

Mongolian Foodways  
Specifically under the reign of Genghis Khan

**The Traditional Diet**

Diet of the Soldiers according to Marco Polo who lived with them for some time...

“Marco Polo tells us that a Mongol cavalryman often slept mounted and armed while his gelding grazed, and that he could go ten days without cooking food. On such occasions he lived on ten pounds of dried milk-curd, two litres of kumiss (fermented mare’s milk), and a quantity of cured meat. A Mongol soldier had three or four spare geldings, and would not ride a gelding until it had rested for three or four days. The Mongols took their herds of cows and sheep with them when they went on campaigns. If they went short of food, they hunted wild beasts.” (Onon 283).

**Animal Foods**

“Then as now (or until very recently) the average Mongol family possessed a herd consisting largely of sheep, with some goats, and a few each of bovines and camels.<sup>2</sup> Then, however, families kept more horses (ponies, actually) to maintain a military capability. For decent subsistence, a family required 100 sheep or the equivalent; for its military role, at least five (gelding) ponies; besides these, perhaps three more ponies and some oxen and camels were useful for transportation; and a mare or two for milking. From these animals the Mongols, like the other nomads of Inner Asia, obtained most of their food.<sup>3</sup> In the words of John of Plano Carpini, who visited the Mongols in the 1240s: “[The Mongols] have neither bread nor herbs nor vegetables nor anything else, nothing but meat ... They drink mare’s milk in very great quantities if they have it; they also drink the milk of ewes, cows, goats and even camels.” (Smith, J.M. 1-2).

“The Mongols’ main meat foods were mutton and lamb; although by all accounts, their favorite was horse-meat, it was a preference that the average family could seldom indulge. The other principal type of food was milk (in various processed forms), again chiefly from sheep, but mare’s milk by preference. The predominance of sheep in the herd and the importance of mutton and sheep’s milk in the diet, as well as the predilection for horse-meat, probably arose from the very high caloric value of these foods, a matter of central importance for practitioners of the hard -- and in Mongolia, cold -- nomadic life. Beef -- our meat mainstay -- has 1,073 kilocalories [kcal -- the same “calories” that we count when dieting] per lb; mutton has 1,834, and horsemeat 1,855. Likewise, cow’s (whole) milk provides around 400 kcal/lb, and sheep’s milk 511.6 Pound for pound, pint for pint, you get the best caloric return from sheep and horses. Fat provides most of these calories: 89% of them in the case of mutton, which is 40% fat; and 67% with sheep’s milk (7.5% fat).” (Smith J.M. 2).

They ate the fat off the tail of the sheep...

“The ‘fat’ referred to in this passage is the thick deposit of fat that builds up on the tails of Mongolian sheep (chichu’a in the Orkhon Turkish dialect); it is a store of food for the sheep (like a camel’s hump) and a source of food for Mongol people.” (Onon 67).

Soldiers were fed rich, juicy meat for the well-being:

“Special attention was paid to the welfare of the soldiers. Chinggis Qahan once said: ‘My soldiers are as numerous as forests, and their women could form a large unit within the army. I want to feed them with juicy meat, let them live in beautiful yurts, and let them pasture their livestock on rich soil.’ (Onon 281).

Advantages of Eating more Meat and Animal Products for Mongol warriors according to one author(an anthropological work written by an anthropologist who spent five years forming a biography on Genghis Khan) :

“Compared to the Jurchid soldiers, the Mongols were much healthier and stronger. The Mongols consumed a steady diet of meat, milk, yogurt, and other dairy products, and they fought men who lived on gruel made from various grains. The grain diet of peasant warriors stunted their bones, rotted their teeth, and left them weak and prone to disease. In contrast, the poorest Mongol soldier ate mostly protein, thereby giving him strong teeth and bones. Unlike the Jurchid soldiers, who were dependent on a heavy carbohydrate diet, the Mongols could more easily go a day or two without food.” (Weatherford 87).

#### *Dairy*

“Since most of the Mongols’ animals provided milk for only about 5 months a year (cf. cows at 10-11 months), the Mongols had to process milk into forms that would keep well during the seven “dry” months. They rendered cow’s milk into a dried skim milk solid, the approximate equivalent of our non-fat milk powder. But they kept and ate the by-product, butter, offsetting the healthful effect of the dried skim.” (Smith J.M. 2).

#### **Cooking**

“When hunters cooked their food while out hunting, they placed their cooking vessel on three stones arranged in a triangle around the fire. Those three stones were known as toola choloo.” (Onon 229).

#### **Social Structure**

##### **Division of Labor**

“Two mares would have been about as many as an ordinary family would have kept. They would have sufficed to enable the man of the family to devote himself to qumis during the five milking months of spring and summer.(Observers of Inner Asian nomads have commonly remarked that the men have nothing to do in peacetime.)” (Smith J.M. 3-4).

##### **Socio-Economic Class and Food Intake**

“Wine, rice wine, fermented honey, and distilled qumis (qara qumis) were all served at the khan’s court in winter.” (Smith J.M. 6).

“Interestingly, poor Mongols probably benefited from a better-balanced diet. After Chinggis’ father died, most of his family’s herds were stolen, so that his mother had to feed her children edible plants: wild pears, bird cherries, garden burnet root, cinquefoil root, wild onion, shallot, lily root, and garlic chives. Despite this diet of what the Mongols considered second-rate foods, Chinggis and the other boys “grew up into fine men” in the words of the Secret History.” (Smith J.M. 3).

### *Other Drinks*

“Also consumed by preference as part of this new world cuisine were many liquid foods. These are “umdan” in Mongolian, “drinks,” constituting along with shülen, “soups,” the two fundamental categories of food in the “Secret History of the Mongols.” “Umdan” were served to Genghiz Khan at his orders by the imperial bodyguard. The most important of these was airag, or kumiss, (My note: also called qumus...see other source below but both referring to fermented mare’s milk) that is, fermented mare’s milk. Fermented mare’s milk was the prestige food of the Mongols, although made and consumed by many other steppe peoples as well.” (Buell 4). Also popularized by the Mongols were many other kinds of drinks. They included variants of the Arabic sharab, sweet drinks made with fruits and berries, favored by the Mongols. Some of these drinks were alcoholic, in one case due to freeze distillation to concentrate alcohol at a low level. Far more alcoholic were distilled beverages, also popularized during Mongol times, along with mobile stills. That most of these have Turkic names indicates the primary source of inspiration, but some of the liquors in question were not originally distilled. This seems to have been a Mongol-era innovation. (Buell 4).

Also a part of the Mongol liquid cuisine during the era was tea. The Mongols learned tea - drinking in China and soon produced their own variants. The first recipe for Mongolian milk tea, tea long boiled in milk or cream, for example, comes from the Yinshan zhengyao. (my note: a text I am assuming)” (Buell 4).

### *Mare’s Milk*

“The Mongols, as mentioned, had (and have) a great liking for mare’s milk. Not on account of the richness of the milk, which, by comparison with the milks of other domesticated animals, is virtually a diet drink at only 214 kcal/lb, but because mare’s milk (qumis) becomes alcoholic with fermentation. Not very alcoholic, however, ranging from 3.25% down to 1.65. Since, as Plano Carpini noted “Drunkenness is considered an honorable thing by [the Mongols],” they had to develop high-volume drinking habits and customs to offset its weakness. Plano Carpini again: “They drink mare’s milk in very great quantities if they have it. ...” And Rubruck amplifies this: “In summer they do not bother about anything except [qumis] ... When the master begins to drink, then one of the attendants cries out in a loud voice ‘Ha!’ and [a] musician strikes his instrument. And when it is a big feast they are holding, they all clap their hands and also dance to the sound of the instrument, the men before the master and the women before the mistress. After the master has drunk, then the attendant cries out as before and the instrument player breaks off. Then they drink all around, the men and the women, and sometimes vie with each other in drinking in a really disgusting and gluttonous manner. ... When they want to incite

anyone to drink they seize him by the ears and pull them vigorously to make his gullet open, and they clap and dance in front of him.” (Smith J.M. 3).

Kumiss, the name for fermented mare’s milk, literally means eating a sour thing....

“Literally, ‘eating a sour thing’. Kumiss (fermented mare’s milk) and the associated verb esükchilejü (used here) derive from esük (ösög) meaning ‘sour’.” (Onon 47).

The amounts of fermented mare’s milk drunk:

“However, the pre-imperial Mongols were probably largely spared the perils of drink. Mare’s milk is generally available only in summer as Rubruck suggests, during three to five months of the mares’ lactation period, and most of it is imbibed at that time. To live exclusively off qumis, at, say, 2,000 calories a day, at least nine pints per person would have been needed: that is, the daily milk production of two mares (above and beyond the needs of their foals). Two mares would have been about as many as an ordinary family would have kept. They would have sufficed to enable the man of the family to devote himself to qumis during the five milking months of spring and summer.” (Smith J.M. 3-4).

At first fermented mare’s milk ‘qumis’ was the only alcoholic, fermented beverage for Mongols to drink, but once more land was obtained during the Imperial Period, Mongols gained access to many other drinks, most of which had higher alcoholic contents:

“Qumis was no longer the only alcoholic drink available. Now that the conquered sedentary lands were paying tribute, much of it in kind, including drink (as we have seen in Ögödei’s provisioning scheme), the imperial Mongols were also supplied with “rice mead” or “rice ale”; with “honey mead”, that is, fermented honey (bal); with a fermented millet drink (buza); and with a red wine “like the wine of La Rochelle,” according to Rubruck. Most of these were surely stronger than qumis -- much stronger in the case of the red wine -- and they were available all year.” (Smith J.M. 5-6)

### **Celebratory Food Intake**

Drinking in excess on New Year’s Festivals, at festivals for each of 13 lunar months, on assorted festive occasions, & on birthdays was done by many in attendance at such events (which included the Mongol rulers--his many wives, concubines, sons (from wives & concubines), other relatives, great commanders and their families). (summary of Smith J.M. p. 7)

“At these great banquets, the guests and hosts drank steadily. Plano Carpini attended the post-election and enthronement banquets for Guyuk Khan, and reported that “the chiefs held their [electoral] conference inside [a] tent. ... There they remained until almost mid-day and then they began to drink mare’s milk and they drank until the evening, so much that it was amazing to see. ... [Some days later] they placed [Guyuk] on the imperial throne, and the chiefs knelt before him and after them all the people, with the exception of us who were not subject to them. Then they started drinking and, as is their custom, they drank without stopping until the evening.” (Smith J.M. 7)

Another account of a banquet:

“Ibn Battuta participated in an imperial banquet of the Golden Horde, to which Mongol commanders of a thousand and above (perhaps 187 of these, assuming that the regular, nomad army of the Golden Horde consisted of 17 tumens, each of ten thousands<sup>33</sup>), along with religious dignitaries and distinguished guests (like Ibn Battuta) were invited. Boiled horse-meat and mutton were served first.”

Then, drinking rituals were practiced:

“After this, drinking vessels of gold and silver are brought. The beverage they make most use of is fermented liquor of honey, since, being of the Hanafite school of [Islamic] law, they hold fermented liquor to be lawful (RELIGION). When the sultan [Ozbek Khan] wishes to drink, his daughter takes the bowl in her hand, pays homage ... and then presents the bowl to him. When he has drunk she takes another bowl and presents it to the chief [wife], who drinks from it, after which she presents it to the other [wives] in their order of precedence. The sultan’s heir then takes the bowl, pays homage, and presents it to his father, then, when he has drunk, presents it to the [wives] and to his sister after them, paying homage to them all. The second son then rises, takes the bowl and gives it to his brother to drink paying homage to him. Thereafter the great [commanders] rise, and each one of [the 17 of] them gives the cup to the sultan’s heir and pays homage to him, after which the [other] members of the royal house rise and each one of them gives the cup to this second son, paying homage to him. The [170] lesser [commanders] then rise and give the sons of the king to drink. During all this [ceremony], they sing [songs resembling the] chants sung by oarsmen.” (Smith J.M. 7-8).

### **Drinking Habits of Rulers and their Women**

“Mongol leaders drank not only at mealtime, but during business hours. Rubruck had several interviews with the Khan Mongke, and at the first he observed that Mongke “appeared to me intoxicated,” while at the last, the khan “drank four times, I believe, “during the meeting.” It is important to emphasize that the women of the Mongol ruling establishment drank as heavily as the men. Wives attended and drank like their husbands at the parties of Mongke and Qubilai mentioned earlier. “[S]inging and loud shouting in drunkenness ... is not considered reprehensible either in men or women.” “[Mongol women] ... may get very drunk, yet in their intoxication they never come to words or blows.” Rubruck and his party were entertained by one of Mongke’s wives, who served them “rice ale, red wine ... and [qumis]. The lady, holding a full goblet in her hand, knelt down and asked a blessing, and all the priests sang in a loud voice and she drank it all. My companion and I were also obliged to sing another time when she wanted to drink. When they were all nearly intoxicated food was brought [mutton and carp], and of this I ate a little. In this way they passed the time until evening. Then the lady, now drunk, got into a cart, while the priests sang and howled, and she went on her way.” my note: drinking seems to commonly be associated with religion in a very festive fashion

A generation later royal women still engaged in heavy drinking. Ghazan Khan, ruler of the Mongol Middle East (1295-1304), attempted to set limits to expenditures by princesses on

purchases of clothing, animals and provisions; allowances for children, salaries for servants -- and the expenses of the sharabkhana, approximately "wine-cellar." Specification of wine supplies as an expense item distinct from "provisions," and the need to control its costs, suggests that the Mongol princesses, like the princes, khans and indeed the Mongols in general, as far as they were able, were still drinking their heads off." (Smith J.M. 9-10).

Mongol Rulers Drinking Themselves to Death:

"The Mongols recognized this early on, but were unable to deal with it, even given the warnings and example of Chinggis Khan. Chinggis drank, but in a controlled fashion, unwilling to suffer mental confusion; he knew the symptoms and consequences of binge drinking: dulled senses, impaired physical control, clouding of the mind, and addiction lead to impoverishment. He tried to set limits on indulgence: no more than three drinking binges a month, preferably fewer and best none. But custom, holding drunkenness an honorable condition, won out, and, with the ready availability of strong alcoholic beverages augmenting the Mongols' high-volume drinking practice, led many Mongol rulers to drink themselves to death. Ögödei, Chinggis Khan's successor (1229-1241), "drank continuously and to excess," and eventually died of it, despite the efforts of his brother, Chaghatai, who "appointed an emir ... to watch over him and not allow him to drink more than a specified number of cups ... [but] he used to drink from a large cup instead of a small one, so that the [amount was large although the] number [of cups] remained the same." Guytik, Ögödei's successor, likewise overindulged, undermining a weak constitution and leading to an early death and a short reign, 1246 -1248 (perhaps saving Europe from a second Mongol invasion). Abaqa, ruler in the Middle East from 1265 to 1282, died in delirium tremens and one of his later successors Oljeitu (1304-1318), expired, at age, of "digestive disorder brought on by the intemperate habits common to all the Mongol princes." (Smith J.M. 10-11).

Drinking also may have compromised rulers' fertility:

"Male alcoholism complemented by heavy drinking on the part of Mongol women may have compromised fertility as well as longevity. Just as Qubilai's long life of 78 years shows what might have been, so does his procreativity. He had, as mentioned, 47 sons (and probably about as many daughters), by four wives and numerous concubines. Hulegu had 21 children by 5 wives and some concubines. Abaqa fathered 9 children by 15 women. Arghun begat 8 children, one of whom died as a child, by more than 9 women. Ghazan had 7 consorts but only 2 children; one died in infancy. Of Oljeitu's 12 women, 3 had no offspring, and of his 9 children by the others, 6 died as infants. Abu Sa'id had only one (posthumous) child by at least two wives. Given what we are now told about fetal alcoholism syndrome and the diminution of male fertility from binge drinking, we can perhaps understand this unimpressive record." (Smith J.M. 11)

### **Health Complications**

"Regular and plentiful consumption of high-calorie foods -- especially horse-meat -- had predictable consequences. Gout, according to Ibn Battuta, was a common affliction -- among the Mongols of the Golden Horde. In the Far East, Qubilai suffered from it for the last 27 years of

his life; he also grew to be “grotesquely fat.” Nevertheless, he lived a very long life -- 1215-1294 -- for a Mongol ruler. Mongol men were not alone in overeating: in Rubruck’s view, the Mongol women were “wondrous fat.” Cardio-vascular problems, although not then subject to diagnosis, may be suspected as well. Heavy drinking, in turn, often led to alcoholism (Smith J.M. 10)....see above under “Drinking at Banquets=>Drinking Habits by Mongol Rulers”

Speculation that Rulers’ Eating Habits had a significant negative impact upon the Mongolian empire as a whole:

“Had the descendants of Chinggis spent less time at the table, they might have lasted longer on the throne, and produced more stable, more capable, and even farther-flung government. But in enjoying too thoroughly the pleasures enabled by the vast empire they had seized, their even greater original intention, to conquer the world, became once again only the subject of drunken boasting, as it had been among Inner Asian nomads during the millennium before the coming of Chinggis Khan.” (Smith J.M. 12).

### **Religious Beliefs**

“Before Buddhism penetrated Mongolia in the thirteenth century, the Mongol religion was Shamanism, which dominated the political, economical and spiritual life of the country. The Shamanist respected and worshipped the Heavens and believed that everything, including both happiness and suffering, derived from the Heavens. However, they also believed that these Heavens contained not just one but ninety-nine tenggeri (or ‘almighty spirits’).

Buddhism never penetrated the Dawr region, where Shamanism was practised well into the twentieth century. The Dawr Mongols believed that there were at least nine levels of Heavens. In Shamanism, the tenggeri (almighty spirits) ruled all above (in space and in the heavens), while the chinggis (almighty spirits) ruled all below (i.e., the land).” (Onon 29-30).

“The Mongols were born free and equal, an idea derived from their Shamanist religion, which was their mighty Heaven, and, in turn, their consciousness, and thus ordained their actions. Shamanism had no canon or doctrine....Chinggis Qahan was born with his destiny ordained by Heaven above, implying that Chinggis was the son of god and so had the right to rule. But in Shamanistic thought, every living being, including the girl in and the wild beasts was born with its destiny ordained by heaven.” (Onon 35-36).

“In the thirteenth century, all Mongols thought themselves to be the centre of the universe, a belief that they derived from their Shamanistic religion. A Shamanist worshipped natural things: the sky, the sun, the moon, rivers and mountains, etc. Heaven was both their guide and their consciousness; thus every Shamanist was born free and equal. Chinggis was, like any other Mongol, a Shamanist, and he treated every Mongol equally.” (Onon 281).

“On another occasion, the Mongol commander Tughluk Timur invited Ibn Battuta to a religious ceremonial banquet: “The servants ... brought in the dishes, consisting of the flesh of horses, etc., and also brought mare’s milk. Afterwards they brought the buza [fermented millet], and when the meal was finished the Qur’an readers recited with beautiful voices.” After this and

other religious presentations, “more food was served, and they continued in this fashion until the evening...” (Smith J.M 5).

#### *Sacrifices & Offerings:*

“It was the Mongol custom to offer food, kumiss, and meat at the graves of ancestors. Bile’ür (‘the bile’ür offerings’) basically means ‘left-over food’, but here it has the specific meaning of ‘sacrificial meat.’ (Onon 64).

#### *Divination & Prophecies:*

“Divination was practised by examining the grain of a sheep’s shoulder bone scorched over a fire.” (Onon 101).

#### *Celebrated Ramadan:*

This account gives the impression that the rulers drank to excess on celebratory occasions & distributed gifts (in this case fermented mare milk - qumis- that had been imported (ration of amount imported which seems like A LOT!):

After this feasting and drinking -- a celebration of the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting -- Ozbek Khan was supposed to attend prayers at the mosque. “The [khan] was late in coming, and some said that he would not come because drunkenness had got the better of him, and other said that he would not fail to attend the Friday service. When it was well past the time he arrived, swaying . ... We then prayed the Friday prayers and the people withdrew to their residences. The sultan went back to [his great tent]” and until the afternoon prayers, “continued as before” -- drinking, presumably.”

“Guests at Ozbek’s celebration received gifts in addition to hospitality: “To the limit of vision both right and left I saw wagons laden with skins of qumis and in due course the sultan ordered them to be distributed among those present. They brought one wagon to me, but I gave it to my Turkish neighbors.” If this wagon was one of the one-ox type, it could have carried 131 gallons of qumis.” (Smith J.M. 8).

### **Recipes**

“Nowhere was the common elite culture more noticeable than in food. This is area well documented in many surviving recipes and in the art of the time. It shows feasting Mongols and their guests, consuming the elite foods of the era. The Mongol banquet soup (shülen), the preferred dish of the khans, had become the prestige food of a world order. The shülen was basically boiled mutton with thickeners. These included hulled and ground chickpeas, from the Middle East, and rice, a Chinese touch. Spicing was often international, although subtle. The result was not always a soup. A dish could be cooked dry. Wolf and even bear could substitute for the mutton.



The following is an example of a shülen consumed in Mongol China. It is from the imperial dietary manual Yinshan zhengyao 飲膳正要, “Proper and Essential Things for the Emperor’s Food and Drink,” presented to the court in 1330. Like most recipes in the text, it is assigned medicinal properties.

Note that a sheng 升 is about 31.5 cu in and a he 合 is one tenth of a sheng. A sashuq is a small coin. The word, like Shaqimur, in the title of the recipe, is Turkic, pointing up the international atmosphere of the Mongol court in China. The shaqimur, like many other raw foods popular at the Mongol court in China, was imported from the West:

#### Shaqimur [Rape Turnip] Soup

It supplements the center, and brings down qi 氣. It harmonizes spleen and stomach.

[Ingredients:] Mutton (leg; bone and cut up), tsaoko [large smoky] cardamoms (five), chickpeas (half a sheng, pulverize and remove the skins), shaqimur (five); this is like manqing 蔓菁 [silver beet or Swiss chard]).

Boil ingredients together and make a soup. Strain [broth. Cut up meat and shaqimur and put aside]. Add 2 he of cooked chickpeas, 1 sheng of aromatic non-glutinous rice, and [the] cooked shaqimur beet cut up into sashuq-sized pieces. Add [the] cut-up meat. Evenly adjust flavors with a little salt.

Eaten alongside the banquet soups were a variety of other foods called ash, variously: “grain foods,” even “side dishes” (to soups). Among the ash were noodle foods that became the rage. One of them was tutumash, originally a Turkic dish, a large stuffed noodle eaten with a sauce of cream and basil. It was known from Turkey to China, and still persists today in Middle Eastern cookbooks. Another was the ubiquitous manta, a steamed bun, also originally Turkic. It was broadly popularized by the Mongols and still a major part of cuisine in the Islamic world. In the following example, the usual dough covering has been replaced by hollowed-out eggplant:

Eggplant manta [Ingredients:] Mutton, sheep’s fat, sheep’s tail, onions, prepared mandarin peel (cut each up finely), “tender” eggplant (remove the pith).

Combine [other] ingredients with meats into a stuffing, but [instead of making a dough covering] put it inside the eggplant [skin] and steam. Add garlic, cream [or yogurt], and finely ground basil.

Also a part of Islamic and, in this case, world cuisine today is another Mongol era creation: bakhlava. The name is from a Mongolian word meaning to pile up in layers. Although today’s bakhlava is a far cry from what this popular dessert was in the 14th century, a recipe book from China contains a dessert that is without question an early baklava. It is called in Turkic güllach, i.e., “flower bread food.” Güllach- Combine evenly egg white, bean paste [or durum flour] and work in cream [to make the dough]. Spread out [the dough] and make into thin cakes. Use a layer of white powdered sugar, [ground up] pine nuts, and [ground up] walnuts for each layer of cake. Make three or four layers like this. Over the top pour honey dissolved in ghee.”

(Buell 2-3).

## **Food Supply**

Approximations of Food Supplied by importing after the Imperial Period (1206-1279) in which the Mongols conquered a good part of the known world including China, Russia, and much of the Middle East. "From the proceeds of this empire, the Mongol rulers then tried to make more food available to their nomad subjects, and to provide for themselves all they could eat of their favorite dishes, plus a staggering supply of intoxicating drink. At first, the Mongols relied on commerce to enlarge food supplies.":

"To calculate the amount of food supplied, we need to estimate the size of the wagonload. Among the Inner Asian vehicles described by Pegolotti, a Florentine trader with knowledge of commerce to East Asia, are a wagon drawn by one ox carrying about 1,000 lbs (10 Genoese cantaras), and a three-camel wagon with a load of about 3,000 lbs (30 cantaras); Pegolotti does not mention a six-ox wagon. If three camels could pull 3,000 lbs, it seems to me that six oxen might draw at least 4,000 lbs, in which case the supply of food and drink to Qaraqorum (Khara Khorum) could have amounted to 1,000 tons a day. If the loads were two-thirds food and one-third drink, most of the people of Outer Mongolia could have received each day two pounds of food (probably grain, flour or pasta), and a pint of drink a day." (Smith J.M. 4-5)

This was expensive to import in all these food supplies that came by caravan as described in the following which gives an idea to just what food (grain, wine, and flour), quantities, way of transportation, and length of travel:

"In 1221 a Chinese traveler encountered a caravan bringing food to Mongolia and reported that "Eight catties [about 100 lbs at 1-1/3 lbs/cattie] of flour here [in western Mongolia] cost as much as fifty pounds of silver, for it is brought on the backs of camels from beyond the [Tien] Shan, some two thousand li [one li is 1,364 feet or about a quarter-mile] away by foreign traders from the Western lands." By 1234, such prices apparently came to be considered excessive even by Ögödei Qa'an, Chinggis' spendthrift successor, since he established a state program to supplement the food supply of Outer Mongolia. "[H]e had issued [an edict (yasa)] to the effect that every day five hundred wagons fully loaded with food and drink should arrive [in Qara-Qorum (Khara Khorum) in central Outer Mongolia] from the [Mongols' Chinese] provinces to be placed in stores and then dispensed therefrom. For [grain] and [wine] there were provided great wagons drawn by six oxen each." (Smith J.M. 4).

"Other important characteristics of the supply-system may also be estimated: grain-wagons took four months for the round-trip between Ta-t'ung, the Chinese frontier city that was the starting-point for the Mongolian supply system, and Qaraqorum, according to Hsiao, pages 59-60. This was a distance, round-trip, of some 1,500 miles, thus covered at an average pace of 12.5 miles per day [mpd] -- not counting time for loading, repairs, etc. Compare the 17 mpd pace of commercial travel across Inner Asia, from Tana on the Black Sea to Kanchow in China,

as listed by Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. Allan Evans (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1936); this East-West transport probably moved faster because it used smaller wagons and faster draught animals. At this pace, the 900-odd miles between Beijing and Qaraqorum could have been covered in 53 days; the round-trip (without allowance for delays in turn-around) in 106 days. So that 500 wagons should arrive at Qaraqorum each day, 60,000 wagons would have been needed (without allowance for down-time), along with 360,000 oxen, at six per wagon (without allowance for replacements or relays), plus at least 60,000 teamsters (assuming a minimal one per wagon). (Smith J.M. 5, footnote).

### **Rations at Royal Banquets**

“Consumption at one royal Mongol party may be quantifiable. On 24 June 1254, Mongke Khan hosted a “great drinking festival” supplied, according to Rubruck, with “a hundred and five carts laden with mare’s milk, and ninety horses [to be eaten] ...” Mongolian ponies weigh on average around 600 lbs, of which about 240 lbs is meat, so 90 ponies would yield about 20,000 lbs of meat. Mongke’s view of rations appropriate for his guests may be estimated from his allowance for Rubruck’s traveling party of four: one sheep every four days. This would have provided a daily ration of three pounds of mutton – 5,502 kcal -- for each man. At three pounds of horse-meat per guest, Mongke’s 90 horses would have fed about 7,000 persons with 5,565 kcal apiece. Assuming 1,000-lb loads on the carts carrying drink, each of the 7,000 would also have been served about two gallons of qumis, the approximate equivalent of 19 shots of 80-proof whiskey. (Smith J.M. 8)

A guest-list of 7,000 is plausible: the khan’s entourage consisted in large part of his Imperial Guard, the *kesig*, a force of 10,000 men drawn from the Mongols’ best families, and Mongke probably invited them all (Qubilai did so every month, as we are told by Marco Polo) save those on guard and catering duty. This duty fell to the night-guards and quiver-bearers, 1,000 of each, leaving as likely guests the 8,000 day-guards. (Smith J.M. 8-9).

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