

A MONGOL GOVERNOR

The Mongols began as one of many nomadic tribes in the area north of China proper. Their rise and rapid creation of a world empire began when Chinggis [Ghengis] (d. 1227) was declared the Khan in 1206. During the course of the next sixty years they conquered China as well as much of central and west Asia. In the process the Mongols visited great destruction on settled populations everywhere but also created the conditions for unprecedented exchange of ideas and goods across Asia. China fell to the Mongols in stages. The Xia (Tanguts) submitted in 1211. The Jin (Jurchens) fell bit by bit from 1215 to 1234. Song territory in Sichuan fell in 1252, but most of the south not until the 1270s.

The Mongol conquerors could not replace all the local administrators with their own people, but when they retained subjects of the former states they had to supervise them closely. Below is a biography of a Mongol officer given the task of supervising the prefects and magistrates of several areas in North China during the decades when the Mongols were consolidating their rule.

This biography is an epitaph meant to be inscribed on stone and buried in the grave. Such epitaphs were a well-established genre of private history-writing, usually written or commissioned by the subject's children. As such they naturally drew attention to the person's merits and were silent on his or her failings. In this case the author was a Chinese literati who put his emphasis on the qualities Chinese officials could admire in this Mongol administrator.

**EPITAPH FOR THE HONORABLE MENGGU,
GREAT GENERAL OF HUAIYUAN, GOVERNOR
OF HUAIMENG ROUTE, AND MILITARY
ADMINISTRATOR OF SEVERAL ARMIES**

Emperor Taizu [Chinggis Khan] received the mandate of Heaven and subjugated all regions. When Emperor Taizong [Ogodei Khan] succeeded, he revitalized the bureaucratic system and

made it more efficient and organized. At court, one minister supervised all the officials and helped the emperor rule. In the provinces, commanderies and counties received instructions from above and saw that they got carried out. Prefects and magistrates were as a rule appointed only after submitting [to the Mongols]. Still one Mongol, called the governor, was selected to supervise them. The prefects and magistrates all had to obey his orders.

The fortune of the common people and the quality of the government both were entirely dependent on the wisdom of the governor.

Zhangde, one of the ten routes, is crucial to communication between north and south. In the fourth month of 1236, the court deemed Menggu capable of handling Zhangde, so promoted him from the post of legal officer of the troops of Quduqu to be its governor. At the time, the Jin had fallen only three years earlier. The common people were not yet free of the army, the injured had not yet recovered, those who had fled had not yet returned, and the residents were not yet contented. Because regulations were lax, the soldiers took advantage of their victory to plunder. Even in cities and marketplaces, some people kept their doors closed in the daytime. As soon as Menggu arrived, he took charge. Knowing the people's grievances, he issued an order, "Those who oppress the people will be dealt with according to the law. Craftsmen, merchants, and shopkeepers, you must each go about your work with your doors open, peaceably attending to your business without fear. Farmers, you must be content with your lands and exert yourselves diligently according to the seasons. I will instruct or punish those who mistreat you." After this order was issued, the violent became obedient and no one any longer dared violate the laws. Farmers in the fields and travelers on the roads felt safe, and people began to enjoy life.

In the second month of 1238, Wang Rong, prefect of Huaizhou, rebelled. The grand preceptor and prince ordered Menggu to put down this rebellion, telling him to slaughter everyone. Menggu responded, "When the royal army suppresses rebels, those who were coerced into joining them ought to be pardoned, not to mention those who are entirely innocent." The prince approved his advice and followed it. When Wang Rong surrendered, he was executed but the region was spared. The residents, with jugs of wine and burning incense, saw Menggu off tearfully, unable to bear his leaving. Forty years later when he was put in charge of Henei, the common people were delighted with the news, saying, "We will all

survive—our parents and relatives through marriage all served him before."

In 1239 locusts destroyed all the vegetation in Xiang and Wei, so the people were short of food. Menggu reported this to the great minister Quduqu who issued five thousand piculs of army rations to save the starving. As a consequence no one had to flee or starve.

During the four years from 1240 to 1243, the great southern campaigns took place. Wherever the armies passed, the local officials complained. Menggu, through loyal and diligent preparations, was able to supply the troops without hurting the people.

In 1247 some previously pacified cities in the Huai and Han areas rose in revolt. Refugees fled north and south. Border generals and local officials joined the fray, fighting and plundering. Menggu, by establishing trust, was able to gather together more than ten thousand households and settle them down as commoners. Even children were included.

At that time the harvest failed for several years in a row, yet taxes and labor services were still exacted. Consequently, three or four of every ten houses was vacant. Menggu ordered the officials to travel around announcing that those who returned to their property would be exempt from taxes and services for three years. That year seventeen thousand households returned in response to his summons.

In the first month of 1248 Zhu Ge, a bandit from Huizhou, organized a gang and rebelled. The military officers were planning to go overboard in their response to this, but Menggu declared, "The state has honored me, enriched me, delegated control of the troops to me, and entrusted the fate of the region to me. Does it want me to pacify the bandits or become a bandit myself? There is no need to act recklessly. If the bandits are not caught or the rebellion not suppressed, I will accept the responsibility." He then personally led the troops, capturing thirty-eight bandits at Heilu Mountain, and restoring peace to the local population. By fall there were no more rebels. When the bandit Xie Zhiqian rebelled in

the third month of 1249, he pacified him the same way.

General Chagan recognized Menggu's honesty and humanity. Whenever the other circuits condemned prisoners to death, he had Menggu conduct the review investigation. Innumerable times, Menggu relied on the law to redress grievances and reduce penalties. Ten years before, a peasant in Anyang had offended a noble and been ordered to turn over six young girls. Menggu ordered the noble official Alachur to marry them all out to commoners. There was a drought in the summer of 1250. After Menggu prayed for rain, moisture became adequate.

In the spring of 1262, Li Tan revolted and sent his henchmen to far away places disguised as mounted couriers. They traveled through many routes, east and west, the officials unable to recognize them. Menggu discovered them and got them to admit their treacherous conspiracy, thus defeating them. When there was a drought in 1263, Menggu prayed for rain and it rained. That year he was given the title Brilliant and August General and made governor of Zhongshan prefecture. In 1270 he was transferred and became governor of Hezhong prefecture. In the spring of 1274 he was allowed to wear the golden tiger tablet in recognition of his long and excellent service, his incorruptibility, and the repute in which he was held where he had served. He was advanced out of order to great general of Huaiyuan, governor of Huaimeng route, and military administrator of several armies. On the 29th of the second month he died of illness in the main room of his private residence at the age of seventy-one.

Menggu was a Mongol, and when young was called Mongol Baer. His father was Xibaer, his mother Lengla. He had six wives . . . , seven sons, . . . and six daughters. . . . Seven years after he was buried, Naohai and his other sons recorded Menggu's virtuous government service for an epitaph and came to ask me to write the inscription.

Alas! When I think about all the government officials of the past and present, I come to the realization that the greedy ones are invariably oppressive and the honest ones are invariably incorrupt, the connection between their virtues and their administrative behavior as automatic as shape to shadow or sound to echo. Those who are greedy are not satisfied; not satisfied, they take by force, not caring how much they harm the world. Those who are honest do not take what is not theirs, no matter how slight it might be. How would they harm others to benefit themselves? The house where Menggu lived when he governed Zhangde nearly forty years ago, and the fields from which he obtained food then, were just adequate to keep out the wind and rain and supply enough to eat. When he died there were no estates or leftover wealth to leave his sons or grandsons. Therefore they had to model themselves on him and concentrate on governing in a way that would bring peace and safety, show love for the people, and benefit all. They have no need to be ashamed even if compared to the model officials of the Han and Tang dynasties. . . .

Translated by Patricia Ebrey