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Legends by the Numbers: The Symbolism of Numbers in the *Secret History of the Mongols*

Abstract

The Secret History of the Mongols, a thirteenth-century text, is often used by scholars as a source for historical data on the early Mongols. The numerical material has found its way into virtually every article on Mongol military organization and on the dating of events. The present article shows that most of the numbers used in the text are of a legendary nature, and are therefore not a reliable source for scholarship.

Key words: Mongols — *Secret History* — Chinggis Khan — Mongol legend

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INTRODUCTION: NUMBER PATTERNS IN THE *SECRET HISTORY*

Oral histories that have made the transition to a standardized literary form often retain a variety of mechanisms that originally served as aids in the processes of memorization and transmission, but that are not recognized as such in the later manuscript texts. Examples include mnemonic devices, alliterative rhyme schemes, epic exaggeration, and culturally significant distortions of fact.

The *Secret History of the Mongols* (SHM), composed in the thirteenth century, is typical of such texts in that it combines historical fact with a number of events and individuals that are clearly imaginary. A case in point is Duwa Soqor, the legendary ancestor of the Mongols, who had an eye in the middle of his forehead with which he could see "three stages ahead" (DE RACHEWILTZ 1971, 118). Similarly fictional are the contents of epic boasts describing the superhuman powers and abilities of certain individuals. Thus Jamuqa, attempting to demoralize the Naiman soldiers on the eve of battle with Chinggis Qahan, attributes qualities of superhuman toughness to the Mongol commanders:

> Their foreheads are of cast copper,
> They have chisels for snouts,
> They have awls for tongues,
> Their hearts are of iron,
> They have swords for whips.

And of one general — Qasar, the brother of Chinggis — Jamuqa makes comparisons that smack of the ancient heroes in other myths:

> He is three fathoms in stature,
> He has a three-year old [mare] for fare,
> He wears a three-layer armor, he is dragged by three bulls.
> If he swallows a man complete with quiver,
> It does not get stuck in his throat. . . .

When he shoots, drawing his bow to the full,
He shoots a distance of nine hundred fathoms,
When he shoots, drawing his bow only a little,
He shoots a distance of five hundred fathoms.
[DE RACHEWILTZ 1978, 55)

For the historian dealing with the SHM, a more complex problem concerns the assessment of data expressed in numerical form. Were there indeed ten thousand soldiers in a *tumen* unit? Were there actually four hounds, or four companions, at the side of Chinggis, and were seventy-three comrades really boiled alive? Or is it possible that the expression of quantities in the SHM has more to do with symbolism than with historical veracity? If these numbers are indeed symbolic in meaning, then much of what historians believe about the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century could be in need of reassessment.

In a previous article I dealt with the symbolic use of the number 9 in the SHM, showing that it is used only to present dramatic events in the life of Chinggis, and never in any other way (MOSES 1986a). In the present study I have analyzed every number in the SHM in search of patterns intended for purposes other than the expression of historical fact. My analysis indicates that textual manipulations of numbers do indeed exist, suggesting that the creators of the earlier oral and later written versions categorized people, events, and spatial and temporal concepts for a variety of reasons. The processes include alliteration for poetical purposes, rhyme and repetition for mnemonic reasons, and, finally, manipulation for the purposes of supernatural and cultural emphasis. Each number is treated separately below, with a summary of its uses within each section. The Mongol word is always given in parentheses, according to the spelling used by DE RACHEWILTZ (1972a).

One (niken)

The number 1 occurs 146 times in the text. It is used most often (49 times; 33.5%) to designate decimal units, usually of humans. These take the form of modifiers in the Mongol text. Thus in the army we find "one ten" (*niken harban*), or "one ten thousand" (*niken tumen*). In general, though, the number 1 is the most diversely used numeral in the SHM, being employed for humans 25 times (17%), for animals 15 times (10%), and for various items of daily use (blanket, jug, etc.) 48 times (33%). The number is occasionally used for spatial and temporal concepts, as in "one day" (8 times) and "one night" (1 time). More difficult to explain is a category perhaps best labeled as "states of mind," which includes such

examples as "being of one purpose" and "having one life to give."

The number 1 is of all the numbers the least illustrative of symbolism and the most difficult to categorize. The following list summarizes the categories of usage:

Humans, units of humans	49 times	(33.5%)
Items, articles	48 〃	(33%)
Animals	15 〃	(10%)
States of mind	11 〃	(7.5%)
Spatial and temporal concepts	12 〃	(8.5%)
Others	11 〃	(7.5%)

Two (qoyar)

Of all the numbers in the SHM, the number 2 displays the most striking pattern. It is the most-used number, occurring 259 times (almost twice as often as any other) both in single-digit fashion and in conjunction with other numbers. In 215 (83%) of the occurrences it refers to human dyads or twosomes, though *qoyar* is never used to link 2 women (see below). In Mongol the format for using *qoyar* dictates that it be employed as a qualifier, as in *jebe subudei qoyar* (Jebe and Subudei, the twain). This usage merges 2 men into a unitary whole; dualities of opposition — right/left, male/female, life/death, good/evil, this world/that world — are infrequently encountered, though they are seen in later Mongol history (ZHUKOVSKAYA 1988, 132). This pattern of usage is so striking that it must be a device deliberately employed by the storyteller. Otherwise a much more diverse pattern would emerge: 2-day journeys would occur; people would have 2 children, or 2 wagons, or 2 sheep; 2 deeds would be performed; 2 units of 10 would be formed in the army. Random examples of this type are seen with other numbers, but not with two.

The next largest category of dyads, with 14 cases (5%), is of random items. Examples include "the two ends of a collar," "the two horns of a calf," and "the two shafts of a cart." Some of these carry a suggestion of a duality of opposites, and, interestingly, they usually refer to types of behavior that are divisive and threaten the unity of the Mongols. The "two shafts of a cart" for example, is an expression used by Chinggis as part of a plea to Jamuqa to let past quarrels be forgotten:

> Tell Jamuqa, "Now the two of us are united. Let us be companions! If we become each of us like one of the two shafts of a cart, would you think of separating yourself from us and being on your own?"
>
> (DE RACHEWILTZ 1980, 23)

Just as illustrative is the "heavenly sign" that appears to Qorchi. In his vision

> there came a fallow cow, she went around Jamuqa and struck his tent-cart with her two horns, then she butted him too, breaking one of her horns. . . . Then a hornless and fallow ox lifted the lower shaft of a great tent, harnessed it to himself and pulled the tent after him.
> (DE RACHEWILTZ 1972b, 162)

The dominant usage of the number 2 to mean "the twain" or "the two of them" is applied in 13 cases (5%) to other numerical units. In every case these are higher numbers: "two units of one hundred," for example, or "two units of ten thousand."

The tight framework within which the number 2 is used to present human dyads may be further narrowed to a relatively small cast of characters, with 8 dyads accounting for 62 of the occurrences. As might be expected, 20 occurrences link Chinggis with other characters (Chinggis and Toghril the Ong Qan being the most numerous, with 15). Several individuals are linked with only one other partner; in some cases the only time the character is mentioned in the entire SHM is as part of these dyads. The most frequently mentioned dyads are:

1.	Chinggis/Toghril	15 times
2.	Altan/Quchar	10 〃
3.	Seche-beki/Taichu	8 〃
4.	Badai/Kishlik	8 〃
5.	Malik/Soltan	7 〃
6.	Qali'udan/Caqurqan	6 〃
7.	Cimbai/Cilagun	5 〃
8.	Bo'orchu/Muqali	5 〃

As stated above, the Mongol word *qoyar* is only used to link men, never women. In the thirteenth-century text of the SHM female dyads are indicated with the archaic term *jirin* (POPPE 1964, 54). This usage occurs 17 times, all in the same obvious patterns. Two pairs of women account for 7 of the occurrences; the rest are either named pairs or are references to *jirin okit* (two virgins) or *ta jirin* (you two). With the women, too, some names never appear except as part of the dyad (as with the queens Orbei/Soqatai and Qorijin/Qu'urcin). In all there are only 5 dyads of women in the text, while, by my count, there are at least 60 such paired linkages of men.

The following table summarizes the 259 various occurrences of the number 2:

1.	Human dyads	215 times	(83%)
2.	Random items	14 〃	(5.5%)
3.	Numerical units	13 〃	(5%)
4.	Places	6 〃	(2.5%)
5.	Horses	5 〃	(2%)
6.	Tribes	3 〃	(1%)
7.	Others	3 〃	(1%)

The fact that this number is used almost exclusively for the grouping of humans clearly calls for some explanation. No easy answer emerges from an analysis of the text either as history or as folklore. A partial solution is suggested, however, by the fact that certain of the pairs mentioned occur in the context of alliterated phrases — there is a clear rhythm created by the repeated use of dyads like Cimbai/Cilagun, Jetei/Jelme, Altan/Quchar, and Jurchedei/Quyildar, a rythm that probably reflects the mnemonic needs of the storyteller far more than the demands of historical veracity. This usage is especially apparent when those mentioned are never cited alone, when their only appearance is in the space of a few parallel lines, and when the same events involving the same individuals are reiterated over several linked paragraphs. Thus the shepherds Badai and Kishlik, first mentioned when they warn Chinggis of a plot against his life, disappear from the story until summoned later to receive their reward, at which time their story is repeated in virtually the same alliterated passages. After this they are never mentioned again. The same is true of the two pairs of queens Orbei/Soqatai and Qorijin/Qu'urcin. Both are troublesome factors: the first pair expel the mother of Chinggis from the tribe in the hope that she and her children will die, while the second pair cause dissension between Chinggis's Borjigit and his rivals the Jurkin. The two pairs of women are eventually discredited and disappear from the text, but their stories show clear patterns of alliteration and mnemonic storytelling.

Three (qurban)

Two patterns account for 95 (76%) of the 125 occurrences of the number 3: it is used 58 times for triads of humans (46%) and 37 times in measures of time, space, or distance (29%).

The handling of triads follows the same pattern seen with dyads. The usual pattern is a listing of a threesome followed by *qurban*, as in

"Temujin, Qasar, Belgutei qurban" (Temujin, Qasar, and Belgutei, the triad). Again, only men are trined in this way; 24 such groupings occur in the SHM. As with *qoyar*, there is clear evidence of alliteration in poetical passages that are dependent upon the rhyme scheme developed by the sequencing of the names, which always occur in the same order, often within passages that repeat earlier information.

There is no one triad that compares in dominance to the dyad of Chinggis/Toghril. As might be expected, the most common triads involve Chinggis's sons and various combinations of his generals and vassals. It is an odd but probably inexplicable fact that few of Chinggis's enemies are trined. It is also odd that his 3 oldest sons are so often mentioned without the youngest, Tolui. The following triads are the most common:

1.	Joci/Ca'adai/Ogodei (oldest sons of Chinggis)	5 times
2.	Bo'orchu/Muqali/Sigi-Qutuqu (generals)	3 〃
3.	Onggur/Arqai/Tolun (generals and vassal)	3 〃
4.	Onggur/Arqai/Sigi-Qutuqu (generals)	3 〃
5.	Ile/Qada/Hobogetur (enemy generals)	3 〃

The usage of the number 3 in measures of time, space, or distance is seen in examples like "three days' travel," or "three nights at that place." Most striking in this context is the fact that few numbers other than 3 are used in this way. The numbers 2, 4, and 8 are never so used, and even multiples of 3 (6, 9, etc.) are used for this purpose only 3 times altogether. Those who attempt to identify the location of battle sites or other places on the basis of lengths of journeys (PERLEE 1969) should keep in mind the repetitive usage of the number 3 and the lack of employment of other numbers.

Few other usages of 3 are as striking as its use in triads and temporal/spatial concepts. Its use with decimals (including $3 \times 10{,}000$, $3 \times 1{,}000$, and 3×100) is the next largest category, with 13 examples. Next is its use in the designation of a particular tribe: the Three Merkit, the life-long foes of Chinggis. This accounts for 11 examples. The following is a list of the usages.

1.	Triads of humans	58 times	(46%)
2.	Time/space/distance	37 〃	(30%)
3.	Decimals	13 〃	(10%)
4.	Tribes	11 〃	(9%)
5.	Acts/deeds	4 〃	(3%)
6.	Animals	2 〃	(2%)

The number 3 has a less obvious but more traditional use as an element in series of triplicated triplets (MOSES 1986a). In these combinations the number 3 points to a divine or supernatural event in the life of Chinggis. The final element is the number 9 (the triplicated triplet) and leads to a test of Chinggis, a threat to his well-being, or a reward bestowed by him on a faithful follower. Nine has been shown to be a sacred number in the Altaic belief system (ROUX 1965) even prior to the arrival of Buddhism (ZHUKOVSKAYA 1988), but is magnified in scope when combined with the triplet.

Four (dorben)

The number 4 in the SHM continues the pattern seen so strikingly with 2 and, to a lesser extent, with 3. While it is used only 49 times in the text, 42 of these occurrences (85%) refer to human foursomes. Most of these tetrads are individuals significant in the career of the conqueror Chinggis. Their designation as "the four hounds of Chinggis," or "the four champions," or Chinggis's "four eyes and ears" lends them a certain mythic stature. But we must also note the references to Chinggis's 4 sons, the 4 orphans gathered by Mother Borte, and the tetrads of warriors rewarded during the Great Quriltai of 1206, when Chinggis created a military-feudal system by reorganizing the army and allocating families and soldiers to those he deemed worthy. Four is never used for designations of temporal, spatial, or distance concepts, nor does it designate items such as sheep, horses, carts, or women. In fact, leaving aside the tetrads of humans, the only usages of the number 4 are with higher numbers (4×100 once, $4 \times 1{,}000$ once, $1 + 4 \times 100$ once), and with deeds (good deeds twice, wrongful deeds once).

As with the numbers 2 and 3, use of the number 4 in grouping people allows the storyteller to arrange his story in rhyme schemes keyed to the names of certain individuals. He then repeats these schemes in various places in the text. For example, the most common tetrad — the 4 champions Bo'orchu, Muqali, Boroqul, and Chila'un — is mentioned 12 times in the text, almost every time in relation to a single event: the rescue of the perfidious Toghril after his betrayal of Chinggis and subsequent downfall at the hands of the Naiman tribe. The story is repeated in 2 separate contexts, but in virtually the same phrasing and rhyme scheme.

The most common tetrads are:

1.	Bo'orchu/Muqali/Boroqul/Chila'un	champions	12 times
2.	Jebe/Qubilai/Jelme/Sube'etei	"hounds"	6 〃

3.	Four Dorben Tribes	clans	5	〃
4.	Qunan/Kokochos/Degei/Usun	"eyes and ears"	3	〃
5.	Temujin/Qasar/Qachi'un/Temuge	brothers	2	〃
6.	Guchu/Kokochu/Shikigen/Boro'ul	orphans	2	〃

Five (tabun)

Curiously in a society supposedly organized in accordance with a decimal system, the number 5 is not mentioned very often in the SHM (nor, as we shall see, is 10). Five occurs only 35 times. Here too the dominant pattern of usage is to gather humans into pentads. There are 14 such groupings (40%), most of which are of unnamed individuals.

The number 5 is, however, also used in a legend that is probably the most authoritative and frequently repeated of any in the SHM. This legend teaches the lesson of unity to the Mongol tribes. In the story, first related in the early section of the text, the legendary ancestress Alan-qo'a is left widowed and alone following the death of her husband, Dobun-mergen. She cares for their 2 sons, and, although without a husband, gives birth to 3 more sons, for a total of 5. The two older brothers dislike their younger half-siblings and question the honor of their mother as well. Tiring of their quarrelling, she calls them together to impress upon them the importance of family unity. She hands each a single arrow and commands them to break the shaft. All are able to do so. She then binds 5 arrows together and repeats her command. When they are unable to break the shafts, she says,

> If, like the five arrow-shafts just now, each of you keeps to himself, then like these single arrow-shafts anybody will easily crush you. If, like the bound arrow-shafts, you remain together and of one mind, how can anyone deal with you so easily?
>
> (DE RACHEWILTZ 1971, 121)

I have discussed this well-known Asian folk motif elsewhere (MOSES 1987). But it is important in this discussion of numbers to note that the combination of Alan-qo'a's 5 sons and the 5 arrows accounts for 10 of the 35 usages of the number 5. In addition, the story is repeated on a number of occasions throughout the SHM to teach new generations of Mongols the importance of unity in the face of adversity.

As might be expected, 5 also occurs in decimal combinations like 5×100, $5 \times 1{,}000$, and $95 \times 1{,}000$. The only other significant appearance of the number is in another epic story used to teach a harsh lesson on loyalty and the recognition of one's proper place in a feudal society. After

Chinggis's bond brother, Jamuqa, betrays Chinggis and falls on hard times, he is reduced to living on the food provided him by his 5 companions. The companions tire of his pretentious behavior and decide to deliver the fugitive to Chinggis and demand a reward. The judgment of Chinggis is swift and brutal, but not what the 5 companions expected:

> Chinggis-qahan said, "How could we let men live who have raised their hands against their rightful master? To whom can such men be companions? Exterminate to the offspring of their offspring these people who have raised their hands against their rightful master!" So he ordered, and had the people who had laid hands on Jamuqa cut down in his (Jamuqa's) very presence. (DE RACHEWILTZ 1980, 21)

One more story concerns Toghril the Ong Qan of the Kereyit, who falls on hard times owing to quarrels with his brothers. After fleeing and losing his realm, he betrays an ally who had given him shelter. Forced to hide in the desert, he is reduced to stealing 5 goats and feeding himself on their milk. Chinggis discovers him on the verge of starvation and gives him shelter, in recognition of the oath that had bound Toghril and the father of Chinggis, Yisugei.

The stories of Alan-qo'a, Jamuqa, and Toghril raise the possibility that use of the number 5 might point to unacceptable behavior, or behavior that violates the Mongol sense of duty and honor. This is clearly the case with Toghril and the 5 companions of Jamuqa, and can be seen also in the lesson of the 5 arrows: the brothers ignore the lesson, suffer the death of their mother soon after, and are set adrift, each on his own course, until they realize the folly of their disunion. In every case the violators end up in desperate straits because of their inability to accept the moral code that binds them, or because they violate it for personal gain.

The following is a list of the usages of the number 5:

1.	Pentads of humans	14 times
2.	Items (goats, arrows, etc.)	11 〃
3.	Decimals	8 〃
4.	Tribes (five Tarqat)	2 〃

Six (jirqo'an, jirwa'an)

Six is the most rarely used single digit in the SHM, occurring only 15 times. Its usage shows no clear pattern, though in almost every instance there is a strong undertone of danger and, at times, of deceit and betrayal.

I have been unable to find any reference to 6 as an unlucky or evil number, nor have any Mongols with whom I have discussed this matter associated any sense of bad luck with it. And yet when it occurs in SHM it is always as a harbinger of bad luck or evil deeds or as a stage-setter for betrayal. For example, 2 of the 7 times that the number 6 is used in spatial or temporal contexts concern Chinggis's punishment of the Jurkin, who, though ordered to report for battle against the Tatars in 3 days, had failed to do so. This forced Chinggis to wait for 6 days, jeopardized his campaign, and compelled him to do battle with reduced forces, putting his army at risk. As further proof of their perfidy the Jurkin plundered Chinggis's base camp while the battle raged. As a result they were exterminated as a people by the Mongol army.

Another incident involving the number 6 must also be seen in the context of danger and betrayal. In 1206, when Chinggis had finally defeated his enemies and succeeded to the position of Qahan, a new threat arose in the form of the powerful shaman Teb Tenggeri. He and his 6 Qongqotan brothers attempted to sow division between Chinggis and his brothers so that they might gather together the "people of the nine tongues" under their own rule. During their confrontation the 6 Qongqotan held Chinggis hostage in his tent while Teb Tenggeri met Temuge, the youngest brother of Chinggis. Fortunately for Chinggis, Temuge killed Teb Tenggeri, and the crisis was averted.

The SHM also uses 6 in the formula 10 + 6 (16) a total of 3 times in the first half of the text. In each case the number is used as a calendar date, "the sixteenth day of the first month of summer, on the day of the full moon," the only times that dates are mentioned (in the second half of the SHM the Chinese zodiac reckoning is employed). In all 3 cases that the date appears, acts of betrayal are reported. In the first instance Chinggis is captured by the Tayichi'ut, locked in a cangue, and forced to endure humiliation (the year may have been 1180). The next occasion is when Chinggis and his bond brother Jamuqa have their fateful falling-out (probably in 1184 or 1185), leading to a long period of warfare between them and the eventual death of Jamuqa. Again on the same date (but in 1204), Chinggis comes to assist Toghril in his war against the Naiman, a tribe with which Chinggis had no quarrel at the time. On the eve of the battle Toghril is persuaded by Jamuqa to desert Chinggis and leave him to fight a far superior Naiman force. Thus these uses of the number 16 all involve the same day of the same month, concern Chinggis and one of his friends or allies, and result in the former's betrayal or endangerment. Chinggis, however, emerges from each of the tests victorious and forgives those who betrayed him, further obligating them to him.

A further example of the number 6 in the context of danger comes in the form of the number 2,600 ($2 \times 1{,}000 + 6 \times 100$). In 1203 Chinggis suffered the worst defeat of his military career at the hands of the combined forces of all his enemies. His losses were enormous, satisfying the epic-genre requirement of a great defeat for the epic hero prior to his final victory. On this occasion Chinggis was forced into retreat, his once massive army of perhaps 30,000 horsemen now reduced to 2,600. Despite his grave losses and the great size of the force he faced (perhaps 50,000 strong), he swore a covenant with his last loyal few that they would die on the attack. He was, of course, victorious, and soon became Chinggis Qahan, ruler of the steppe and eventually conqueror of the world.

In the above examples the number 6 retains its significance as an indicator of immediate danger or betrayal, but this time with the suggestion, perhaps, of great victories to come, in the same way that the number 9 is used to point to events of almost supernatural force in the life of Chinggis.

The implication of danger continues in those cases in which the number 6 or its derivatives occur as proper names. All such names refer to specific and well-known individuals (except for a certain Jirqo'an of the Oronar clan, a name occurring in a long list of unrelated names and never mentioned again). The first name mentioned is Jirqo'adai, a derivative of *jirqo'an*. Jirqo'adai was responsible for the severe wounding and near death of Chinggis in a battle in 1201 with the Tayichi'ut. After the survivors of the defeated enemy are captured Chinggis asks who fired the arrow that wounded him. Jirqo'adai steps forward and says, "I shot the arrow from the top of the mountain. If now I am put to death by the Qa'an, I will be left behind to rot on a piece of earth the size of the palm of a hand, but if I obtain mercy, for the Qa'an I will charge ahead" (DE RACHEWILTZ 1974, 70). Instead of executing this man who had wounded him, Chinggis uses the event as an object lesson in honor, saying:

> A man who was once an enemy, when it comes to his former killings and hostile actions "conceals his person and hides his tongue" — he is afraid. As for this one, however, he does not hide his killings and hostile actions; on the contrary, he makes them known. He is a man to befriend. He is named Jirqo'adai, but because he shot an arrow at the first vertebrae of my tawny battle horse with the white mouth, I shall call him Jebe and I will use him as my jebe-arrow.
>
> (DE RACHEWILTZ 1974, 70)

This was the Jebe who served as a general in Chinggis's army of conquest over the next 20 years. His value lay not only in the ability he had shown with a bow and the honesty he had displayed in confessing to an act that could have cost him his life, but also in his readiness to step forward when summoned no matter the consequences.

There is much that is formulaic in events associated with 6. The above-mentioned date, "the sixteenth day of the first month of summer, on the day of the full moon," is a particularly good example. Repeated only 3 times and the only "non-Chinese" date in the text, it seems as much a mnemonic device as history. The date is also the summer solstice, of course, and has significance in that way as well. But the suspicion remains that the storyteller, who could have chosen other dates or used the Chinese calendar throughout, had a purpose in selecting the number 6.

The following list summarizes the uses of the number 6.

1.	Spatial and temporal concepts	7 times
2.	Names of men	3 〃
3.	Tribal identity	2 〃
4.	Sixth child (Guchu)	2 〃
5.	Decimal unit	1 〃

Seven (dolo'an)

Seven as a distinct number occurs only 26 times in the SHM, and again there is a clear pattern of usage. As with most of the single numbers above 3, the number 7 most often occurs in the context of a repeated story. Of the 26 appearances, 16 (61%) involve heptads of humans. But in this case 15 of the 16 are accounted for by only 2 heptads.

The first of these (chronologically speaking, though not in terms of number of appearances) is found in the genealogical section of the SHM, where Chinggis's line of descent is given. His most important ancestor is Qabul Qahan, who probably lived in the eleventh century and was the first in the line to carry the title of Qahan. The SHM says that Qabul Qahan had 7 sons, whose names are listed the first time they are mentioned. Though reference is made throughout the SHM to the "seven sons of Qabul," their names are not given again as a heptad.

The second heptad is the more frequently mentioned of the two, accounting for 9 occurrences. It relates to the story of Teb Tenggeri and his brothers, already related above under the number 6. This time they are treated as a heptad, sometimes in the company of their sire, Father Monlik. References to "the seven sons of Father Monlik" and "the seven Qongqotan" occur until the death of Teb Tenggeri reduces

their number to 6, and their prospects to zero. The lesser 6 are never named.

The only other heptad occurs in the very earliest part of the SHM, again in the genealogical section. Here the ancestor Menen-Tuden is credited with 7 sons, whose names are interesting for the possible insight they provide into the way oral history is transmitted. The list of names — Qachi-kuluk, Qachin, Qachi'u, Qachula, Qachi'un, Qaraldai, and Nachin-ba'atur — appears to be an alliterative scheme to help the storyteller memorize the epic poem; the genealogy, uncorroborated by any other source, seems fictive. The same is not the case with Qabul-Qahan's 7 sons; Okin-barqaq, Bartan-ba'atur, Qutuqtu-monggur, Qutula-Qahan, Qulan, Qada'an, and Todo'en-otchigin are historical figures, depriving the storyteller of the convenience of fictive lineage.

Of the remaining 10 usages, 4 are accounted for by the phrase "seven strokes of the rod" used by Chinggis when he metes out punishment to guards for dereliction of duty. If the infraction is repeated or especially grave, the punishment becomes 37 strokes (or, more likely, death). The only other use of the number 7 is in temporal contexts: on 2 occasions the age of a character is given as 7 years, and on 1 occasion it is mentioned that Chinggis spent 7 years in the "lands of the Sarta'ul" (a reference to the western campaign of 1218–25).

The following list summarizes the use of the number 7.

1.	Heptads of humans	16 times
2.	Strokes of the rod	4 〃
3.	Temporal concepts	3 〃
4.	Other/unclassifiable	3 〃

The use of 7 seems in most cases to be a textual device. If we eliminate the 2 primary heptads there is little left to consider. There are no groupings of animals, females, or items and no listings of journey times, companions, or units in the army, nor are there any of the other uses to which the numbers are put. It appears that the storyteller has a specific use for this number — the reporting of events surrounding the two heptads — and does not need it for other alliterative or mnemonic purposes.

Eight (naiman)

The number 8 presents a peculiar problem, since the Mongol word ***naiman*** is also the name for one of the tribal enemies of Chinggis. The Naiman tribe occupied the western part of Mongolia in the thirteenth

century and proved troublesome both to Toghril the Ong Qan and to Chinggis. Because the tribe occupied so much of Chinggis's time and military effort it is mentioned numerous times in the SHM. Of the total of 59 occurrences of *naiman*, 50 (85%) relate to this tribe. If we delete these references the number 8 becomes the rarest of the single digits, occurring only 9 times. Like 6, which also occurs rarely, 8 has no overtones in Mongol of bad fortune or the supernatural (at least until Buddhism makes its appearance after the writing of the SHM).

Even more curious, the number has only 2 uses when the Naiman tribe is eliminated. One is in yet another recurring story, and the other is in conjunction with decimal units. The story concerns an adventure of an epic-quest nature that takes place when Chinggis is about 10, a time when he and his family live in exile and survive by hunting and by husbanding 9 horses. One day 8 of the horses are stolen. Chinggis pursues the thieves. He meets a boy his own age named Bo'orchu, who joins him in his search and later decides to serve his new friend for the rest of his days, becoming a great general in his own right. The story is a description not only of a test of the boy Temujin-Chinggis but also of the first hero to join Chinggis in his quest. It is also a story of loyalty rewarded, for in 1206, some 30 years later, Chinggis refers to the "eight horses" when he rewards Bo'orchu with high honors.

The other 4 uses of the number 8 occur during the Great Quriltai of 1206, when Chinggis reorganizes his army and bodyguard units. He first organizes the bodyguard into units of 800 (8×100) day-guards and 8,000 day-guards ($8 \times 1{,}000$). These are soon increased to units of 1,000 and 10,000, respectively.

The number 8 does not seem to be of much use to the epic storyteller. It is not used to designate any category other than the three listed above, and disappears almost entirely if we remove the Naiman tribe. No humans are grouped into octets, and no one has 8 sons, 8 companions, or 8 wives. There are no groupings of 8 animals other than the horses, nor are there any 8-day journeys or campaigns. No miscreants are punished with 8 strokes of the rod. Surely such random events would account for some uses of 8 if the SHM were truly a literal history.

Nine (yisun)

The way the number 9 is used also suggests that the SHM should be seen, not as literal history, but as a combination of history and epic narrative (see MOSES 1986). The numbering system provides one of the few clues for determining which events fit which genre.

The number 9 occurs only 20 times in the text. It is an element in

certain names, such as Yisui, Yisugei, and Yisun-To'e, but this usage is not relevant to this study. The occurrence of 9 in the text coincides exactly with the description of Chinggis Qahan's life — it does not appear in the 59 paragraphs that precede his birth or in the 15 paragraphs that follow his death. In view of the fact that the text is only 282 paragraphs in length, the omission of the number 9 in 74 of the paragraphs is clearly due to something other than random chance. No other number, including the rarely occurring 6 and 8, follows such a pattern.

Chinggis is introduced by a 9 in paragraph 60, where he is described as being 9 years of age; there are no references to the first 8 years of his life. He is ushered out in paragraph 267 with four 9s, just prior to the section dealing with the career of his son and successor, Ogodei. In between the number 9 (often combined with a triplicated triplet, a 3×3 series of acts) presages every occasion in which Chinggis faces a major threat to his life or prepares for momentous events. The result of the event associated with the 9 is almost always a qualitative change in the status of Chinggis and his quest; if he ignores an implied warning the outcome is often a disastrous turn for the worse. This occurs, for example, following his refusal to heed the warning of the gods when trapped on a mountain by his enemies. As he attempts to leave the mountain the gods, or fate, intervene 3 times, once when his saddle falls from his horse, again when a boulder the size of a tent falls in his path, and finally when, emerging from his retreat, he is captured by his enemies the Tayichi'ut.

Although one could point out that the number 9 fits into the categories established elsewhere, such as temporal and spatial concepts, rewards, and human groupings, such a simplification ignores the weight carried by each occurrence. For example, Chinggis's ninth year (for which his early life is passed over) is the time of his journey with his father Yisugei to seek a bride for the boy and the subsequent murder of Yisugei by the Tatars. Similarly, the 9 horses that apppear in the property list of Chinggis's family after their quarrel with the Tayichi'ut and subsequent exile comprise, as mentioned above, the core of an epic test of the boy Temujin. Eight of the horses are stolen, while the ninth provides a means to pursue the thieves. Again a triplicated triplet occurs, with 3 days given to the first leg of the search, ending with Chinggis's chance encounter with Bo'orchu; another 3 days given to the pair's finding of the thieves and recovery of the horses; and a final 3 days given to the return home with the horse herd now restored to its original 9 animals.

Each event involving a 9 can be explained in the same fashion: it indicates either a major event; a hyperbolic description, especially of

groups of people like the "peoples of the nine tongues"; or the involvement of Chinggis in supernatural, religious, or mythic behavior, such as his regular practice of kneeling 9 times towards the sun while offering prayers to Heaven (ROUX 1959).

The following is a list of the usages of the nine:

1.	Temporal/spatial/distance concepts	5 times
2.	Acts or deeds	5 〃
3.	Items	5 〃
4.	Enneads of humans	2 〃
5.	Decimals	2 〃
6.	Animals	1 〃

Ten (harban)

As noted above in the section on the number 5, the number 10 occurs surprisingly seldom in the SHM considering the fact that the Mongol army and feudal system was supposedly based on units of 10. All together it is seen only 32 times in the entire work. It is used most often in the context of the reorganization of the army and tribal system that followed Chinggis's accession to the position of Qahan in 1206. One also finds units of 10 men accompanying Chinggis on missions, a unit of 10 wounded men, and a total of 10 men killed by the Jurkin. Fourteen (43%) of the 32 uses are of this type.

Here again we find formulaic patterns. On 5 occasions the entire phrase reads "Then, having formed units of a thousand, a hundred, and ten men . . . ," or "He appointed the leaders of a thousand, the leaders of a hundred, and the leaders of ten" (DE RACHEWILTZ 1978, 48). These set phrases lend the pattern an alliterative and mnemonic quality, especially since they appear in repetitive lines that vary little across the section that deals with Chinggis's organizational scheme.

The second most common form in which 10 is found is in the formation of numbers from 11 to 19. Only 3 of these — 11, 13, and 19 — occur, and even these are rare, appearing only 9 times in the entire text. The number 16, as mentioned above, appears 3 times in the ominous formula "on the sixteenth day of the first month of summer, on the day of the full moon." Eleven and 13 occur in a variety of situations. Chinggis is 11 when he pledges *anda*, or bond brotherhood, with Jamuqa, and Toghril is 13 when he is driven from his home. There are 13 camps in the original clan/tribe alliance formed by Chinggis after his election as Qahan, and 13 clan/tribe units that form behind Jamuqa in response.

A final use of the number 10 is in oaths. On 2 occasions people swear

to strive for vengeance "until your ten fingers are worn off" (DE RACHEWILTZ 1971, 127). This usage, like the others, appears to be formulaic; none, however, are repeated often enough for a clear pattern to emerge.

The following list summarizes the usages of 10.

1.	Decimal units	14 times
2.	Numbers from 11 to 19	9 〃
3.	Spatial and temporal concepts	5 〃
4.	Oaths and omens	2 〃
5.	Other/unclassifiable	2 〃

Again it is interesting to note how 10 is *not* used. There are no units of 10 women or 10 animals. Journeys do not occur in lengths of 10 days or 10 weeks. Thus here too the use of 10 seems not to be random but rather quite restricted, just as with the other numbers.

Patterns of Decade Sequences

Numbers in the decades, from the 10s to the 90s, occur only 36 times in all in the SHM. In order to facilitate analysis let us begin with a breakdown.

1.	Tens (*harban* + ?)	9 times
2.	Twenties (*qorin*)	3 〃
3.	Thirties (*gucin*)	8 〃
4.	Forties (*docin*)	1 time
4.	Fifties (*tabin*)	1 〃
5.	Sixties (*jiran*)	0 times
6.	Seventies (*dalan*)	7 〃
7.	Eighties (*nayan*)	4 〃
8.	Nineties (*yeren*)	3 〃

The 10s have already been considered above and will not be analyzed again. The 3 occurrences of the 20s in the text each concern groupings of people: Naiman scouts ride out in a group of 20 to 30 men; Qasar, a bowman of epic ability, wounds these 20 to 30 men with 1 shot; and, finally, 20 men are appointed as post-road attendants. There is no discernible pattern here. A pattern is, however, present in the 30s, with 5 of the 8 occurrences relating to the story of Qorchi and his request to Chinggis for 30 wives as a reward for having foretold great events in the conqueror's future. The story, repeated on 5 separate occasions, shows

alliterated phrasing. Two of the remaining 30s are part of another phrase, the "thirty-seven strokes" of the whip meted out to guards derelict in their duty on more than one occasion. The final instance is the above-cited group of 20 to 30 Naiman scouts.

The sole reference to the 40s occurs in the claim that Toghril is the oldest of 40 sons (a claim that might well be hyperbole, but there are no other sources to check it against). The 50s are likewise mentioned only once, when the Jurkin raid the base camp of the Mongols and seize the clothing of 50 men, then compound the crime by killing 10 soldiers. The absence of 60s in the text lends weight to the suspicion that the number 6 in any form presages danger or ill fortune.

The 70s present problems different from those of the other decades. The total number of occurrences in the text is 15. Eight of these, however, are place names, 5 being references to a battle site called Dalan Nemurges (70 shelters?) and 3 to a place named Dalan Baljut (70 marshes), where Chinggis was badly defeated by Jamuqa. An additional 5 uses relate to the day-guard formed by Chinggis, which comprised 70 men before being expanded to 8,000. The phrases dealing with the 70 day-guards are formulaic in their coupling with the phrases for the 80 night-guards (see below), and in their placement within larger paragraphs dealing with organization. Two other numbers in the 70s occur: Chinggis is described as being fortunate as a youth because he possessed 73 geldings, and numerous princes of the Chinos are reported to have been boiled alive in 70 cauldrons.

The 4 occurrences of the 80s are all references to the early organization of the night-guard, which first comprises 80 men, then 800, and finally 2,000 (in 2 units of 1,000 men each, who are part of the larger unit of the 10,000 men who form the bodyguard). Again the presentation is formulaic and part of a larger sequence, as with 70, with which it is always linked. The pattern is clearer with 80, however, since it is only used in one way.

The 3 occurrences of the 90s all relate to the great host that was to become the Mongol army. Two are in the phrase "the ninety-five leaders of a thousand," and one is in the phrase "the ninety-five thousand." Both usages appear to be formulaic, since there were not in fact 95 commanders (an actual count of those appointed yields only 88), and since it does not appear likely that the army actually numbered 95,000.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the use of the decades is the rarity of anything other than whole numbers (i.e., 20, 30, 40, etc.). Only 3 exceptions are found: 37, 73, and 95, which occur a total of 6 times. This is a small percentage (16%) of an already inconsequential sum.

When we remember that the number 10 occurs only 32 times, it seems obvious that the storyteller prefers to relate his events in terms of single digits. It seems odd, for example, that the SHM presents no casualty figures other than 1 or 2 references to the deaths of 10 men — this, in battles between armies numbering 30,000 on a side. The conclusion that myth, or perhaps the demands of oral epic formula, is at work seems inescapable, even allowing for possible exaggerations in the size of the military units, in the scarcity of casualties, or in the perfidy by which even these deaths are accounted for (as in the Jurkin raid on Chinggis's base camp). There are, to be sure, hints of more severe casualties in certain battles, as when the text relates that "he exterminated the Tayichi'ut clansmen, . . . he blew them to the winds like hearth-ashes, even to the offspring of their offspring" (DE RACHEWILTZ 1976, 41). But even here one suspects that the reference is more to the disbanding of the tribe and its dispersal as property to feudal chiefs than it does to actual deaths in battle.

Virtually all of the decades include references to units of humans. There is, quite unusually, even one reference to women, using the number 30 (in the above-mentioned tale of Qorchi's request for 30 wives). There is also a single reference to animals (the 73 geldings referred to as the patrimony of Chinggis), to items (the 70 cauldrons used to boil the Chinos princes), and to actions (the 37 strokes of the rod meted out to those guilty of dereliction of duty).

NUMBERS HIGHER THAN 99

One Hundred, and Numbers from 100 to 999 (ja'un)

The unit 100, and its combinations up to 999, are again relatively rare. The whole number 100 occurs 36 times, 33 of which simply refer to units of 100 men. The other 3 references concern the tribute — 1 of every 100 sheep — to be paid to feudal leaders. There are no numbers from 101 to 199. There are 9 usages of the plural form of 100 (*ja'ut*), all of which use the whole number 100 as a base. Thus there are 2×100 slaves (used twice), 3×100 Merkit (twice), 4×100 quiver-bearers (once), a 5×100 fathom (*alda*) arrowshot (once), 8×100 night-guards (twice), and a 9×100 fathom arrowshot (once). Six hundred and 700 do not occur. There are, in all, only 9 occurrences of 100s higher than 199, and all are round numbers.

A striking feature of the use of 100 is the concentration of its distribution. Only 23 of the 282 paragraphs of the text include units of 100, and 16 of the total occurrences are found in just 7 of these paragraphs. All 16 of these are linked with units of 1,000s, and occur in the setting of the

great reorganization of the army and bodyguard in 1206. It seems apparent here that the storyteller is employing rhymed phrases to ease the task of repeating the same models again and again.

One hundred and its higher combinations appear, then, for a total of 50 times, the vast majority of which are references to units of 100 men (80%); the few remaining occurrences comprise 3 references to animals and 2 to measures of length. Most of the usages relate to the organization of the army and are part of the set phrase, "the leaders of 1,000, 100, and 10 men." Other usages include a unit of 100 envoys deputed by Chinggis for a special mission, 100 slaves allocated to a loyal subordinate, and 100 men who flee with Toghril. Perhaps the only puzzling usage amidst this common pattern is the title *ja'ut-quri* (commander of hundreds?) awarded to Chinggis after a successful campaign against the Tatars (DE RACHEWILTZ 1974, 59). The 100s are not used to group women, measure days of travel, or count animals other than sheep (an oddity in light of the Mongol stress on horses as a measure of wealth, masculinity, and military power).

The following list summarizes the uses of 100 as both a whole number and as a base for higher numbers.

One hundred as a round number	
1. Units of 100 humans	33 times
2. Units of 100 animals	3 〃
One hundred as a base for higher round numbers	
1. 200 slaves	2 times
2. 300 Merkit tribesmen	2 〃
3. 400 quiver-bearers	1 〃
4. 500 *alda* length	1 〃
5. 800 night-guards	2 〃
6. 900 *alda* length	1 〃
7. 100s as an inclusion in numbers of 1,000 or more	5 〃

Numbers Using 1,000 (minqan) *as a Base*

This number appears exactly 100 times in the text in a variety of spellings; of the 100 usages, 80 are the simple round number itself. Oddly for a number that appears so frequently, the first use of 1,000 does not occur until almost midway through the text, in paragraph 170, chapter 6. As with 100, it appears in relatively few paragraphs: 26 of the 282, with only 5 paragraphs accounting for 52 of the occurrences. This concentration is, again, in the sections dealing with the army and the bodyguard, where the number is usually paired with 100.

Virtually all of the units of 1,000 are groupings of humans (chiliarchies). The single exception is when Chinggis, defeated by the combined forces of his enemies and at the nadir of his career, takes refuge at Lake Baljuna in eastern Mongolia. At that time, "from Alaqush-digit-quri of the Onggut came the Muslim Asan (Hasan). He was riding a white camel, and was driving a thousand wethers [gelded rams] along the Ergune River downstream in order to buy pelts of sable and squirrels" (DE RACHEWILTZ 1977, 41–42). This may be the Husun rewarded in 1206 with command of his own unit of 1,000. The entire incident of the "thousand wethers" appears almost as an afterthought; without it the only use of 1,000 would be in chiliarchies of (male) humans. Again, it is curious and revealing that there are none of the temporal or spatial uses of 1,000 that are found in the folklore and epic narrative of other cultures — the 1,000 *li* journeys in Chinese literature, for example, or the *Tales of the Thousand and One Nights*.

There is a curious parallel in the usage pattern of 1,000 in the SHM and that in certain chapters of the Christian Bible. In the biblical chapters recounting the complex relationship of Saul, Jonathan, and David there are many references to David as the "captain of one thousand" and to the formation of units under "captains of one hundred and of one thousand." This and other similarities[1] indicate that the SHM may have been influenced by Nestorian Christianity, then prevalent among some of the Turkic tribes of Mongolia, or that outside epic themes may have infiltrated Mongolia.

The remaining 20 occurrences involve multiples of 1,000 or combinations with 1,000 as a base:

1.	1,300 soldiers	2 times
2.	1,400 people awarded to Qasar	1 〃
3.	1,500 people awarded to Belgutei	1 〃
4.	2,000 night-guards	2 〃
5.	2,600 soldiers in Chinggis's army	1 〃
6.	3,000 Bagarin people	1 〃
7.	4,000 Uru'ud people	5 〃
8.	4,000 people awarded to Qasar	1 〃
9.	5,000 people awarded to Chagatai	1 〃
10.	5,000 people awarded to Ogodei	1 〃
11.	9,000 people awarded to Jochi	1 〃
12.	$90 + 5 \times 1{,}000$ army of Chinggis	3 〃

All of these relate to the formation of the army and the bodyguard, or to

the division and distribution of conquered peoples among the sons, brothers, and supporters of Chinggis.

Numbers Using 10,000 (tumen) *as a Base*

The unit of 10,000, the *tumen* or myriarchy, is used both as actual number and as an expression of exaggerated or immense numbers (POPPE 1964, 54). Numbers higher than 10,000 do not occur in the SHM. (Later Mongol texts use *bum* for 100,000, and *saya-a* for one million, both of which are borrowings from Tibetan.)

The *tumen* unit, which appears 52 times, follows the basic pattern set by 100 and 1,000. It refers exclusively to myriarchies of humans (soldiers, peoples, and tribes) and is used in alliterated and mnemonic fashion. It also resembles 100 and 1,000 in the nature of its distribution within the text: it appears in only 25 of the 282 paragraphs, and 25 of the occurrences deal with the organizational events of 1206 (these 25 occurring in 11 paragraphs).

The occasions on which *tumen* functions in its capacity of expressing immense (and not literal) numbers include the Merkit war of 1184, when, in response to the kidnapping of Borte, Toghril decrees that he will field 2 *tumen* of soldiers and Jamuqa pledges 2 *tumen* more (with Chinggis to provide 1 of these *tumen*). The total of 40,000 soldiers smacks of exaggeration for several reasons. First, the Merkit forces responsible for taking Borte number only 300, hardly a threat requiring such an enormous host. Second, Chinggis at that time had a following that included no more than 4 brothers, a sister and a mother, and a cohort of more than 3 or 4 friends. The "*tumen*" he commanded may have been a force of some size, but certainly not of 10,000 soldiers.

There are basically only 2 occasions when the *tumen* has relevance, one being the just-mentioned campaign to rescue Borte, the other being the organization of the army and bodyguard. All occurrences of the number are, therefore, in 2 dense clumps within the text. Of the 52 designations of 10,000, a total of 42 (81%) concern army and bodyguard groupings (myriarchies). The remaining 10 (19%) list enemy tribal units, as in "the Tumen Kirgisut," "the Tumen Oyirat," and "the Tumen Tubegen." These designations are probably best translated as, for example, "the Kirgisut host" or "the army of the Kirgisut" rather than as "the ten-thousand Kirgisut."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This analysis has attempted to show that numbers in the SHM, whether used for grouping humans, conveying spatial and temporal concepts, or

listing items, cannot always be relied upon as sources of historical fact. Rather, they portray epic or legendary events, serve mnemonic and alliterative purposes, or contribute exaggerated or hyperbolic effect.

In recent years there has been a steady flow of books on the Mongols, on the early life of Chinggis, on the campaigns of conquest carried out by Chinggis, his sons, and his grandsons, and on the organization of the Mongol army (PERLEE 1969; LEGG 1970; PHILLIPS 1969; ROSSABI 1988; LISTER 1989; MARSHALL 1993). All of these works rely on a literal reading of the quantitative material in the SHM. By dint of simple and continuous repetition this material has acquired historical validity. Perlee, a diligent historian and archeologist, has gone so far as to construct a chronological time frame that posits exact life spans for every individual named in the SHM, tracing the legendary ancestors of the Mongols back into the eighth century. Others of the authors listed above have developed chronological schemes for travel to battles, or distances between places, as a means of locating sites in the text.

At best, it seems unlikely that any of the numbers in the sequences prior to 1201 (the first verifiable date in the text) have any historical certainty. The historicity of quantities of time and space are likewise in doubt.

NOTE

1. The covenant sworn between Jonathan and David parallels a similar pact of *anda*, or bond brotherhood, between Chinggis and Jamuqa, and the mythic description of Goliath bears many of the same qualities as Jamuqa's description of the brothers of Chinggis, Qasar and Temuge, on the eve of their great battle with the Naiman.

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