

A Memoir of the Mongol Invasion of the Lands of Islam*

By Ibn ul-Athir[†]

Translated by David Teeple[‡]

For a number of years I tried not to think about this event, judging it to be monstrous and hateful to remember. Whenever I began to take a step towards it, I would immediately take another step back. Who would find it easy to write the obituary of Islam and of Muslims? And who would not be troubled by such memories? If only my mother had not given birth to me! If only I had died before it happened, forgetting everything and myself forgotten. But a group of my friends urged me to compose the history of it. At first I hesitated, but then I saw that neglecting it would be of no benefit to anyone, and moreover, writing the history would ensure that this terrible event, this great and unprecedented calamity affecting all Muslims, would be remembered. If someone had told me that in the entire lifetime of man the world would never be afflicted by such a disaster as this, I would have believed him. It has never had any precedent in history, nothing even approaching it. Among the greatest events of history, we find Nebuchadnezzar's killing of the children of Israel, and the razing of their temple; but what, after all is a temple, compared to what was destroyed by these accursed savages, none of whose cities is even worth a single temple? And how many were the children of Israel, compared to the number killed by the Mongols? In only one city, the number of people killed was greater than all of the children of Israel. Creation may never witness another event so tragic until the end of world, when Gog and Magog will ravage the land, and the Antichrist will remain to rule over those remaining and to destroy all that preceded him.

No one was spared in the Mongol's attacks. They killed men, women and children alike, even ripping open the bellies of pregnant women and killing the unborn fetuses. We are all God's, and to him we shall return, and there is no power and no strength but in God

*From *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* (The Complete History).

[†]Kurdish, 1160-1233 AD. Lived in Iraq at the time of the Mongol invasions, but did not live to see the brutal sacking of Baghdad under Hulagu Khan (1258 AD), which was the death knell of the Abbasid Empire.

[‡]American, 1978-present. Lived to see the brutal sacking of Baghdad under George W. Bush (2003 AD), which was the death knell of the Ba'athist regime.

Almighty, to help us in this time of tragedy in which evil and hardship reign, spreading over the land like storm clouds on the wind. Their people invaded from the outskirts of China, heading straight for the lands of Turkestan, among them Kashghar and Balasaghun, then from there to the lands of Transoxiana, such as Samarqand, Bukhara and others, conquering each in turn and doing unspeakable things to the people there. Then a band of them crossed into Khurasan, looting, destroying, killing and plundering. Then they passed over Rayy, Hamadhan, and the mountain territories, which were mostly unpopulated, up to the border of Iraq. Then they headed for the lands of Azerbaijan and Arraniyya, destroying everything they found and killing most of the people there. Only a few very young ones managed to escape. This was unheard of. Once Azerbaijan and Arraniyya had been emptied of people, they marched to Darband-e-Sherwan, conquering its cities and sparing nothing but its castle, where their king stayed. They then crossed into the land of the Lan and the Lakiz, and the lands of various other nations, and there was widespread killing and looting and destruction. Then they headed for the lands of the Qipchaq, among the most populous of the Turkish people, and they killed anyone who stood before them. Those remaining fled to the swamps and the mountain peaks. The lands were divided up, and the Mongols took control of them just as quickly as they had arrived from the steppes. Yet another party of men passed into Ghazna and its provinces, and the bordering lands of India, Sistan, and Kerman, and did there as the others had done.

This was beyond anything that had ever happened. Alexander himself, who the historians agree conquered the world, didn't conquer it nearly as quickly. It took him about ten years, and he hardly killed anyone, because the people were content to obey him. They conquered most of the civilizations of the earth, improved them, built them up, increased their population. They treated the people of the earth with justice and morals.

While the Mongols were off marching for about a year, everyone in the conquered lands slept poorly, fearing that they would return needing supplies and provisions. When they arrived, the people would bring them sheep, cattle and horses, and other beasts to feast on. And the animals they rode in on tore up the ground with their hooves and overgrazed the fields, right down to the roots, for barley was unknown among the Mongols. When they set up their homes anywhere, they need no provisions from outside, for they herd their provisions along with them. As for their religion, they pray to the rising sun, and hold nothing to be unlawful. They eat every kind of beast, even dogs and pigs. Marriage is foreign to them. A woman can have relations with more than one man, and if she bears a child, his father will be unknown.

Indeed, Islam and its believers have been afflicted with a calamity greater than any nation on earth has endured. These Mongols, may God curse them, came from the East and did things that would cause anyone who hears of it to see them as monsters. They will be expelled in due time, God willing, just like the Franks, may God damn them, who invaded Syria from the West, first attacking the lands of Egypt, and conquering it up to the border of Damietta, then conquering Syria and elsewhere. They would still possess those lands if it

were not for the grace of God and his victory over them. Let us remember that in 614 a.h. [1217-1218 AD] one of their two legions surrendered, their swords still unsheathed in a civil war. Let us remember it. We are all God's children, and to him shall we return.

We ask God to make the Muslims' victory an easy one, for the protector and defender of Islam is currently nowhere to be found. If God wants to do harm then no one can dissuade him, and no one has any protector but him. If he shows favor to these Mongols, then this means we have lost our guardian; the reason he has abandoned us must be that Khwarazm-Shah Muhammad was previously the ruler of these lands. He killed its kings and brought an end to their family lines, and remained as the sultan. When they were routed, there was no one left to protect our lands. This was all as God had planned it.