CHAPTER 2

Continuity and Change in the Mongol Army of the Ilkhanate

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One of the important trends of late medieval societies in much of the Islamic world is that the military elite became increasingly identified with the political ruling class. This tendency possibly reached its height in the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria. One cannot go quite so far when describing the nature of Mongol rule in Iran and the surrounding countries, but it would be fair to state that the army was the most important institution in the Ilkhanid state (and Mongol states as a whole). It is thus not surprising that the study of military aspects of the Ilkhanate (and the Mongol armies that preceded it) have received some serious attention in modern scholarship. Mention can be made of the important studies on the Mongol armies in the Middle East (some of them parts of larger works) by Bertold Spuler, David Morgan, C. E. Bosworth, John M. Smith, Jr., and Arsenio Martinez. To this can be added very useful studies on the Mongol army as a whole by H. Desmond Martin, S. R. Turnbull, Robert Reid, Witold Świętosławski, Timothy May, and others, which help us understand the background of much of the Mongol military activity in the countries today known as the Middle East. My own contributions to the study of the Mongol military machine have generally been in connection with the ongoing Ilkhanid war with the Mamluks, and I have tried to put this war in

1 Spuler, Die Mongolen in Iran, 330–48.
6 Martin, The Rise of Chingis Khan, 11–47.
7 Turnbull, The Mongols, 105.
9 Świętosławski, Arms and Armour of the Nomads of the Great Steppe, 103–10. I am thankful to Kate Raphael for bringing this work to my attention.
10 May, The Mongol Art of War.
the larger context of military, political and social developments of the military within the Ilkhanate, as well as the wider Mongol picture.\footnote{Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, esp. chapter 10; Amitai, *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands*, esp. part 3.}

There is a consensus in the above studies, to which I certainly subscribe, that the Mongol army under Chinggis Khan that invaded Transoxania and north-eastern Iran in 1219 was overwhelmingly (if not exclusively) composed of light-cavalry, i.e. disciplined masses of mounted archers. All students of the Ilkhanid military would probably agree that such an army was also generally the case in the mid-1250s, when another Mongol force arrived in the area under Chinggis Khan’s grandson Hülegü. It would seem, however, that this later force contained more auxiliary units than its predecessor. There remain, however, significant areas of disagreement among contemporary scholars regarding certain key matters: the use of gunpowder in siege warfare; the nature and extent of auxiliary units, both of East Asian and Middle Eastern provenance; the tactical and related changes that the Mongol army may have undergone over the many decades of its residence in Iran and the surrounding countries; the importance of logistics—i.e. pasturage and water—in determining Mongol strategy and the outcome of campaigns; and the relative quality of the Mongol troops when compared to their enemies, not least the Mamluks. In my previous work I have dealt with the last two questions, perhaps not to everyone’s satisfaction, but I will not delve into them again here. The question of gunpowder is an important one which refuses to go away, and I hope to attempt an investigation of this matter—at least as far as impinges on the frontier with the Mamluks—in the future; in the meantime, we have a very important pioneering study on the matter by Dr. Kate Raphael, which has appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.\footnote{Raphael, “Mongol Siege Warfare,” 355–70. Cf. Khan, “The Coming of Gunpowder,” 27–45. The forthcoming work of Stephen J. Haw may shed further light on this matter.} The role and identity of auxiliaries will also be left to another occasion. By process of elimination, one can surmise that this present discussion will focus on the possible changes that the Mongol military underwent in the realm of tactics during the almost one hundred and twenty years that began with the first Mongol conquests in the Islamic world in 1219 and lasted until the breakup of the Ilkhanate in the years after Abū Sa‘īd’s death in 1335. This question ties in with matters of armament, equipment and horses, which will also be touched upon below.