

18 Escape from the Mongols

A Letter from Mosul, Written in December 1236

Oxford, Bodl., Ms. Heb. a 3 (Catal. 2873), f. 24

Text in Goitein, Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida I (1956), pp. 405/8

(Although letters containing the learned opinions of the heads of the Jewish Academies in Iraq form a considerable part of the texts preserved in the Cairo Geniza (cf. above p.       ), only very little has been found in it of private correspondence from countries east of Palestine and Syria, the eastern fringes of the Mediterranean. The following example was chosen both because of its content and its date. It is far later than any of the texts translated on the preceding pages, a fact reflected, for example, in the exaggerated use of honorific epithets.)

The letter was sent from Mosul in December 1236. At that time the Near and Middle East were at the mercy of the Mongol hords, who, after the defeat and death of the Khwārizm Shāh Jalāl ad-Dīn, encountered no military force which was able and willing to oppose them. Jingiz Khan was already dead, but it was under his successor Ogothay (1229-1241) that the Mongol armies became the undisputed lords of the Eurasian continent. Kiev fell (1240) and ancient Russian history came to an end. The joint German and Polish armies were routed at Liegnitz (1241) and it was only inner Mongolian developments which prevented the victors from pursuing their enemies