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THE POLITICAL ROLE OF THE JALAYIR IN THE MONGOL EMPIRE

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Abstract

This article reconsiders the political role of the Jalayir within the Mongol Empire and its successor states, arguing that they should be understood not as a marginal tribal group, but as a politically consequential confederation whose influence extended across the Mongol world. Drawing on Mongolian, Persian, Chinese, and Arabic sources, it examines the Jalayir from their early formation in the Uighur–Khitan frontier to their incorporation into the Chinggisid imperial order and subsequent expansion across Eurasia.

It argues that the Jalayir were a composite tribal formation of mixed Mongolic, Turkic, and Tungusic origin whose political significance derived not from demographic scale, but from military utility, political adaptability, and durable integration into imperial structures. By tracing their roles in Mongolia, Central Asia, and the Ilkhanate, this study positions the Jalayir as a key example of how mobile tribal elites shaped both the formation of the Mongol Empire and the political order of its post-imperial successor states.

Keywords: *Jalayir, Mongol Empire, Inner Asia, tribal elites, Ilkhanate, political integration*

Introduction

The Jalayir were one of the prominent tribal groups of Inner Asia whose historical significance extended from the pre-imperial steppe to the political formation and successor states of the Mongol Empire. Appearing in Mongolian, Persian, Chinese, Arabic, and Turkic historical traditions, the Jalayir occupied an important place within the military and political structures of the Mongol world despite never constituting one of its largest tribal confederations. From their incorporation into the Chinggisid imperial order to the establishment of the Jalayirid polity in Iraq and Azerbaijan, the history of the Jalayir reflects the broader mobility, adaptability, and political resilience of tribal elites across medieval Eurasia.

Although the Jalayir appear frequently in medieval historical sources, modern scholarship has often treated them primarily within discussions of ethnogenesis, tribal classification, or regional political

history. Considerable attention has been devoted to the origins of the ethnonym Jalayir and its possible connections to earlier Uighur, Turkic, and Inner Asian tribal formations. Comparatively less attention, however, has been paid to the broader political role of the Jalayir across the Mongol imperial and post-imperial world, particularly their transformation from a steppe tribal confederation into an influential military and administrative elite within several Mongol successor states.

This article argues that the Jalayir should be understood not as a marginal tribal remnant, but as a politically consequential confederation whose historical influence far exceeded its demographic scale. Their significance derived from their military utility, political adaptability, and durable integration into imperial structures stretching from Mongolia to Central Asia and the Middle East. By examining their historical development from their early formation in the Uighur–Khitan frontier to their later role in the Ilkhanate and Central Asia, this study highlights the central role played by mobile tribal elites in shaping both the expansion of the Mongol Empire and the political order of its successor polities.

The article first examines the historiographical and historical background of the Jalayir, including debates surrounding their ethnogenesis and early political development. It then analyzes their incorporation into the Mongol imperial system and their role within the military and administrative structure of the empire. Finally, it explores the political activities of the Jalayir in Mongolia, Central Asia, and the Ilkhanate, with particular attention to the emergence of the Jalayirid state in the post-Ilkhanid Middle East.

1. Origins and Ethnogenesis of the Jalayir

1.1 The Ethnonym “Jalayir” and Early Uighur Connections

The ethnonym *Jalayir* has attracted considerable scholarly attention and has been linked to earlier forms such as *djala'ir*, *yalaqar*, and *yaglaqar*. Linguistic studies suggest that these variants may preserve traces of an older Turkic origin. J. Hamilton, for instance, interprets *jayla-* or *jala-* as deriving from a Turkic root meaning “fat,” “oil,” or “to become oily,” while *-qar* / *-gar* functions as a formative suffix associated with nominal or ethnonymic construction. Parallel forms appear in Chinese and Inner Asian sources: Tang records render the name as *Yao-luo-ge*, the Orkhon inscriptions preserve the form *Jaylaqar*, and Khotan-Saka documents record a related variant reconstructed as *Jajlaqar*. Building on these philological correspondences, B. Batsuren identifies the *Yaologe* as a Turkic-speaking clan of early medieval Central Asia associated with the ruling lineage of the Uighur Khaganate and argues that this group corresponds to the later Jalayir (Batusren, 2016).¹ Such evidence suggests that the early history of the Jalayir was closely connected to the political and ethnocultural milieu of the early Uighur world.

1.2 The Jalayir in the Uighur–Khitan Frontier

According to historical and philological studies, the Jalayir were incorporated into the political sphere of the Uighur Khaganate by the tenth century and are thought to have inhabited the region of the Kimek–Orkhon basin. During the period of Khitan expansion, they occupied territories adjacent to the Tatars and early Mongol groups and came under the authority of the Liao Empire, whose influence extended across the steppe zone from the Gobi to Lake Baikal. By this period, the Jalayir had become one of the steppe groups incorporated into the broader Khitan imperial frontier.² As Yu.A.Zuev has noted, although the historical formation of the Jalayir was shaped in part by their interaction with the Khitan world, their earlier ethnopolitical roots remained closely tied to the Uighur milieu.³

1.3 Migration and Conflict with the Early Mongols

¹ B. Batsuren, “Яглакар [Yaglaqar (a Turkic clan name)],” in *Монгол түүхийн тайлбар толь [Explanatory Dictionary of Mongolian History]* (2025).

² A. Ochir, “Халхын арын долоон отгийнхны угсаа хамаадал, тархац [The Lineage, Relations, and Distribution of the Seven Rear Tribes of Khalkha],” in *Монголын түүхийн судалгаа III [Studies in Mongolian History, Volume III]* (Ulaanbaatar, 2011).

³ Batsuren, under “Яглакар [Yaglaqar (a Turkic clan name)].”

By the mid-eleventh century, increasing Khitan military pressure appears to have accelerated the westward displacement of the Jalayir. Around the 1040s, following sustained pressure from the east, Jalayir groups migrated toward the lower Kherlen basin, where they became neighbors of the early Mongol tribes. Mongol narrative tradition preserves the memory of this migration in highly dramatized form, depicting the Jalayir as a displaced and impoverished people reduced to foraging for wild roots.⁴ In one such account, a conflict arose when Monolun, wife of Menen Tüdü of the ancestral Mongols, encountered Jalayir children digging in the pasturelands and, enraged, ordered them killed beneath the wheels of her cart. The episode, preserved in later historical tradition, serves less as a literal record than as a narrative explanation for the outbreak of hostility between the Jalayir and the early Mongols.

Subsequent retaliatory violence marked the beginning of prolonged conflict between the two groups. In response to the killing, the Jalayir are said to have raided the encampments of the ancestral Mongol nobles, plundering their households and killing members of the ruling lineage. D’Ohsson records that in this attack “eight of Monolun’s nine sons were killed, and only the youngest, Qaidu, was spared”.⁵ Whether historical or stylized, this episode reflects a remembered period of violent confrontation in which competition over territory, resources, and political survival shaped relations between the Jalayir and the early Mongols. These conflicts continued until Qaidu, son of Menen Tüdü, is said to have subdued the Jalayir and brought them under his authority, marking the beginning of their gradual incorporation into the emerging Mongol political order.

1.4 Tribal Composition and Confederative Structure

By the mid-eleventh century, the Jalayir had been incorporated into the political orbit of the ancestral Mongols and came under their authority as a subordinate tribal group. For this reason, several historical traditions describe the Jalayir as having once served as the *ongu* (or *ongon*) retainers of the forebears of Chinggis Khan, reflecting an early relationship of political dependency and service.⁶ Yu.A.Zuev, drawing on the studies of Sun Lian and H. F. Martin, likewise notes that on the eve of Chinggis Khan’s rise the Jalayir were settled along the Selenga and Khilok river systems and were recorded under the form *Yalair* or *Yalayar*.⁷ Other sources similarly indicate that by the twelfth century the Jalayir occupied the broader Onon river basin, placing them firmly within the political and geographic sphere of the emerging Mongol tribal confederation.⁸

According to the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh (Compendium of Chronicles)*, by the late twelfth century the Jalayir were divided into ten principal clans: Jat, Tūqara’un, Qunqsa’ut, Qumsa’ut, Uyat, Nilqan, Qūrkin, Tūlangit, Tūri, and Šangqut.⁹ This internal segmentation indicates that the Jalayir were not a genealogically uniform tribe, but rather a composite tribal confederation composed of lineages of varied origin. As in many steppe political formations, tribal unity appears to have rested less on common descent than on political integration and shared allegiance.

A. Ochir offers the following observations on the constituent clans of the Jalayir:

Jat: The Jat (*dzhat*) may have been a lineage incorporated into the Jalayir from outside their original tribal structure.

⁴ M. Baron C. D’Ohsson, *Moğol Tarihi [History of the Mongols]*, ed. E. Kalan and Q. Şüküov (İstanbul, 2006).

⁵ D’Ohsson, *Moğol Tarihi [History of the Mongols]*.

⁶ Ochir, “Халхын арын долоон отгийнхны угсаа хамаадал, тархац [The Lineage, Relations, and Distribution of the Seven Rear Tribes of Khalkha]”; Rashid al-Din, *Сборник летописей [Compendium of Chronicles]*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Москва–Ленинград, 1952).

⁷ Batsuren, under “Яглакар [Yaglaqar (a Turkic clan name)].”

⁸ Kh Nyambuu, *Монголын угсаатны зүй [Mongolian Ethnology]* (Ulaanbaatar, 1992).

⁹ Ochir, “Халхын арын долоон отгийнхны угсаа хамаадал, тархац [The Lineage, Relations, and Distribution of the Seven Rear Tribes of Khalkha]”; Rashid al-Din, *Сборник летописей [Compendium of Chronicles]*, vol. 1.

Tūqara'un: Supporting the interpretation of L. Bölcs, A. Ochir suggests that *Tūqara'un* may derive from the Mongolian *togoruun* (“crane”). If so, the clan name may reflect a totemic association, indicating a group that revered the crane as its *ongon*.

Tūlangit: This name is generally regarded as a variant of *Telengüd*, a tribal ethnonym of probable Turkic origin. Chinese historical sources mention the Telengüd as early as the sixth century.

Qūrkin: This name closely resembles *Kurykan*, an early tribal name. V.V. Radlov identified the Kurykan as the ancestors of the modern Yakuts and regarded them as a mixed Uighur–Tungusic people, while A.P. Okladnikov considered them to be of Turkic origin. The Qūrkin within the Jalayir may represent a branch of this earlier tribal formation. Some scholars further argue that the Kurykan confederation itself was composed of Turkic, Tungusic, and Mongolic elements, part of which may have entered the Jalayir between the sixth and tenth centuries.

Šangqut: This ethnonym is not known among modern Mongolic-speaking groups. However, A. Ochir cautiously compares it with the Oirat clan name *Šangas*, suggesting a possible historical connection.

Qunqsa'ut and Qumsa'ut: These clans may have been of Tungusic origin and appear to have undergone substantial Mongolization within the Jalayir by the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Tūri: This name may survive in altered form among the modern *Toroo* clan of the Ööld in western Mongolia.

Taken together, these clan names suggest that the Jalayir were not an ethnically homogeneous tribe, but a politically consolidated confederation formed through the incorporation of Mongolic, Turkic, and Tungusic elements. Their internal structure reflects the broader pattern of tribal formation in Inner Asia, where political cohesion often emerged through alliance, absorption, and military integration rather than strict genealogical continuity.

A.Ochir therefore concludes that the Jalayir were originally a composite tribal formation, consisting of Mongolic, Tungusic, and Turkic elements united within a single political confederation.¹⁰

2. The Jalayir and the Formation of the Mongol Empire

According to several historical sources, when Chinggis Khan undertook the unification of the “people of the felt-walled tents,” the Jalayir were among the tribes that entered his authority, while a smaller branch came under the domain of Qasar.¹¹ As recorded in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the Jalayir submitted to Chinggis Khan during the period in which he consolidated his power over the steppe and brought neighboring peoples under his control. Thereafter, they became integrated into the military and political structure of the emerging Mongol state and took an active role in the imperial campaigns initiated by Chinggis Khan, particularly those directed toward the south.

A number of prominent imperial commanders emerged from the Jalayir, the most distinguished of whom was Muqali (Muqulai), one of the foremost generals of the early Mongol Empire.¹² A member of the Jalayir, Muqali commanded the left wing of Chinggis Khan’s army, reportedly consisting of 26,000 troops, and is identified in historical tradition as one of Chinggis Khan’s famed “Four Hounds.” His career illustrates the extent to which Jalayir elites rose to prominence within the imperial military hierarchy and became central to the expansion of Mongol power.

¹⁰ Ochir, “Халхын арын долоон отгийнхны угсаа хамаадал, тархац [The Lineage, Relations, and Distribution of the Seven Rear Tribes of Khalkha].”

¹¹ Van Manduga, ed., *Монголын түүхийн толь [Dictionary of Mongolian History]* (Huh hot, 1999).

¹² Sh. Choimaа, ed., *Монголын нууц товчоо [The Secret History of the Mongols]* (Улаанбаатар, 2011), 29.

Following the reorganization of the empire under the decimal military-administrative system, the Jalayir were divided into seven *mingghan* (thousand-household units). Of these, two were assigned to the right wing of the Great Mongol Empire and four to the left wing, while another appears to have been attached to the ulus of Ögedei. This distribution indicates both the numerical strength of the Jalayir and their strategic importance within the imperial military structure. Their integration into multiple wings of the imperial order also suggests that the Jalayir were not treated as a peripheral tribal remnant, but as a politically reliable and militarily valuable component of the Chinggisid state.

The prominence of the Jalayir is further reflected in their presence within Chinggis Khan's own *keshig* and personal military retinue. Among the commanders of his personal thousand was Uldai Khorchi of the Jalayir, who led one of its constituent hundreds. The appointment of a Jalayir commander to such a position demonstrates the degree of trust placed in Jalayir elites and underscores their close integration into the inner military and political circle of Chinggis Khan.¹³

3. The Jalayir in Mongolia after the Empire

As the Mongol Empire expanded across Eurasia, branches of the Jalayir were dispersed into the territories of the Golden Horde, the Ilkhanate, and the Chaghadaid Khanate, where they became incorporated into the political and social structures of these successor polities. Over time, many of these western branches were assimilated into the local populations among whom they settled, gradually losing their original Mongolian language and adopting new linguistic and cultural identities. This process reflects a broader pattern of elite and tribal dispersion under Mongol imperial expansion, in which military mobility often led to long-term ethnocultural transformation.

The principal body of the Jalayir that remained in Mongolia underwent a different historical trajectory. According to historical sources, in the late 1240s the main Jalayir groups, together with the Qonggirad, Ikires, Uru'ud, and Mangghud, migrated southeastward and settled in the region of the present-day Yellow River (Luuha River). This movement formed part of the wider post-imperial redistribution of tribal populations within eastern Mongolia. Some of these Jalayirs, who had long remained under the authority of the descendants of Chinggis Khan, later came under the rule of Ašikhai, the eldest son of Batumöngke Dayan Khan, in the mid-sixteenth century.¹⁴

The branch of the Jalayir that entered the domain of Qasar followed yet another line of development. During the Northern Yuan period, these groups became known as the Jalayid. Some were incorporated into the Khorchin and came under the authority of Qasar's descendants.¹⁵ After migrating southward and settling in the basin of the Non River, they became known as the "Non Khorchin," reflecting both their political affiliation and geographic relocation. This transformation illustrates how older tribal identities were preserved, reconfigured, and absorbed within the evolving political structure of the eastern Mongol world.

Genealogical traditions further trace the later lineage of the Jalayid through the descendants of Qasar. Qasar's fifteenth-generation descendant, Kuimeng Tashkhar, had two sons. His elder son, Bodidara Jorigh Noyan, had nine sons, of whom the youngest, Amin Darkhan Baga Noyan, became the ruler of the Jalayid and is remembered as the progenitor of the later Jalayid lineage. In subsequent generations, the Jalayid, together with the Khorchin, submitted to the Later Jin state and were reorganized as an administrative *hoshuu* under the jurisdiction of the Jirim League. Their incorporation into the Qing frontier administrative order marks the final transformation of the Jalayid from an imperial tribal lineage into a banner-based administrative community.¹⁶

¹³ Ochir, "Халхын арын долоон отгийнхны угсаа хамаадал, тархац [The Lineage, Relations, and Distribution of the Seven Rear Tribes of Khalkha]."

¹⁴ Ochir, "Халхын арын долоон отгийнхны угсаа хамаадал, тархац [The Lineage, Relations, and Distribution of the Seven Rear Tribes of Khalkha]."

¹⁵ Van Manduga, *Монголын түүхийн толь* [Dictionary of Mongolian History].

¹⁶ Van Manduga, *Монголын түүхийн толь* [Dictionary of Mongolian History].

According to the research of A.Ochir, the descendants of the Jalayir remain widely distributed across contemporary Mongolia, where they survive both as distinct lineages and in mixed tribal formations. Intermixed with the Besüd, Jalayir descendants are found in Taishir, Delger, Biger, Khaliun, and Chandmani soums of Govi-Altai Province; throughout Erdene, Tsogt, and Tseel soums of the same province; and in the western parts of Bayantsagaan and Bayan-Öndör soums of Bayankhongor Province. Intermixed with the Olkhonud, they are also present in Khökhmorit, Bayan-Uul, and Jargalan soums of Govi-Altai, as well as in Darvi soum of Khovd Province. Among the Uriankhai, Jalayir-related groups are recorded in Tonkhil, Tögrög, Bugat, and Altai soums of Govi-Altai, while smaller numbers are also found among the Khoid in Sharga soum.

In addition, Jalayid/Jalayir clan groups are registered in Selenge soum of Bulgan Province, Shiluustei soum of Zavkhan Province, and Tumentsog and Erdenetsagaan soums of Sükhbaatar Province. Their present distribution across western, central, and eastern Mongolia reflects the long historical process of migration, political realignment, and ethnogenetic transformation that has shaped the Jalayir from the medieval period to the present.¹⁷

4. The Ilkhanate and the Jalayir

The Jalayir were among the principal Mongol tribes that played a significant role in the formation and political life of the Ilkhanate. Their prominence within the western uluses of the Mongol Empire is well attested in both Persian chronicles and modern scholarship, particularly in the works of J. A. Boyle and P. Wing, who have examined the political and administrative role of Mongol tribal elites in the Ilkhanid state.¹⁸ Within the Ilkhanate, the Jalayir emerged not merely as a military contingent, but as an influential political and administrative elite whose authority endured well beyond the collapse of Ilkhanid rule.

When Chinggis Khan apportioned peoples and territories among his sons, the Jalayir noble Möge (Müge) Noyan was assigned to Chagatai.¹⁹ His son Yesür later served as a military commander under Baraq Khan, indicating that branches of the Jalayir were already embedded in the military-political structures of the Chaghadaid realm before their more visible emergence in the west. Although the Jalayir are not explicitly listed among the Mongol groups that entered western Asia with Chormaqan and Eljigidei, they are recorded among the tribal contingents that later accompanied Hülegü during the establishment of Ilkhanid rule, together with the.²⁰ By the reign of Hülegü, the Jalayir in the Ilkhanate were under the authority of Ilka Noyan, who appears to have been one of their principal commanders.

In Anatolia, several Jalayir nobles held considerable authority, among them Baltu, Toku (the son of Ilka Noyan), Uruktu, and Iqbal. These figures illustrate the extent to which Jalayir elites became integrated into the military and provincial administration of the Ilkhanid west. Among the most prominent of these was Ilka Noyan himself, followed by his son Aq Buqa and grandson Emir Husayn, all of whom served as provincial governors during the reigns of Ghazan Khan and Öljeitü. Their successive appointments demonstrate not only the continuity of Jalayir influence across generations, but also the degree to which the tribe became embedded in the administrative framework of the Ilkhanate.

Like the Barlas in Central Asia, the Jalayir remained politically active long after their initial incorporation into the western Mongol world. Over time, however, they underwent rapid linguistic and

¹⁷ Ochir, “Халхын арын долоон отгийнхны угсаа хамаадал, тархац [The Lineage, Relations, and Distribution of the Seven Rear Tribes of Khalkha].”

¹⁸ J. A. Boyle, “Dynastic and Political History of the Il-Khans,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 5: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods* (Cambridge University Press, 1968); Patrick Wing, “The Jalayirids and Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Ilkhanate” (University of Chicago, 2007), 421.

¹⁹ Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami‘u’t-Tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles. A History of the Mongols, Part One*, ed. W. M. Thackston (Harvard University, 1998), 41.

²⁰ Z. V. Togan, *Umumi Türk Tarihine Giriş [Introduction to General Turkish History]* (İstanbul, 1981); Jean-Paul Roux, *Moğol İmparatorluğu Tarihi [History of the Mongol Empire]*, ed. Aykut Kazancıgil and Ayşe Berekut (Kabalıcı Yayınları, 2001); Faruk Sümer, “Anadolu’da Moğollar [The Mongols in Anatolia],” *Selçuklu Araştırmaları Dergisi [Journal of Seljuk Studies]* (Ankara) 1 (1970): 11–12.

cultural transformation, gradually adopting Turkic speech and, in many cases, Islam. This process of Turkicization and Islamization did not diminish their political prestige; rather, it reflects the adaptive strategies through which Mongol tribal elites preserved authority in the post-imperial Islamic polities of western Asia. Even after the fragmentation of Mongol imperial rule, descent from Mongol tribal lineages continued to carry considerable political legitimacy.²¹ The Jalayir played a particularly decisive role in the political struggles that followed the death of Abū Saʿīd Khan in 1335. In the succession crisis that followed, competing factions sought to install rival claimants to the Ilkhanid throne. Although one faction supported Mūsā, the grandson of the Oirat noble Baiju of Diyar Bakr, the Jalayir instead advanced Muḥammad, a descendant of Hülegü, as their preferred candidate. Following victory over rival factions, Muḥammad was enthroned in Tabriz in July 1336.²² In this struggle, Hasan Buzurg Jalayir—governor of Anatolia and son of Emir Husayn—played a decisive role, emerging as one of the most powerful political actors in the post-Ilkhanid west.

The assassination of Muḥammad in 1338 and the ensuing collapse of centralized Ilkhanid authority marked a turning point in Jalayir history. The ensuing struggle between Hasan Buzurg and Hasan Küçük became one of the defining conflicts of the post-Ilkhanid period. After Hasan Küçük seized Tabriz in 1338, the political center of Jalayir power shifted to Baghdad, which by the 1340s had become the principal seat of the emerging Jalayirid polity. From this point onward, the Jalayir ceased to function merely as an Ilkhanid tribal elite and instead emerged as the ruling house of an independent post-Mongol state.

After the death of Hasan Buzurg in 1356, his son Uways succeeded him and consolidated Jalayirid rule over Iraq and Azerbaijan. By 1358, Uways had expelled the Qipchaqs and brought Azerbaijan under firm Jalayirid authority. Until his death in 1374, he ruled as the effective sovereign of Baghdad and Tabriz, overseeing the political and cultural consolidation of the Jalayirid state. He was succeeded by Husayn Jalayir (1374–1382), and later by Aḥmad Jalayir, whose reign was marked by prolonged resistance against the advancing forces of Timur.²³

Aḥmad Jalayir's opposition to Timur marked the final major phase of Jalayir political independence. Although ultimately unable to withstand Timurid expansion, the Jalayirid rulers remained among the most important heirs of the Ilkhanid political tradition in western Asia. Their courts preserved important elements of Mongol political culture while simultaneously participating in the Persianate urban and administrative world.

The memory of Jalayirid political prestige endured even after their decline. When the Castilian envoy Ruy González de Clavijo passed through Tabriz in the early fifteenth century on his embassy to Timur, he recorded the enduring splendor of the city and attributed one of its great palaces to the Jalayir rulers. He wrote: "*The architecture of Tabriz is remarkably beautiful... one palace we visited was extraordinarily magnificent with 20,000 rooms... We were told that this palace had been built by Sultan Jalayir.*" Though brief, the observation is revealing: even after the fall of their dynasty, the Jalayir remained remembered as patrons of monumental architecture and sovereigns of lasting prestige in the urban memory of the post-Mongol Middle East.²⁴

By the fourteenth century, the Jalayir had become firmly established in Baghdad and later in the Tabriz region, where they emerged as one of the most powerful post-Ilkhanid political houses. What distinguishes the Jalayir from many other Mongol tribal groupings incorporated into the Ilkhanate is that, following the collapse of centralized Ilkhanid authority, they succeeded in transforming their tribal identity into the basis of dynastic sovereignty. In northern Iraq and Azerbaijan, they established an independent polity that bore their own tribal name—the Jalayirid State (*Dawlat al-Jalāyir*)—which

²¹ L. Jamsran, ed., *Монгол улсын түүх, боть 2 [History of Mongolia, Volume 2]* (Ulaanbaatar, 2003).

²² Roux, *Moğol İmparatorluğu Tarihi [History of the Mongol Empire]*.

²³ R. Grousset, *Bozkır İmparatorluğu [The Empire of the Steppes]*, ed. R. Uzmen (İstanbul, 2010).

²⁴ Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, *Anadolu, Orta Asya ve Timur [Anatolia, Central Asia and Timur]*, ed. Ö. R. Doğrul (İstanbul, 1993), 98.

endured from 1340 to 1431. The formation of the Jalayirid state marks one of the clearest examples of a Mongol tribal elite successfully converting imperial military status into post-imperial dynastic rule.

The rulers of the Jalayirid state were as follows:

Hasan-i Buzurg (740/1340)
 Uways I (757/1356)
 Husayn I (776/1374)
 Aḥmad (784/1382)
 Shāh Walad (813/1410)
 Shāh Maḥmūd (814/1411, first reign)
 Uways II (818/1415)
 Muḥammad (824/1421)
 Shāh Maḥmūd (825/1422, second reign)
 Husayn II (827–835 / 1424–1431)

This succession illustrates both the longevity and instability of Jalayirid rule.²⁵ Although the dynasty preserved political authority in Iraq and Azerbaijan for nearly a century, the later period was marked by succession disputes, internal fragmentation, and increasing pressure from rival Turco-Mongol powers, particularly the Timurids and the Qara Qoyunlu. Nevertheless, the Jalayirids remained one of the most significant post-Mongol dynasties of the Middle East, preserving elements of Mongol political legitimacy while simultaneously participating in the Persianate administrative and urban traditions of the region.

5. The Jalayir in Central Asia

Within the Chaghadaid ulus, branches of the Jalayir were dispersed across Central Asia, where they became integrated into the political and military structure of the Chagatai Khanate. According to the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh*, Chagatai, the second son of Chinggis Khan, received 4,000 troops, among whom the Barlas and Jalayir formed an important component. This early incorporation into the Chaghadaid military order ensured that branches of the Jalayir became firmly established in Central Asia from the earliest phase of Mongol imperial expansion.

By the thirteenth century, the Jalayir and Barlas were still recognized as Mongol tribal groups. Yet within roughly a century, both had undergone substantial assimilation among the Turkic-speaking populations of Transoxiana and the Kashka-Darya region of present-day Uzbekistan. By the fourteenth century, they had largely shifted to Turkic speech and were increasingly integrated into the Islamicate social and political milieu of Central Asia. Their transformation closely parallels that of other Mongol tribal groupings in the region, whose political authority endured even as their linguistic and cultural identity changed.

This continuing prestige is reflected in Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s *History of Timur*, where he describes the principal tribal groupings of Central Asia in the Timurid age: “*The Turks, like the Arabs, have clans and tribes... The leading clan is called Arlat. The second is the Jalayir, the third the Qavchin, and the fourth the Barlas*”.²⁶ This testimony indicates that the Jalayir remained one of the most influential tribal groupings in Central Asia into the early fifteenth century. By this time, however, they had clearly become Turkic-speaking and had adopted Islam, reflecting the broader processes of Turkicization and Islamization that reshaped the post-Mongol societies of Transoxiana.

According to the *Tārīkh-i Rashīdī*, during the age of Timur the Jalayir, under the leadership of Hamdī, governor of Andijan, joined the Qipchaqs in revolt and participated in the siege of Samarqand.

²⁵ Muzaffer Ürekli, “Celâyirliler [The Jalayirids],” in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi [TDV Encyclopedia of Islam]*, vol. 7 (İstanbul, 1993).

²⁶ İbni Arabşah, *Acâibu’l-Makdûr [The Wonders of Destiny]*, ed. A. Batur (İstanbul, 2012).

The rebellion was ultimately suppressed, and Timur responded by dispersing the Jalayir among his emirs as dependents and military retainers. This episode demonstrates both the continuing political significance of the Jalayir in Central Asia and the extent to which Timur sought to weaken potentially autonomous tribal power by redistributing them under direct elite control. Some scholars have further suggested that the Jalayir played a substantial role in the ethnogenesis of several later Central Asian peoples.²⁷ They are often associated with the formation of segments of the Great Jüz within the Kazakh tribal confederation,²⁸ and are likewise thought to have contributed to the ethnogenesis of the Uzbek people. While such claims must be treated cautiously, they nonetheless reflect the enduring demographic and political imprint of the Jalayir in the wider history of Central Asia.

As far as current evidence indicates, the Jalayir first appear in written sources in the tenth century. By the time of Chinggis Khan, they had already come to be classified among the *unagan bo'ol* ("hereditary retainers") and had become one of the prominent tribal groupings incorporated into the Great Mongol Empire. With the expansion of the empire, branches of the Jalayir were redistributed across multiple imperial spheres: some became attached to the ulus of Chagatai and settled in Central Asia, while others followed Hülegü into Iran and Iraq.

In both regions, the Jalayir retained political significance long after their initial incorporation into the Mongol imperial system. In Central Asia, they remained influential into the age of Timur; in Iran and Iraq, they became one of the principal tribal groups of the Ilkhanate and, after the death of Abū Sa'īd Bahadur Khan, established their own successor polity in the form of the Jalayirid state. Yet despite this political prominence, the western and Central Asian branches of the Jalayir gradually lost their distinct Mongolian linguistic and cultural identity through processes of Turkicization and Islamization, eventually becoming absorbed into the broader populations of the regions in which they settled.

The branches of the Jalayir that remained in Mongolia followed a different trajectory. Their descendants are still found in considerable numbers in Govi-Altai Province, as well as in Bulgan, Sükhbaatar, and Zavkhan provinces. In addition, communities preserving genealogical traditions linked to the Jalayir are found in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China.

Conclusion

The history of the Jalayir illustrates a broader historical pattern in Inner Asia: tribal communities displaced by warfare, ecological pressure, and imperial expansion were often absorbed into new ethnopolitical environments, where they gradually assimilated into surrounding populations. Yet assimilation did not preclude historical significance. On the contrary, many such groups continued to play important political and social roles in their adopted regions. The Jalayir represent one of the clearest examples of this process. Though never among the largest of the Mongol tribes, they were among the most historically consequential. Across Mongolia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, the Jalayir left a political legacy far greater than their numerical size might suggest.

From the early steppe world to the imperial and post-imperial spheres of Eurasia, the Jalayir demonstrate how a comparatively small tribal confederation could attain enduring political importance through military service, political adaptability, and successful integration into changing imperial systems. Their rise within the Mongol imperial order, and later emergence as the ruling house of the Jalayirid state in Iraq and Azerbaijan, further illustrates how tribal elites of the Mongol world could transform military and administrative authority into lasting dynastic and regional political power.

The history of the Jalayir also demonstrates that the political structures created during the Mongol Empire did not disappear entirely with imperial fragmentation. Rather, tribal elites who had risen within

²⁷ Mirza Haydar Duġlat, *Tarih-i Reşidî [The Rashidî History]*, ed. O. Karatay (İstanbul, 2006), 207–8.

²⁸ V. V. Vostrov and M. S. Mukanov, *Родоплеменной состав и расселение казахов: конец XIX – начало XX в. [Tribal Composition and Settlement of the Kazakhs: Late 19th – Early 20th Century]* (Издательство «Наука» Казахской ССР, 1968).

the Chinggisid military and administrative system continued to shape the political order of the post-Mongol world across multiple regions of Eurasia. In this respect, the Jalayir reflect not only the mobility and adaptability of Inner Asian tribal elites, but also their enduring role in the political and cultural transformations that followed the expansion of the Mongol Empire.

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