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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The cosmopolitanism of Karakorum, capital of the Mongol empire in Mongolia

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Abstract
Karakorum, in present-day Mongolia, was the first capital of Mongol empire and has often been portrayed as the cosmopolitan city par excellence of its era. This portrayal is primarily based on the description of the city as a multicultural community in a travelogue written by the Franciscan monk William of Rubruck, who spent some time there in 1254. This understanding of cosmopolitanism stems from a colloquial sense of the term and does not take into account its history and layered meanings. Based on a discussion of the term, this article presents an approach to cosmopolitanism suitable for archaeology, namely by examining the practices of 'lived cosmopolitanism'. Taking the archaeological evidence from Karakorum as a case study, the author explores the cultural fields of city layout and architecture, cuisine, religion, and funerary rites to answer the question of whether and how the people of Karakorum were cosmopolitan. The discussion shows that it is of the utmost importance to distinguish between social groups and their status. While the Great Khans can be viewed as cosmopolitans of their time, the commoner population of Karakorum appears rather to have been segregated into different groups. The material evidence so far points to low degrees of engagement among different groups within the city. Yet, the discussion of cosmopolitanism reveals deeper insights into the social realities of the city's inhabitants and unresolved questions in the study of this important city.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism; Karakorum; Mongol empire; archaeology; arbanism

Introduction

Karakorum, the first capital of the Mongol empire from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, has often been described as a cosmopolitan city. This take on cosmopolitanism springs from an everyday, colloquial understanding of the word, which implies the co-presence of people, materials, thoughts, or ideas from different parts of the world within a single locale. Arguably, most mentions of cosmopolitanism in scholarly

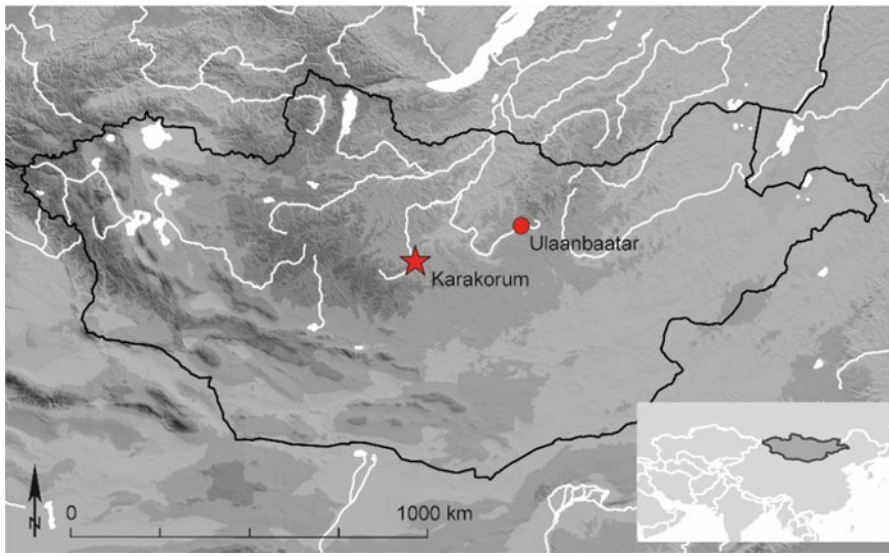

Figure 1. The location of Karakorum in the Orkhon valley, Mongolia. *Source*: Author. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

writings stem from this casual, simple understanding.[1] Looking at the history of the term 'cosmopolitanism',[2] however, we recognize that the concept has more to offer than just a synonym for multiculturalism or the possibilities of expanding networks of trade. To explore more complex processes of cosmopolitanism was the professed goal of the conference that provided the starting point of this article.[3] The Mongol empire, the largest contiguous land empire in world history and, more precisely, its first capital Karakorum in Central Mongolia, provides a suitable case study for such an endeavour (see Figure 1).

From Chinggis Khan's (r. 1206–1227) rise to Great Khan of the unified Mongolian tribes in 1206, he and his successors went on to conquer large stretches of the Eurasian landmass, culminating in the conquest of the Song in 1279 by Khubilai Khan (r. 1260–1294). At this point, the Mongol empire had been divided into four more-or-less independent successor states—the Yuan empire (including the Mongolian heartland), the Ilkhanate, the Golden Horde, and the Chaghadaid Khanate. The Mongols established the Yuan dynasty in China and were able to hold the

[1]For example, S. Reichert, *Craft production in the Mongol empire: Karakorum and its artisans*. Bonn Contributions to Asian Archaeology, vol. 9 (Bonn: vfgarch.press, 2020), p. 15.

[2]For example, C. A. Breckenridge, S. Pollock, H. K. Bhabha and D. Chakrabarty (eds), *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2002). J. M. Ganim and S. A. Legassie (eds), *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). G. Sluga and J. Horne, 'Cosmopolitanism: Its pasts and practices', *Journal of World History*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2010, pp. 369–374, available at https://muse.jhu.edu/article/400865, [accessed 3 November 2023]. M. C. Nussbaum, *The cosmopolitan tradition: A noble but flawed ideal* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019).

[3]Virtual conference 'Cosmopolitan pasts of China and the Eurasian world' organized by Annie Chan, at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich, Germany, 11, 12, 18 and 19 June 2021.

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government until 1368, when they were forced to flee and ultimately ended up as the Northern Yuan in their Mongolian homelands.

During the heyday of these Mongolian states, however, Eurasia witnessed hitherto unheard-of scales and ranges of trade and intercultural exchanges, often attributed as *Pax Mongolica*.[4] Karakorum, the initial capital of the empire, founded by Chinggis Khan in 1220 and erected under his son and successor Ögödei Khan (r. 1229–1241) in the Orkhon valley from 1235 onwards, served as a trading hub for the Mongolian steppes. The city continued to thrive and take part in these exchanges well beyond its own demotion in 1260 when Khubilai conferred the capital status first on Shangdu and later on Dadu (modern Beijing). According to our current knowledge, the city's history only ends in the early fifteenth century, at which time changing political realities possibly undermined the rationale for a city in the steppes.[5] The construction of the Buddhist monastery Erdene Zuu in 1586 on top of what is assumed to be the former palace area marks a more definite end point in the history of Karakorum. Building blocks and inscribed stones from Karakorum were used as *spolia* for the erection of some of the Buddhist temples in the monastery.[6]

Excavations in the middle of the city in the early 2000s uncovered areas of the artisans' quarter, where deposits of up to four metres in depth contained remains of residential quarters associated with intense manufacturing workshops, covering a wide spectrum of crafts, e.g. blacksmithing, silver- and goldsmithing, glass works, and mineral stone works.[7] There is abundant evidence of imported goods and long-distance trade based on the provenance of finds and materials. Porcelain and other glazed ceramic wares were, for example, imported from China.[8] The overall number of glazed wares speaks to the assumption that Karakorum's population had easy access to these goods, some of which were brought there from over 2,000 kilometres away. Other examples underline the function of Karakorum as a trading hub. Glass objects of different compositions, which point to origins in Central Asia and China, cast iron ingots probably imported from China, and an astounding variety of foodstuff, some of which, such as rice and plums, must have been imported from far away, can all be seen as a reflection of the far-reaching trade networks of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[9]

[4]R. Amitai and M. Biran (eds), *Nomads as agents of cultural change: The Mongols and their Eurasian predecessors.* Perspectives on the Global Past (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015). T. T. Allsen, *Culture and conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). T. T. Allsen, 'Mongols as vectors for cultural transmission', in *The Cambridge history of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age*, (eds) N. Di Cosmo, A. J. Frank and P. Golden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 135–154. For critical discussion of the *Pax Mongolica*, see N. Di Cosmo, 'Black Sea emporia and the Mongol empire: A reassessment of the Pax Mongolica', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 53, no. 1/2, 2010, pp. 83–108.

[5]S. Reichert, *A layered history of Karakorum: Stratigraphy and periodization in the city center.* Bonn Contributions to Asian Archaeology, vol. 8 (Bonn: vfgarch.press, 2019).

[6]K. Matsuda and A. Ochir (eds), *Research on the extant inscriptions of the Mongol empire and the Yuan dynasty in Mongolia: The report of the achievements of the Bichees Project* (Osaka: Osaka International University, 2013).

[7]Reichert, *Craft production*.

[8]A. Sklebitz, 'Glazed ceramics from Karakorum: The distribution and use of Chinese ceramics in the craftsmen quarter of the Old-Mongolian capital during the 13th–14th century A.D.', Inaugural dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 2018.

[9]Reichert, *Craft production*. M. Rösch, E. Fischer and T. Märkle, 'Human diet and land use in the time of the Khans—Archaeobotanical research in the capital of the Mongolian empire, Qara Qorum, Mongolia',

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The Mongol empire and Karakorum thus fit the description of the colloquial sense of cosmopolitanism and provide a springboard into a deeper inquiry into cosmopolitanism. Historiographical works show the cross-cultural engagement of people who were building successful intercultural careers in the vast empire and the active encouragement they received from the Mongol Khans.[10] These people were mobile elite personnel, most of whom were responsible for the administration of the empire, but also included other specialists from fields as diverse as medicine and astronomy. Bilingual administration under Yuan rule promoted the mixing of different population groups while preserving the Mongolian language.[11] In particular, the merchants, Marco Polo being the most well-known, are often portrayed as cosmopolitan agents whose language skills were highly esteemed.[12] Trade vocabularies, such as the Rasûlid Hexaglot, compiled during the heyday of trade relations across the Eurasian continent bear witness to the importance of communication in different languages.[13] Juvaini, for example, was struck by the numerous scribes of different languages when visiting Karakorum.[14]

A limited set of about 14 stone inscriptions, mostly found as *spolia* within the monastery of Erdene Zuu, provides clues as to the use of language in Karakorum by different actors.[15] All of these inscriptions can be attributed to the time frame of 1327 to around 1350. Ten of the texts are in Chinese and deal with the commemorations of high officials of Karakorum, the erection and renovations of a Confucian shrine and school as well as a shrine for the Three Sovereigns, and relief policies during famines. As such, they were probably all commissioned by the province administration of Lingbei stationed in Karakorum. The choice for Chinese-only inscriptions stands in contrast to two inscriptions from 1347 and 1348, probably both commissioned by the emperor Toghon Temür and both displaying bilingual versions of the text in Mongolian in the adapted Uighur script and in Chinese.[16] The inscription from 1347 commemorates the building of the 'Pavilion of the Rising Yuan' and can be related to the Buddhist temple

Veget Hist Archaeobot, vol. 14, no. 4, 2005, pp. 485–492, doi:10.1007/s00334-005-0074-y. M. Rösch, E. Fischer, T. Märkle and B. Oyuntuya, 'Medieval plant remains from Karakorum', in *Mongolian-German Karakorum Expedition 1: Excavations in the craftsmen quarter at the main road*, (eds) J. Bemmann, U. Erdenebat and E. Pohl. Forschungen zur Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen, vol. 8 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2010), pp. 219–249.

[10]For example, M. Biran, J. Brack and F. Fiaschetti (eds), *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, merchants, intellectuals* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020). Allsen, *Culture and conquest*, p. 79.

[11]H. Franke, 'Chinese historiography under Mongol rule: The role of history in acculturation', *Mongolian Studies*, vol. 1, 1974, pp. 15–26.

[12]S. Kinoshita, 'Reorientations: The worlding of Marco Polo', in *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages*, (eds) Ganim and Legassie, pp. 39–57.

[13]P. B. Golden (ed.), *The King's dictionary. The Rasûlid Hexaglot: Fourteenth century vocabularies in Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Greek, Armenian, and Mongol*. Handbuch der Orientalistik/Handbook of Oriental Studies. Achte Abteilung, Zentralasien/Central Asia, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[14]J. A. Boyle, *The history of the world-conqueror by 'Ala-Ad-Din 'Ata-Malik Juvaini.* Translated from the text of Mirza Muhammad Qazvini, 2 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), vol. 2 p. 607.

[15]See in Matsuda and Ochir, *Extant inscriptions*.

[16]T. Matsukawa, 'The stele of the Xingyuange, granted by imperial order', in *Extant inscriptions*, (eds) Matsuda and Ochir, pp. 161–174. T. Matsukawa and D. Matsui, 'Sino-Mongolian inscription of 1348', in ibid., pp. 175–193. F. W. Cleaves, 'The Sino-Mongolian inscription of 1346', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1/2, 1952, pp. 1–123.

uncovered in the southwest part of Karakorum.[17] The simultaneous use of these two scripts and languages can be seen as one strategy of Toghon Temür to embrace different population groups in his realm, in contrast to the earlier exclusive use of Chinese by the city administration, which—judging by their names—mostly involved Chinese personnel. The preservation of native language identity is likewise represented by the two known Persian inscriptions, dated to 1332 and 1341/1342.[18] The practice of commissioning inscriptions in Karakorum therefore points to a difference in attitude among different groups: while imperial policy clearly included a bilingual government, local groups in Karakorum clung exclusively to their own language. This observation leads to the question of whether different groups in Karakorum were truly cosmopolitan.

The main reason why cosmopolitanism is attributed to Karakorum can rightfully be seen in William of Rubruck's detailed description of the city. The Franciscan monk travelled to the Mongolian steppes from 1253 to 1254 in order to proselytize and to look for European captives who provided crucial skills for their new Mongolian masters.[19] The monk spent several months in the city in 1254, so he was intimately familiar with its layout and its people. Rubruck mentions a colourful mix of people and structures: Möngke Khan (r. 1251–1259), the palace, 'all the nobles from any place up to two months' journey away', envoys, one quarter for Muslim merchants with bazaars, one quarter for Chinese craftspeople, Buddhist temples, Muslim mosques, a Christian church, and court scribes.[20] Adding to this list are his personal encounters, for example with Guillaume de Boucher, a French artisan; 'Hungarians, Alans, Russians, Georgians and Armenians'; and envoys of a sultan of India.[21] However, not all of these people dwelt voluntarily in Karakorum; artisans, for example, were prized booty in the Mongol conquests, and Guillaume de Boucher was one of those captured in Hungary and brought to the Mongolian steppes.[22]

The image of the city as a gathering place for different groups is corroborated by other sources. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Persian Rashīd al-Dīn mentions markets and storehouses, that the construction of the palace area had been carried out by Chinese craftsmen, and that nobles were asked to build residences nearby the khan's palace.[23] The Arab Ibn Fadl Allah al-'Umari wrote in the mid-fourteenth century that the city served as the main station for the Mongol

[17]C. Franken, *Die 'GROSSE HALLE' von Karakorum: Zur archäologischen Untersuchung des ersten Buddhistischen Tempels der alten Mongolischen Hauptstadt*. Forschungen zur Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen, vol. 12 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2015).

[18]K. Isogai and Y. Yajima, 'The Persian inscription of 732 A.H. from Qara-Qorum', in *Extant inscriptions*, (eds) Matsuda and Ochir, pp. 223–235. K. Isogai and Y. Yajima, 'The Persian inscription of 742 A.H. from Qara-Qorum', in ibid., pp. 237–266.

[19]P. Jackson (trans.), *The mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His journey to the court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253–1255*. Introduction, notes and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990).

[20]Ibid., pp. 209, 221.

[21]Ibid., pp. 212–213, 247.

[22]T. T. Allsen, 'Population movements in Mongol Eurasia', in *Nomads*, (eds) Amitai and Biran, pp. 119–151. Jackson, *Rubruck*, p. 183. G. G. Guzman, 'European captives and craftsmen among the Mongols, 1231–1255', *The Historian*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2010, pp. 122–150, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6563.2009.00259.x.

[23]Rashīd al-Dīn and J. A. Boyle, *The successors of Genghis Khan*. Translated from the Persian of Rashīd Al-Dīn by John Andrew Boyle (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1971).

military and had several imperial workshops for the production of fine textiles and luxurious goods.[24]

We must also keep in mind that the population of Karakorum changed dynamically throughout the year due to the mobility of the Mongol court and seasonal fluctuations in merchants' routes.[25] It is difficult to estimate the permanent, steady parts of the population of Karakorum, but a mixture of craftspeople, administrative staff and scribes, religious professionals, and stationary troops might be assumed.

The city thus emerges as a place full of opportunities to encounter people of different cultural backgrounds, but this does not tell us about the mindsets of the people and how they engaged with one another. There is research that has treated themes that relate to issues of cosmopolitanism in the Mongol empire from a distinct historiographical perspective,[26] but to the knowledge of the author, there is no dedicated discussion of cosmopolitanism as such that concerns the heart of the Mongol empire. Studies of cosmopolitanism with an explicit focus on archaeology and material culture are few.[27] This article presents the first foray into this field for Karakorum. Cosmopolitanism certainly evokes the picture of modern, multicultural city cultures. The question here, however, is if the same can be said about Karakorum. Did the inhabitants of Karakorum make use of the multitude of different opportunities, and if yes, how did they engage with groups perceived as different from their own?

First, a closer look at the history of the term 'cosmopolitanism' and its layered meanings will serve to provide an understanding of the term in contexts that are relevant and amenable to an archaeological approach. Key cultural areas will then be explored based on the actual archaeological findings from Karakorum, underpinned by evidence from written sources, to tease out the nature of everyday cosmopolitan practices in the city. The goal of this article is therefore twofold: to provide a better understanding of Mongol period city culture within steppe societies and to explore

[24]K. Lech, *Al-'Umarī's Darstellung der Mongolischen Reiche in seinem Werk Masālik Al-Abṣār Fī Mamālik Al-Amṣār: mit Paraphrase und Kommentar*. Asiatische Forschungen, vol. 22 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1968), p. 112. Bearing in mind that the historian drew heavily from Juvaini's writings and had himself never been to Karakorum, this description might well be more accurate for an earlier time period.

[25]C. P. Atwood, 'Imperial itinerance and mobile pastoralism: The state and mobility in medieval Inner Asia', *Inner Asia*, vol. 17, 2015, pp. 293–349. J. A. Boyle, 'The seasonal residences of the Great Khan Ögedei', in *Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur der Altaischen Völker: Protokollband der 12. Tagung der Permanent International Altaistic Conference 1969 in Berlin*, (ed.) G. Hazai (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974), pp. 145–151. N. Shiraishi, 'Seasonal migrations of the Mongol emperors and the peri-urban area of Kharakhorum', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2004, pp. 105–119. C. P. Atwood, 'Arctic ivory and the routes north from the Tang to the Mongol empires: Dedicated to the memories of Berhold Laufer and Thomas T. Allsen', *Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei*, vol. 12, 2019–2020 (2021), pp. 471–502.

[26]For example, M. Biran, 'The Mongol imperial space: From universalism to glocalization', in *The limits of universal rule: Eurasian empires compared*, (eds) Y. Pines, M. Biran and J. Rüpke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 220–256.

[27]For example, K. Franklin, *Everyday cosmopolitanisms: Living the Silk Road in medieval Armenia* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021). R. Coningham, M. Manuel, C. Davis and P. Gunawardhana, 'Archaeology and cosmopolitanism in early historic and medieval Sri Lanka', in *Sri Lanka at the crossroads of history*, (eds) Z. Biedermann and A. Strather (London: UCL Press, 2017), pp. 19–43. T. Insoll, 'The archaeology of complexity and cosmopolitanism in medieval Ethiopia: An introduction', *Antiquity*, vol. 95, no. 380, 2021, pp. 450–466.

how material culture might reflect the notion of cosmopolitanism beyond what is portrayed historiographically.

Terms and models

Even the most exhaustive works on cosmopolitanism have found it to be indefinable.[28] More often, we find the term used as a good-sounding buzzword. Definitions of cosmopolitanism stem from a wide range of disciplines and cover many and very different aspects. For Biedermann and Strathern, dealing with early modern history, cosmopolitanism stretches between two poles as it embodies heterogeneity, the occurrence of plurality within one locus, and homogeneity, in the sense of being part of a larger translocal community, e.g. the Buddhist ecumene, at the same time.[29] In modern history, cosmopolitanism has also been framed as a modern political ideal and agenda. Here, the emphasis is 'on cosmopolitanism as a practice, a cultural form, that is, "a way of being in the world"'.[30] To anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, cosmopolitanism is, foremost, a personal stance and 'state of mind' of people who are willing to engage with diverse cultures.[31] Consequently, cosmopolitanism can likewise be seen as a kind of competence. It is both a general skill of manoeuvring with other cultures and, more specifically, cultural competence within a particular culture.[32] Each of these perspectives reveals a much deeper meaning of cosmopolitanism than the mere coexistence of foreign people and materials in one place. The crucial element is the consideration of how individuals situate themselves *vis-à-vis* foreign elements.

So, where did the concept of cosmopolitanism originate? The initial coining of the term is ascribed to Diogenes the Cynic in ancient Greece (the fourth century BCE), who, when asked in exile to which city-state he belonged, called himself a *kosmopolitês*, which translates as 'citizen of the world'. However, even concerning the record of this event, scholars have put forward different exegeses. According to Martha Nussbaum, Diogenes wanted to convey a shared humanity, irrespective of origin or other divides (gender, status, wealth). This notion of cosmopolitanism, which is imbued with a sense of moral duty, has been very influential in modern political and historical scholarship.[33] Other scholars underlined Diogenes's oppositional stance and criticized

[28]S. Pollock, H. K. Bhabha, C. A. Breckenridge and D. Chakrabarty, 'Cosmopolitanisms', in *Cosmopolitanism*, (eds) Breckenridge et al., pp. 1–14.

[29]Z. Biedermann and A. Strather, 'Introduction', in *Sri Lanka at the crossroads of history*, (eds) Biedermann and Strather, pp. 1–18, see foremost pp. 4–5. On the notion of ecumene, see S. Pollock, *The language of the gods in the world of men: Sanskrit, culture, and power in premodern India* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 10. See similarly Pollock et al., 'Cosmopolitanisms', p. 11. Although sometimes conflated, the notion of universalism, as expressed within the terms of *tianxia* (Chinese 'All-under-Heaven') and Mongol *tengrism* (another term sometimes thrown in the mix), is starkly different to the notion of universalism as expressed in cosmopolitanism. While the former certainly denotes political ambitions of rulership, the latter implies no such ambitions. For *tianxia* and *tengrism*, see Biran, *Mongol imperial space*.

[30]Sluga and Horne, *Cosmopolitanism*, p. 370. The authors' ideas certainly trace back to Ancient Greece, while at the same time asking to de-couple it from the European history of ideas.

[31]U. Hannerz, 'Cosmopolitans and locals in world culture', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 7, 1990, pp. 237–251, see foremost pp. 238–239, https://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002014.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Nussbaum, *Cosmopolitan tradition*, pp. 1–2.

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Nussbaum's take on cosmopolitanism, since it undermined the challenge faced by marginalized and dislocated people in environments culturally different from their own.[34] The positive connotation ascribed to cosmopolitanism is furthermore deeply entwined with Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) 'hospitality', the idea of being responsible for beings other than yourself, which lay the groundwork for the emerging paradigm of human rights.[35] This positive meaning of cosmopolitanism is likewise prevalent in modern political philosophy.[36]

It has therefore been argued that cosmopolitanism is first and foremost an attitude and a mindset, and that it comprises the freedom to act in this way voluntarily. It goes beyond the reductive view of cosmopolitanism seen as the intensification of transregional trade and exchange networks. At the same time, cosmopolitanism is not a neutral term; it is charged with political ambition advocated as a moral goal for modern societies. Retrospectively projecting modern values onto the past risks producing results that are incongruous with past life experiences. But, as we have seen, there is not one way to understand cosmopolitanism. Rather, it has been stated that it might be 'uncosmopolitan' to define cosmopolitanism,[37] which answers to the variance in approaching cosmopolitanism within and between disciplines. It might be then more fruitful to follow a multiplicity of approaches, namely 'cosmopolitanisms' and to 'simply look at the world across time and space and see how people have thought and acted beyond the local'.[38] The question of 'how people acted', when we refer it to archaeology, marks a crucial shift in the approach of cosmopolitanism as it looks into practices of human behaviour, which leaves materials traces. It opens up the possibility for sources and methodologies of archaeology to be applied. So far, there have been relatively few discussions of this concept in archaeology, compared to other disciplines.[39]

The philosophical definition of cosmopolitanism by which all humans belong to a single community is challenging to apply in archaeology. Coningham et al. opt for a wider definition of cosmopolitanism as a reflection of multiculturalism and a general worldliness. Through their analysis they identify instances of different communities and their relationships and identities.[40] In his study on medieval Ethiopia, Insoll follows Hannerz's definition of cosmopolitanism 'as a willingness to engage with the other', which he sees manifested 'through material evidence (e.g., trade goods, images, coins, architecture, epigraphy and burial practices) that increasingly demonstrates extensive commercial, religious, social and cultural interaction'.[41] This approach sets

[34]J. M. Ganim and S. A. Legassie, 'Introduction', in *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages*, (eds) Ganim and Legassie, pp. 1–19, see foremost pp. 10–11.

[35]A. Nascimento, 'Immanuel Kant, the Anthropocene, and the idea of environmental cosmopolitanism', in *Readings in the Anthropocene: The environmental humanities, German studies, and beyond*, (eds) S. Wilke and J. Johnstone (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 169–194.

[36]For example, K. A. Appiah, 'Cosmopolitan patriots', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 23, 1997, pp. 617–639, see foremost pp. 638–639. G. Delanty, 'Not all is lost in translation: World varieties of cosmopolitanism', *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2014, pp. 374–391, see foremost p. 375.

[37]Pollock et al., 'Cosmopolitanisms'.

[38]Ibid., pp. 8–10.

[39]Similarly stated by Coningham et al., 'Archaeology and cosmopolitanism', p. 19.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Hannerz, 'Cosmopolitans and locals', p. 239. Insoll, 'Archaeology of complexity', p. 452.

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the bar quite low for identifying cosmopolitanism, as it simply invokes the equation of the occurrence of foreign objects with cosmopolitanism. This simple equation should rather be overcome. A more challenging undertaking has been put forth by Kate Franklin.[42] Answering to post-colonial critiques of cosmopolitanism as a white, male, elite project, she follows Pollock in her endeavour to discern everyday practices of cosmopolitanism, especially as acts of hospitality.[43]

All the different takes on this term are unified in seeing cosmopolitanism as a certain understanding, a certain attitude of how individuals situate themselves in relation to others. Therefore, cosmopolitanism is not a policy. It goes beyond multiculturalism, which rather describes a coexistence of different groups.[44] It is also not a theory in the sense that it explains a specific situation, observation, or phenomenon. Rather, cosmopolitanism provides instead a certain lens through which to re-examine established findings.

It would be all too easy to uncritically identify cosmopolitanism among Karakorum's inhabitants on the basis of the mere occurrence of different materials perceived as foreign. Delanty assumes that exchange and mobility are preconditions for cosmopolitanism, but that they were certainly not the same.[45] Certainly not every tourist who spends most of their time in a resort engages meaningfully with their new environment.[46] Thus, not all mobility equals cosmopolitanism.

The already mentioned risk involved with applying this etic concept and projecting it into the past highlights more than just anachronism. Here, the goal is not to identify the origins of cosmopolitanism, but to use this concept as an analytical stance from which to learn more about how different groups encountered one another, and how people engaged in their daily lives at Karakorum. Drawing on Franklin, cosmopolitanism should be seen as action and furthermore applied to members of society normally outside the purview of cosmopolitanism.[47] For the purpose of this article, I see cosmopolitanism as denoting a purposeful engagement of individuals with alien groups and particular practices in their positioning towards such groups, most often understood in cultural/ethnic terms.[48]

[42]Franklin, *Everyday cosmopolitanisms*.

[43]Ibid., pp. 3–16. S. Pollock, 'Cosmopolitan and vernacular in history', in *Cosmopolitanism*, (eds) Breckenridge et al., pp. 15–53.

[44]D. L. Sam, and J. W. Berry, 'Acculturation: When individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds meet', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2010, pp. 472–481.

[45]Delanty, 'Not all is lost', p. 382.

[46]Hannerz, 'Cosmopolitans and locals', pp. 241–243.

[47]Franklin, *Everyday cosmopolitanisms*, pp. 3–16.

[48]This statement touches upon the issue of identity. Discourses on identity underline the situational and multiple constructions of identity which intersect gender, sex, ethnicity, religion, profession, and so forth, in a fluid and continual process. Based on sociological studies, ethnicity is now seen as self-ascribed identity and cultures consequently as heterogeneous and processual phenomena, but not closed entities. Ethnic identity is a collective sense of belonging to a common ancestry and culture, which can (but not necessarily) be expressed through a subjective selection of symbols and attributes to denote distinction from other groups. See foremost M. Díaz-Andreu and S. Lucy, 'Introduction', in *The archaeology of identity: Approaches to gender, age, status, ethnicity and religion*, (eds) M. Díaz-Andreu, S. Lucy, S. Babić and D. N. Edwards (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1–12, p. 2. S. Brather, 'Ethnische Identitäten als Konstrukte der Frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie', *Germania*, vol. 78, 2000, pp. 139–177, p. 158. S. Lucy, 'Ethnic and cultural identities', in *Archaeology of identity*, (eds) Díaz-Andreu et al., pp. 86–109, pp. 87–91.

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Material views

Practice theory in archaeology, which mirrors the shift away from thinking of cosmopolitanism as a state of mind or attitude and instead towards acts of cosmopolitanism, is useful for these new ways of engaging with cosmopolitanism.[49] Simply put, habitual acts by human agents produce patterns in the material record that archaeologists can recognize later after factoring in taphonomic processes. Working on the assumption that cosmopolitanism was an explicitly lived practice among the inhabitants of Karakorum, we should be able to discern such acts of lived cosmopolitanism in the material record. Different aspects of material culture will be interrogated to test this hypothesis, and to establish how different groups engaged with one another. If everyday practices manifested in the material remains at Karakorum comprise the primary analytics, then any critique of cosmopolitanism as inherently Eurocentric may be untangled from the more apt uses of cosmopolitanism for which I argue in this article.[50]

Lived cosmopolitanism can manifest in any field of everyday human activities and cultural practices. These include spatial organization and use of settlements, architecture, cuisine, religion, funerary rites, writing, dress and clothing styles, technology, and medicine. In this article, I specifically address manifestations in spatial organization and architecture, cuisine, religion, and funerary rites. Dress and clothing styles, although highly important for the expression of different identities and therefore for the identification of cosmopolitan practices, are not sufficiently represented in the archaeological record retrieved so far from Karakorum and are therefore not included in this study.

Delanty emphasized that material expressions of cultural fields can be seen 'as media through which many social relationships and interactions are negotiated; archaeology can detail how the material world both engages, and is engaged in, the articulation of social identity, both of the individual and of the group'.[51] This article takes on the challenge of teasing out how cosmopolitanism is manifested in material culture through the combination of cultural fields and their related materials in order to hopefully provide a plausible picture of Karakorum city and its potentials of lived cosmopolitanism.

Spatial organization and architecture

In general, cities appear as sporadic phenomena in pastoralist empires. They rose and declined in tandem with larger confederations or empires and, in the eastern extremities of the Eurasian steppe belt,[52] they did not constitute a sustained

S. Jones, *The archaeology of ethnicity: Constructing identities in the past and present* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997). The Mongols themselves do not seem to have clearly differentiated between ethnic and religious identities. See C. P. Atwood, 'A secular empire? Estates, *nom*, and religions in the Mongol empire', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2022, pp. 796–814, pp. 803–805.

[49]Díaz-Andreu and Lucy, 'Introduction', pp. 5–6. But see also the critical discussion of practice theory in L. Meskell, *Archaeologies of social life: Age, sex, class et cetera in ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 8–52.

[50]Delanty, 'Not all is lost'.

[51]Díaz-Andreu and Lucy, 'Introduction', p. 9.

[52]J. Bemmann and S. Reichert, 'Karakorum, the first capital of the Mongol world empire: an imperial city in a non-urban society', *Asian Archaeology*, no. 4, 2021, pp. 121–143, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41826-020-00039-x.

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urbanization process. The same holds true for Karakorum, which had been built at the behest of the Mongol khans. The city was planned and erected from scratch without prior settlements in its location—a phenomenon that might be coined as 'implanted city'.[53]

This observation can be fruitfully combined with environment-behavioural theory, which addresses how people shape their built environment and how this built environment in turn shapes human behaviour, and Amos Rapoport's delineation of three levels of meaning attributed to the built environment: low-level meaning refers to visual cues that enable people to identify the accepted function and use of buildings and spaces; middle-level meaning refers to the communication of certain political or social statements, such as wealth or power, through buildings or cities; and high-level meaning pertains to the symbolic representation of cities specific to a cultural system.[54]

Looking into the high-level meaning expressed by Karakorum, we have reason to presume a culturally specific, ideological plan in the city's design. The layout is the most prominent argument in this respect (see Figure 2). As already discussed elsewhere,[55] Karakorum is categorically different from the models of either Chinese or Central Asian cities. Instead, nomadic cosmological programmes underlying the layout of the *ordu* (the imperial camp) and the spatial patterns of the nomadic mobile residence—the yurt—appear to have informed Karakorum's design.[56] Per this programme, the palace was placed along the southernmost edge of the city, securing the Great Khan an unobstructed view to the south. At the same time, certain building elements and techniques, e.g. fired bricks and roof tiles, some of which are glazed, follow Chinese and Central Asian styles.

Another highly prominent feature of Karakorum is its wall. Compared to strictly square, or at the minimum, rectangular Chinese city walls,[57] the curiously asymmetrical layout of the Mongol city's wall has attracted scholarly attention.[58] City walls,

[53]Ibid. J. Bemmann, S. Linzen, S. Reichert and Lkh. Munkhbayar, 'Mapping Karakorum, the capital of the Mongol empire', *Antiquity*, vol. 96, no. 385, 2022, pp. 159–178, doi:10.15184/aqy.2021.153. S. Reichert, N.-O. Erdene-Ochir, S. Linzen, Lkh. Munkhbayar and J. Bemmann, 'Overlooked—enigmatic—underrated: The city Khar Khul Khaany Balgas in the heartland of the Mongol world empire', *Journal of Field Archaeology*, vol. 47, no. 6, 2022, pp. 397–420, doi:10.1080/00934690.2022.2085916.

[54]A. Rapoport, 'Levels of meaning in the built environment', in *Cross-cultural perspectives in nonverbal communication*, (ed.) F. Poyatos (Toronto: C. J. Hogrefe, 1988), pp. 317–336. A. Rapoport, *The meaning of the built environment: A nonverbal communication approach* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990). See also the discussion in M. E. Smith, 'Empirical urban theory for archaeologists', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, pp. 167–192, doi:10.1007/s10816-010-9097-5.

[55]Bemmann and Reichert, 'Karakorum', p. 134.

[56]Jackson, *Rubruck*, p. 131. J. Wasilewski, 'Space in nomadic cultures: A spatial analysis of the Mongol yurts', in *Altaica Collecta: Berichte und Vorträge der XVII. Permanent International Altaistic Conference 3.–8. Juni 1974 in Bonn/Bad Honnef*, (ed.) W. Heissig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1976), pp. 345–360.

[57]See, for example, the compilation in N. Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese imperial city planning* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990). For a critical discussion of the simplistic equation of walled enclosures with cities, see L. von Falkenhausen, 'Stages in the development of "cities" in pre-imperial China', in *The ancient city: New perspectives on urbanism in the old and new world*, (eds) J. Marcus and J. A. Sabloff. School for Advanced Research Resident Scholar Series (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008), pp. 209–228.

[58]E. Pohl, 'Interpretation without excavation: Topographic mapping on the territory of the first Mongolian capital Karakorum', in *Current Archaeological Research in Mongolia: Papers from the First*

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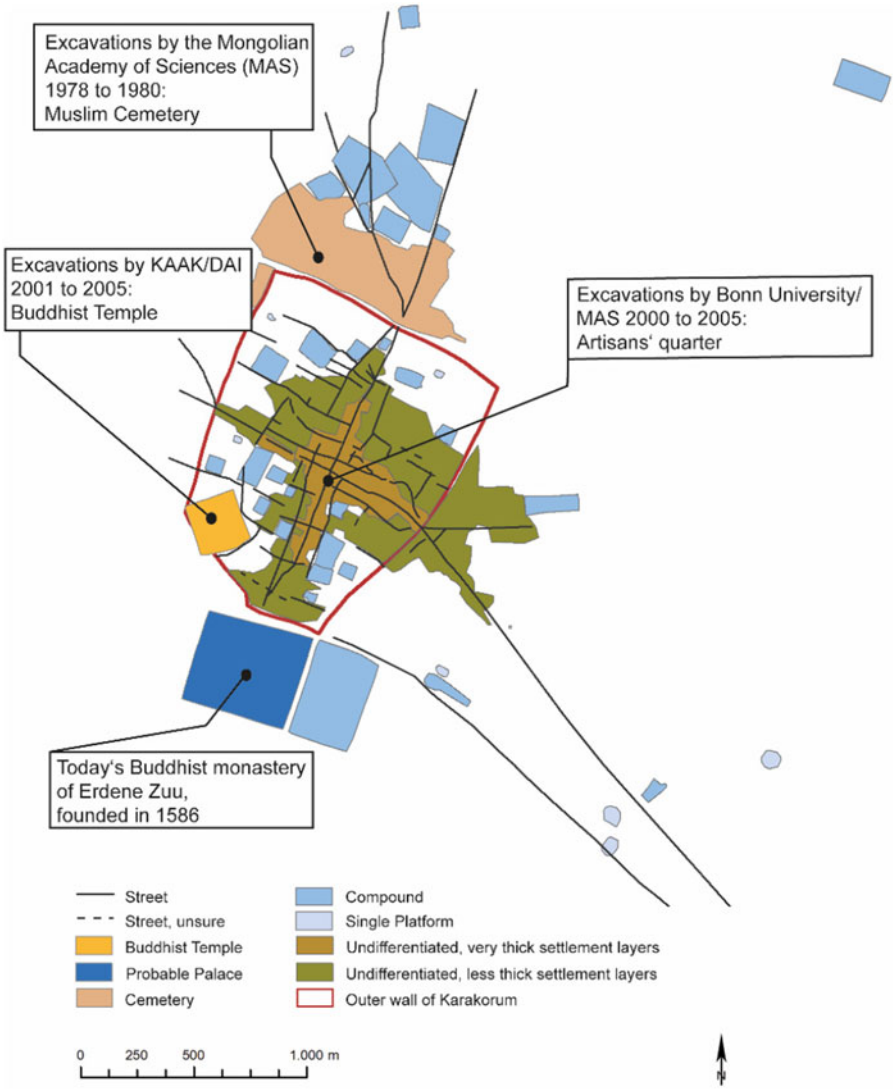

Figure 2. Annotated city map of Karakorum based on topographical and geophysical surveys. See online for the colour-coded version of this figure. *Source*: Author, Jan Bemmann, and Anna Stefanischin.

however, were not an essential feature of Mongol period urban sites.[59] Karakorum is the only Mongol period settlement in the northern steppes that was walled. This stands in stark contrast to Chinese traditions of city planning, where the wall is

International Conference on 'Archaeological Research in Mongolia' held in Ulaanbaatar, August 19th–23rd, 2007, (eds) J. Bemmann, H. Parzinger, E. Pohl and D. Tseveendorzh. Bonn Contributions to Asian Archaeology, vol. 4 (Bonn: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 2009), pp. 505–533, pp. 530–531.

[59]Bemmann and Reichert, 'Karakorum'.

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not only a defining feature, but the term 'wall' (*cheng* 城) is synonymous with 'city'.[60] Ögödei Khan's plan to surround the city with a wall speaks to his interest in this feature. Taken together, the layout of Karakorum displays a combination of different sources, from nomadic cosmological ideas to the appropriation of various architectural styles and features. This might reflect the open-mindedness of the Great Khans and their courts, as they were the decision-makers of the planning and establishment of the city.

The city's layout exhibits further evidence of cosmopolitanism. But we should look not just to the collection of physical attributes that might signal cosmopolitanism. Returning to practice theory, we might ask, for example, in which way the city's infrastructural and architectural layout might have hindered or actively encouraged the communication between different groups and their daily encounters. In other words, does the layout of the city manifest any elements indicative of a lived cosmopolitanism?

Taking a close look at the city's throughways and road system, we discern no blockages or dead ends (see Figure 2).[61] Also, the spatial configuration does not show residential neighbourhoods separated by walls that could be used to shut off the area at night or times of distress, which is a major characteristic of cities in the Islamic world contemporary with Karakorum as well as the Chinese city of Chang'an during the Tang period.[62] The lack of physical barriers might indicate relative freedom for people to roam the streets of Karakorum, which is conducive to intergroup communication and exchanges. Rubruck's description corroborates this interpretation. Judging by his experiences, he was free to navigate the city and interact with different people.[63]

Architectural layouts of residences uncovered during excavations in the middle of Karakorum likewise support this observation. For instance, one house facing the street was the site of a workshop for non-ferrous metal works, which was probably open to the front to maximize the use of sunlight and air circulation (see Figure 3).[64] The layout of this workshop, which had been used shortly after the middle of the thirteenth century, therefore allowed ample interaction with passers-by and potential clients.

The presence of religious buildings and houses used for Christian gatherings, as described by Rubruck, which have been partly evidenced by archaeological excavations, also provided public spaces for intergroup encounters and communication.[65] While these examples suggest that opportunities for interaction in Karakorum were at

[60]N. Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese architecture: A history* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 8.

[61]Bemmann et al., 'Mapping Karakorum'.

[62]M. E. Smith, 'The archaeological study of neighborhoods and districts in ancient cities', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, vol. 29, 2010, pp. 137–154, p. 146. V. C. Xiong, *Sui-Tang Chang'an: A study in the urban history of medieval China*. Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies, vol. 85 (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2000). S. Bianca, *Hofhaus und Paradiesgarten: Architektur und Lebensformen in der Islamischen Welt*, 2nd edn (München: C.H. Beck, 2001).

[63]Throughout Jackson, *Rubruck*.

[64]Reichert, *Craft production*, pp. 91–94.

[65]Jackson, *Rubruck*, p. 221. Franken, *GROSSE HALLE*. H. Rohland, 'Die Nordstadt von Karakorum: Archäologische Spuren der Kirche des Ostens und Interkulturelle Kommunikation in der Altmongolischen Hauptstadt', Inaugural dissertation, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, 2019. There is no evidence, however, of any built infrastructure within the city that would encourage interaction like the Roman

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Figure 3. Workshop fronting the street in the middle of Karakorum and dating to the thirteenth century. A) Upper edge of wooden anvil stand protruding from soil. B) Ditch of street. C) Paved street. *Source*: Author, Bonn University.

least tolerated and not actively hindered by the Mongol khans, other pieces of evidence distort this picture.

Rubruck mentions bazaars in the middle of Karakorum that are associated with Muslim merchants of Central Asian origin. His description of four markets situated at the four main gates to the city, however, raises questions: 'At the east gate are sold millet and other kinds of grain although seldomly imported; at the western, sheep and goats are on sale; at the southern, cattle and wagons; and at the northern, horses.'[66] The animals mentioned here can be deemed core steppe 'products', probably brought by Mongolian pastoralists in the vicinity. It is peculiar that these people were apparently outside the gates: why was that the case? Is it because it would have been too messy to place animal markets inside the city? There would have been empty unbuilt areas for such markets, especially in the northern area within the walls of Karakorum. Or did the nomads prefer to stay outside the city proper? If so, we would have to exclude pastoralists from the mix of people under consideration who frequented the streets of Karakorum.

Moreover, public access to certain areas within the city was restricted. Apart from the palace, which was walled and controlled by four gates, there is a cordon of walled compounds of varying sizes between the palace area and the densely built middle of

forum or the Greek *agora*. Apart from the northern areas within the walled part of the city, which were seemingly empty of buildings, the steppes outside provided ample place for gatherings of any sort.

[66]Jackson, *Rubruck*, p. 221.

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the city.[67] While the symmetrical layout of buildings within these walled areas might point to their religious function, some of these buildings might have been housing for the aforementioned nobles who were asked to build residences near the Great Khan's palace. Their different sizes might be interpreted as differences in wealth and social status, which brings us to the identification of different neighbourhoods and their possible social differentiation.

Excavations by Russians, Mongolians, and Germans in the middle, densely built areas of Karakorum revealed evidence of households occupied with craft activities.[68] We see here the evidence of one of the two quarters mentioned by Rubruck, which he differentiated based on the profession and ethnicity of the residents. Two recent studies, partially based on new geophysical and topographical surveys of Karakorum,[69] took the first step in identifying the layout and types of spatial zones, e.g. residential or civic-ceremonial. The authors found that 'standardized building forms or floor plans cluster in different areas and along the main streets, which could indicate a social and/or occupational differentiation of the neighborhoods'.[70] However, for now, the archaeological data only show us the occupation, and not the ethnic identity, of the residents. We can identify zones within Karakorum that were segregated by social status, religion, and occupation. If, and how, different groups followed possible cosmopolitan practices will be further discussed in the next section on the art of cuisine.

Cuisine

Cuisine encompasses the whole range of dietary behaviour, from what we eat, how we prepare the food to how we eat the food. It is highly adaptable to changing circumstances, and most ingredients can be exchanged for an equivalent that is easier to come by in a different environment. It therefore provides a window into how people coped with fluctuating food supplies in Karakorum.

Human remains found within and in the surroundings of Karakorum have not been fully analysed for a reconstruction of human diet.[71] Botanical and faunal data from

[67]Bemmann et al., 'Mapping Karakorum'.

[68]S. V. Kiselev (ed.), *Drevnemongol'skie Goroda* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1965). Reichert, *Craft production*.

[69]Smith, 'Neighborhoods and districts', p. 138. Bemmann et al., 'Mapping Karakorum'. Bemmann and Reichert, 'Karakorum'.

[70]Bemmann and Reichert, 'Karakorum', p. 134.

[71]In addition to the funerary remains close by to Karakorum, discussed below, there are a few fragmentary skeletal remains from the excavations in the middle of city, which were reconstructed as belonging to ten individuals. C. Lee, 'Human skeletal remains from the excavations in the craftsmen-quarter of Karakorum (KAR-2)', in *Mongolian-German Karakorum Expedition 1*, (eds) Bemmann, Erdenebat and Pohl, pp. 213–217. Together with the human bones of the burial excavations of the 1970s and 1980s, and more recent activities in the surroundings of Karakorum, they might form a corpus to conduct further bioarchaeological studies focused on stable isotopes and proteomics on dental calculus to tease out the differences in dietary practices among different groups; see, for example, A. Toso, S. Schifano, C. Oxborough, K. McGrath, L. Spindler, A. Castro, L. Evangelista, V. Filipe, M. José Gonçalves, A. Marques, I. Mendes da Silva, R. Santos, M. João Valente, I. McCleery and M. Alexander, 'Beyond faith: Biomolecular evidence for changing urban economies in multi-faith medieval Portugal', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, vol. 176, no. 2, 2021, pp. 208–222, doi:10.1002/ajpa.24343. Recent bioarchaeological studies, together with a survey of written sources on food practices among Mongolian groups during the Mongol empire, provide important

excavations in the early 2000s provide another data set for reconstructing the diet of the populace.[72] So far, 10 per cent of the overall faunal collection retrieved during these excavations were analysed. Although the animal bones cannot be related to individual households since animal bones retrieved from the street layers were analysed together with materials from the residential quarters, the results are still useful to provide a broad picture of consumption patterns in the city.[73] Based on characteristic butchering marks, von den Driesch and colleagues found that sheep dominated the dietary intake of meat, followed by cattle, and minor proportions of horse and goat.[74] These are the main species of locally available animals. Kill-off patterns, mostly of juvenile male sheep, correspond to herd composition dictated by optimal herd management practices.[75]

Additionally, birds, mostly chicken, were consumed. Scarce finds of dog and pig bones point to their minor role in dietary intake. The consumption of pork is often associated with people of Chinese origin.[76] In the case of Karakorum, the authors suggest that—since conditions in the Orkhon valley were not ideal for raising pigs—the pig bones might point to the consumption of dried or salted pork imported from the south.[77] Judging by the low number of pig bones in the entire faunal collection uncovered in the middle of Karakorum, these imports were either very limited or did not reach the people living there as they may not have been part of the ordinary food allotments.

Hunting, or at least the consumption of hunted wild animals, did not play a substantial role in the food acquisition strategy. A low proportion of wild animal bones in the faunal collection has been similarly described for an adjacent area excavated in

information on the pastoralist foodways at that time; see J. M. Smith, JR, 'Dietary decadence and dynastic decline in the Mongol empire', *Journal of Asian History*, no. 34, 2000, pp. 35–52; A. Ventresca Miller, S. Wilkin, J. Bayarsaikhan, A. Ramsøe, J. Clark, B. Byambadorj, S. Vanderwarf, N. Vanwezer, A. Haruda, R. Fernandes, B. Miller and N. Boivin, 'Permafrost preservation reveals proteomic evidence for Yak milk consumption in the 13th century', *Communications Biology*, vol. 6, 2023, article no. 351, https://doi.org/10.1038/s42003-023-04723-3; S. Wilkin, A. Ventresca Miller, B. K. Miller, R. N. Spengler, W. T. T. Taylor, R. Fernandes, R. W. Hagan, M. Bleasdale, J. Zech, S. Ulziibayar, E. Myagmar, N. Boivin and P. Roberts, 'Economic diversification supported the growth of Mongolia's nomadic empires', *Scientific Reports*, vol. 10, 2020, article no. 3916, doi:10.1038/s41598-020-60194-0; S. Wilkin, A. Ventresca Miller, W. T. T. Taylor, B. K. Miller, R. W. Hagan, M. Bleasdale, A. Scott, S. Gankhuyg, A. Ramsøe, S. Uliziibayar, C. Trachsel, P. Nanni, J. Grossmann, L. Orlando, M. Horton, P. W. Stockhammer, E. Myagmar, N. Boivin, C. Warinner and J. Hendy, 'Dairy pastoralism sustained Eastern Eurasian steppe populations for 5,000 years', *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2020, pp. 346–355, doi:10.1038/s41559-020-1120-y.

[72]A. von den Driesch, J. Peters and L. Delgermaa, 'Animal economy in the ancient Mongolian town of Karakorum: Preliminary report on the faunal remains', in *Mongolian-German Karakorum Expedition 1*, (eds) Bemmann, Erdenebat and Pohl, pp. 251–269. Rösch et al., 'Human diet'. Rösch et al., 'Medieval plant remains'.

[73]von den Driesch et al., 'Animal economy', p. 251.

[74]Ibid.

[75]Ibid., p. 259 Tab. 9, p. 260 Tab. 11.

[76]A. V. Davydova, 'The Ivolga Gorodishche (A monument of the Hsiung-Nu culture in the Trans-Baikal region)', *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 20, 1968, pp. 209–245, p. 239. Hsing-Tsung Huang, *Fermentations and food science*. Science and civilization in China, vol. 6: Biology and biological technology, part 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 59.

[77]von den Driesch et al., 'Animal economy', p. 253 Tab. 1.

the 1940s.[78] Fishing, probably in the nearby Orkhon, in contrast, was a major strategy for the supply of proteins.[79]

A comparison with faunal data retrieved from the area of the Buddhist temple in the southwestern part of the city reveals slight differences in the pattern of meat consumption. Here, we can assume a different social makeup of the consumers, who were probably Buddhist monks and potentially servants needed for the maintenance and running of the temple. These people preferred horse and cattle over sheep and goat, which might point to ethnic differences in meat consumption.[80]

Similar to the faunal remains, only a subset of the soil samples taken during excavation in the middle of Karakorum was analysed for macrobotanical remains, which severely limits the effective evaluation of identified plant residues throughout the whole settlement sequence.[81] Most of the botanical remains identified are millet, barley, and common wheat; there are also small quantities of foxtail millet. Since these are all summer crops and the researchers also identified chaff and straw, it seems likely that these cereals were cultivated locally in the Orkhon Valley.[82]

Winter crops, namely oat, rye, dinkel wheat, and einkorn wheat were found in far smaller quantities and might have been either locally produced or imported from Central Asia or China.[83] There were only two specimens of rice, which was certainly imported from China. The scarcity of this crop in Karakorum, which was, and still is, a staple in South Asian cuisines, is notable.[84] Possibly due to the abundance of animal protein, oil plants and pulses, which might have been locally grown, did not form major components in the diet.

Remains of a variety of spices, vegetables, and fruits that could be gathered in the wild, e.g. strawberries, pine nuts, juniper, and caraway, have also been identified, although they are rare due to taphonomic processes.[85] Some of the plant types identified in the macrobotanical remains could not be grown in central Mongolia and must have therefore been imported, most likely from China or Central Asia. Among them are grapes, figs, dates, plums, and black pepper.[86] All in all, the archaeobotanists identified more than ten different species of vegetables and spices, 20 species of fruits and nuts, and ten different Cerealia, which, in their view, indicate a varied diet similar to patterns found in medieval towns of Western Europe.[87] The limited number of macrobotanical

[78]V. I. Tsalkin, 'Fauna iz Raskopok Kara-Koruma', *Kratkie Soobshcheniia Instituta Archeologii*, vol. 114, 1968, pp. 16–23.

[79]von den Driesch et al., 'Animal economy', p. 258 Tab. 8.

[80]Ibid., p. 264. Huang, *Fermentations*, pp. 55–56.

[81]Rösch et al., 'Medieval plant remains'.

[82]Ibid., p. 221. The authors, however, also hint at the possibility that crops were imported with chaff and straw still attached to the grains and then further processed at the place of consumption, which has been shown in ethnographic studies. A recent isotope study with a subset of Mongol empire period individuals corroborates, however, the regular inclusion of millet and, in some cases, possibly wheat and/or barley in Mongolian diets; see Wilkin et al., 'Economic diversification'.

[83]Rösch et al., 'Medieval plant remains'.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Ibid., p. 221.

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remains recovered from the excavations of the Buddhist temple does not allow for a comparison.

Overall, the patterns of meat consumption in the middle of Karakorum show that foreigners had to adapt their potential meat preferences to that which was available in the Mongolian steppes. The tastes of the potentially Chinese populace were only sparingly accommodated by the supply of pork meat or imports of rice. The relative importance of fishing might indicate that people had to supplement their daily calories strategically. Furthermore, as Rubruck details, some Christian dependants were not sufficiently supplied with food by their Mongolian masters.[88] His observation that grain was not always attainable in the markets of Karakorum also bears witness to the fragility of the supply of bulk goods from outside the region.[89]

We may now conclude that the people living in the middle of Karakorum, who probably originated from China, Europe, and Central Asia, embraced their new place of residence and, as cosmopolitans, consumed foods that were not normally part of their diets. However, the restricted availability of different plants, legumes, and meats might have led to a situation where people had little choice in the kinds of food they could consume daily, but rather had to make ends meet from the available resources.

A recipe book from 1330 written by Hu Sihui paints a rather different picture with regard to the food practices of the Mongolian emperors.[90] His 'Proper and Essential Things for the Emperor's Food and Drink' ('飲膳正要Yinshan Zhengyao') can be portrayed as a fusion of Mongolian, Turkic, South and West Asian, and Chinese cuisines.[91] Furthermore, the ability to offer a diverse range of foods has been interpreted as a power display at the Mongol court.[92]

Another way to look into cooking and eating is through the pottery that was used and discarded by the inhabitants. The majority of glazed ceramic wares found in the middle of Karakorum was imported from China (84.6 per cent) and Central Asia (1.3 per cent). They are mostly bowls and plates used for eating and drinking. Glazed wares of unknown, possibly local, provenance (14.1 per cent) are mostly storage vessels.[93] Locally produced grey, unglazed ceramic pots as well as iron and bronze cauldrons seem to have been used as cooking ware.[94]

The range of ceramic ware at Karakorum differs greatly from that of Yanjialang, Inner Mongolia, in terms of vessel shape and use.[95] Assuming that the function of the

[88]Jackson, *Rubruck*, pp. 214–215.

[89]Ibid., p. 221.

[90]P. D. Buell and E. N. Anderson, *A soup for the Qan: Chinese dietary medicine of the Mongol era as seen in Hu Sihui's Yinshan Zhengyao*, 2nd edn (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010).

[91]Ibid. See also Franklin, *Everyday cosmopolitanisms*, pp. 122–124.

[92]E. N. Anderson, *Food and environment in early and medieval China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

[93]Sklebitz, *Glazed ceramics*, pp. 208, 212.

[94]Personal communication with Ernst Pohl, field director of the excavations in 1999–2005, 30 August 2022. The grey, unglazed ceramics from the excavations of the middle of Karakorum have not been comprehensively published so far. High numbers of iron and bronze cauldron fragments point to the availability of such items, and repairs indicate that they were valued and much-used possessions; see Reichert, *Craft production*, pp. 118–119.

[95]Sklebitz, *Glazed ceramics*, pp. 214–218. Other ceramic objects of high importance in China but missing in the Karakorum data set are pillows and boxes; ibid., p. 212.

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items had remained the same, the lack of certain objects in Karakorum might indicate that the imports were driven by Mongolian choices and not necessarily by those of the inhabitants who used the ceramics in the middle of Karakorum. According to Paul Buell, the Mongols disseminated their predilection for liquid meals, mostly soups and broths, across Eurasia, which is expressed in a corresponding surge in demand for specific vessel forms, namely glazed bowls.[96] This attests to Eurasian culinary adaptability and flexibility.

Religion

The Mongol rulers were renowned for their pluralistic attitude towards religion.[97] For example, they offered tax exemptions to religious professionals.[98] As a trade-off, the rulers profited from prayers and the spiritual potency attributed to these religious professionals.[99] The practice of holding interfaith debates at the court provided a venue to negotiate political power and can likewise be seen in the light of the khans' cosmopolitan attitude.[100] At the same time, the khans were known to react strongly and violently against perceived abuses of their own customs.[101] The roots of the Mongols' particular stance might have been grounded in their immanentist religious practices.[102] The coexistence of diverse religious communities in Karakorum attests to this practice of religious pluralism and also points to a lived cosmopolitanism.[103]

In the words of Rubruck, 'There are twelve idol temples belonging to different peoples, two mosques [mahumnerie] where the religion of Mahomet is proclaimed, and one Christian church at the far end of the town.'[104] Two of these places were identified through excavations and both date to the thirteenth century. A building complex within the northeastern walled area of Karakorum was possibly used by the Church of the East and potentially reused as a Buddhist temple.[105] With a reconstructed dome

[96]P. D. Buell, 'Food, medicine and the Silk Road: The Mongol-era exchanges', *The Silk Road*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2007, pp. 22–35.

[97]Christopher Atwood traces this view back to Edward Gibbon; see C. P. Atwood, 'Validation by holiness or sovereignty: Religious toleration as political theology in the Mongol world empire of the thirteenth century', *The International History Review*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2004, pp. 237–256.

[98]Atwood, 'A secular empire', pp. 801–802. Atwood, 'Validation'.

[99]Atwood, 'Validation', p. 242. Atwood, 'A secular empire', pp. 801–802. J. Brack, 'Chinggisid pluralism and religious competition: Buddhists, Muslims, and the question of violence and sovereignty in Ilkhanid Iran', *Modern Asian Studies*, no. 56, no. 3, 2022, pp. 815–839, p. 820. Allsen, *Culture and conquest*, p. 200.

[100]J. Brack, 'Rashīd Al-Dīn: Buddhism in Iran and the Mongol Silk Roads', in *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia*, (eds) Biran, Brack and Fiaschetti, pp. 215–237. G. Lane, 'Intellectual jousting and the Chinggisid wisdom bazaars', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 26, 2016, pp. 235–247.

[101]Brack, 'Chinggisid pluralism', p. 821. Another example would be Möngke's ban of the Nizari Isma'ili sect of Islam; see Atwood, 'Validation', p. 251.

[102]Brack, 'Chinggisid pluralism'.

[103]See, for a similar case, Coningham et al., 'Archaeology and cosmopolitanism'.

[104]Jackson, *Rubruck*, p. 221.

[105]Rohland, Nordstadt. But see a differing interpretation by T. Batbaiar, *Kharkhorumyn Nestoryn Shashintny Dursgalyn Arkheologiĭn Sudalgaa. Archaeological research on the monuments of the Nestorians in Karakorum*. Mongolyn Arkheologiĭn shinė sudalgaa/New Researches on Mongolian Archaeology, vol. 7 (Ulaanbaatar: Institute of Archaeology Mongolian Academy of Sciences, 2022).

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roof, the earlier building phase A reflects Central Asian building styles, while the later phase B follows Chinese building traditions.

Another building complex in the southwest, formerly thought to be the Ögödei palace, was positively identified as a Buddhist temple.[106] The architecture of this building combines ideas from Tibet with building techniques from China.[107] Clay figurines of bodhisattvas as well as fragments of wall painting from inside the building represent 'the "International style" of the 12th to 14th century, which is characterised by Indo-Nepalese, Tibetan, Tangut and Chinese elements'.[108] The construction of this building shortly after the destruction of the Western Xia in 1227 by Chinggis Khan, along with the identified artistic styles, has led to the assumption that Tangut craftspeople were brought to Karakorum to build this temple.[109] The style of architecture therefore has diverse origins and might also reflect the backgrounds of craftspeople from different parts of the empire during certain periods. There is a noteworthy decline of objects of Central Asian provenance, e.g. glazed ceramics and glass, in the fourteenth century.[110] This decline might be explained by shifting political alliances rather than as a reflection of changes in consumer choice. Nevertheless, the coexistence of various religions and architectural styles still highlight the openness of early Mongol Great Khans.

They not only tolerated the co-occurrence of different faiths in their capital, they also actively built temples, as detailed in the inscription from 1347 mentioned earlier.[111] The bilingual inscription was probably installed in the so-called Great Turtle of Karakorum, a landmark of the city (see Figure 4). This stone statue, situated less than 50 metres south of the Buddhist temple, is probably in its original position.

The turtle represents ancient Chinese imaginary worlds; prior examples can be found in Mongolia in the old Turkic memorial sites of Khöshöö Tsaidam, not far from Karakorum.[112]

The inscription praises Buddhism several times. Toghon Temür, for example, is placed in the tradition of the Mongolian Great Khans Ögödei and Möngke, who are invoked as positive role models, and described as promoters of Buddhism and

[106]Cleaves, 'Sino-Mongolian inscription', p. 23. S. V. Kiselev and L. A. Evtiukhova, 'Dvorets Kara-Koruma', in *Drevnemongol'skie Goroda*, (ed.) S. V. Kiselev (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1965), pp. 138–166. Franken, *GROSSE HALLE*, pp. 161–162.

[107]Franken, *GROSSE HALLE*, p. 157. Bao Muping, 'A multi-storied wooden building in thirteenth century Karakorum: A study on the architectural style of the Xingyuanpavilion', in *International conference on ten years of the World Heritage Site Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape: Past and present*, (eds) T. Matsuka and A. Ochir (Ulaanbaatar, Kharkhorin city: IISNC, 2015), pp. 73–82.

[108]H.-G. Hüttel, 'Royal palace or Buddhist temple? On search for the Karakorum Palace', in *Current Archaeological Research in Mongolia*, (eds) Bemmann et al., pp. 535–548, p. 543.

[109]H.-G. Hüttel, 'Berichte für die Jahre 2009–2010 der Projekte der Kommission für Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts: Die Ausgrabungen der Mongolisch-Deutschen Orchon-Expedition (MONDOrEx)', *Zeitschrift für Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen*, vol. 4, 2012, pp. 415–419.

[110]Reichert, *Craft production*. Sklebitz, *Glazed ceramics*.

[111]Cleaves, 'Sino-Mongolian inscription'. S. Reichert, 'Auf dem Rücken der Schildkröte: Eine Inschrift im Spannungsfeld von Konflikt und Konsens im Mongolischen Weltreich', in *Macht und Herrschaft als Transkulturelle Phänomene: Texte Bilder Artefakte*, (ed.) E. Brüggen. Macht und Herrschaft, vol. 13 (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2021), pp. 33–51.

[112]L. Šmahelová, 'Kül Tegin monument and heritage of Lumír Jisl: The expedition of 1958', in *Current archaeological research in Mongolia*, (eds) Bemmann et al., pp. 325–341.

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Figure 4. The stone turtle of Karakorum with the monastery of Erdene Zuu in the background. *Source:* Author.

wise men. At the same time, these rulers had located their centre of rule in the Mongol heartland. By joining this tradition, Toghon Temür affirms his Mongol origin and might thus refute critiques of him being too Sinicized.[113]

The turtle's pictorial programme and its inscription, as well as the use of different scripts and languages, can be seen as another example of the Yuan ruler's open attitude: Buddhists, Mongolian traditionalists, and followers of general Chinese ideas could all feel equally addressed. This of course is only true for those who had access to the temple precinct and who were literate in one or both languages and the accompanying pictorial programme.

Rubruck's travel report leaves the impression that the city's population was divided along ethnic and religious lines. His description of different quarters is one example, even though this portrayal might have been dictated by his world view of how

[113]The question of how Sinicized or less nomadic Mongols became in China has seen a long debate in scholarly literature; see I. Landa, 'The strategic communication between the Yuan imperial capitals and the northern macro-regions: The fragile stability of the empire', in *Core, periphery, frontier: Spatial patterns of power*, (eds) J. Bemmann, D. Dahlmann and D. Taranczewski. Macht und Herrschaft, vol. 14 (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2021), pp. 187–257, p. 196 with fn. 28. A different understanding of Sinicization is offered by Atwood who points to the emic perspective on culture in ancient China, which differentiates between ordinary customs and a high court culture achieved by Confucian training; see C. P. Atwood (ed. and trans.), *The rise of the Mongols: Five Chinese sources*. Introduction by Christopher P. Atwood, with Lynn Struve (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2021), pp. 21–22.

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towns should look, as the ghettoization of people of Jewish faith was well underway in European towns in his time. Then again, even his encounters with segregated Christian groups—on the one hand, Nestorians or Christians of the Church of the East and Christians of the Roman faith, on the other—convey the presence of segregated communities.[114]

Funerary rites

Except for one necropolis outside the north-west city wall of Karakorum, there are no known large cemeteries in the vicinity of the city from the era of the Mongol empire (see Figure 5).[115] Single and small burial groups have been uncovered mostly through chance finds and during rescue excavations,[116] but most of these have remained either unpublished or have been presented with incomplete information.

Generally, Mongol period burials are characterized by inhumation in pit-graves, sometimes in wooden coffins. The surface of the burial site is commonly marked by a layer of small stones obtained in the immediate surroundings. The dead were placed in a supine position, as a rule oriented north–south—although exceptions to the rule can be observed as well—and accompanied by their personal belongings. Some burials are lavishly furnished. However, not all members of the Mongolian society received the kind of burial that could be identified by later generations, let alone centuries later by archaeologists. It is known that the uppermost elite of the ruling clan were buried in secret and it is doubtful whether commoners are even represented in the archaeological record.[117] The limited information available on burials around Karakorum suggests differently structured burial rites, pointing to various groups that laid down their dead spatially segregated (see Figure 6).[118] But whether the people buried within these surrounding graves were actually inhabitants of the city or nomads who lived outside the city cannot be known.

However, Karakorum stands out from all other contemporary settlements in the northern steppes in that there are two cemeteries attributed to Islamic communities. One lies outside the north-west city wall of Karakorum where there is a large area of funerary buildings.[119] Another cemetery about 8.5 kilometres north-east of Karakorum

[114]Jackson, *Rubruck*, p. 213.

[115]U. Erdenebat, 'Altmongolisches Grabbrauchtum: Archäologisch-Historische Untersuchungen zu den Mongolischen Grabfunden des 11. bis 17. Jahrhunderts in der Mongolei', 2 vols (Text and Katalog), Inaugural dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 2009.

[116]Ibid. (Katalog), pp. 229–242. V. E. Voĭtov, 'Mogil'niki Karakoruma: Po Materialam Rabot 1976–1981 Gg', in *Arkheologicheskie, Ėtnograficheskie i Antropologicheskie Issledovaniia v Mongolii: Sbornik Nauchnykh Trudov*, (eds) A. P. Derevianko and Sh. Natsagdorzh (Novosibirsk: Nauka Sibirskoe Otdelenie, 1990), pp. 132–149.

[117]J. A. Boyle, 'The burial place of the Great Khan Ögedei', *Acta Orientalia*, vol. 32, 1970, pp. 45–50. J. A. Boyle, 'The thirteenth-century Mongols' conception of the after life: The evidence of their funerary practices', *Mongolian Studies*, vol. 1, 1974, pp. 5–14. Bemmann and Reichert, 'Karakorum', p. 134. U. Erdenebat, J. Burentogtokh and W. Honeychurch, 'The archaeology of the Mongol empire', in *The Mongol world*, (eds) T. May and M. Hope (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 507–533, pp. 518–520.

[118]Compare data assembled in Voĭtov, 'Mogil'niki Karakoruma' with Erdenebat, 'Altmongolisches Grabbrauchtum' (Katalog).

[119]Voĭtov, 'Mogil'niki Karakoruma'. Bayar and Voitov,'Islamic cemetery', pp. 289–305.

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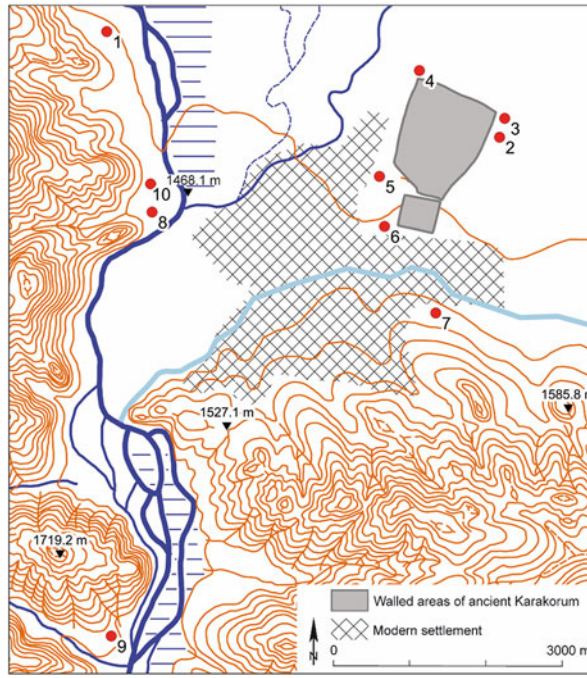

Figure 5. Map of Karakorum and its surroundings with known and at least partially excavated burial places dating to the Mongol period, with 1 Baga Artsat Am;[120] 2 Karakorum city, east;[121] 3 Karakorum city, MDKE east;[122] 4 Karakorum city north;[123] 5 Karakorum city, west;[124] 6 Karakorum, mass grave;[125] 7 Mamuu Tolgoĭ;[126] 8 Moĭltyn Am;[127] 9 Nariĭny Am;[128] 10 Tüvshinshirėėgiĭn Am.[129] *Source*: Author.

[120]Voĭtov, 'Mogil'niki Karakoruma', pp. 144, 134, Figure 1. Erdenebat, 'Altmongolisches Grabbrauchtum' (Katalog), pp. 229–230.

[121]Voĭtov, 'Mogil'niki Karakoruma', pp. 133, 134, Figure 1.

[122]E. Pohl, Lkh. Mönkhbayar, B. Ahrens, K. Frank, S. Linzen, A. Osinska, T. Schüler and M. Schneider, 'Production sites in Karakorum and its environment: A new archaeological project in the Orkhon Valley, Mongolia', *The Silk Road*, vol. 10, 2012, pp. 49–65, p. 53.

[123]D. Bayar and V. E. Voitov, 'Excavation in the Islamic cemetery of Karakorum', in *Mongolian-German Karakorum Expedition 1*, (eds) Bemmann, Erdenebat and Pohl. Voĭtov, 'Mogil'niki Karakoruma', pp. 133, 134, Figure 1.

[124]Voĭtov, 'Mogil'niki Karakoruma', pp. 134, 134, Figure 1. Erdenebat, 'Altmongolisches Grabbrauchtum' (Katalog), pp. 231–232.

[125]S. Khürėlsükh, 'Kharkhorumyn Mökhöltėĭ Kholbogdokh Nėgėn Dursgal', in *Kharkhorum-800: Mongolyn Ėzėnt Gürniĭ Nīslėl Kharkhorum Khot Baĭguulagdsany 800 Zhiliĭn Oĭd Ögüülliĭn Ėmkhėtgėl*, (eds) Ts. Tsėrėndorzh and L. Ganbat (Ulaanbaatar: Sėlėngė Press, 2022), pp. 69–86.

[126]Voĭtov, 'Mogil'niki Karakoruma', pp. 138, 134, Figure 1. Erdenebat, 'Altmonoglisches Grabbrauchtum' (Katalog), pp. 232–236.

[127]Ibid., pp. 236–238.

[128]Ibid., pp. 238–241.

[129]Ibid., p. 242.

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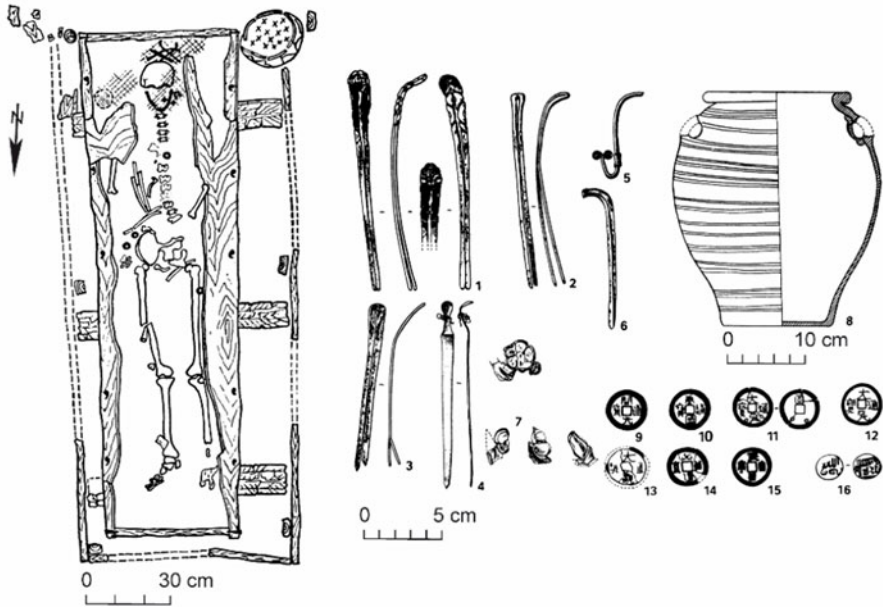

Figure 6. Example of a Mongol period burial from Mamuu Tolgoĭ with assemblage. *Source*: Author modified after Voĭtov, 'Mogil'niki Karakoruma', p. 139, Figure 5 and p. 140, Figure 6.

near Öndör Tolgoĭ is likewise said to represent burials by a Muslim community, but it has not yet been published.[130]

Excavations in the north cemetery of Karakorum between 1978 and 1980 brought to light a central subterranean funerary house with an inhumation burial surrounded by 36 individuals.[131] While some aspects of the burial style were at first glance not dissimilar from Mongolian traditions—the dead lay mostly in a supine position, oriented roughly north to south—other characteristics pointed to a different community.

Most graves are not marked on the surface. The heads of the deceased were mostly turned to the east, so that they were facing Mecca and bodies were stripped of all personal belongings. Some were possibly buried in a shroud, which fits the custom of a Muslim burial (see Figure 7).[132] Especially noteworthy is the age profile of the burials: of the 37 human remains identified, 67.6 per cent were infants or children at the time of their death. This seemingly high proportion is well in line with established mortuary rates of these age groups in premodern societies.[133] Underrepresentation of juveniles in archaeological datasets is a well-known issue,[134] which is also prevalent in Mongolian records.

[130]Bemmann and Reichert, 'Karakorum', p. 134.

[131]All descriptions of the burials taken from Bayar and Voitov, 'Islamic cemetery'.

[132]T. Insoll, *The archaeology of Islam* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 169–172.

[133]A. A. Volk and J. A. Atkinson, 'Infant and child death in the human environment of evolutionary adaptation', *Evolution and Human Behavior*, vol. 34, 2013, pp. 182–192.

[134]A. T. Chamberlain, *Demography in archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 81–90.

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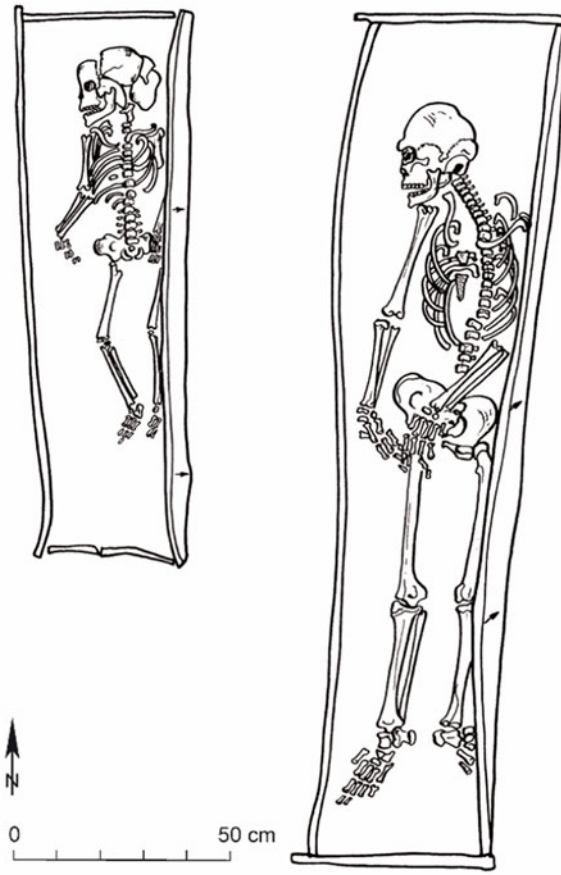

Figure 7. Example of Muslim-style burials from the north cemetery of Karakorum, graves 8 (left) and 9 (right). *Source*: Author modified after Bayar and Voitov, 'Islamic cemetery', p. 293, Figure 4.

As already stated, we do not have a comparative dataset from the Orkhon Valley, but a comparison with the Mongol cemetery of Buural Uul, Khongor Sum, Selenge Aĭmag, where 20 burials were excavated from 1980 to 1984, shows a very different mortuary age distribution. From Buural Uul, there are 17 age estimations, only 29.4 per cent of which are represented by juveniles.[135] If the statistics are not the result of lower mortality rates among infants and children in this Mongolian community, differential preservation, or faulty age estimations, they may be an indicator of how differently the Muslim community treated their dead.

One conclusion to draw from these observations is that different communities in Karakorum buried their dead in different places. This phenomenon is also observed around the city of Timbuktu, Mali, where archaeologist Timothy Insoll identified burials divided ethnically into different cemeteries that mirror the division of residential

[135]See individual burial descriptions in Erdenebat, 'Altmongolisches Grabbrauchtum' (Katalog), pp. 243–261.

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quarters within the city.[136] So far, around Karakorum, we cannot observe a shared burial place or the incorporation of different styles within one burial. This segregation along religious, and potentially ethnic, lines could be used to argue against the presence of lived cosmopolitanism, although it should be taken into account that funerary traditions are known to be rather conservative practices in human societies. We also do not know if Muslims of different origins were buried within the same necropolis at Karakorum. Even if analyses of stable isotopes on the human remains might help to approximate their origins in the future, the self-ascribed identity of the individuals would still remain an unresolved question since grave furnishings are missing in these burials.

Lived cosmopolitanism of Karakorum?

What conclusions can we draw from the presented materials with respect to practices of cosmopolitanism at Karakorum? First, Karakorum can be deemed a pragmatic combination of steppe spatial organization realized through building techniques and styles appropriated from conquered regions, principally of China. This blending and appropriating of existing traditions into new ones can therefore be seen as an expression of the lived cosmopolitanism of the uppermost Mongol rulers, foremost Ögödei and Möngke. Most buildings we know from Karakorum are attributed to building programmes from the earlier phases between 1235 and the 1250s. Further examples of lived cosmopolitanism, such as food practices at the court, openness to religious pluralism, and a pluralistic approach to languages, are likewise the result of cultural and political decisions made by the uppermost ruling elite. These examples stem mostly from around the mid-fourteenth century, which attests to the long tradition of lived cosmopolitanism among the Mongol great khans.

As the exploration of the available material from Karakorum shows, the positive identification of cosmopolitan practices among the common people remains, however, a challenge. The current state of knowledge of the material record would suggest a low degree of willingness in engaging with and incorporating different cultural strands. The cited examples stem from the whole settlement sequence of roughly 200 years. A more detailed analysis of individual settlement phases might reveal a more nuanced development of potential cosmopolitan practices over time.

For now, differences in food consumption between the middle of Karakorum and the Buddhist monastery might point to different ethnic preferences for certain meats. Burial places and mortuary practices are another example of ethnically divided religious groups. The description by Rubruck of different quarters segregated along ethnic and professional lines strengthens this impression. Other aspects, such as the issues of volition and agency, also need to be taken into consideration with regard to these findings. As already pointed out, the craftspeople from the middle of Karakorum were captives from far-flung corners of the growing empire and did not voluntarily reside in Karakorum, which is very different to the specialist elite culture at the Mongol court outlined in the introduction. Who decided where these people lived and buried their dead, and how were the decisions made? Were these conscious decisions by different

[136] Insoll, *Archaeology of Islam*, p. 175.

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groups, religious, ethnic, professional, or otherwise? Or were they imposed by higher authorities? While textual sources do not openly discuss these questions, Rubruck's encounters with Christian groups certainly imply that there was room for decision-making by non-elite individuals and possibilities for personal advancement, as the impressive career of the goldsmith Guillaume de Boucher demonstrates.

But even for groups who certainly had more leeway in terms of decision-making, the state of cosmopolitanism is not as clear-cut as one would think. We learn from the Persian inscriptions from Karakorum about endowments and donations by certain people who were well-to-do, but it is unclear how legal ownership and property rights in Karakorum were formulated and connected to the endowments. Both assumedly Chinese city administration personnel and the Persian donors adhered strictly to the legal systems and language of their supposed origins, which does not provide evidence of lived cosmopolitan practices among these groups, even though the acceptance of different languages on monuments within the city can be seen as exceptional and an expression of toleration. Quite the contrary, these findings do not reveal the merging of various population groups into a homogeneous mass, sometimes referred to as the 'melting-pot'.[137] Similar observations have been stated in the case of Sarai, a city of the Golden Horde: 'But Sarai was not a melting pot, exactly, as groups of foreigners tended to live in their own clearly demarcated districts.'[138] The cities of the Golden Horde could provide helpful material for a comparative case study on steppe cosmopolitanism in future research. The turn to practice theory provides the nexus to identify cosmopolitan practices in the archaeological record. However, as we have seen, it is important to clearly differentiate between population groups and actors within the city, since everyday experiences and practices vary. Simply equating Karakorum as a whole with cosmopolitanism fails to do justice to the rich variation of people in this city as well as to the layered meanings of the term 'cosmopolitanism' itself.

Conclusion

There are varied definitions of cosmopolitanism in the scholarship, but the term is most often interpreted as a normative concept that describes a certain mindset of openness towards the 'other'. The discussion of cosmopolitanism in this article led to a fruitful new approach in archaeological studies, primarily based on material culture, coined 'lived cosmopolitanism', suggesting a turn to practice-oriented questions, which is compatible with archaeological approaches. In exploring the archaeological record of Karakorum, this article traced cosmopolitan practices in the cultural fields of spatial organization and architecture, cuisine, religion, and funerary rites. Although cosmopolitan practices are identified in different aspects of human behaviour, we can conclude that there is no such thing as a cosmopolitan Karakorum as a whole. Instead, we need to carefully differentiate between social groups and their individual capacity for decision-making. The Mongol rulers manifested as true cosmopolitans of their time, while among the common people of Karakorum, the communities appear rather segregated.

[137]Sam and Berry, 'Acculturation'.

[138]M. Favereau, *The horde: How the Mongols changed the world* (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), p. 238.

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This article is merely the start of a conversation about cosmopolitan practices. It has therefore focused on selected aspects of the Karakorum society, which would be worthwhile to explore in more depth, e.g. through the incorporation of object life histories. Exploring cosmopolitanism runs the risk of oversimplification in attributing certain objects of the archaeological record to specific ethnicities or other identities, be they gender, religious, or other roles. Instead, findings need to be discussed in the multidimensional ways they could have been used in the past.[139] The approach of object life history entails a holistic view of the life cycle of the artefact in question, from production to distribution and consumption, as a basis for reconstructing object identities or their usage within different contexts, which could reveal instances of lived cosmopolitanism.[140]

Although the evidence so far does not suggest a high degree of lived cosmopolitanism among the inhabitants of Karakorum, posing the question revealed previously un- or under-explored aspects of the inner workings of city life that has conventionally been generalized. It is problematic to simply label the city as cosmopolitan, although individual experiences might vary among different social groups. Even if there might not be a straight answer to whether the city's inhabitants followed cosmopolitan practices, exploring cosmopolitanism raised important questions which scholarship has, until now, overlooked, such as property rights and individual decision-making processes. It laid bare issues pertaining to the social lives of the population. The scholarship has not always acknowledged the harsh realities in which underrepresented groups in the written sources found themselves. Although the answers to these questions lie outside the scope of this article, the turn towards cosmopolitanism will hopefully encourage further research into these areas.

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Competing interests. The author declares none.

[139]K. P. Hofmann, 'Akkulturation und die Konstituierung von Identitäten: Einige theoretische Überlegungen anhand des Fallbeispiels der *Hogbacks*', in *Die Wikinger und das Fränkische Reich: Identitäten zwischen Konfrontation und Annäherung*, (eds) K. P. Hofmann, H. Kamp and M. Wemhoff. MittelalterStudien des Instituts zur Interdisziplinären Erforschung des Mittelalters und seines Nachwirkens, vol. 29 (Paderborn: Fink, 2014), pp. 21–50, pp. 22–25. S. Schreiber, 'Archäologie der Aneignung: Zum Umgang mit Dingen aus kulturfremden Kontexten', *Forum Kritische Archäologie*, vol. 2, 2013, pp. 48–122, p. 77. Brather, 'Ethnische Identitäten', p. 158.

[140]Lucy, 'Ethnic and cultural identities', p. 102. More forcefully Schreiber, 'Archäologie der Aneignung'.

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