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Naomi Standen and Monica White

From classical times until the present day, 'nomads' have been compared and contrasted with 'sedentary' societies, often being held up as a prime example of 'the other'.[461] Authors have emphasised their strange food, language, clothing, housing, and customs, often describing them as invaders or raiders. These negative traits are often understood to be the result of the nomads' mobile pastoralist lifestyle, because their constant movement subverted the norms of settled society and made interactions difficult. Such clichés, repeated over centuries, have contributed to uncritical assessments of both pastoralists and their neighbours. But in contrast to other major aspects of human experience (gender, class, race, etc.), scholars, and particularly historians, have largely failed to move beyond othering portrayals of 'nomads' to interrogate the category of mobility itself, and its importance across perceived social divides. This oversight has done nothing to counteract a scholarly tendency to lapse into stereotypes and teleology:[462] the term 'nomad' is applied to certain groups, often with negative implications, while other groups which engaged in similar activities are not given the same label because they fall on the other side of a historical, ethnic or rhetorical line. Such stereotyping also has implications for the understanding of supposedly sedentary groups whose significant mobility is effaced by insistence on the nomad/sedentary dichotomy. The

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[461] The earliest extant western discussion of this sort is in Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (London, 1954), Book 4, 271–318.

[462] The appropriation of the term by theorists has not advanced our understanding of nomads as historical phenomena because it relies on the same unproblematised stereotypes: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, 1987), ch. 12 '1227: Treatise on Nomadology — The War Machine', 351–423.

identity of sedentary groups can readily be based on their contrast with, and often their opposition to, the nomad, but despite pervasive implications to the contrary, this did not arise from an intrinsic divide but rather was adventitious and a matter of convenience.[463]

These tendencies are particularly pronounced in discussions of the medieval world, since groups identified as 'nomadic' by modern scholars rarely left written records and much of the associated archaeology is thinly scattered and not well studied.[464] In many studies, the characteristic of mobility thus comes to 'belong' to groups defined by it as nomads, which feeds a model of a stereotypically static medieval world of discrete units in which nobody

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[463] E.g. Naomi Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China* (Honolulu, 2007); Yang Shao-yun, *'Fan* and *Han*: The Origins and Uses of a Conceptual Dichotomy in Mid-Imperial China, ca. 500–1200', in Francesca Fiaschetti and Julia Schneider (eds.), *Political Strategies of Identity Building in Non-Han Empires in China* (Wiesbaden, 2014), 9–36.

[464] Sinor, 'Reflections', 5–6. The fieldwork currently permitted in China maintains a traditional focus on tombs and urban sites that illuminate politics, religion and elites, for instance, Dong Xinlin 董新林, 'Liao Shangjing chengzhi kaogu fajue he yanjiu xinshi' 辽上京城址考古发掘和研究新识 [New findings from the excavation and study of the site of the Liao Supreme Capital], *Beifang wenwu* 北方文物 (2008/2), 43–5. In Mongolia there is more attention to ordinary nomads and everyday life, for instance in the work of Joshua Wright, William Honeychurch and Chunag Amartuvshin, including 'The Xiongnu settlements of Egiin Gol, Mongolia', *Antiquity*, lxxxiii (2009), 372–87. But the volume of work is tiny. For an introduction to Pecheneg archaeology see O. Pritsak, *The Pečenegs: A Case of Social and Economic Transformation* (Lisse, 1976).

(except nomads!) went anywhere. Such uses of the *idea* of nomads rest upon not looking too closely at the content of the category, but even more upon imagining 'sedentary' societies as almost entirely immobile. Aside from specific groups, such as merchants, pilgrims, soldiers and the like, we are told firmly that most medieval people strayed rarely if ever beyond their home villages or at most the local town. But focusing on the presumed (but often unproven) rootedness of the peasant masses is to discount the many types of mobility that were essential for the functioning of economies, trade and resource gathering; politics, loyalty, diplomacy and war; religious practice and institutions; society and family; and perhaps, in the end, everything.

Yet the medieval world also provides excellent opportunities to take a fresh look at the full spectrum of mobility, precisely because medieval sources often offer a different perspective on the characteristics which united and divided different groups. The term 'nomad' itself, from the Classical Greek word for 'pasturage', did not have exact equivalents in many medieval languages. It is found in some, although not all, Byzantine texts which refer to pastoralists, such as the brief descriptions of the Pechenegs by the tenth-century historian Leo and Deacon and the eleventh-century historian John Skylitzes.[465] On the other hand, Byzantine authors might describe agriculturalists of whom they disapproved for other reasons as having 'nomadic' qualities. The Serbs, for example, who are not generally classified as nomads, were nevertheless characterised disparagingly as 'not stationary, stable or stopping to settle down' by Eustathios, a twelfth-century archbishop of Thessalonike.[466] Other medieval societies made different distinctions. The East Slavs did not seem to have a specific word for

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[465] Leo the Deacon, *Historiae*, IX, 12 (ed. Migne, 117, 884C); John Skylitzes, *Synopsis historion*, XXI (ed. Thurn, 455-59).

[466] Eustathios of Thessalonike, 'Ad Isaacium Angelum Imp. post Serbos fugatos allocutio', 10 (ed. Tafel, 44).

nomadism, and referred to their steppe-dwelling neighbours variously as 'Ishmaelites', 'pagans', 'Saracens' or by their tribal names.[467] In Chinese, pastoralists were classically characterised as 'following the water and pasture',[468] to the extent that the 'grand historian' Sima Qian 司馬遷 said that the Xiongnu 匈奴 (variously from c. third century BCE to c. fifth century CE), were 'regarded as beasts to be pastured, not as members of the human race'.[469] Pastoral mobility was more often evoked — sometimes inaccurately — than explicitly stated.

Thus, the nomadic/sedentary divide was by no means an objective one, and was not necessarily perceived by members of societies who lived in much closer contact with pastoralists than most modern scholars. It is also instructive to remember that hindsight has a significant role to play in modern designations of this sort. People who travelled extensively at one point in their history but later changed to an agriculturally-based economy (such as the

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[467] See the perceptive analysis of the portrayal of pastoralists by Yulia Mikhailova, '"Christians and Pagans" in the Chronicles of Pre-Mongolian Rus', in Christian Lübke, Ilmira Miftakhova and Wolfram von Scheliha (eds.), *Geschichte der Slavia Asiatica. Quellenkundliche Probleme* (Leipzig, 2013), 50-79. Mikhailova notes that the term 'tent' (*vezhi*) is often used in connection with pastoralists, but they are only once described as 'wandering' (*khodiashche*), from the general verb 'to go, travel' (*khoditi*) (p. 61).

[468] E.g. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 laments that Yidi 夷狄 — non-Chinese to the north and east, here referring to the Kitan-- 'migrate in winter and summer following the water and grass' 隨水草寒暑徙遷, in *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 [New History of the Five Dynasties] (Beijing, 2015), ch. 72, 1001.

[469] Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*, 127, 129.

Vikings, or the Kushans, who were founded by the mobile pastoralist Yuezhi 月氏[470]) are not known to history as 'nomads'. It is much easier, on the other hand, to assign this term to people who either disappeared from the historical record as a distinct group (such as the Pechenegs of the western steppe) or some of whose descendants still practice pastoralism (such as the Mongols).

Even if one acknowledges such nuances, it could be argued that the dichotomy of 'nomadic' and 'sedentary' is still useful. After all, there can be no doubt that the primary economic basis of some societies was indeed grazing flocks and herding them long distances to seasonal pastures. Yet pastoralism was rarely, if ever, a society's sole occupation, and was usually balanced by (among others) trading, raiding, craft production, mercenary service, and indeed agriculture, all of which could involve at least some people spending significant periods in one location. Conversely, the fact that the annual cycle of resource-gathering, production, exchange and politics required mobility would not have been news to many living in ostensibly 'sedentary' societies. And that the direction, range and intensity of the cycle might be affected by factors ranging from the environmental to the political would also not have been a surprise. Mobility was, in fact, a structural aspect of pre-modern societies of all kinds, leading to a continuous ebb and flow of goods and people across lands too readily characterised in absolute terms as steppe or sown, and chipping away at artificial divisions between nomadic and sedentary.

In this paper we propose to tease out some of the mobilities to be found among 'settled' populations in Eurasia, particularly in eastern Europe, Rus, and Northern Eurasia (comprising broadly the greater Yellow River region, the eastern steppes and Manchuria), in search of

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[470] Liu Xinru, 'Migration and Settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan: Interaction and Interdependence of Nomadic and Sedentary Societies', *Journal of World History*, xii (2001), 261–92.

illuminating comparisons with those described as 'nomads' (see Maps 5 and 6). A different - though we would guess complementary - set of comparisons might be found in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa or the American plains, but these are beyond our regional competence. We proceed from the observation that it is far too simplistic to treat pre-modern Eurasia as a world in which some groups never moved and others never stopped. But instead of re-treading issues related to nomadic movement, we will focus on the mobilities of selected groups who are usually characterised as sedentary in order to highlight the broad spectrum of movements which characterised medieval Eurasia. Although a wealth of topics, from transhumance to hostage-taking, could illustrate this point, we have chosen the following for their cross-regional relevance: resource gathering and trade; political mobility, muster and campaign; and timing, or getting stuck.

The structural importance of mobility may be seen most obviously in resource gathering and trade. If anyone from the sedentary world is seen to travel, then surely it is merchants, who are also, necessarily, the prime agents of connection for World Historians interested in economic linkages.[471] Yet the similarities between the regular, predictable routes of long distance trade and the movements of nomads are rarely discussed, even though some have seen trade as a major motivator of the actions of the latter,[472] and others have credited them

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[471] Michael McCormick has based a huge research project on evidence of journeys, mostly of traders, but including religious and diplomatic travellers as well. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300–900* (Cambridge, 2002).

[472] Sechin Jagchid and Van Jay Symons, *Peace, War, and Trade Along the Great Wall: Nomadic-Chinese Interaction Through Two Millennia* (Bloomington, 1989).

with facilitating long-distance routes such as the Silk Roads (Map 3).[473] Less obvious, but just

as important (and intertwined), were the structural roles of political mobility, muster and

campaign. Quite simply, political formations could not function without the continual

movement of key players, and sometimes entire sectors of the population. 'Nomad' rulers are

famed for moving around, often on an annual cycle, but many European kings were

necessarily peripatetic, while Northern Eurasian rulers (among many others) insisted that their

clients, generals and officials attend upon them at intervals that were variously regular,

systematic and responsive, but never arbitrary. This sort of political mobility resulted from the

same needs as those of rulers who resided at fixed capitals (at least when they were not away

hunting, on progress, for ritual purposes, on campaign, or for other reasons) and required their

subjects to come to them for various reasons and at varying frequencies. By the same token,

we shall see that the processes of recruiting, gathering and deploying armies could be annual

or irregular, but always required the coordination of vast numbers of people on the move.

Thirdly, we approach the issue of structural mobility from the direction of failure: what

happened when routes, plans and support structures broke down? There were numerous

reasons for getting stuck along a journey and forms that the delay might take, whether that

was confinement in a restricted space or inability to return home. We explore the impact of

these unwanted hiatuses, interruptions and detours as a way of shedding light on what was

desired and normative.

I. Resource gathering and trade

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[473] Though Nicola di Cosmo notes that this view can be problematical: 'Black Sea Emporia

and the Mongol Empire: A Reassessment of the *Pax Mongolica*', *Journal of the Economic

and Social History of the Orient*, liii (2010), 83–108.

A valuable source for studying the diverse forms of mobility in medieval western Eurasia is the *De Administrando Imperio*, a foreign policy handbook compiled in the 950s by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII, which devotes considerable attention to the peoples who inhabited the vast regions to the north of the empire.[474] A keen observer of the empire's neighbours, Constantine's work shows his awareness of the migrations they undertook, both at the time of writing and earlier in their history. The travels of one group in particular, the Rus (generally identified with merchant-adventurers of Scandinavian stock, that is, Vikings), are described in great detail. Constantine relates that they spent the winter collecting tribute (mainly fur, slaves, honey and other forest products) from Slavonic tribes in what is now north-western Russia. When the ice melted, they began an arduous journey south along the river system and the Black Sea, eventually reaching Constantinople, the market for their wares.[475] An important aspect of this journey was its cyclical nature: it is clear from the description that it happened every year, and was thus a reliable aspect of the economy for the Byzantines, the Rus and the Slavs. The Rus involved with this trade must therefore have spent a large proportion of their adult lives travelling to obtain and transport their goods.

Other sources confirm the peripatetic nature of the Rus. Over the course of the half-century or so before the compilation of *De Administrando Imperio*, the centre of the Rus trading, raiding and administrative operations had been shifting from the area around the Baltic Sea to Kiev. This city was conveniently located on the Dnieper River, between the resource-rich forests of the north and the markets of the south, thus facilitating trade with

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[474] On the date of the sections under discussion see R. J. H. Jenkins (ed.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus De Administrando Imperio: Commentary* (London, 1962), 5–6; Alexander Kazhdan, '*De Administrando Imperio*', in Alexander P. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1991), i, 593.

[475] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 9 (ed. Moravcsik and Jenkins).

Byzantium.[476] The Rus were on the move once again, some twenty years after the compilation of *De Administrando Imperio*, when the leader Sviatoslav responded to a request from the emperor John I to attack the Bulgarians. To the emperor's chagrin, however, Sviatoslav decided to settle in the Balkans and move his capital from Kiev to Pereiaslavets on the Danube, prompting a war with Byzantium to dislodge him from the empire's borders.[477] Thus, over the course of less than a century, the Rus centre of power moved almost 2,000 kilometres, from the Baltic region to the shore of the Black Sea. Populations were established and continued to live at many points in between, and through the tenth century some Rus made journeys across this entire territory and beyond, to their ancestral homeland in Scandinavia. Regular travel across areas they controlled, as well as migration into and conquest of new territory, thus underpinned the economy, society and political system of the early Rus.

All of this moving about inevitably brought the Rus into contact with other people involved in similar enterprises. One of these, the Pechenegs, received even more attention than the Rus in *De Administrando Imperio*. Like the Rus, these people had migrated far from their ancestral homeland over the course of a few generations. Constantine relates that they originally hailed from the area between the Volga and the Urals, but that they were expelled from that area fifty-five years before the time of writing. The Pechenegs in turn expelled the

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[476] These movements are reflected in some of the early entries of *The Primary Chronicle*, e.g. *The* Povĕst' vremennykh lĕt: *An Interlinear Collation and Paradosis*, i, 22,24–24,4. For historical analysis see Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750–1200* (London, 1996), 91–111.

[477] This confrontation is recorded in both Rus and Byzantine sources: *The* Povĕst' vremennykh lĕt, i, 69,23–72,22; Leo the Deacon, *Historiae*, viii–ix; Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, 15, 9–18 (ed. Thurn, 294–310).

'Turks' (that is, Hungarians) and settled in their territory on the southern Dnieper, where they remained during Constantine's reign.[478] Also like the Rus, the Pechenegs are described as travelling extensively for the purposes of campaigning, trade and work. In addition to grazing livestock, they were frequently at war with many of their neighbours, including the 'Turks', Bulgarians, Croatians and Rus, either for their own purposes or as clients of Byzantium. Their relations with the surrounding peoples were not exclusively hostile, however: they sold cattle, horses and sheep to the Rus and performed unspecified services for the residents of Cherson, Byzantium's Crimean outpost, presumably travelling to their clients.[479] The attention devoted to the Pechenegs indicates that Constantine and previous emperors valued and feared them, both as fierce warriors who could be paid to attack various rivals of the empire (instead of the empire itself), and as traders who offered valuable commodities and services.[480] But alongside their mobility, the Pechenegs also had a relatively high degree of territorial organisation. Constantine gives a detailed account of the boundaries of some of the Pecheneg provinces and districts, and the Turkic names assigned to these areas indicate that his source was a native informant.[481] Furthermore, Bruno of Querfurt, a missionary from Latin Germany, reports that they had a designated central gathering site where they assembled for councils, seemingly

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[478] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando*, 37, 1–14. The aim of the present study is not to assess the accuracy of Constantine's observations, on which see E. Malamut, 'L'Image byzantine des Petchénègues', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, lxxxviii (1995), 105–47.

[479] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando*, 2, 1–3, 5; 6; 13, 9–11.

[480] *Ibid.*, 1, 16–28; 4, 1–5, 13; 8.

[481] *Ibid.*, 37, 15–19, 34–45, 68–71. For the etymology of the Pecheneg toponyms see Jenkins (ed.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 142–5.

within one week of messengers being dispatched.[482] Although it is not clear whether anyone

was continuously resident there, the site itself must have been permanent in order to have

been an effective meeting point.

Unlike the historians Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes discussed above, Constantine

does not use the label 'nomads' to refer to the Pechenegs, but provides more nuanced

information about their diverse living arrangements. He notes that, following their expulsion

from their ancestral homeland, they 'fled and wandered round, casting about for a place for

their settlement'.[483] The Greek word *kataskenosis*, translated here as 'settlement',

incorporates the word for tent (*skene*), no doubt because the Pechenegs made use of them. In

an earlier section, however, Constantine describes how to conduct negotiations about military

service with 'a settled folk (*kathezetai laos*) of the Pechenegs' in the region of Bulgaria.[484]

The phrase implies that at least the leaders of these particular Pechenegs occupied a fixed

location, and can be compared with a similar usage in the next section, which describes the

Rus prince Igor as having 'his seat' (*ekathezeto*) in the city of Novgorod.[485] This level of

detail is appropriate for a foreign policy handbook, which needed to convey as much

information as possible about potential allies, whereas works of history in which they did not

play a central role could describe them in sweeping generalisations. From the point of view of

Byzantine foreign policy, then, both the Pechenegs and the Rus controlled certain fixed points

but were also frequently on the move, and it was apparently not helpful to assign labels to

them solely on this basis. Rather, their travel needed to be carefully studied as it related to

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[482] Bruno of Querfurt, 'List Brunona do Henryka II', (ed. Bielowski, 225). On the

archaeological evidence for this site see Pritsak, *The Pečenegs*, 16–17.

[483] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando*, 37, 8–9.

[484] *Ibid.*, 8, 5–6.

[485] *Ibid.*, 9, 4–5.

their alliances and economic endeavours: it could be useful, neutral or dangerous to the empire, depending on the extent to which it could be known and controlled.

The cases discussed above reveal that, far from wandering aimlessly, groups involved in long-distance resource gathering and trade operated in both settled and mobile modes. It was in their interest to undertake regular, predictable journeys in order to secure stable markets for their goods and be 'contactable' by representatives of neighbouring societies who wished to employ them. Both the Pechenegs and the Rus were, moreover, integrated into infrastructure associated with sedentary societies, using and relying on cities, whether their own or other peoples', as stable points where trade and other interactions took place.

In North Asia too, mobility required stopping places. The Mongols and other North Asian groups did not move all the time but followed a regular seasonal cycle of camps, spending several months in each. Although modern evidence suggests that individual groups might have migrated only a few hundred kilometres, the extensive nature of herding meant that groups were scattered over a huge area, and it could be a very long way to market. It is, for example, 1200 km from the medieval Uyghur city of Ordu Baliq (Karabalgasun) to their later centre at Gaochang 高昌 (near Turfan 吐魯番), or 1400 km to Youzhou 幽州 (present-day Beijing). Pastoral mobility was between known and relatively fixed locations, at each of which specific activities took place, such as birthing livestock, hunting, fattening, selection for market.[486] Markets were the primary intersection between the worlds of farmers, urbanites and pastoralists, and the last of these were particularly reliant on the fixity of certain locations

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[486] Bat-Ochir Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society: A Reconstruction of the 'Medieval' History of Mongolia* (Richmond, 2001). Sources for the Mongols, especially the *Secret History* (originally in Mongolian), and European travel accounts by the likes of Marco Polo or William of Rubruck, provide our best information about pastoralist life. Bold notes that 'Even the merchant is a transhumant', 410.

for the prosecution of exchange activities. Given the paucity of distinctive features in this region,[487] the conduct of trade at settlements marked by walls made considerable sense. Apart from the more usual potential uses of walls as defence, boundary or display,[488] in a Northern Eurasian context they also increased the settlement's visibility from longer distances, making it somewhat easier for those seeking it to find the right spot.[489]

But all parties used known, stable points in their cycles of periodic movement. Anyone who traded in settlements such as Gaochang, Ordu Baliq, or the successive cities at the site of present-day Beijing, had the advantage of places to store their goods, gather their purchases,

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[487] Numerous travellers comment, like Xuanzang 玄奘, on the 'boundless' view 四顧茫然, 'no sound of man or bird' 人鳥俱絕 (cf. Beal: 'no traces either of man or horse'; he has mistaken 鳥 for 馬), and failing to find landmarks like mountains. Huili 慧立, *Da Tang sanzang Xuanzang fashi biaoqi* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師表 [History of the Tripitaka Master of the Great Cien Temple of the Tang], ch. 1, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 [Continued and revised *Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*], vol. 1286, 11b; trans. Samuel Beal: Hwui li [Huili], *The Life of Hiuen-tsiang*, new edn. (London, 1911), 22.

[488] For the latter two see Lin Hu, 'Perceptions of Liao Urban Landscapes: Political Practices and Nomadic Empires', *Archaeological Dialogues*, xviii (2011), 229–33; also ongoing PhD work by Jonathan Dugdale, University of Birmingham.

[489] Daniel C. Waugh, 'Nomads and Settlement: New Perspectives in the Archaeology of Mongolia', *The Silk Road*, viii (2010), 103. Tamīm ibn Bahr spotted the *qan*'s gold tent from 5 *farsakh*s because it was on top of a palace. See V. Minorsky, 'Tamīm ibn Baḥr's Journey to the Uyghurs', *BSOAS*, xii (1948), 283.

assemble transport caravans, and to reside, eat and find entertainment in the meantime.[490] These benefits were presumably some compensation for becoming liable to taxation, levies and regulation, although surviving contracts and court documents suggest that the positive side of state intervention was access to adjudication of disputes and enforcement of agreements.[491] Traders of all backgrounds — mobile pastoralists, visiting farmers, itinerant traders, agents for distant merchants, apprentices and many others — flowed into and out of these nodes of exchange, some staying briefly, others sojourning for lengthy periods. Along

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[490] One classic description of Northern Eurasian city life is Jacques Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250–1276* (Stanford, 1962), on Kaifeng 開封.

Tamim ibn Bahr speaks of populous markets in Karabalgasun: Minorsky, 'Tamīm ibn Bahr', 283. Xuanzang's life describes producers in Gaochang making clothing suitable for a cold climate 'such as face-coverings, gloves, leather boots', and he obtained gold, silver, hundreds of bales of different types of silk, thirty horses, fruit, servants and supplies in general 製法服

三十具。以西土多寒，又造面衣、手衣、靴、韤等各數事。黃金一百兩，銀錢三萬，

綾及絹等五百疋，充法師往還二十年所用之資，給馬三十疋，手力二十五人：

Xuanzang, ch. 1, 14b; Beal, *Life*, 30–1 (who gives twenty-four instead of twenty-five servants). *Liao shi*, ch. 40, 562 describes the Southern Capital (Nanjing 南京, at the site of present-day Beijing).

[491] Valerie Hansen, for instance, discusses commercial and court documents from Turfan in 'The Impact of the Silk Road Trade on a Local Community: The Turfan Oasis, 500–800', in Étienne de la Vaissière (ed.), *Les Sogdiens en Chine* (Paris, 2005), 283–310. See also Ian Forrest and Anne Haour in this volume.

the Silk Routes between the second and eighth centuries, Sogdian traders, agents and enclaves exemplify an array of structural mobilities among town-dwellers engaged in activities of exchange.[492]

Coordinated mobility between known places was the foundation of Sogdian trading.[493] Our evidence for these networks is largely drawn from a chance find of five letters, dated to the early fourth century, in a watchtower near Dunhuang 敦煌.[494] The main Sogdian centres were the cities of Samarqand and Bukhara in the plains east of the Oxus or Amu Darya, 2400 and 2600 km west of the letters' place of discovery. Permanent Sogdian communities lived in far flung places, with Letter II mentioning 'a hundred freemen from Samarqand' in one illegible place and 'forty men' resident in another.[495] Places like Dunhuang, Chang'an 長安 and Jiuquan 酒泉 were evidently regular nodes in the networks, to which our correspondent

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[492] A comprehensive overview of evidence for the Sogdians is Étienne la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History*, trans. James Ward (Leiden, 2005), but this is a growing field. Representative authors writing in English include Arakawa Masaharu, Chen Jinhua, Mateo Compareti, Albert Dien, Frantz Grenet. There is a great deal more in Chinese and Japanese.

[493] Hansen, 'Impact of the Silk Road Trade', 284: 'Local officials referred to them as sojourning West Asian merchants (literally "Non-Chinese 'Hu' merchants conducting business" *xingsheng hushang* 興生胡商, often shortened to *xinghu*). They must have coined this term in response to local conditions because it occurs neither in the official histories nor in *The Tang Code*.'

[494] The most helpful reference is probably 'The Sogdian Ancient Letters', trans. Nicholas Sims-Williams, https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/sogdlet.html (accessed 17 July 2017), which includes an expert bibliography.

[495] De la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 44.

regularly sent agents. At least some of these followed flexible routes, for he worries that in the absence of the usual missives he has no news of how his correspondents are or what places they have reached. Sogdian traders seem to have fallen into categories who travelled circuits of different lengths — a couple of hundred kilometres, 1000 or 3500[496] — but they all shared with mobile pastoralists the characteristic of necessary regular mobility among known places, combined with flexibility over the details and devolved structures of authority over mobility. According to Êtienne de la Vaissière, our letter writer managed the movements required for trade as the middle level of a three-tier network, operating with considerable independence from the top level in Samarqand.[497] In similar fashion, pastoralist chiefs in contemporary Northern Eurasia, independently of any *qan*, directed their followers in the distribution of grazing rights, the timing of seasonal migrations and moves to new areas or to raid neighbours. Sogdian and pastoralist movements both structured the fundamentals of life: what would be traded where and with whom, and thus whether a living was made; and where a pastoralist group would live for part of that year and maybe others to come.

In both cases these movements relied upon access to basic resources in fixed places: pasturelands in specific locations and provisions in the cities. Direction of the incessant mobility needed to bring people and things from one fixed location to another required effective communications systems in the plural, to provide failsafes.[498] The Sogdian evidence

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[496] Jonathan Karam Skaff, 'The Sogdian Trade Diaspora in East Turkestan during the Seventh and Eighth Centuries', *JESHO*, xlvi (2003), 505–6; Hansen, 'Impact of the Silk Road Trade', 290–4.

[497] De la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 48–50.

[498] Visible in this plaint: 'now no one comes from there so that I might write to you about the Sogdians who went "inside" (to the Central Plains regimes), how they fared and which countries they reached'. De la Vaissiere, *Sogdian Traders*, 44.

points to kin networks and official structures, both most visible at times of failure. Sogdian farming households in eighth-century Turfan were probably partly supported by remittances of trading income from mobile family members,[499] suggesting one or more method for doing so. Meanwhile, Sogdian Letters I and III feature disappointed expectations due to family networks failing to resolve the correspondents' problems: 'Again and again I send you a letter, (but) I do not receive a (single) letter from you, and I have become without hope towards you.'[500] Those without nearby kin or reliable agents could have recourse to a specific official (perhaps a *sabao* 薩保[501]) within their city, but in time of crisis, formal position was no guarantee of efficacy. A caravan that reached Luoyang 洛陽 four years earlier had found that 'the Indians and the Sogdians', specifically, had starved to death in that city, and Letter II's writer feared the same outcome in Chang'an. She laments that 'we only survive so long as the [probably an official title]. . . lives, and we are without family'.[502] The real solution was held to be mobility. Four of the letters speak to situations in which the writers could not undertake the normal movements that would have resolved their situations. The writer of Letter V complains 'I have become isolated, and, behold, I stay here ... and I do not go hither

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[499] Skaff, 'Sogdian Trade Diaspora', 491–2.

[500] 'Sogdian Ancient Letters', https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/sogdlet.html.

[501] This position was specific to Sogdian communities. De la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 148–52; Hansen, 'New Work on the Sogdians, the Most Important Traders on the Silk Road, AD 500–1000: *Zhonggu Zhongguo yu wailai wenming* 中古中國與外來文明 by Rong Xinjiang 榮新江', *T'oung Pao*, 2nd ser., lxxxix (2003), 155–6.

[502] 'Sogdian Ancient Letters', https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/sogdlet.html; de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 44.

(and) thither, and there is no caravan(?) (departing) from here'.[503] The wife who sent Letter III laments that her servant has refused to escort her to join her husband, while her daughter adds that the servant has now run away. Thus his successful movement denied the women theirs. For these people, mobility meant life.

II. Political mobility and muster

The examples in the first section concerned interactions of a very ancient type involving groups which blurred the boundaries between nomadic and sedentary. However, 'nomads' travelled not only for economic and connective purposes, but also to sustain their political organisation. The main purpose of pastoralist gatherings in Eurasia was to affirm the political structure that bound disparate groupings together.[504] Attendance by chiefs and their presentation of tribute gifts enacted their subordination to the leadership of the *qan* and thereby reinforced the ruling status of his clan. Meanwhile, the *qan* hosted the chiefs at banquets and hunting parties, gave them gifts, confirmed their positions and titles, and entrusted selected individuals with significant tasks, as copiously documented in the *Secret History* and Marco Polo, among others.[505] Participation in such activities bolstered the subordinate chiefs' authority over their own followers and announced wider acceptance of the smaller political units thus constituted. Inclusion in this politics demanded presence, which in

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[503] 'Sogdian Ancient Letters', https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/sogdlet.html.

[504] Following Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society*, 83–4.

[505] Igor de Rachewiltz (trans.), *The* Secret History of the Mongols*: a Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden, 2006), §202–23; Henry Yule (trans.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1975 [1903–1920]), Book Second, chs. VI–VII, XIII–XVI, XX–XXI. Yule's remains the most comprehensive and scholarly translation into English.

turn required the participants to spend months, perhaps on an annual basis, travelling to and from the gathering place.

But the reproduction of political authority in these ways was not restricted to nomads.[506] Rather, in this respect nomadic leaders were part of a wider world in which personal attendance on the holders of superior authority and bestowers of subordinate authority was the normal mode of politics, regardless of whether rulers themselves were mobile or, at least nominally, fixed. In the famously centralised middle Byzantine Empire, the highest levels of power rarely budged from Constantinople. As we shall see, however, musters of part-time provincial soldiers, involving regular travel by large groups of people, contributed to the empire's military preparedness and the loyalty of its troops in much the same way as pastoralist gatherings.

Further east, the bureaucratic administrations of Eastern Eurasia sustained complex hierarchies of officials staffing the central organs around the court, and districts down to county level in the regions. The ethnicity and lifestyle of the rulers made no difference; what mattered was authority over populations who paid taxes. Appointees to official posts in regimes based in North China received their commissions in person from the ruler at the capital. This was entirely routine, but occasional representations include a probably thirteenth-century painting that shows the administrator dressed in his new robes of office, having abandoned his old clothes at the palace gate.[507] Loyalty was also tested by additional demands for attendance, trapping those who were thus summoned in a no-win position. Officials spent weeks or months on the road between the court and their postings. Even before

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[506] For further parallels see also Hilde de Weerdt, Catherine Holmes and John Watts, in this volume.

[507] Shane McCausland, *The Mongol Century: Visual Cultures of Yuan China, 1271–1368* (Honolulu, 2015), 37–8 and n.

the Mongols, officials in the largest empires faced journeys of some 2000 km to the far northwest or up to 1500 km to the far south to reach their posting — and that was as the crow flies. When the posting ended or a new one was awarded, the official made the reverse journey, and then, potentially, travelled again. The Southern Song (1127–1276) poet Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210) held irredentist views that came in and out of imperial favour. Accordingly he travelled several times between the court at Hangzhou 杭州, where he accepted official postings, and his family home at Shaoxing 紹興 about 50 km to the southeast, where he spent periods of retirement, until in 1169 he was posted to Sichuan 四川, some 1500 km to the west. He recorded his long journey there in an influential travel account, and did not return east for nearly a decade.[508] These were movements to and from an immobile court, and as we shall see, when the ruler was himself mobile, whether leading his own armies or travelling for other reasons, his officials had not only to travel but to find their way to him. The administrative map of the empire could be traced not in terms of boundary lines around the territory under control, but as a tangled network formed by these journeys. The acquiescence of those who travelled back and forth, to a centre whether fixed or shifting, formed a tangible measure of the legitimacy of the leaders at that centre. And it was of course from these same leaders that officials derived their authority in their postings.

Considering postings from the perspective of structural mobility offers new dimensions on certain practices. A useful illustration is Wang E's 王鄂 account of the Mongol siege of Caizhou 蔡州, which ended the Jin 金 dynasty (1115–1234). The Jin rulers were Jurchens 女真 originally from Manchuria, but they disposed of a bureaucratic administration inherited, along with most of its personnel, from a chain of multiethnic predecessors including the

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[508] Richard E. Strassberg (trans.), *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley, 1994), 205–9.

Tang.[509] After Emperor Aizong 哀宗 (1198–1234) fled his capital for refuge in Caizhou, regular court business continued in the new location, now become politically central. Two days after the emperor's arrival on 2 August 1233 Wang E received a new appointment, and five days after that (9 August) the emperor promoted the regional military commander, the logistics manager for the move, and a guard general, all of whom were present at the temporary court and able to receive their commissions in the normal way.[510] Aizong was still making appointments in person on 12 January 1234, of generals for what would be the Jin's last stand, who were inside the city.[511] Aizong also appointed to postings outside the city, but apparently only to places from which Caizhou could still be reached. At Shouzhou 壽州, 225 km to the east, all the officials were promoted in recognition of their stout resistance to the Mongols.[512] A particularly determined official was captured by mutineers but escaped and

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[509] Chen Sanping, *Multicultural China in the Early Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2012), 4–38.

[510] Wang E 王鄂, *Runan yishi* 汝南遺事 [Reminiscences of Runan], in *Jifu congshu* 畿輔叢書 [Collection of the Metropolitan Region], ed. Wang Hao 王灝 (1879), trans. Chan Hok-lam, *The Fall of the Jurchen Chin: Wang E's Memoir of Ts'ai-chou under the Mongol Siege (1233–1234)* (Stuttgart, 1993), 65, 68–9. For the sake of the non-specialist we will refer to translations of Chinese texts except for quotations.

[511] Chan, *Fall of the Jurchen Chin*, 108.

[512] *Ibid.*, 83–4. At *ibid.* 70, we see promotions given to two officials holding *yaoshou* 遙授 appointments to provincial postings. Chan, n. 41, mistakenly says that *yaoshou* appointments were those made by dispatch of a decree at times when appointees could not get to court, and takes the use of such appointments as a practical adaptation marking the difficult times. However, *yaoshou* appointments were those granted to officials who held them *in absentia*,

headed back to the Jin capital at Kaifeng 開封. Finding that the emperor had gone to Caizhou, the official walked there, a distance of 200 km.[513] When the emperor himself moved, on horseback as a sign of status, he was met at Caizhou by officials on foot in a standard enactment of their subordination.[514] These movements and meetings were an exact measure of the emperor's authority; officials who could not physically reach him could not serve him.

Despite the trials of travel, large numbers of people were mobile. Wang E records numerous couriers and escorts, some sent to recruit soldiers, or a rider pursuing troops to rescind an order,[515] or a hundred troops who summoned Jin generals to assist a beleaguered prefecture,[516] or the implication of a messenger to carry a rescript sent to the Duke of Hengshan 恆山公.[517] Messenger mobility functioned at perhaps the lowest level of the political structure, but if anything, it increased its importance. If messengers could not travel, then the ruler could not even summon officials, let alone receive their legitimating subordination. Rulers thus could not even attempt to exercise their authority in the messengers' destinations. The loss of those places to the enemy was yet more damaging to ruling authority, and a messenger arriving after the event was cut loose from his moorings; he might well face new obstacles to using the post roads, and the new political situation might

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either because their substantive post kept them at court or, as in these cases, where they were appointed to districts that were in enemy hands. Both officials were in Caizhou at the time of these promotions. See also *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大辭典, vol. 10, 1143.

[513] Chan, *Fall of the Jurchen Chin*, 78.

[514] *Ibid.*, 64, 65.

[515] *Ibid.*, 66, 77, 91.

[516] *Ibid.*, 75–6.

[517] *Ibid.*, 78–9.

offer him additional options. Deciding where he went next might be anything but straightforward. Mongols appear to have made much less use of messengers, for reasons to be explored in due course.

As to escorts, the commonest were probably those for diplomatic missions. We hear how on 7 September 1233 a Pacification Commissioner reported over a hundred Mongols mixed with Song people proceeding north, and scouts clarified that these were envoys from the Mongols, returning together with a Song mission charged with negotiating a peace treaty.[518] It was common practice to send back visiting envoys in company with the return mission, which reduced the troop numbers required. We see here how the hundred persons in a typical embassy were mostly soldiers detailed to guard gifts and supplies. Escorts also ensured that envoys stuck to the routes designated by their hosts, which would often avoid towns and inhabited areas to minimise the strategic information that envoys could collect en route.[519] Given the time taken to cover the distances and the number of missions sent, especially in multi-polar political situations or times of war, there must have been an envoy mission on the road somewhere at any given moment.[520] This incessant movement lay at the heart of relations between leaders. Communications, gifting and negotiations by envoys were the material substance of political relations; without such actions, there was no relationship. All shared this form of mobility and engaged in the system it sustained.

Individual tensions between a ruler and follower could be expressed through the

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[518] *Ibid.*, 80.

[519] Gwen Bennett, 'The Archaeological Study of an Inner Asian Empire: Using new Perspectives and Methods to Study the Medieval Liao Polity', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* (2015), 8–10.

[520] David C. Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh-Century China: Sung's Foreign Relations with Kitan Liao* (Leiden, 2005), 101–7.

medium of mobility. Wang E reports under 20 September 1233 that the emperor's palace attendants criticised a censor for allowing his wife to deny them provisions. In response, the emperor summoned him only rarely to the regular court sessions that court officials attended, showing disapproval by denying the censor the expected opportunities for individual communication with his emperor, and thereby denying expression of the political relationship between them. The censor, 'feeling saddened and discouraged' 憂憤鬱, feigned illness to provide an alternative reason for his absence. Lacking normal regular contact, the relationship deteriorated, with the emperor implying his dissatisfaction with the censor, and the censor literally immobilised.[521] Mongol versions of this situation were played out in the idioms of feasting and hunting, for example, declining to attend banquets or being banned from hunting.[522] We should note that distance was not a factor here: mobility across just a few hundred metres had the same structural importance as travelling from the ends of the empire.

Nevertheless, the potential for an actual breach of the relationship was greater with a regional posting, the classic case being the Tang border governor An Lushan, who rebelled in 755 rather than risk the dangers of attending a court filled with accusations against him.[523]

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[521] The emperor declared he wanted 'to rectify the administration' 治正之, and the officials thereby knew, in Chan's translation (*Fall of the Jurchen Chin*, 87), that the emperor was 'indirectly chafing at' the censor. This reads rather a lot into the phrase 知上意之, which is more simply rendered as '[the officials] knew the emperor meant him [the censor]'. The case was eventually resolved after the intervention of a member of the imperial clan on behalf of the censor. Cf. *Runan yishi*, ch. 2, 6b.

[522] *Secret History*, §9, 275.

[523] H. S. Levy (trans.), *Biography of An Lu-shan* (Berkeley, 1960); Denis Twitchett (ed.), *Cambridge History of China, Volume 3, Sui and T'ang China 589–906, Pt 1* (Cambridge,

Troop movements could follow unpredictable trajectories. Before the emperor arrived, the Caizhou commander had declined entry to a fellow general leading several hundred retreating cavalry, claiming the lack of an imperial decree to admit them. In truth, the Caizhou general seems to have mistrusted the retreating officer who, when subsequently admitted to a nearby city, arrested its commander on a fabricated charge.[524] These movements had political import, being the prelude to the alienation of the censor discussed above, which diverted energy that could, in a time of crisis, have been better spent. By contrast, Wang E highlights generals who demonstrated their loyalty by making their way to court with whatever troops they had. In October 1233 a general starting some 280 km from Caizhou, 'led several dozen elite cavalrymen to visit [the emperor]' 領精銳數十騎來見.[525] Two days later another general lost nearly a thousand troops — half of his force — fighting through the mountains to Caizhou, a journey made harder by avoiding the imperial road network.[526] Similar deeds may be found in the *Secret History*.[527] Praise and publicity for such exploits of mobility boosted morale at the time and contributed to a positive historical memory.

Wang E's text subtly contrasts with the habitual official presentation of an emperor-centred politics in which the ruler was omnipresent but rarely mentioned directly. Grammatical subjects were normally omitted in sentences that recorded decisions, conjuring the implication of the emperor as the still centre from which all power emanated. Wang

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1979), 428–63 and refs.

[524] Chan, *Fall of the Jurchen Chin*, 86.

[525] *Runan yishi*, ch. 3, 5b, trans. Chan, 95.

[526] Chan, *Fall of the Jurchen Chin*, 96.

[527] *Secret History*, 240. The role of roads in what we are calling structural mobilities is explored in Susan E. Alcock, Richard Talbert, John Bodel (eds.), *Highways, Byways, and Road Systems in the Pre-Modern World* (Oxford, 2012).

makes greater use of 'the emperor' or 'his majesty' as subjects, and emphasises the details of Aizong's actions, including his movements. The Byzantine empire in the period after late antiquity also tended to project an image of centralisation, but was in fact a highly mobile place.[528] To be sure, Constantinople was the uncontested political, cultural and economic centre, particularly after the loss of Alexandria and Antioch to the Arabs. It was not unusual for emperors rarely to leave the city, and most mid- to high-ranking careers, whether in the church, administration, or army, were unthinkable without spending some period of time there.[529] As medieval governments go, it was on the opposite end of the spectrum from the itinerant kings of western Europe or the peripatetic elites of east Asia discussed above. But even if emperors and officialdom were firmly anchored in Constantinople, one does not need to look far beyond the façade of stasis to discover a state which relied on frequent travel, not just to and from the capital but between many other points as well.

Trade, diplomacy and pilgrimage are just a few examples of enterprises which connected Byzantium to neighbouring and more distant states and encouraged the constant circulation of people within the empire. However, the institution which accounted for the most large-scale movements of people was the army. Offensive and defensive campaigns on the borders of the empire and beyond might take large armies hundreds of miles from home. Byzantium was engaged in such operations frequently as it reconquered, defended and lost territory in the Middle East and the Balkans and endured raids from those areas.[530] The

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[528] The discussion below will focus on the early part of the middle Byzantine period, roughly the mid-seventh to late tenth centuries.

[529] Prominent examples of emperors from this period who did not venture far from the capital include Leo VI and Constantine VII.

[530] Overviews of the victories and reversals which characterized the middle Byzantine period can be found in e.g. Jonathan Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*

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strategies, fighting methods and logistical arrangements which were employed once the army had embarked on a campaign have received considerable attention.[531] Yet setting this in motion depended on the processes of assembly and mobilisation, particularly of the provincial armies, which can roughly be grouped under the category of 'muster'. This preliminary step prior to the army's departure reveals a low-level and largely overlooked form of mobility, yet one which was a structural aspect of the middle Byzantine provincial economy and society. Like the rulers and officials discussed above, these soldiers traced a tangled network of their own from their scattered homes to central gathering points, moving en masse and at regular intervals. This process, despite involving the opposite end of the social spectrum from its counterpart in east Asia, similarly reveals a 'sedentary' state's simultaneous dependence on, and frustrations with, large-scale movements of people.

Much of middle Byzantium's fighting was carried out by the elite *tagmata* forces. They comprised the empire's standing army and navy, and were trained rigorously throughout the year. Permanently stationed in Constantinople and a few provincial outposts, they could be deployed anywhere at relatively short notice from these central locations.[532] By contrast, the armies of the provinces (*themata* or themes) were in practice (if not in theory) reserve forces, and their dispersal across vast territories led to much more complicated patterns of movement.

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c. 500–1492 (Cambridge, 2008), 249–304, 365–94, 493–536; Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, 1997), 455–533.

[531] The scholarship on middle Byzantine strategy and logistics is vast and expanding rapidly. For an excellent starting point see e.g. John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 560–1204* (London, 1999), 71–90, 128–225; John Haldon (ed.), *Byzantine Warfare* (Aldershot, 2007), parts III–VI and the military handbooks cited in this section.

[532] For an introduction to the tagmatic armies see Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army 284–1081* (Stanford, 1995), 28–32.

The origin of the thematic armies lay in Byzantium's efforts to cut costs when, following the Arab invasions, it could no longer afford to maintain large field armies. Instead of being permanently deployed, thematic soldiers occupied plots of land which they farmed together with their households. From the proceeds, they were expected to support themselves and assemble regularly in a central location, fully equipped with armour, food, weapons, servants and horses (in the case of cavalry) for exercises and campaigns.[533] Although each theme had a general with a small permanent staff, the vast majority of the provincial forces consisted of farmer-soldiers living on their own land.[534]

This system succeeded in creating armies with excellent local knowledge and a strong motivation to defend their provinces. The thematic armies were, however, less good at offensive operations and could become a headache to the military leadership. If they were well disciplined and regularly trained, such as those on the eastern borders of the empire with frequent experience of fighting the Arabs, they might be induced to rebel by charismatic local commanders.[535] But left to their own devices, as those in the protected interior of Anatolia

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[533] The notoriously complex and controversial questions surrounding the development of the thematic armies and the status of the soldiers' lands cannot be discussed here. For opposing views see John F. Haldon, *Recruitment and Conscription in the Byzantine Army c. 550–950* (Vienna, 1979) and Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 98–109, 171–9.

[534] Constantine VII refers to the permanent officers in *The Book of Ceremonies*, 663, 667 (trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall). On thematic generals and their salaries see N. Oikonomidès, 'Middle-Byzantine Provincial Recruits: Salary and Armament', in John Haldon (ed.), *Byzantine Warfare* (Aldershot, 2007), 152–3.

[535] On the reasons for military rebellions in this period, including rivalries between themes and generals' resentment of emperors, see W. E. Kaegi, 'Patterns of Political Activity of the

could be, they would soon lose their skills and be of no use in battle. As the author of *Campaign Organization and Tactics*, an anonymous late tenth-century military handbook, complains: 'But for soldiers to stay home and do nothing, to get no exercise, not to go on campaign each year at the proper time, this is to reduce them to the ranks of merchants and common farmers. For, selling their best horses and buying cows and the other things one would expect of a farmer, and gradually becoming accustomed to leisure, they embrace it.'[536]

The regular muster (*admoumion*) of the thematic armies was therefore a vital exercise for training inexperienced troops and monitoring the loyalty of seasoned ones. This obligatory appearance was one of the few means the government had to exert direct control over a significant portion of its armed forces, and generals were well aware of the importance of the exercise for the army's continued functioning. *Campaign Organization* describes muster rolls as 'not the least of the elements assuring the security and coherence of the army'.[537] The muster, called at least every few years and sometimes annually, thus involved up to a few thousand people travelling from their homes to central gathering points.[538] They did not usually have to cover vast distances, since their meeting places were in their own provinces rather than Constantinople. Yet even these relatively short journeys required thematic soldiers across the empire to be available for call-up and away from home for up to several months at a time. They were thus forced to divide the year between different income-generating

Armies of the Byzantine Empire', in Morris Janowitz and Jacques van Doorn (eds.), *On Military Intervention* (Rotterdam, 1971), 13–19.

[536] *Campaign Organization and Tactics*, 28 (trans. Dennis, 319).

[537] *Ibid.*, 29 (trans. Dennis, 321).

[538] The regularity of musters and distribution of salaries is discussed in Oikonomidès, 'Middle-Byzantine Provincial Recruits', 151–60. For estimates of the numbers of tagmatic and thematic soldiers in this period, see Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 64–80.

activities, not unlike the Rus collecting and then selling resources or Pechenegs travelling to distant clients to perform services.

Descriptions of the *adnoumion* give glimpses into both the importance of this system for the maintenance of the empire's defences and the problems it caused for officers and soldiers alike. Although generals relied heavily on the thematic armies, the muster was an unpredictable process because of the amount of time it could take for soldiers to assemble. The historian Leo the Deacon relates, for example, that the future emperor Nikephoros II conducted a muster in 963 in stages: 'Upon arrival in Cappadocia […] he established his quarters there, and sent off dispatches in every direction, mobilizing his army and summoning them to him in full force. […] Thus the general drilled the army, while awaiting the arrival of the remaining troops […].[539] The military leadership was aware that geographical difficulties could cause delays, and could make allowances for them in their planning.[540] More challenging was the problem of motivating the soldiers to leave their farms for an uncertain, costly and dangerous assignment. The enforced travel involved with the *adnoumion* and the necessity to equip oneself, combined with the vagaries of farming, could cause significant financial hardship, and it is clear that soldiers were often not keen to participate. The author of *Campaign Organization* is insistent about the need for accurate record-keeping by officials, and is frank about the likelihood of desertion and late arrivals. Registering the troops, he contends,

will enable his holy majesty to know how many men there are for the

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[539] Leo the Deacon, *Historiae*, III, 1 (ed. Migne, 117, 713; trans. Talbot and Sullivan, 87).

[540] John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy, 'The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organization and Society in the Borderlands', in Hugh Kennedy (ed.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (Burlington, 2006), 167.

expedition, how many have been left at home, how many have run away. In addition he will learn which ones have actually been left behind because of weakness, which ones have died, which ones keep their horses and fighting gear in good condition. … [H]e should know who is working hard, who is lazy enough to prefer his own comfort to the common good, and how many have slacked off in other respects. … If the muster rolls are kept accurately, the men serving in the army will not dare to stay behind when there is an expedition. […] If, for some reason, any troops should arrive too late and be left off the first muster roll, they may be listed in the later one.[541]

Countering this official view is the perspective of an ordinary soldier found in a hagiographic text, the *Life of St Philaretos the Merciful*, which, although modelled on the Book of Job, includes valuable detail about Byzantine provincial life in the mid-eighth century. It includes the story of an impoverished thematic soldier, Mouselios, whose only horse died on his way to an *adnoumion*. Threatened with punishment, he begged Philaretos to loan him a horse for the day so he could get through the muster. When Philaretos asked what he planned to do after returning the horse, Mouselios replied: 'To begin with let me get through this day without being beaten by the captain of thousands, then I shall run away and go to a far country as fast as my legs can carry me, for I do not know what to do.'[542]

The *adnoumion* was, therefore, as much about accounting for and controlling soldiers as it was about training them. It was a significant part of a Byzantine politics of presence which

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[541] *Campaign Organization*, 29 (trans. Dennis, 321, 323).

[542] Niketas, *The Life of St Philaretos the Merciful Written by his Grandson Niketas*, 125.218–127.247 (ed. Rydén, 72–5). Philaretos, of course, gave Mouselios his horse and he proceeded to the muster.

was in many ways the opposite to that in China. Instead of a peripatetic ruler attracting trailing followers hoping for promotion and favours, representatives of the state forcibly drew in those who owed it service with a combination of inducements and threats. Despite the risks they faced, Chinese officials who undertook journeys to attend on emperors could usually hope for worthwhile perks at the end of their journeys. By contrast, the most that the thematic soldiers could expect was their modest salary and possibly campaign pay and booty.[543] Neither of these may have been necessary if farming was going well, and they had to be weighed against the dangers of warfare.

The *adnoumion* was thus, without doubt, a messy process which Byzantine officers struggled to control. As well as being centralising, by causing soldiers to leave their scattered holdings for provincial gathering points, it also significantly increased the mobility (voluntary or otherwise) of the farming population, thus contributing to a 'bottom up' politics of presence in which thematic soldiers were summoned to report to representatives of the state. But despite its many awkward aspects, it contributed to a period of relative growth and stability by ensuring that Byzantine soldiers were both adequately trained and rooted in their local communities, giving them a strong incentive to defend their land.[544] The seemingly static empire was thus remarkably dependant on movement, even at the most local level.

III. Timing and getting stuck

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[543] For estimates of amounts and frequency of pay, which varied over time, see Oikonomidès, 'Middle-Byzantine Provincial Recruits', 151–60; Haldon, *Recruitment and Conscription*, 75; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 126–8; Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 135–41.

[544] The decay and demobilisation of the themes, particularly those on the borders, has often been linked to the empire's growing insecurity in the eleventh century. For a summary see *ibid.*, 214–19.

Those on the move needed to know not only the established routes but also how long the journey would be. Time taken was a function of distance, mode of transport, and also of terrain, with obstacles whether natural or artificial. This 'friction of distance',[545] explains why travel accounts often detailed how long a particular route took, and the reasons.[546] The Mongols demonstrated widespread and detailed knowledge of routes and journey times, such that they could plan complex military strategy for enactment on a specified day, thousands of kilometres and many months away.[547]

But this was not just Mongol practice. At Caizhou the Jin planned in the same way, implying similar knowledge about routes and travel times. On 14 July 1233, Aizong sent 'cavalry units to meet [at the rendezvous]. They were all informed of [His Majesty's] dates and routes of travel' 遣軍馬來迓，俱諭以行期道路.[548] On 3 August, newly arrived in Caizhou, the emperor contacted the general Wu Xian to 'arrange a date to join forces for a military expedition' 約會征進之期,[549] and a month later ordered another general 'to gather a great army by the middle of the ninth month to converge with His Majesty's forces at the

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[545] James C. Scott, *The Art of* Not *Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Yale, 2009), 165–7.

[546] The classic example is Marco Polo. In Henry Yule's edition, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1975 [1903–1920]), distances are scattered throughout Book First, especially, for example, in Chapters XVII, XIX, XX, XXVIII.

[547] Denis Sinor, 'On Mongol Strategy', in Ch'en Chieh-hsien (ed.), *Proceedings of the Fourth East Asian Altaistic Conference* (Tainan, 1975), 238–49, repr. in Denis Sinor, *Inner Asia and its Contacts with Medieval Europe* (London, 1977), XVI.

[548] *Runan yishi*, ch. 1, 1a, trans. Chan, 61.

[549] Wang, *Runan yishi*, ch. 1, 3b, Standen trans., cf. Chan, 65.

Raofeng Pass' 期以九月中聚集大軍，與上會於饒豐關 for a surprise attack.[550] Such plans did not always work out. An order of 20 November summoned numerous armies 'to join forces to fight ... on the New Year's Day of the following year. ... But on the agreed date, not a single man arrived' 期以來年正月旦日會戰 ... 及期，無一人至者.[551] Support for the Jin was haemorrhaging, but this was also a period of widespread blocked communications.[552] Still, the ability to converge at fixed times and places was essential to strategic planning for military forces in general, and regardless of the reasons, not turning up on time meant military failure.

While armies might sometimes fight their way past obstructions, individuals were more likely to just get stuck. They lacked the main force to face down bandits or military obstacles, knowledge of alternative routes, and the capacity to reconnoitre new ones, and so possessed fewer options for improving their circumstances. Buddhist monks sailing west to collect new scriptures experienced the imperatives of timing in relation to the monsoon. Yijing 義淨, for instance, set off for India in 671:

> By this time a ship from Srivijaya will have arrived there. This is generally in the first or second month of the year. … We stay in Jiecha (Kedah) till winter, then start on board ship for the south … The time of arrival is generally in the first or second month. We stay there till the middle of summer and we sail to the north … The first half of the year will be passed by this time.[553]

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[550] *Runan yishi*, ch. 2, 3b, trans. Chan, 79.

[551] *Runan yishi*, ch. 3, 7b, trans. Chan, 99.

[552] Chan, *Fall of the Jurchen Chin*, 79, 90.

[553] Takakusu Junjiro, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671–695)* (reprint, New Delhi, 1982), xxxiv. This passage is from a note on

此屬<u>佛逝</u>舶到之時當正二月 ... 停此[<u>羯荼國</u>]至冬，汎舶南上 ... 亦以正二月而達.

停至夏半汎舶北行 ... 經停向當年半矣。

Thus an unfavourable wind forced another monk, Mahaprajna 智弘 (Zhihong), to stay
in Guangdong 廣東 longer than intended.[554]

Unhurried monks routinely stayed at monasteries or urban sites to study, to learn about
local customs, or be entertained by rulers, building relationships at every turn, as well as
undertaking a regular summer retreat of their own.[555] While rarely recorded, being stuck
would have allowed for more of the same, although sometimes people sought alternative
routes, like Xuanzhao in the late seventh century.[556]

Yijing's travels that he added to his translation of *Mûlasarvâstivaâda-ekasatakarman* 根本說

一切有部百一羯磨 (part of the Buddhist Tripitaka), j. 5. The Chinese text may be consulted

conveniently at http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/BDLM/sutra/chi_pdf/sutra11/T24n1453.pdf,

35.

[554] Yijing 義淨, *Da Tang Xiyu qiufa gaoseng zhuan*, in Wang Bangwei's 王邦維 critical

edition (*Da Tang Xiyu qiufa gaoseng zhuan jiaozhu* 大唐西域求法高僧傳校注 [Critical

edition of *Biographies of Eminent Monks Who Went to the Western Regions in Search of the

Law During the Great Tang Dynasty*] (Beijing, 1988), trans. Latika Lahiri, *Chinese Monks in

India: Biography of Eminent Monks Who Went to the Western World in Search of the Law

During the Great T'ang Dynasty* (Delhi, 1986), 89.

[555] Lahiri, *Chinese Monks in India*, 22.

[556] *Ibid.*, 15.

Waiting around was a normal part of sea travel, but less familiar is the urgency of departure when the wind was right.

> Just at that time the merchant found the wind favourable, and raised the sails to their utmost height. I was in this way conveyed back (although not myself intending to go home). Even if I asked to stop, there would have been no means of doing so. By this I see it is the influence of Karma that can fashion (our course), and it is not for us ... to plan it.[557]
>
> 于時商人風便，舉帆高張。遂被載來，求住無路。是知業能裝飾，非人所圖。

When timing failed, mobile monks had to accept the consequences, which provided a spiritual test. But set alongside dangers such as wild animals, thieves and bandits, shipwreck, and running out of water, merely getting stuck was scarcely even a hardship. Nevertheless, the need to be in the right place at the right time structured this form of mobility. When monks — and the traders on whose ships they sailed — got stuck, they had to spend additional money until they could resume their journey. The implication was always that movement *would* return, and that the delay was fundamentally temporary. The frequent incidence of delay in pilgrimage accounts certainly suggests the normality of getting stuck, but the spiritual benefits of such interruptions may also have made them a narrative requirement of the genre.

Getting stuck was, without doubt, a common (even predictable) element of medieval mobility, whether for large armies or small groups of pilgrims. Although chronicles can reveal the consequences of such events (for instance, failing to engage the enemy) on a

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[557] *Da Tang Xiyu qiufa*, ch. 2, p. 214, trans. Takakusu, xxxiv-xxxv, slightly modified (also Lahiri, 114).

societal scale, it is also vital to understand the experiences and coping mechanisms of individuals who found themselves stuck en route: did they put it down to karma, curse their luck, or go native? The rare but valuable sources which include such information provide some of the best insight into the lived experiences of medieval mobility and the difficulties thereof.

A case in point is a colourful account of travel to India in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, this time from the west. It describes the experiences of someone who, although constantly on the move, was stuck in foreign lands and unable to return home. The merchant Afanasii Nikitin's seven-year wanderings involved encounters with thieves and bandits, shipwreck, monumental failures of timing, and much else. They took him from his native Tver, in central Muscovy, through the southern Caucasus, Iran, the Arabian peninsula, central India and eastern Turkey, and even included a brief stopover in Ethiopia. This voyage, recounted by Nikitin in a travel diary known as 'Journey beyond the Three Seas', was not planned. It began as a routine trading trip to the region of Shirvan, on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. As was normal practice at the time, Nikitin obtained credentials from the prince and archbishop of Tver and set off down the Volga with a group of other merchants. The company was, however, robbed near Astrakhan at the mouth of the Volga and, despite making representations to the local ruler, obtained no help. At that point, the company disbanded and everyone went their own way. Nikitin himself eventually crossed the Caspian Sea and hopped across Iran, spending a few months in a number of cities, before setting off from the island of Hormuz across the Arabian Sea to Gujarat. The majority of his account concerns his time in India, where he visited a number of cities in the central part of the sub-continent.[558] As a rare account of the experiences of a non-elite person who had to fend for

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[558] Afanasii Nikitin, 'Khozheniia za tri moria' [Journey beyond the Three Seas], in L. A. Dmitriev and D. S. Likhachev (eds.), *Pamiatniki literatury drevnei Rusi, Vtoraia polovina XV*

himself in utterly foreign lands, Nikitin's diary is instructive for those seeking to understand the reality of getting stuck in the medieval world.

The account has been studied chiefly for its literary qualities, as well as the information it provides about India and Nikitin's own beliefs. The reasons why Nikitin pursued this dangerous and uncharted itinerary, rather than returning to Muscovy, have also been a matter of some debate. The once widely-accepted theory that he was a spy working on behalf of the Muscovite grand prince is no longer seriously discussed.[559] More believable is Gail Lenhoff and Janet Martin's idea that, with debts outstanding in Tver, Nikitin was simply trying to recoup his losses by following what was in fact an established trade route: visiting one market town after another in hopes of finding a place conducive to business.[560] This explanation fits with the tone of the text, which is full of observations about the wares on offer in each region, the honesty of the locals (or lack thereof) and the discrimination faced by a non-Muslim and non-Hindu who wished to engage in trade. Nikitin was thus stuck both economically and geographically: despite his extensive travels around Iran and India, he did not have the financial means to extricate himself from a part of the world which he never intended to visit.

Surprisingly little attention has been paid to Nikitin's situation of being stuck, his

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veka [Monuments of the literature of Early Rus, Second half of the Fifteenth Century] (Moscow, 1982), 443–77.

[559] For a summary of these debates see Ia. S. Lur'e, 'Afanasii Nikitin', in D. S. Likhachev (ed.), *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti drevnei Rusi* [Dictionary of Literary People and Works of Early Rus], 3 vols. (Leningrad, 1987), iii/i, 81–8.

[560] G. D. Lenkhoff and D. V. Martin, 'Torgovo-khoziaistvennyi i kul'turny kontekst "Khozheniia za tri moria" Afanasiia Nikitina' [The trade, economic and cultural context of Afanasii Nikitin's 'Journey beyond the Three Seas'], *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, xlvii (1993), 98–104.

coping strategies with his unusual circumstances, and how he communicated his predicament

to his intended audience, whoever they may have been.[561] Unlike the strategists and monks

discussed above, Nikitin had no prior knowledge of most of the places he described, nor

profound spiritual reasons for going there. Although he was clearly interested in trade and

spent much of his time trying to engage in it, he was generally pessimistic about the prospects

for Muscovite trade with India:

> Those Muslim-dogs lied to me: they said that they had a lot of wares, but
>
> there is nothing for our land. All the high quality goods are for the Muslim land:
>
> pepper and dyes which are cheap. Some who transport wares [?] by sea don't pay
>
> duties. But they don't let us transport goods without paying duties. And the duties
>
> are high, and there are a lot of robbers at sea.[562]

Probably in part for these reasons, Nikitin's account differs in some significant ways

from other medieval travel narratives. His intention does not seem to have been to provide

information for would-be future traders about the lengths of routes, obstacles, and the like.

Large portions of the narrative are devoted to his sojourns in various towns, but not how long

it took him to get there or tips for navigating the road (aside from the sarcastic remark: 'So,

Christian Rus brothers, whoever wants to go to the Indian land, he should leave his faith in

Rus and, having accepted Mohammed, go to the Hindustan land.')[563] About halfway through

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[561] Brief comments about this subject can be found in Ia. S. Lur'e, 'Afanasii Nikitin's

Weltanschauung', trans. Jana R. Howlett, *Polata Knigopisnaia: an Information Bulletin*

Devoted to the Study of Early Slavic Books, Texts and Literatures, xvi (1987), 132–4.

[562] Nikitin, 'Khozheniia', 452.

[563] *Ibid.*

the text, however, after describing several years' worth of experiences in India, Nikitin unexpectedly launches into a list of the number of days' travel between places he had visited from the start of his journey at Hormuz (Map 3).[564] Another such list, although with less detail, occurs at the end of the text in Nikitin's description of his journey back to Rus, starting from Ethiopia, where he landed briefly after being blown off course.[565] (Although Nikitin did reach the East Slavonic lands of Lithuania, he died before arriving in Tver.)

Context indicates that Nikitin's accounting of journey times had more to do with personal anxieties than a desire to convey information to others, and this aspect of the text is key to understanding the true and total isolation which could be a consequence of getting stuck in the medieval world. The previous section, describing his journey to the holy city of Parvat, is decidedly worldly, and includes remarks about the prices charged by prostitutes.[566] Nikitin then attempts to relate the date on which he arrived at his next stop of Bidar, which leads to painful reflections:

> From Parvat I came to Bidar, fifteen days before the Muslim Eid al-Adha.
> And I don't know when the Great Day of the Resurrection of Christ is, but guess
> by signs: the great Christian day occurs nine or ten days earlier than the Muslim
> Eid al-Adha. I have nothing with me, not a single book. I took books with me
> from Rus, but when I was robbed they took them. And I have forgotten the whole
> Christian faith: I don't observe the Christian festivals, the Great Day or
> Christmas, and don't [fast] on Wednesdays and Fridays.[567]

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[564] *Ibid.*, 460.

[565] *Ibid.*, 474, 476.

[566] *Ibid.*, 460.

[567] *Ibid.*

This passage, along with various other remarks, have given rise to a debate about whether he converted to Islam.[568] However, the intense focus on this question is unhelpful in understanding the larger picture of Nikitin's predicament and what it can tell us about how an individual dealt with getting stuck. A certain amount of slippage in his views and language is understandable, given a level of disorientation which is difficult to imagine today. Presumably, for a period of several years, at least from the time he entered Iran until well into his return journey (possibly in the lands of the former Byzantine empire), he did not encounter anyone who shared his language, religion or culture. Even if he had not lost his books with tables of the date of Easter, correlating the Christian moveable feasts based on a solar calendar with the Muslim moveable feasts based on a lunar calendar would have been extremely difficult, particularly in non-scholarly or religious circles and given the differences between the seasons in Muscovy and central India.[569] On top of everything else, Nikitin was unsuccessful in his efforts to establish trade with Muscovy. After seven years of trying to cope with this situation, inconsistencies and syncretism are understandable, and it is not surprising that his writings include a reference to his 'Muslim name', prayers in creolised

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[568] For the case in favour of conversion see Gail Lenhoff, 'Beyond Three Seas: Afanasij Nikitin's Journey from Orthodoxy to Apostasy', *East European Quarterly*, xiii (1979), 432–47. Mary Jane Maxwell, 'Afanasii Nikitin: An Orthodox Russian's Spiritual Voyage in the *Dar al-Islam*, 1468–1475', *Journal of World History*, xvii (2006), 264 claims that 'he became a quasi-convert to Islam and would have been well on his way to full conversion had he not returned to Rus'. This discussion cannot be continued here, and is in any case not relevant for our current purposes.

[569] For further discussion and arguments against Nikitin's adherence to Islam or Christian heresies see Lur'e, 'Afanasii Nikitin's *Weltanschauung*', 127–36.

Arabic and statements which do not conform to Orthodox dogma.[570]

Whether or not Nikitin formally converted, and whether that was out of 'sincere' faith or a desire to negotiate better business deals, is less important than what his account actually communicates. His experiences were at the far end of the spectrum of both mobility and getting stuck, and he comes across as both bewildered and intrepid — qualities which probably described many people following a breakdown in the structures of mobility on which they depended. Although it is safe to assume that most medieval travellers did not go as far as Nikitin, and were usually in at least a small company of fellow-countrymen, many must have shared both Nikitin's despair and his determination to make the best of unpromising situations. The reality of being stuck, then, was one of variously making compromises, flailing ineffectually, and engaging in ad hoc diplomacy, coupled with a healthy dose of moaning about the locals: all understandable responses to testing times.

IV. In Conclusion

Across medieval Eurasia, people of all stripes were constantly on the move. Scholarship has traditionally focused on specific types of travel, such as pilgrimage, with little consideration for the larger significance of mobility across social groups. With selected case studies, we have attempted to show how mobility (and its difficulties) was, in fact, a structural element of medieval Eurasian societies, particularly those characterised as 'sedentary'. Movement, in many forms, over varying distances and for diverse purposes, was woven into the fabric of everyday life: conscripts, officials, traders, monks, hostages and many others were dependent on the functioning of systems which kept them on the go, and suffered consequences ranging from inconvenience to destitution when these broke down. The study

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[570] See analysis in Lenhoff, 'Beyond Three Seas', who takes these as proof that Nikitin converted to Islam, despite his clear statements to the contrary.

of structural mobility sheds new light on how entire societies — and not just elite groups normally identified as 'travellers' — functioned. It is also an important step towards breaking down the artificial dichotomies between nomadic and sedentary which have long gone unchallenged. When subjected to scrutiny, it turns out that 'sedentary' societies practised and relied on diverse forms of mobility at least as much as their 'nomadic' neighbours, which raises the question of the usefulness of such terms in the first place.

In essence, the function of mobility is to place people or things that begin in different locations in dynamic relationship with each other. The components of mobility are *nodes* or specific points — not always fixed in space — between which journeys are made, forming *vectors*. These features of mobility are common to both 'sedentary' and 'nomadic' groups, and provide a simple framework within which to examine different types of mobility alongside each other. As it happens, this paper has paid more attention to nodes than vectors, but some forms of mobility were more about the journey than the stopping points, and this is a key factor in understanding the diversity of medieval mobility. Journeys to trade or gather resources were functional, being quite straightforwardly about moving as efficiently as possible between places of sojourn where food or goods might be collected or traded. By contrast, the goals of envoy missions were set by their dispatchers and focused on the foreign court, but diplomatic parties also engaged in trade at their final destination and sometimes elsewhere, with greater or lesser awareness on the part of their hosts. In this case the endpoints were the primary concern, but adventitious private or imperial profits might be made at lesser stopping points along the way.[571] Monks also sometimes wrote about their journeys, which tended to be a good deal longer than those of envoys. While this kind of

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[571] For instance, Herbert Franke, 'Sung Embassies: Some General Observations', in Morris Rossabi (ed.), *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries* (Berkeley, 1983), 124, 139.

religious traveller had a goal in sight, the journey itself, with all of its dangers and delays, was just as much a part of the spiritual experience, and this presumably helped pilgrims to be sanguine about what other types of traveller would have regarded as great misfortunes. Finally, there are the journeys taken for their own sake and recorded by some Chinese literati in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, in which the journey was the destination. Although we could not consider them here, they are an important (if not widespread) aspect of the diversity of medieval mobility, pointing less toward similarities with 'free' nomads than with modern leisure travel.[572]

Whether travel was conducted for its own sake or only to reach a destination, a characteristic shared by many (if not most) medieval journeys was their difficulty and, concomitantly, the effort devoted to making them happen. Many journeys were, of course, physically dangerous, although travel could also be difficult without necessarily being long or intrinsically perilous — like the journey from an official's capital residence to the emperor's daily court session. Trade, political relations, administrative hierarchies, military organisation, religious exchange, diplomacy: none of these could function unless the protagonists or their agents actually met and spent time together. A wide range of groups showed their willingness to expend significant resources — people, equipment, road- or port-building, protection, supplies, receptions, administrators, and time — to enable such face-to-face meetings.

This commitment may point to the distinctively medieval aspects of mobility — and the priorities that have not changed between then and now. In modern times the increased — and still increasing — speed and efficiency of communications allows travel to be undertaken more lightly and spontaneously. Thus, in the modern world many more people move longer distances more often than was true of their medieval ancestors. Less clear is the degree to which they move for different reasons. Political, economic and religious reasons for travel

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[572] Strassberg, *Inscribed Landscapes*, 56.

still loom large, although political and economic structures have been transformed and the nature of mobility for these reasons has changed accordingly. On the other hand, religious movement, for pilgrimage and to learn from co-religionists, seems to have remained similar in structure while speed and volume have increased.

At the same time, more joint activities may be embarked upon without physical meetings. Traders, administrators, armies and the faithful can all be directed or conduct their affairs by remote means. Businesspeople videoconference, administrators respond to email, armies fight by drone and preachers proselytise on Youtube. All of these activities benefit from physical meetings, but these are most often aimed at establishing, maintaining or managing the underlying relationships, and are no longer required to prosecute the activities themselves. Political relations and diplomacy are different, however. Here the importance of real-life meetings was and is paramount. Visiting envoys have been replaced by permanent diplomatic establishments that maintain, in other countries, a physical presence of people and buildings — on a (notional) piece of their home territory, no less.

A cursory glance at the modern world reinforces the notion of mobility as a structural component of diverse societies: something which has increased in speed and scale, but not fundamentally changed, since medieval times. Although traditional forms of pastoralism have largely been killed off by modern government policies, the new contrast is between those who stay at home and those who move more or less permanently to a new region or country. Migrants are as readily demonised as 'nomads' were when they provided a convenient Other to fill that particular rhetorical and political niche. But in the present day, the mobilities of commuting, work, consumption, visiting family and friends, and leisure, bring migrants and domestic populations closer together, just as political, economic and religious journeys generated some similar patterns of mobility among 'sedentary' and 'nomadic' populations in

the global Middle Ages. In both modern and medieval times, for significant groups of people, journeys are just something they do a lot.