

THROUGH STEPPE TO KARAKORUM

Travelling in the Mongol Empire¹

M I C H A L H O L E Š Č Á K 

Mongol Empire and its warriors swept through the Eurasian steppe belt from the east to the west, establishing a vast empire stretching through the big part of Eurasian continent. This vast distance was traversed by many individuals, from soldiers, messengers and merchants to foreign ambassadors, trying to contact the most powerful political player in the region. From the written sources of these foreign visitors and the local sources and chronicles, we get the image of how the everyday travel was organized, consisting of the line of stations that served to exchange horses and provide food and accommodation, established in a firm way by the Great Khan Ögedei. From the western sources, mainly the two travellers, John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, who left their narrative notes on their travel in written form, it is possible to see the development and evolution of this system. Both travellers got to Karakorum, passing nearly the whole Eurasian Steppe belt, stretching from the Lower Danube to the Mongolian plane and gave the description of an everyday life on the road, the specific ways of transportation but also characteristics of the horse, their look and behaviour, as well as riding equipment used by the Mongols, that can be traced in the archaeological sources from this region.

Keywords: Mongol Empire, travel, horse, riding equipment.

INTRODUCTION

Medieval Mongols were known for two things: archery and horsemanship. Similar to other contemporary nomads, they honed these skills since young age, both boys and girls. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Mongols spent their life in a saddle of a horse. Horses played very important factor in the military expansion, fact that was widely reflected by the contemporary authors as well as modern scientists, describing the Mongol cavalry subjugating the nations from China to the Lower Danube under their hooves and creating the largest Medieval Empire (Pow 2018). To analyse the whole scope of the steppe nomad horse husbandry culture, horse genetics or their usage in warfare and subsistence strategy would take a space of number of monographs. This article is dealing with one aspect: travelling on horseback through the vast Empire, described in the Mongol and European written sources and how it can be possibly mirrored in the archaeological material.

One of the most detailed narrative accounts of the Mongol society is the Secret history of the Mongols, describing ascendance of Temüjin to the title of Chinggis Khan and his successor Ögedei, also including a number of details from the everyday

life of Mongols in the 13th c. (Onon 2001). Second internal source is Ata-Malik Juvayni, Persian-born official and chronicler on the court of the Ilkhan Hülegü (Juvayni 1958). Western sources with the most thorough description of the Empire comes from the notes of two clerical missions that got as far as the khan's residence in Karakorum. First traveller was John of Plano Carpini, papal legate sent to the Great Khan. His journey started in the year 1245 in Lyon and through meeting with Batu, ruler of the Ulus of Jochi at Volga, in 1246 came to the vicinity of Karakorum during the Great Kurultai at which Güyük was elected to be the Great Khan, witnessing his formal enthronement (Carpini 1996). Second traveller leaving the account on the travelling though the Mongol Empire was William of Rubruck, sent by the king of France on a christianization mission in the year 1253 during the Seventh Crusade. He started in Constantinople where he met with Baldwin of Hainaut, other diplomatic envoy to Karakorum who unfortunately didn't leave written account about his travels. William continued by boat to Crimea, from where he continued once again through Batu's ordu to Karakorum, where he was received by the Great Khan Möngke, stayed there for a couple of months and returned by a different route to Holy Land in 1255 (William 1990).

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TRAVELLING

During the time of the expansions, Mongolian soldier travelled between fights in a same way as during a regular day. Of course, bearing in mind the specifications of a military march, the simple soldier was supposed to tend for himself in the basic needs, such as saddling the horse and taking care for his grazing. Mongol soldier, as well as common nomad didn't have just one horse, but usually a couple spare ones, following the rider due to their herd instinct. Such cases are described by the eyewitnesses of the Mongol Invasion of Europe (Thomas 2006, 285). Spare horses were kept in close to be able to change them and spread the exhaustion on more animals than just one and keep the speed of the march. In the Secret History of the Mongols, Chinggis Khan give advices how to not damage the horses by arduous ride. Soldiers are to spare their horses and not to let them became too lean, not to hunt wildly in gallop, but organized, and most of all, not to attach the cruppers or tail straps of the saddles when not fighting, not tighten the bridles (Onon 2001, 183, 184). It is also forbidden to strike a horse with a bridle or to lean on a whip (Carpini 1996, 45). Losing the horses due to avoidable circumstances on a military campaign where there was no certainty to obtain new ones, but also simply losing the base economical unit for the common nomad, was certainly a mistake to avoid. John of Plano Carpini (1996, 91) adds that the Mongols leave a horse to rest for three or four days after one day ride. This underlines the notion that each Mongol had at least three or four spare horses accompanying him. William of Rubruck mentions an episode when they encountered a Mongol that nonchalantly approached his herd of grazing horses, picked the strongest one and rode it off to deliver a message (William 1990, 169).

Horse was not the only way of transport, even though certainly the most common one. Friar William started his travel in Crimea with a choice, whether along with riding animals, they would use spare horses or carts pulled by oxen. Ill-advised, he chose the latter, as he was told, that he would have to change the load of the pack horses at each stop. However, this made him to travel at half a speed, as he mentions that the road to Sartaq, son of Batu took him two months instead of one (William 1990, 68). System of such horse exchange stations, called *jam*, is described in vast collection of scientific papers, focusing on one or another region of the Mongol Empire (Shim 2014, with further literature). Even though the scope of this article is not a deep analysis of this system, some remarks that are connected with travelling have to be made. *Jam* was

first formally organized by khan Ögedei, as the old messenger system, which was relying on supplies of food and horses on the nomad camps the rider visited was slow and put an economical stress on local inhabitants needed to be changed and better organized (Atwood 2004, 258). In this prior system, everyone, whether commoner or general, must give the khan's messenger fresh horses and food, as described by John of Plano Carpini. Some probably richer individuals and noble princes already established a few horses that were prepared for such occasions (Carpini 1996, 64–66), but to the less wealthy nomad it could have caused considerable financial loss (Juvayni 1958, 33, 34). On the road, messengers were given fresh horses depending on the habitation of the area. Sometimes they were able to change several times a day, but in the derelict steppe or mountainous regions they had to ride the same animals for two or three days (Carpini 1996, 99, 103). Ögedei thus set up a system of official postal stations, providing fresh horses and food and possible accommodation to the messenger, kept by a professional employee. Although, by mentioning the places where the stations already existed, it seems that some system was started to be built earlier, only without a set rule of running it, possibly from the aforementioned noblemen prepared for the situation of a visiting messenger. Ögedei's brother Chagatai, master of central ulus agreed with the idea and promised to create a line of post stations joining the Great Khans domain with his, urging Batu, lord of the western ulus to do the same (Onon 2001, 275, 276). *Jam* stations had set up quotas for the numbers of postal geldings, mares for milking, sheep as a food source and oxen together with carts they pulled (Onon 2001, 277). One station was according to Juvayni supposed to be responsibility of two *tumens* (20,000 soldiers), which seems not very reliable (Juvayni 1958, 33, 34). Thusly, a line from Karakorum to the western regions of the steppe was firmly established sometime after the Carpini's visit, but before the William of Rubruck, as he already describes the unified system starting east from the Don River. Looks like there were no official *jam* stations west from the Don River, as William is mentioning being given the horses only by the captains of the Tatars in their camps. The small vilage of Rus ferrymen on Don was strictly forbidden to give to the travellers more than only a help with crossing the river (William 1990, 105). The travellers had to walk for a few days before finding a place where they were supplied horses. After that, they travelled from station to station until they reached Sartaq's encampment (William 1990, 110). Word *jam* by itself is although first mentioned by William of Rubruck in the vicinity of this camp, mistakenly

used for the headman instead of the station itself (William 1990, 114). Such a headman had obviously important position, as he was responsible for the smooth delivery of the messages. Ambassadors and their traveling needs were possibly only secondary, as we see in the William of Rubruck's notes, that even the Great Khan knew that it is possible they won't be able to get the best care in some of the stations (William 1990, 250). William also writes about one of the station commanders who tried to send them to the Khan's court by a much longer way, supposedly to show off the power of the Empire to make it looks bigger. This was supposed to be a common practice towards foreign ambassadors (William 1990, 170).

How these stations looked like? It certainly depended on the geographical position. Marco Polo describing the *jam* system writes about big luxurious buildings with well-furnished apartments, suitable even for a king (Komroff 1926, 26), but his accounts must be taken with caution. Stable stone or wooden buildings were possible in the vicinity of permanent settlements, but in the open steppe just the typical yurts or gers with grazing twenty to thirty horses were used, as reported by William (William 1990, 140). According to khan Ögedei, roughly twenty people were assigned to take care for the horses where the new stations were created and exactly twenty people where the stations already existed (Onon 2001, 276). *Jam* stations were also important in the vicinity of the camps of nobility and khans, as not only the messengers were passing through them but also the ambassadors were accommodated here while waiting for the audience. For example, Batu had four stations on the border of his camp in each of the world side, specialized on receiving the travellers coming from that direction. Thus, the various ambassadors can't meet each other, whereas in Karakorum, there was only one central *jam* station for every incoming (William 1990, 183, 184). It seems that it wasn't positioned exactly at the city gates, as William of Rubruck mentions a story about one monk from Jerusalem who complained about everyday bringing the horses and cattle to Karakorum and asked the Khan to move to the church inside the city (William 1990, 251).

Usually, the stations were supposed to be positioned every circa 45 km (Atwood 2004, 258, 259). According to William of Rubruck, they were able to ride a distance between Paris and Orleans in one day (William 1990, 140), which is roughly 125 km nowadays, changing horses on some places twice or three times a day, which would confirm the 45 km distance. However, his distance estimation must be taken with a grain of salt, as he is not extremely sure about it himself. Other William's

remarks for the distance and time travelled ratio weren't firsthand information for sure. According to them the distance between Don and Volga took ten days of journey and from Danube to Don two months (William 1990, 105, 106). Unfortunately, we don't know between which points to measure the distance nowadays, but still the daily travel distance would vary between 20 to 60 km a day, contradicting William's own earlier account. Overall, bearing in mind all the mentioned above, it can be roughly estimated, that Mongol messenger could during the favourable circumstances, such as good weather and terrain and availability of *jam* stations, travel more than 100 km a day. Interesting notion is that from among the horses exchanged at the *jam* stations, Mongols chose first and Europeans got to pick last, usually from the worst animals available. Also, William was according to his words man of 'very great weight' who needed the strongest animal to be able to carry him (William 1990, 140). William's road back after the long stay at the Great Khan's camp in Karakorum took him by a different route, through the steppes north of lake Balkash. Here the *jam* stations were in abundance, if existed at all, since he mentions they were able to rest only once in two months and ten days (William 1990, 254). Later, already in the lands south of Caucasus, it became a problem for William to acquire horses (William 1990, 272, 273), obviously because these tributary states didn't use the *jam* system of the Mongols, even though in Georgia, the system was pushed by the conquerors (Juwayni 1958, 524). *Jam* was however used also in later time, in the realm of Tamerlane (Clavijo 2005, 94) and also in Muscovy (Alef 1967, 1–15), it was also observed by Odoric of Pordenone in the early 14th c. Mongol ruled China (Liščák 2014, 37). Messengers and important travellers got from the Great Khan a special type of pass (Carpini 1996, 117) in form of a plate called *paiza*, made from precious metals for high dignitaries and from wood to lower ones (Juwayni 1958, 158). They are also recorded in the archaeological heritage (Elnikov 2015, fig. 6: 1). This pass used to be issued by any nobleman, but after the ascension of Ögedei, only the Great Khan was allowed to issue one, to avoid confusion and corruption (Juwayni 1958, 551).

Greatest obstacle in the traveling were the rivers. According to Thomas of Split, Mongols were able to cross even rapid rivers on the back on the horse. If they can't do such thing, they make makeshift boats out of wicker and hide, where they store their belongings and pass like mentioned before (Thomas 2006, 285). Similar way is also described by John of Plano Carpini. According to him, each Mongol carry a piece of rawhide, that tied by the strings turns into a sack. When more soldiers are moving,

they put together more of those and make a raft, on which they put the saddles and other load, which they either attach to a horse or use some makeshift paddles and oars. The horses follow a swimming man that is leading them to the other side. If there is just one rider and can't make a raft, he simply puts his personal belongings to the rawhide sack and swims together with the horses (*Carpini 1996, 74*). Danube however posed as a problem for the invading Mongol army as it was impossible for them to cross, until it completely froze (*Kiss 2000, 150, 151*).

HORSE AND RIDING EQUIPMENT

Typical steppe horse, or a pony, is an ancient looking beast, still similar to their wild ancestors. Mongol horses are roughly 120–140 cm tall in withers and tends to have long head, short but strong limbs and also short neck and back, with strong musculature (*Turk 2017, 23*). Both modern Mongol horses and those described in the written sources have diverse coloration, Secret History of the Mongols often describes various spots or specific differences in the colour or the condition of a tail and mane that was used to recognize them from the rest of the herd. For example, an off-white, fleet-footed horse with a mangy tail and sores along its black-striped back, pale-bay geldings, bald tailed chestnut horse, black-backed grey, white or black-maned, black-tailed yellow horse (*Onon 2001, 46, 68, 76, 154*).

Except this, there is not many details about the look of the horse, since they didn't need to describe for them an obvious thing. Better, even though slightly biased descriptions come from the western sources which were wondering about the steppe horse husbandry, different from what they were used to. Thomas the Archdeacon of Split, living during the Mongol Invasion of Hungary in 1241–1242, comments on the Mongols horses as being short, but very tough, being able to endure the long strides without exhaustion and very little food (*Thomas 2006, 285*). Similar picture is painted by John of Plano Carpini who had to change the European horses in Kyiv, since they wouldn't survive in the steppe during the winter, as only the Mongol horses are able to dig through the snow and find a suitable source of food, as the Mongols don't keep stored hay or fodder (*Carpini 1996, 96*). Steppe horses acquired from the territory of the western ulus of the Mongol Empire were cherished mostly for their hardiness and resilience, valuable in Rus and other Slavic countries (*Turk 2017, 24*). There is even evidence that the Rus were probably stealing the horses from the Mongols in order to sell them, as the *John of Plano Carpini (1996, 44*

mentions prince Andrew of Chernigov being killed by Batu for such an accusation. Market specially for the horses in Mongolia is mentioned in the city of Karakorum, next to the northern gate (*William 1990, 221*). It is also known that the Mongols did come into the contact with other types of the horses and utilize them, mainly the Arab horses sent as a tribute from the subjugated territories, described as slender and tall-legged with long necks (*Onon 2001, 267*). This description for sure means that they differed from the typical steppe horse in these characteristics, as also proves the archaeozoologic research. Arab horse, even though lame and unfit for anything else than parading, was found in a rich burial of the Late Medieval nomadic Cuman nobleman in Hungary (*Priskin 2006, 217–219*).

Main parts of the horse equipment saddle with stirrups and bridle. Mongols as well as other nomads didn't use spurs. Also are, chronicler Thomas of Split is describing that they rode in a fashion of the villagers, meaning without spurs, but also without the horseshoes (*Thomas 2006, 285*), even though there is one item in the grave from Mongolia from this period that is supposed to be a part of a horseshoe (*Erdenebat 2009, 91*). *William of Rubruck (1990, 91)* describes that the manufacture of stirrups, bits and saddles was man's job, while felt and textile covers that were also used in travelling were made by women. Basic construction of a saddle with wooden construction, mainly used by the Mongols consists of two wooden panels that lay on the horse's back and two bows, frontal called the pommel and canter in the back connecting them. These parts are joined together either by wooden or bone pegs or leather straps (Fig. 1). It usually has one chest strap, one or two seat straps going under the belly of the horse and a crupper secured under the horse tail to prevent the saddle movement in any direction (*Onon 2001, 71, 153*). This construction is then covered with leather or fabric and rests on the cloth blankets to protect the horse from abrasion (*William 1990, 86, 87*). Important rich individuals decorated the pommels and leather straps with small plaques made of gold or other precious metals, both recorded in the written (*Carpini 1996, 108*) and archaeological (*Uray-Kóhalmi 1968, fig. 6: 7*) sources. Other saddles were decorated with ornamented bone plaques (*Kirpichnikov 1973, fig. 64*). Saddle in the Mongolian Empire in the 13th–14th c. usually had high prominent pommel and steep sloped low canter (*Erdenebat 2009, 86*). Archaeological remains of fully preserved saddles come from Northern Mongolia, close to the river Selenge (*Erdenebat 2009, fig. 337*), and Western Mongolia (*Uray-Kóhalmi 1968*), but also from the area of the Mongol Empire

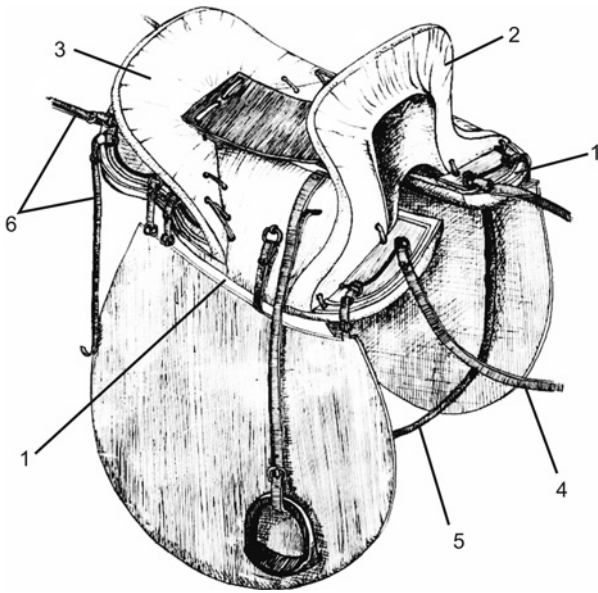


Fig. 1. Reconstruction of a saddle used by the medieval Mongols with basic parts marked by the numbers. 1 – side panel; 2 – frontal bow (pommel); 3 – back bow (canter); 4 – chest strap; 5 – seat strap; 6 – crupper (after Uray-Kóhalmi 1968, fig. 8; edited by M. Holeščák).

in general, from the steppes of southern Russia, through Siberia, Altai, Mongolia and Inner Mongolia (Erdenebat 2009, 87, here further literature in the footnote 266). Except the riding saddle, that can be supposed to be those found in the graves, there was also a pack saddle used to attach the load on the horse (Onon 2001, 149). It could have been ridden in the time of need, but it wasn't its primary purpose (Onon 2001, 51, footnote 203). It is possible that it didn't have the wooden construction, just the textile covers and straps to attach the cargo. William of Rubruck mentions a story about cleric from Acre who was supposed to bring the letters to the Great Khan, which has been lost when unruly pack horse with everything he owned escaped from him. He also warns that this is common incident that happens when one is dismounting the horses (William 1990, 184, 185). It is possible that there was also difference between the riding horse and pack horse, as William of Rubruck also mentions exchanging them only in the very dire situation (William 1990, 140).

Stirrups, although barely mentioned in the written sources, are common and well explored item in the archaeological point of view. Numerous scientific works dedicated to the typology and chronology vastly exceed the scope of presented article. They are found in graves of both sexes, which underlines the fact mentioned by John of Plano Carpini (1996, 54) that the women can ride as

good and as long as men, only with shorter stirrups. In fact, the best documented iron stirrups dated in the 13th–14th c. in Mongolia were found in a female grave, together with a part of a saddle, bronze mirror, spindle and one leather boot with felt lining (Erdenebat 2009, fig. 325–330). In the pre-Mongol era, the stirrups had a separated ear for attaching the leather strap and a neck, like the find from Arcat Del (Erdenebat 2009, fig. 316). During the Imperial period of 13th–14th c., the hole for the strap was struck in the upper part of the arch of the stirrup. The overall shape was round, D-shaped or drop-shaped, with more or less oval but very wide footrest (Erdenebat 2009, 90) and analogical artefacts can be found as far as the Carpathian basin (Fodor 1976, fig. 5), widely spread in the whole steppe area (Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 11–16). The wide footpad offered better stability and also more comfort during the long travel. Sometimes the eyelet was missing and the strap was only tied around the bow, example of it was found at Chovdyn Gol in Western Mongolia (Uray-Kóhalmi 1968, 354). However, the stirrups were not only made of iron. Rarely preserved are wooden stirrups with the shape copying the iron ones, for example the item found in the Khovd aimag by the Jamnaa Gol stream (Uray-Kóhalmi 1968, fig. 6: 12).

Bridle is not often recorded in the written source. In the Secret History of the Mongols, it is usually paired together with the saddle (Onon 2001, 251, 272) or in already mentioned context of the Chinggis Khan's advice how to not exhaust the animals during campaign. The archaeological remains from the 13th–14th c. contains mainly two-pieced iron bits connected in the centre, with circular rings for attaching the reins, typical for not only the nomadic societies basically from the whole Eurasia. Archaic forms with S-shaped sidepieces are still visible on the paintings, for example at the famous painting of the Kublai Khan on the hunt (Erdenebat 2009, 88, 89). Distance which the Mongols had travelled, at the first phase in a military way, can be illustrated by unique find of bridle and harness decorations found at Rakamaz in Hungary (Mesterházy 1984, fig. 1–7). Origin of the richly ornamented and gilded metal plates can be found in 6 000 km distant Minusinsk basin around the river Yenisei. It may had belonged to the auxiliary of the Mongol Empire during the invasion, or a personal item of a highborn Mongol warrior (Mesterházy 1984).

As was already mentioned, the Mongols didn't use spurs in general, for making the horse go faster they used whips (Carpini 1996, 98). When Chinggis Khan decided, that Ögedei will become his successor, Tolui expresses his future support among other promises, that he will be the whip of his chestnut

horse (*Onon 2001, 247*). It is problematic to exactly say how did these whips looked like, as they are very rarely found in the archaeological material, since they were mainly made of organic material. In the grave from the beginning of the 11th c., one 53.5 cm long straight wooden stick with perforation and two semicircular notches and the rests of the leather string at one end is interpreted as the whip (*Erdenebat 2009, fig. 346*). The fashion of making it was probably very similar to the whips that are used in Mongolia even nowadays and it is possible to assume, that this simple concept was also used in the 13th–14th c. Leather part of the whip made from number of braided strings was recorded in the grave of a possibly Cuman warrior of the Golden Horde period in Olen-Kolodez (*Efimov 1999, 101*). There is one specific type of archaeological finds, typical for the western Eurasian steppe and the region of Ulus Jochi, that is traditionally interpreted as the pommel of the handle of aforementioned type of horse whip. It is made of bone, specifically horse vertebrae, or sometimes bronze and is roughly in the shape of a bird head (*Chkhaidze 2016*). The horse could have also been moved by a simple stick, as the *John of Plano Carpini* (1996, 48) explains, how they didn't dare to take switches to strike the horses from the brush that was considered sacred.

Last mentioned item connected with the horse handling is *uurga*, the pole-lasso used to catch a horse. As the name itself says, it is a willow or birch stick, up to 6–7 m long, with a leather or rope noose at the end (*Atwood 2004, 223*). In *Secret History of the Mongols*, there is one instance when this tool is mentioned, in a story when Chinggis Khan meets first time his future general Bo'orchu. They together find the horses that were stolen from Temujin's family and when rescuing them, they are chased by men armed with *uurga*, preparing to catch Temujin or his horse, only to be saved by coming night (*Onon 2001, 77*). In the context for travelling, it was used to take out selected horse out of the herd and serves for this purpose in Mongolia even nowadays.

CONCLUSIONS

Travelling in the Mongol Empire was done mainly on the horseback. In need of connection between the wide regions reigned by the various Mongol princes, khan Ögedei put an order in the system of relay stations, that were in some way already established by the Chinggis Khan. These stations, called *jam*, situated at least on day travel from each other were used to exchange the exhausted horse for the new one, have a meal and if needed also provided accommodation. This postal service however wasn't used only by the messengers but also by the ambassadors and missionaries which started to travel to the Empire after it's opening to the world and releasing the pressure towards the Western and Central Europe. Two of these travellers, John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, went as far as Karakorum and left detailed descriptions of their journey, including all the perils they encountered on the road. It is possible to count, how long distance could such a traveller overcome in one day: around a 120 km if he had a fresh horse every day, which was not a rule, mainly in the remoted areas of the South Siberian steppe. In some parts, like in the mountain passes of Western Mongolia and Eastern Kazakhstan which were crucial to the messenger system of the Mongol Empire, it was possible to pass two *jam* stations in a day. It seems that the dependent states such as Sultanate of Rum didn't use the *jam* system from their Mongol overlords, other countries, such as Muscovite Russia used it extensively also after gaining independence from the fragments of the Mongol Empire. Horse of a typical steppe build was a traveller's companion, sharing with him hardships of a cold climate, with little to no maintenance needed, opposite of the European horses. Travellers were amazed, how much can this short but muscular beast endure. Horse harness, mostly the typical steppe saddle and stirrups, utilized by Mongol in their own fashion, provided as much comfort as possible in traversing the vast distances in the Mongol Empire, through the Eurasian steppe belt, up to the city of Karakorum.

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Mgr. Michal Holeščák, PhD.
National Archaeological Institute with Museum
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
2 Saborna Str.
BG – 1000 Sofia

Archeologický ústav SAV, v. v. i.
Akademická 2
SK – 949 21 Nitra
m.holescak@gmail.com

Stepou do Karakorumu

Cestovanie v Mongolskej ríši

Michal Holeščák

SÚHRN

Naprieč Mongolskou ríšou sa cestovalo v prvom rade na koni. Chán Ögedei kvôli potrebe spojenia medzi širokými regiónmi, ktorým vládli rôzne mongolské kniežatá, zorganizoval systém "poštových" staníc, zriadených pred ním Džingischánom. Stanovišťa nazývané *jam*, umiestnené aspoň na jeden deň cesty od seba, slúžili na výmenu vyčerpaného koňa za nového, na občerstvenie sa, a v prípade potreby aj na krátke ubytovanie. Tento systém však nevyužívali len poslovia, ale aj veľvyslanci a misionári, ktorí začali do ríše cestovať po jej otvorení sa svetu a uvoľnení tlaku na západnú a strednú Európu. Dvaja z týchto cestovateľov, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine a William z Rubrucku, zašli až do hlavného mesta Karakorumu a zanechali podrobné opisy svojej cesty vrátane všetkých nebezpečenstiev, s ktorými sa na nej stretli. Je možné približne vypočítať, akú vzdialenosť by mohol cestovateľ prekonať za jeden deň (okolo 120 km), ak by mal každý deň čerstvé kone, čo nebolo pravidlom, hlavne v odlahlých oblastiach juhosiбирskej stepi. V nie-

ktorých častiach, ako napríklad v horských priesmykoch západného Mongolska a východného Kazachstanu, ktoré boli rozhodujúce pre kuriérsky systém Mongolskej ríše, bolo možné prejsť dvoma stanicami *jamu* za deň. Zdá sa, že podriadené politické jednotky, ako napríklad Rímsky sultanát, neprevzali systém *jamu* od svojich mongolských vládcov, no iné krajiny, ako napríklad Moskovské kniežatstvo, ho vo veľkom využívali aj po získaní nezávislosti od fragmentov Mongolskej ríše. Kôň typickej stepnej postavy bol spoločníkom cestovateľov, zdieľal s ním útrapy chladného podnebia, s minimálnou alebo žiadnou potrebou starostlivosti, na rozdiel od európskych koní. Cestovatelia boli ohromení, koľko toho tento nízky, no svalnatý tvor vydrží. Kónské postroje používané Mongolmi, väčšinou typické stepné sedlo s drevenou kostrou a strmene s rozšírenou podnožkou, poskytovali maximálny možný komfort pri prekonávaní obrovských vzdialeností v Mongolskej ríši cez euroázijský stepný pás až do mesta Karakorum.

Obr. 1. Rekonštrukcia sedla používaného stredovekými Mongolmi, s vyznačenými základnými súčasťami. 1 – lyžiny kostry podsedlia, 2 – predná rázsocha, 3 –

zadná rázsocha, 4 – poprsný remeň, 5 – podbrušný remeň, 6 – podchvostový remeň (podľa *Uray-Kóhalmi 1968*, fig. 8; upravil M. Holeščák).