsed. After that it was the Moghuls who were pushing towards the east.

At first the eastern frontier of the Moghul khanate reached only Turfan which was controlled indirectly through indigenous chieftains. Later the Moghul khanate brought Turf an under more direct control, causing the massive emigration of the Buddhists into the territory of China. The next target of the khanate was Hami, which they invaded and took over several times. However, upon the request of the Ming court the Moghul khanate gave the city back,

putting it directly at the disposal of the Ming. Then they used this as an opportunity to gain better conditions in their tributary relations with China.

At the beginning of the 16th century however, the Moghuls suddenly undertook a change of policy; they conquered Hami again and this time they were never to return it. What was the reason behind this change? I suggest that it was caused by a new political situation in Inner Asia. The Khirghiz, who had been living on the upper Yenissei River, moved southwards and took possession of the pasture land to the north of Tian shan. This area had been the homeland of the Moghuls, but the latter were unable to oppose resistance to the new competitors because they were divided into two groups and considerably weakened by internal rebellions.

The eastern khanate of the Moghuls, led by Mansur Khan, lost the north of Tian shan and the west of Kucha. Qara khoja (Chalish) and Turf an, which had been frontier cities, now became central places. Mansur, who could not expand his territory either to the north or to the west, had only one possibility, to turn to the east. Hami was at this time torn by dissension and there was no external power to stop him. He conquered Hami in 1514 and took it permanently. He started a "Holy war" against China, raiding Suzhou and Ganzhou. This was the end of the Hami Kingdom.

The rise and fall of the hami Kingdom show us the extreme fragility of oasis states on the Silk Roads. This fragility in my view, comes from (i) the insufficiency of natural resources (water and agricultural), (ii) the limited population and (iii) the inadequacy of communication. These three factors made political and economic integration among the oasis states very difficult, and it is the reason why we rarely see the case of a strong and united indigenous state in the history of the Tarim basin. As Lattimore pointed out earlier, a common religion and culture may have worked as a cohesive power compensating this political and economic disintegration.

Considering the internal weakness of Central Asian cities, it is not at all surprising that they had been the prey of outside powers, and that their political vicissitudes had largely depended on the changes of balance of international power. Nonetheless, as I have shown above through the case of the Hami Kingdom, the relationship between oasis states and the outside forces was not one-dimensional (i.e. one to one relation). Rather, it involved a very complex and multidimensional relationship. In this sense, we can say that Central Asia has

not only been the meeting place of eastern and western cultures, but also the point of confluence of diverse streams of Eurasian history.

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