

## СТАТЬИ

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WHO WAS THE BUILDER OF MONGOL TOWNS  
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**Abstract:** In the Transbaikalia territory, unique archaeological sites belonging to the Mongol Empire period are found – the town of Khirkhira and the palace of Kondui. They were already known as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century and were excavated in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by S.V. Kiselev. The summarized research results were published in a book, “Ancient Mongolian Towns” (1965). The results of recent investigations open up the new prospects for research.

*Purpose* – the article is an attempt to ascertain who the initiator was of construction of Mongol Empire towns of the Transbaikalia territory.

*Research materials* – summarized results of the archaeological excavations of the towns and manor complexes on the Transbaikalia, along with published written sources on the Mongolian history.

*Research novelty* comprises the statement of results of the new archaeological studies as well as in the localization of the territories in Transbaikalia and contiguous zones of the Inner Mongolia (Hailar) assigned to the brothers of Chinggis Khan, Qasar and Tämügä (Otchi Noyan), and their descendants.

*Research results* indicate that the urbanization processes in the Transbaikalia territory of the Mongol Empire are related to key times in the establishment and rise of the Chinggis Khan's Empire. The towns appeared here in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and likely persisted into the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The town of Khirkhira is traditionally interpreted to be the residence of Yesünggü, son of Qasar. The mention of his name on the “Chinggis's stone” is the rationale behind this assertion. The written sources afford opportunity to clarify some new, previously unknown details of his biography and the dating of the stele.

**Keywords:** Mongol empire, Chinggis Khan, Qasar, Yesünggü, Khirkhira, Kondui, Chinggis stele

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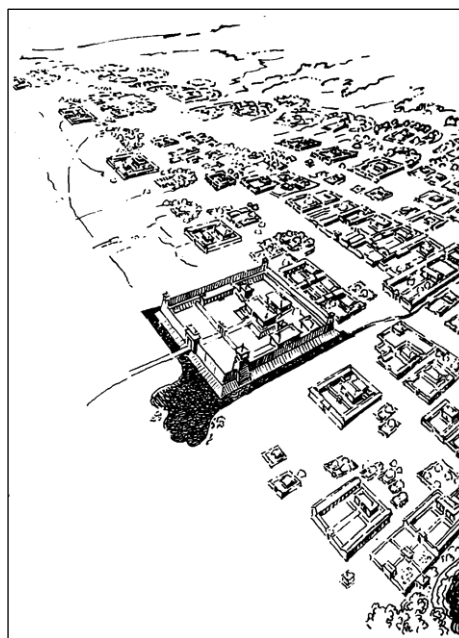
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In the Mongol Empire, the towns and settlements of different types – imperial mega-cities capitals (Karakorum or Kharkhorin, Shandu, Dadu), administrative and economical centers, craftsmen settlements as well as isolate palaces and other elite residences – have existed [2; 4; 8; 10; 13; 14; 20; 26].

Several of them were situated on the Russian territory. Probably, the Khirkhira town is one of the most known sites. It is in the Argun river district (Southern Transbaikalia Region). The site is located on the low terrace above the flood-plain, not far from the mouth of Khirkhira River which debouches into the Urulyungui river. The Urulyungui is a tributary of Argun River which is relatable to the ancestral homeland of the Mongols. The town consists of several tens of elite manors and about 100 isolated houses (Fig. 1). Is it extended at distance of about two kilometers along the west-east line and about 700 m along the north-south line. In the western site, the elite manors are arranged separately from one other while, in the eastern one, they are combined into the complex system of the quarters, streets and bystreets. North of the Khirkhira town, the burial ground of Okoshki dated from the Mongolian period lies [7; 9].

In the south-eastern site, at 350 m from the Khirkhira River bank, the khan's palace garden with walls and moats all round (110x100 m) was situated. The palace has presented a large building on the artificial platform (15 x 30 m) with a ramp. The palace had the timber walls and tile roof with four sloping surfaces. In the palace, the Far-Eastern heating system (*kangs*) was disclosed. The floor was lined with the sun-dried earth brick. As a result of excavations under the direction of Sergey Kiselev in 1957–1959, the palace, gates and town houses with *kangs* were investigated and a quantity of construction materials (tile, bricks), subjects of labor and everyday subjects, armaments, adornments were found [10, p. 23–58].



**Fig. 1.** Khirkhira town.  
Reconstruction by architect L.Minert

He dated the site from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and assumed that the palace was destroyed as a result of a fire.

For some years, beginning in 1997, the site was investigated by Aleksandr Artemyev. He has excavated two elite residences. The first of them being in the eastern part of the town included two houses with *kangs* (one house with brick floor). In the second one (western end of the site), the building with 12 column bases and *kang* was found. Among the finds are the everyday subjects, armaments, adornments, bronze 12-year calendar and iron fork delivered, most likely, from Europe. Artemyev has also obtained the radiocarbon dates for the western manor (1330–1420), which extended the time of the site existence [1].

Our investigations of the site in 2013–2014 were carried out in the other elite residence located in the western town. As a result of works, the remains of the colonnaded building on the fill platform were opened. The roof has rested on the larch columns with the stone bases. Evidently, the roof was thatched. Inside of the building, the stove and *kang*'s remains of the complex structure were found. A quantity of bones of the domestic and wild animals, fish bones, nails, beads and fragments of the porcelain and glazed ceramics including large vessels were also discovered. Finding out of porcelain with the blue cobaltic painting confirms that the site has existed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

At 9 km to the north-east of the Khirkhira town, the palace estate Alestui lies. It presents the fill platform with size of about 17x28–32 m extended along the north-south line. On the southern side of the slope, there is a flat ramp. Around the platform, a low rampart (0.3 m) having approximately square form and size of about 71x71 m, is located. To the northern rampart, one more bunded area of the sub-rectangular shape and size of about 64x33 m was attached. In the course of excavations in 2009–2011, we studied the northern and western parts of the estate and northern part of the yard contiguous to them [12].

The platform was composed of the heavy grey clay. In the course of excavations, the traces of several chimney channels were found out. A *kang* with three chimney channels was disclosed in the northern part of the building. The other several *kangs* were examined in the course of excavations in the western part of the house. Each of them had presumably 4–5 chimney channels. It can be assumed that it is a local development of the Far-Eastern tradition of constructing *kangs*.

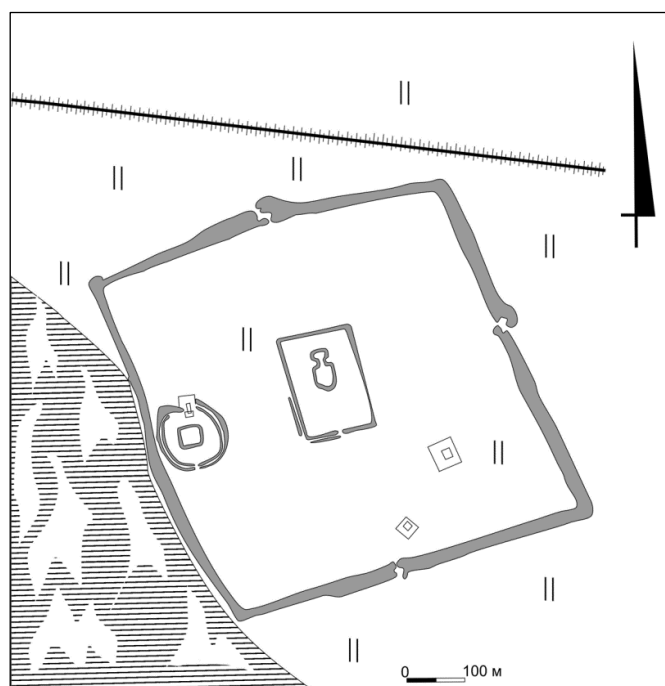
At different levels of various parts of the excavation, the remains of brick walls, 16 full bricks and about three thousand of their fragments of different sizes, tile (about 24 thousand fragments), stone bases of the column constructions, pieces of different iron and bronze articles, iron nails of different sizes (163 pc.), iron arrow-heads, two iron knives, fragments of iron saw, fragment of plowshare, pieces of crucible, Jurchen and Mongolian iron looks, wheel hub liners, rim and pieces of iron boiler walls, astragals, chips for games etc. were detected. One Song coin *Zhi dao yan bao* (至道元寶) of the 11<sup>th</sup> century was also found out. The fragment of porcelain, fragment of watering vessel and fragment of glazed bottle were detected.

It is recognized that the Khirkhira town was the headquarter of Yesünggü – the son of Qasar, the blood brother of Chinggis Khan [10, p. 56–57]. The whys of it is an inscription on the well-known stone stele (“Chinggis’s stone”) found nearby and stored in the Hermitage (St. Petersburg). It is the most ancient inscription in the old-Mongolian (1225 or 1226). Up to now, the scholars did not reach a consonance

in respect of translation of this text; however, the names of Chinggis Khan and Yesünggü are present in all variants [18; 21; 25].

In all appearances, the so called Heishantou site in Hailar district of Inner Mongolia had a direct relationship to Khirkhira town. In China, it is called “Qasar’s town”. The distance between these sites is only 87 km. The Heishantou site is approximately at 11 km from the frontier between Russia and China and at 10 km to the north of the modern Heishantou town. In shape, it is close to square, oriented in the cardinal directions and surrounded by rampart and moat. The length of ramparts: 587 m – northern, 578 m – southern, 598 m – western and 592 m – eastern one. The height of the major rampart is up to 4 m from outside and about 2 m from inside. In the site, there are four gates which are arranged on center of each wall. There are the frontal and corner towers. Inside of the town, there are two palaces or large administrative buildings. The first of them has the shape of rectangular and is surrounded by the wall and moat. The platform of the palace or building is inside of the area. Here, the glazed tile, glazed ware and end plates with dragons were found out. The other wall has the circular shape and there is the square platform.

It is not clear, what relevance had Qasar to this town. The town is walled. The early Mongolian towns had no walls. Probably, it is an attribute of the late times when the conflicts for power happened between the Mongolian khans (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Heishantou site (“Khasar town”)

The other world-known site of the Mongolian times on the territory of Transbaikalia is the Kondui palace. It is at 61.7 km to the west of Khirkhira town. The site has taken its name from the Kondui River. The history of the site’s study goes back more than two hundred years [10; 16; 19 and others]. The most large-scale studies are associated with the name of Sergey Kiselev. In 1957–1958, he

carried out the excavations in the central building (palace), southern gates and one of the pavilions of the site. The total area of excavations was 2,500 sq. m [10, p. 324–369].

The Kondui palace has presented the cross shaped building. It was located on the two-meter platform. The platform had two levels of terraces. The floor was lined with the square plates with sizes of 30x30 cm. The terraces were ornamented with the wooden balustrades covered with red varnish. The lower terrace was adorned by granite sculptures of 31 dragons mounted into the terrace at intervals of two meters. The corners of the terrace were adorned by sculptures of turtle-dragon.

The platform is provided with five brick ramps – two ones from the east and two ones from the west, and one at the principal entrance from the south. On the northern side, the ramp was absent. The similar planigraphical structure combines the principles of space organization used by the Chinese (and, indirectly, Jurchen) architects with traditions of the space organization of the Mongolian nomads (the exit from yurt to the south, while the northern side, being the most honorary, is forbidden; Mong. *hoimor*).

The wall of the palace about 1.5–2 m in height was made of the stone and brick. At the top, the walls were wooden. Inside of the building, 37 stone bases for columns were arranged. The columns were made of timber, wrapped in fabric and covered with red varnish. To all appearance, the building has consisted of several parts: entrance room, walk-through corridors, audience room, domestic premises and auxiliary rooms. The walls of the palace were adorned by figures of animals and aerial creatures. The roof was tiled. The ridges and copings were covered by tile with yellow, green and red glazing. The ridges were adorned by heads of dragons with wings. At the corners, the roof was adorned by human figures in the Buddhistic dress as well as by phoenixes and chimeras. In Kiselev's opinion, the Kondui palace was destroyed by fire at the close of the 14<sup>th</sup> century [10, p. 369].

The second excavation area of Kiselev was located west of the palace. In this place, the four-cornered arbour with columns was arranged. On the floor, the square plates lay also. The roof was covered with the glazed tile. To the north, west and east of the major palace, other buildings were located. This was the integrated palace complex which, in all probability, was enclosed by the wooden fence in the Mongolian times (Fig. 5).

On the southern side, the main gate was arranged. The third excavation was made on the place of the southern gate. Here, the bases of columns, two side rooms and passage on centre were also found. To the south of the palace, no other structures were not constructed. To the north, west and east of the palace complex, other buildings, probably, houses of high-status persons, were arranged. It is likely that the above-ground dwellings or movable yurts of people providing the activities of daily living in the palace could be behind them. However, it is impossible to check this at the present time due to the intense plowing of this territory in the Soviet times. In essence, a similar organization of space has completely copied the principles of arrangement of yurts of the Mongolian headquarters (Fig. 3, 4).

At 1.0 km to the north-west of the palace complex, Kiselev has fixed many small hillocks which were interpreted by him as the remains of houses of common people. Unfortunately, all of them were plowed up by now. At 3.5 km to the east of the palace, a number of hills as well as a quantity of fragments of tile and bricks, slag

and defective ceramics were found in the flood-plain of the Kondui River's left bank. Kiselev suggested that perhaps the furnaces for production of construction materials and community of craftsmen-pot makers were situated here [10, p. 327–328]. This point of view is confirmed by the current geophysical explorations at the site.

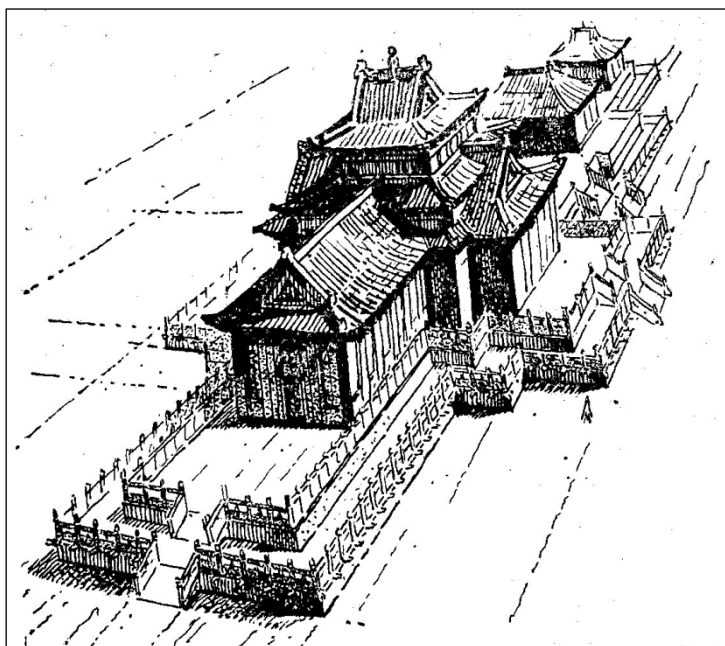


Fig. 3. Kondui palace. Reconstruction by architect L.Minert

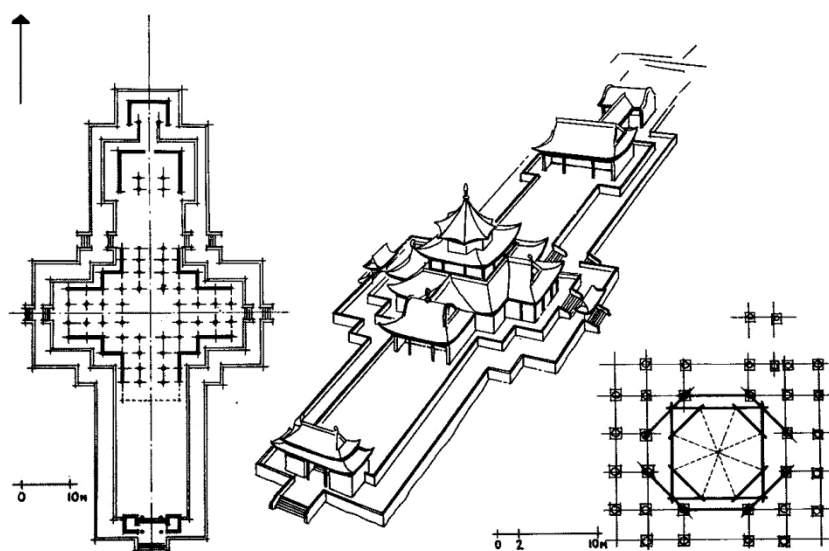
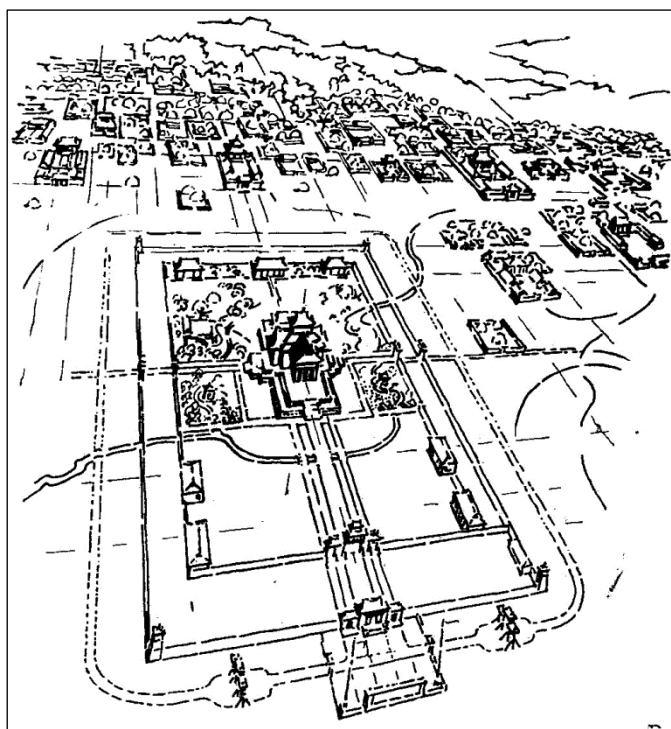


Fig. 4. Kondui palace. Reconstruction by architect V. Tkachev

In 2015–2016, we carried out the investigations of the north-western pavilion of the palace complex (Fig. 6). The building of size 23x9 m was oriented by the long side along the west-east line. It was constructed on the artificial platform. Along the perimeter of the building, the external brick wall was installed and it, very likely, prevented the wash-out of the fill platform. The basic wall of the pavilion was at distance of about 60 cm. The space was packed by stones, fragments of bricks and ground. The base of wall was made in two brick courses and filled internally with the ground, fragments of bricks and stones. Inside of the wall and at the corners of the pavilion, the stone column bases of square shape and different sizes were arranged. The size of the smallest base is 46x46 cm, while that of the biggest one is 56.5x65. The bases were placed at regular intervals, approximately, 3–3.5 m. The entrance to the building was on the southern side and was made in the form of brick ramp.



**Fig. 5.** Kondui town. Reconstruction by architect L.Minert

During dismantling the internal part of the structure, a quantity of timber, in all appearances, the fragments of wooden columns was found at the level of floor. According to preliminary analysis, the columns were made of pine wood. The floor in the building was lined by the bricks of square and rectangular shapes. Some bricks, dragons and pillar bases were extracted during pillage of the site for using for construction of the Kondui church and Tsugol Datsan. The roof of building was tiled. Here, a quantity of the fragments of tile covered with green and yellow glazing and one fragment of the end plate were found. In addition, the ridge capping were ornamented by the sculptural images of dragon-like beings. The construction

materials – bricks, tile, stone bases – are similar to those found on site of the central building; however, the building was not such majestic as the palace. Because the remains of the heating system in the building were not detected, it can be assumed that this was the summer pavilion. As to artefacts, the nails, grindstone, stacks of chips, glazed and porcelain ware as well as the bones of domestic animals were discovered.



**Fig. 6.** The excavation of north-western pavilion in Kondui palace



**Fig. 7.** Pilar foundation and stone dragons from palace in Kondui Orthodox Church



The palace complex was constructed according to the syncretic Mongolian-Chinese tradition. In the first considering, such elements as symmetric strict arrangement of the objects along the north-south axis, position of the palace ensemble at the centre etc. suggest the Chinese architectural tradition. However, the strict compliance of the principle of arrangement of all auxiliary structures to the north of the main place and unclosed view to the south (Mong. *huree*) gives evidence of the steppe traditions in the space organization [17, p. 145–146].

The Kondui complex was non-unique palace on the territory of the northern provinces of the Mongolian Empire. One more palace building was excavated by Sergey Danilov in the Narsatui village (Buryatia). The building was erected on the puddle clay platform reinforced by the brick wall. The internal area of the building was 16x19 m. The floor was lined by the baked bricks. As the footing for the wooden columns, the granite bases were used. The roof of building was made of tile [4, p. 83–84].

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the construction materials of the site – bricks, granite bases of dragons and column bases (Fig. 7) – were used by the Russian Cossacks and peasants as the footings of houses in Kondui village as well as for construction in 1806 of the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God and Holy Martyrs Quiricus and Julietta [15]. In addition to it, the materials were removed to the Aga steppes for the erection of Tsugol Buddhist temple in 1801 [16, p. 22]. S. Kiselev believed that this site refers to the 14<sup>th</sup> century [10, p. 369]. However, the calibrating radiocarbon date indicates that the palace existed in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century [14, p. 170]. In such a way, the time of the palace construction falls on the period of the Chinggis Khan's Empire prosperity and period of residence of the Chinggis Khan's brothers Qasar and Tämügä (Otchi Noyan) and their successors at the Mongolian historical ancestral homeland.

This is confirmed by the written sources. In *Jami'u't-tawarikh*, it is said: "Yesünggü's and Jochi Qasar's offspring's yurt and dwelling place are inside Mongolia, on the northeastern side, in the vicinity of the Argun, Kökä Na'ur Lake, and the Qailar, near the location of the yurts of Jibu, Otchi Noyan's son, and his grandson Taghachar" [23, p. 130]. Here the area of distribution is clearly localized with the Argun river, Nulun or Dalai-nuur like, and and Hailar district in contemporary Inner Mongolia of China.

The residence of Tämügä was approximately in the same area. "His territory and yurt were in the northeast, the farthest reaches of Mongolia, so far in that direction that there were no other Mongol tribes" [23, p. 132]. It is possible that, in this case, one highly piquant detail explains a presence of large number of monumental sites on this territory. The same chronicle says that "Otchi Noyan loved building, and everywhere he went he built palaces, pavilions, and gardens" [23, p. 132].

A presence of dragons on palaces points at the imperial status of the structures. This is confirmed by the inclusiveness of the brothers of Chinggis Khan and their descendants in the highest elite of the empire. About Qasar, the following was said: "However, in Genghis Khan's big battle with Tayang Khan, the ruler of the Naiman, he ordered Qasar to command the center of the army. He performed valiant feats in that battle, and therefore Genghis Khan rewarded him and gave him and his sons fraternal and princely rank and status over all the brothers and nephews. Until the present it is customary that, of all the uncles and cousins of Genghis

Khan's family, only Jochi Qasar's offspring are seated in the row of princes. The others sit in the row of commanders. Some stories about Jochi Qasar and his sons will come in the course of the history of Genghis Khan" [23, p. 130].

Something similar was written in the sources about Tämügä. "Genghis Khan loved him more than any of his brothers and seated him above his own elder brothers" [23, p. 132]. Some descendants of Qasar had also the high status. "One branch of Jochi Qasar's offspring came to this land. They were here during Abaqa Khan's time, and some of them are still here now" [23, p. 132]. Some descendants of Qasar have part in the military campaign against Iran and stayed there. The Qasarids held the high posts and even struck their coins [24]. Temür, one of the descendants of Togha, held even the post of khan in the Ilkhanate in 1338–1352 [5, p. 3–5, 21, 17–39, 35–37; 27, p. 106].

Yesünggü was the best known among all the descendants of Qasar during Khubilai khagan's reign. There is a detailed description of his external appearance as well as basic facts of his life. "Yesünggü was tall and red of face and kept his countenance and beard drawn. When Jochi Qasar died, his most respected son, Yegü, took his place. When Yegü died, his son Harqasun took over his post. After him, his uncle Yesünggü succeeded. During Mänggü Qa'an's and Qubilai Qa'an's time Jochi Qasar's successor was Yesünggü, and his name and repute are well known. He participated in weighty matters and consultations of affairs of state, and they respected him greatly" [23, p. 130].

Yesünggü is also mentioned in one, essential in the Mongolian history, case. At the end of 1224, after he won over the Tanguts, Chinggis Khan returned to the Mongolian steppes and summered there. The *Secret History* confirms this fact: "Then Činggis Qa'an returned home. On the way he spent the summer on the river Erdiš. In the autumn of the Year of the Hen (1225) – the seventh year of the campaign – he settled at his Palaces in the Black Forest by the Tula" [22, § 264, p. 174].

In *Jami'u't-tawarikh*, this event is given in more detail and with important supplement. Probably, Rashid al-Din reported an incorrect year. "At the beginning of spring of Noqai Yil, the Year of the Dog corresponding to 623/1226, he came to Olqun Talan Qodun. While there, he suddenly began to think of his own condition, for he had a dream that indicated that his death was proximate. Of all the princes, Jochi Qasar's son Yesuqa [Yesünggü] Aqa was present. Of him he asked, 'Are my sons Ögödäi and Tolui near or far?' (They were in their own military circles.) He told the amirs and those present that they were two or three days away. Immediately someone was sent to summon them. At dawn the next day, while they were eating, he said to the amirs and those present, 'I have a confidential secret and advice for my sons. I want to be alone for a time so that we can tell our secrets to one another and have a consultation in that regard'" [23, p. 259].

From this text, it turns out that Yesünggü was active bystander of the events of utmost importance when the fate of imperial polity was hanged in the balance – who will be the following ruler of the most powerful empire in the world of the time. The fact of returning of Chinggis Khan and his secret meeting with children is confirmed by Juvaini who says that this happened in the "old encampment" [6, p. 180].

Practically at the same time, the name of Yesünggü is again present in the sources but, for once, on the stone stele, the well-known "Chinggis's stone". This monument was in the Transbaikalia, near Khirkhira. It is recognized that it is the

earliest inscription on the Mongolian. Generally it is dated 1224–1225. Based on the above mentioned events, this should be 1225 or 1226, but not later. If only the inscription was made after the death of Chinggis Khan, it would be compulsorily pointed at this. There are different variants of translation [see, for example: 3; 11], but the majority of scholars agree that the stele was erected in honor of the unique sporting achievement of Yesünggü. He could do archery over a distance of 335 *alds* (more than 500 meters). It is possible that he hit the mark. Most likely, the competitive shooting were held during any feasting. The Mongolian feasting were accompanied usually by the horse races, archery and wrestling. Afterwards, the monument was raised in the native country of the hero.

The high status of the Qasarids and Temugeids has lasted to the end of the 1380s. At the time of conflict between Khubilai and Khaidu, they turned against the Emperor of the Yuan dynasty. “They all conspired to join Qaidu and rebel against the Qa’an. When the conspiracy was unmasked, the Qa’an led his army, seized them, executed some of them, and disbanded their troops. Now there is no one left of their *ulus*” [23, p. 132–133]. We do not have any data but, maybe, just then and for this reason, the palaces of the Mongolian khans in Transbaikalia were burned.

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## КТО СТРОИЛ ГОРОДА МОНГОЛЬСКОГО ВРЕМЕНИ В ЗАБАЙКАЛЬЕ?\*

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На территории Забайкалья расположены уникальные археологические памятники времени Монгольской империи – Хирхиринское городище и Кондуйский городок. Они известны еще с XVIII в., а в середине XX в. раскапывались С.В. Киселевым. Обобщенные результаты исследований опубликованы в книге «Древнемонгольские города». Результаты исследований последних лет открывают новые перспективы.

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*Цель* статьи – попытаться выяснить, кто был инициатором строительства городов Монгольской империи на территории Забайкалья.

*Материалы* исследования – обобщенные результаты археологических раскопок городищ и усадебных комплексов на территории Забайкалья, опубликованные письменные источники по монгольской истории.

*Новизна* исследования заключается в введении в научный оборот результатов последних археологических исследований, а также в локализации территорий в Забайкалье и смежных зонах Внутренней Монголии (Хайлара), закрепленных за братьями Чингиз-хана – Хасаром и Темуге-отчигином, как и их потомками.

*Результаты* исследования показывают, что урбанизационные процессы в Монгольской империи в Забайкалье связаны со временем становления и расцвета державы Чингиз-хана. Города возникли здесь в XIII веке и, возможно, продолжали существовать в XIV веке. Хирхириновское городище традиционно интерпретируется как резиденция Есункэ – сына Хасара. Основанием этого является упоминание его имени на «Чингисовом камне». Письменные источники дают возможность уточнить некоторые новые, ранее неизвестные, черты его биографии и датировку стелы.

**Ключевые слова:** Монгольская империя, Чингиз-хан, Хасар, Есункэ, Хирхириновское городище, Кондуйский городок, Чингисов камень

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