

THE MONGOL NAVY: KUBLAI KHAN'S INVASIONS IN ĐẠI VIỆT AND CHAMPA



Vu Hong Lien

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'The battle on Bach Dang river in 1288 (defeated Mongolian's invasions in Dai Viet)'. Courtesy of the Vietnam National Museum of History.

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The Mongol Navy:

Kublai Khan's Invasions in Đại Việt and Champa

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ABSTRACT

During his campaign in southern China and following his final victory over the Southern Song in 1279, the Yuan Emperor Kublai Khan launched a series of naval campaigns to conquer East and Southeast Asia. The chain of attempted conquests began with Japan and ended with Java, and all ended in failure. Although Kublai Khan did not succeed, the Mongol intervention seriously affected the dynamics of the region and left long-lasting consequences. Most remarkable of all, the naval campaigns marked a dramatic change in the Mongol traditional warfare.

Based on historical accounts by the Persian historian Rashid-al-Din, who had access to Kublai Khan's papers, the Yuanshi, Vietnamese pro-Mongol documents, the Vietnamese official annals and analyses by modern historians, this Working Paper focuses on the series of crucial events that took place in the late thirteenth century, when the Mongols actively and violently interfered in Đại Việt and Champa. It highlights the first-ever failure of the Mongols worldwide in Đại Việt, a hitherto less known fact due to the lack of cross-study on the Mongols in the East and the West. As events gradually unfold, we can see why Kublai Khan paid such close attention to Southeast Asia, how the Mongol Navy was created, the Mongols' own reaction to its function, and why they failed repeatedly in their attempts at expansion down the South China Sea/Bien Dong.

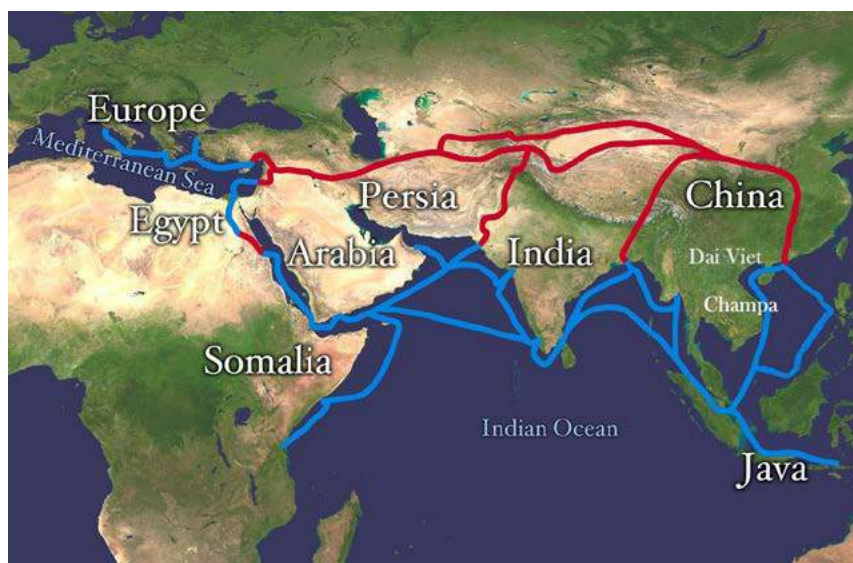
INTRODUCTION

This paper is about a series of crucial events that happened in the 13th century, when the Mongols actively and violently interfered in southern China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. The main focus is on their naval activities from 1274 to 1293 CE, in Đại Việt and Champa. Đại Việt was the name for the northern region of today's Vietnam under the Lý (1009–1225 CE) and Trần (1225–1400 CE) dynasties. Champa was a loosely formed alliance of ancient kingdoms once occupying today's Central Vietnam.

This chain of Mongol invasions, directed by the Yuan Emperor Kublai Khan, started with Japan but also saved that country from being invaded again after the Mongols failed to conquer it in 1281, for, in the middle of his preparation for a third naval assault on Japan, Kublai Khan decided to divert Mongol resources to the campaigns in the South China Sea (Bien Dong in Vietnamese). The reason was, by then, it had become clear to him that Champa was a more advantageous location to control the East-West maritime trade route that linked China with the Middle-east and part of Europe. The invasions of Đại Việt, in 1285 and 1287–1288, likewise, diverted resources from the Mongol campaigns in Burma when Mongol forces from Yunnan were ordered to move to Đại Việt instead. All three campaigns failed. Later, without the maritime bureau in Champa as a base for logistical

support, the Mongols failed in their invasion of Java in 1292–3. Modern scholars have questioned this theory but so far it is more than likely that without a stopover in Champa, half way down the South China Sea, the Mongol fleet could not break their over month-long journey from southern China to take in supplies and to allow both the men and horses to rest. While Kublai Khan's intentions in Đại Việt and Champa were made clear in a series of communications between the Yuan, Đại Việt, and the Cham courts, what he wanted in Java, at such a late date, was more obscure and has been a puzzle to many modern historians. This is despite earlier explanations offered, such as to gain access to the spice-rich island of Java and beyond and/or take revenge for an insult that a Java king inflicted on a Mongol envoy. To assess what happened in Southeast Asia in the second half of the 13th century, it is imperative that we first take a step back and look into the personal background of Kublai Khan and the circumstances surrounding his ascension to the position of Mongol Great Khan in order to better understand some of the reasons behind his action in Southeast Asia. Apart from being the Yuan Emperor, it has often been overlooked that Kublai Khan was also an unpopular Great Khan in the extended Mongol family. In some cases, he even went to war against his brother and cousins in order to gain access to the overland Silk Route—the crucial trade corridor linking East and West that became increasingly important for China in the 13th century.

Fig. 1. The land and maritime routes linking China with Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Marco Polo travelled on the land route to China and the maritime route on his journey back to Europe in the 13th century (Source: Wikimedia)



KUBLAI KHAN: HIS LIFE AND CAREER

From birth to great warrior (1215–56)

Kublai Khan was born in 1215, a second child of Tolui, son of the great Chinggis Khan, and his second wife Sorghaghtani Beki. His birth took place in the middle of the Mongol empire-building period and during the time his father Tolui was beginning to earn his fearsome reputation as a ruthless warrior during the conquest of northern China. The family was united and disciplined, the Mongol principles were strictly observed and

Mongol warriors were confined to land wars supported by swift horses, heavy weapons such as the trebuchet, a sling shot device, and sheer manpower.

Chinggis Khan made his name first in 1205–6 with his conquest of the Xi-Xia region, a vast area owned by the Tanguts in northwestern Asia that formed the east end of the traditional trade corridor linking Europe and China known today as the Silk Route.¹ Chinggis Khan was hailed Great Khan by a Mongol assembly of noblemen, the *khuriltai*, in 1205–6.

Chinggis Khan's then developed a Mongol strategy that was to become their campaign model from East to West: first ask for submission, then attack when the answer was negative. Kublai Khan was brought up and trained in this type of warfare, which he continued to apply to his campaigns in East and Southwest Asia.

Fig. 2. Mongol cavalry and their traditional military tactics (Source: Rashid-al-Din, Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Orientabteilung, Diez A fol. 70, p. 58)



By the time Chinggis Khan died in 1227, the Mongols had mastered the entire length of the overland Silk Route and the world was a much-altered place. By then, the Mongol Empire boundaries had extended from the Caspian Sea in the west to the edge of Korea in the east. Maps of many states were unequivocally redrawn, global population dispersed and the ethnic mixture of its inhabitants changed forever. By then, the Mongol Empire had also been divided into four sections, each ruled by one of Chinggis Khan's sons. Jochi, Chaggatai, Ögödei, and Tolui who was given the far-eastern part of the empire. It was here that Kublai Khan grew up.

Three years after Chinggis Khan's death, Tolui died on his way back home from northern China. The young Kublai was only 14 at the time. Kublai Khan's early life and career were then managed and shaped by his mother, Sorghaghtani Beki. It could be said, arguably, that without his mother's influence and active intervention, there would not be

¹ Khwandamir, *Habibu's-siyar*, Tome three, part one (Thackston 1994:11); Rashid-al-Din, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, [Compendium of Chronicles], Part one (Thackston 1998:144).

the Kublai Khan we seem to know today, for Sorghaghtani Beki, a Nestorian Christian, was not only strong but also skilful in the art of empire building:

Sorghaghtani Beki laid a foundation that would have been beyond the capability of any crowned head... she always maintained the good will of her kinfolk and relatives through gift and presents and through generosity and favours she kept the troops and foreigners obedient and on her side. (*Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, Part two, p. 401)

Fig. 3. The Mongol Empire at the time of Chinggis Khan's death in 1227 (Source: Wikimedia)



In 1240, Kublai Khan was granted, in his own right, a land of 10,000 households in Hopei province (Rossabi 1988:11). Following the death of the third Great Khan Güyük, Kublai's eldest brother Möngke was elected fourth Great Khan in 1251. Soon after this, Möngke Khan awarded Kublai two more provinces of Honan and Ching-chao, and gave him the title of 'Lieutenant-General in charge of the region south of the desert' (Howorth 1876:187). Kublai's fate seems to have been linked with China from this day onward. Despite his great administrative skills in managing this region, Kublai Khan was called upon to conduct a new campaign against the Southern Song in 1252 (*Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, Part two, pp. 413, 424; Howorth 1876:211; Nicolle 1990:211–212). His role in this campaign was to be the overall commander of an expedition to 'the province of Nankiyas which borders Cathay' (*Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, Part two, p. 424). Nankiyas was another name for southern China, a sophisticated realm under the rule of the Song.

Kublai Khan's army set forth to Nankiyas, but provisions were scarce and 'the road was extremely rough' so 'a messenger was sent to Möngke to report and ask permission to go first and conquer the country of Qarajang and Chaghanjang' (*ibid.*). In a footnote to his translation of the Part two of *Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, Thackston (1998:424) identified this region as northwest Yunnan and the region was called 'Dai Liu in Cathaian language'. It is also known as Dali in later historical documents. Rashid-al-Din attributed this event to the year 1256, the year the conquest was completed whereas the Dali campaign began in 1253 as described in other historical sources such as *Yuanshi* and the *Vietnamese Annals*. Rashid-al-Din further explained the position of Dali as 'a land bordering on Tibet and Tanqut, part of the realm and mountains of Hindustan, and the realm of Cathay' (*ibid.*).

Dali during this time was the capital of an independent state, the successor of the Kingdom of Nanzhao. This part of Yunnan was a mountainous area inhabited by different Tai speaking tribes. In the 7th century, this region was supported by Tang China to act as a buffer zone for their southwestern border. The Duan kings in Dali took over the power of Nanzhao in the 10th century and established a strong royal family who had reigned over the Kingdom for 22 generations by the time Kublai Khan arrived. The region under the Duan's control was often described as the land connecting 'the commercial networks between the Irrawaddy plains, India and China' (Hall 1992:247). From Dali, the geography of the land offers a rugged route southward, toward the rest of mainland Southeast Asia. It also offered a gateway from China to Angkor and Pagan, today's Myanmar. As such, at least in theory, it appeared that Dali was the back door needed into southern China for the Mongols, apart from being the front door, conveniently, for all routes leading to richer destinations further south.

To reach Dali in the southwestern direction of China, Kublai Khan and his men had to cross a large and difficult terrain to face a brand new theatre of war that combined all unfamiliar elements for the Mongols. Terrain, however, was only one natural element amongst many that hampered the advance of Kublai's army as the climate turned out to be a formidable adversary as well. For the horsemen who lived mainly in the cold dry north, the humidity of the south, and its accompanying tropical diseases, were as bewildering as devastating. Many died along the route from diseases, others from heat exhaustion and frequent skirmishes with local inhabitants. Even so, with their superior fighting skills, the Mongols managed to secure victories over the ill-equipped locals. After each victory, Kublai Khan incorporated the vanquished army into his force, as per Mongol customs, so by the time he arrived in Dali, the Mongol army was made up of a fairly large number of mixed tribal forces (*ibid.*).

As if the combination of adverse factors was not enough to challenge the Mongol troops under Kublai Khan, the land between Shensi and Dali, across most of Tibet, was full of high mountains and large rivers. Upper Yunnan was the source for several major rivers of Southeast Asia, such as the Salween, the Red river, the Yangtze and the Mekong. Each one of them was enough of a challenge for a tired army suffering from heat and unknown diseases. Kublai Khan's army had to devise many ways to cross these rivers as they were too deep for their horses to wade across. The usual inflated sheepskin rafts that were often mentioned as part of Mongol travelling techniques were useless (Howorth 1876:211; Nicolle 1990:58). A new type of rafts had to be devised and the task fell on Kublai Khan's general Bayan, who became one of Kublai's most trusted generals in his later campaigns (Nicolle 1990:58).

The experience of crossing larger rivers than the familiar mountain streams in the northern region, perhaps, gave Kublai Khan the confidence that later marked the birth of the Mongol waterborne strategy in southern China and, much later, in Southeast Asia. It was to become a favourite battle plan that the Mongols applied more and more extensively, however to mixed results.

After months on the road, Kublai Khan arrived in Dali area in the winter of 1253 to begin his campaign. The geography of Dali was, however, its own effective defence. The plain of Dali was a small strip of land of 48 kilometres long and less than 5 kilometres wide, hemmed in between the lake Erh Hai and the high mountain range of Ts'ang Shan. The only accessible way into Dali was through the Upper Gate, Shang Kuan, at the north end of the lake. Even then, the narrow passage was 'unsuitable for horses and mules' and blocked by snow during the winter (Fitzgerald 1942:50–59).

The Dali defenders managed to hold off the Mongol force for 15 months. In the end, Kublai Khan's force broke through the north passage at the *Shang Kuan* and entered Dali. The Duan family escaped to Kunming, today's capital of Yunnan, and Kublai Khan proclaimed victory for the Mongols. He then appointed a Pacification Commissioner in Dali and, in 1254, returned to Shensi to join Möngke in another mission, leaving the mopping-up operation to his general Uriyangkhadaï (*Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, Part two, p. 413). His departure from Dali was noted by Rashid-al-Din that 'Qubilai attacked and raided that land, which is known here as Qandahar and then returned to Mongke Qu'an', without mentioning the year (*ibid.*). The Duan family finally surrendered and were brought back to Dali in 1256 (*ibid.*:425). Here, King Duan Xingzhi pledged allegiance to the Mongols and was embraced into the occupation administration.

The Mongol expedition to Yunnan was meant to turn this territory into a staging post for an attack against the Song from the southwestern direction, while another force led by Möngke pressed down from the north and northwest. By the time the Mongol army in Yunnan began to move to southern China in 1257, the command of the south wing was in the hands of Kublai Khan's trusted man, general Uriyangkhadaï.

Although not recorded explicitly, the Yunnan experience perhaps played an important role in shaping the characters of the future Yuan Emperor Kublai Khan. His encounter with water travelling perhaps gave him the novel idea of a waterborne strategy. It also established a Mongol/Yuan tradition of maintaining local rulers of his conquered lands. They had to submit to his overall control and accepted his *Six Requirements*, a set of demands that he later perfected to be his foreign policy on all conquered lands.

From Warrior to Great Khan (1256–60)

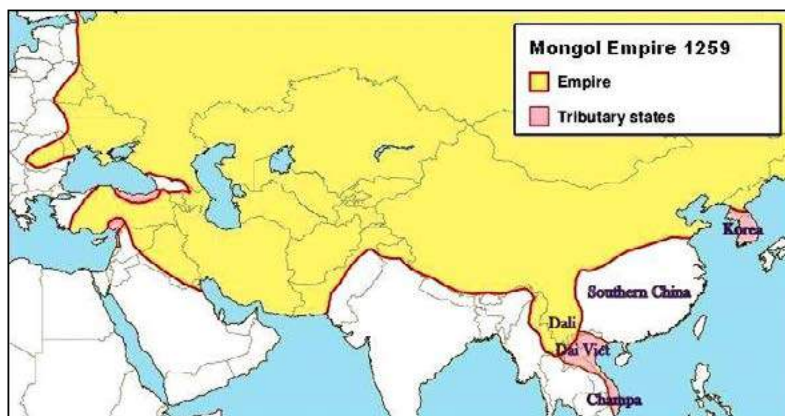
With his victory in Yunnan, Kublai Khan the warrior officially emerged into the spotlight in the year 1256. It was his first major campaign that he succeeded, even with much to learn and more to prove. He was now ready to join his Great Khan brother Möngke for greater things, the next stage of the campaign against the Southern Song. However, although his reputation was now firmly established, Kublai Khan was not included in this part of the campaign at first. Various reasons have been offered to explain his absence at the beginning of this stage. One of them was that he needed a period of rest (*Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, Part two, pp. 414, 425). It was however alleged that Kublai Khan fell out with Möngke at this stage, and was only called on after the campaign was well under way (*ibid.*:415).

Once allowed to participate, Kublai Khan took command of one army wing, in the traditional Mongol battle plan of a three-prong attack. He started out from Kaiping to travel south, General Uriyangkhadaï was called on at the beginning of the campaign to command a wing from Yunnan travelling up from the southwestern direction. Möngke led his centre force from the northwest, all were to meet up at Guilin.

The route that Kublai Khan and his army travelled on was 'extremely long and difficult', and the entire country was filled with 'rebels and the air was putrid' (*ibid.*). It took Kublai Khan until early September of the next year to reach the area north of the Yangtze river, the northernmost border of the Southern Song, while Möngke did not reach his destination at all. He died on 11 August 1259 from unclear causes, during his siege of a fortress called 'Do li Shang' in 'Khan Sina province' (*ibid.*:416). Rashid-al-Din described Möngke's death as happening in the middle of a hot summer and during an 'epidemic of dysentery':

...cholera spread among the Mongol soldiers, and many of them died, Möngke drank wine to ward off the cholera... Suddenly he developed an indisposition and his illness came to a crisis... He passed away at the foot of the unlucky fortress... It was the seventh year of his reign. (*ibid.*)

Fig. 4. The Mongol Empire at the time of Möngke's death 1259. Dai Viet and Champa were marked as Mongol tributary states as they were seen from the Mongol point of view. In the view of Dai Viet and Champa, they sent tributes to the Mongols but continued to be independent (Source: Wikimedia)



Militarily, the death of Möngke did not seem to affect the Mongol campaign in Southern China at first but it changed everything for Kublai Khan. He first learned of his brother's death 10 days later, but did not return to attend the meeting of the supreme committee *khuriltai* to elect a new Great Khan. He dismissed the news of his brother's death as 'rumours' and proceeded with his attack across the Yangtze. By crossing the large river, with a width of 'two leagues' and 'as wide as a sea', he succeeded in establishing a bridgehead on its south bank to lay siege to the city of O-Chou (*ibid.*). The ensuing battles were ferocious and the Mongols suffered heavy losses. They were now reduced to 50,000 men. At this point, Kublai Khan suddenly abandoned his attacks and took the Mongol army back home. It seems that he now realised that he had to claim the position of Great Khan (*ibid.*).

According to Mongol tradition, the selection of the successor to the vacant seat of Great Khan was a bitter struggle among Mongol family members. This time, the contest was between two Tolui brothers, Kublai Khan and Arigh Boke who until then held the position of 'herath keeper'; who guarded the Mongol land while his brothers were away on their campaign against the Southern Song. Arigh Boke invoked his position to claim the Great Khan title in Kublai's absence. He held a *khuriltai* in Karakorum, the Mongol capital, while Kublai Khan was still fighting his battles in southern China. Arigh Boke's action was supported by some Mongol noblemen but proved to be unpopular among other family members. Without a clear mandate, the position of Great Khan was considered still undecided by the time Kublai Khan arrived back. He, in turn, held his own *khuriltai* and was quickly proclaimed Great Khan in 1260 with the support of his brother Hulegu the Il-Khan of Persia, who did not contest (*Habibu's-siyar*, p. 35). The election of Kublai as Great Khan thus caused an irreconcilable rift among Khan family members, and resulted in a breakup of the Mongol empire.

The rivalry within the Mongol empire reinforced the division of the Mongol land as four separate regions and turned the two regions between China and Europe into hostile lands for Kublai Khan. Some parts of the overland Silk Route were now inaccessible to him. The only ally left for the new Great Khan Kublai was the Il-Khan of Persia, Hulegu, who lived at the other end of the Silk Route. Arigh Boke, meanwhile, entrenched himself in the traditional Mongol capital of Karakorum in Mongolia and was openly hostile to Kublai.

The brotherly rivalry turned the next three years into a bitter time of hostility between Arigh Boke and Kublai Khan and the two fought a number of inconclusive battles. After three major battles and much bloodshed, in 1264, Arigh Boke finally accepted Kublai's authority and submitted (*ibid.*:36). Kublai Khan now owned an unbroken territory that included northern China, Mongolia, Korea, and Tibet, a vast empire by all means, but was equal to only a quarter of the Mongol Empire that he should have been ruling over as Great Khan. More problematic for him, though, was the interrupted traffics on the Silk Route as some members of his family were still hostile to his position of Great Khan. He had to find an alternative route to continue the East-West trading traffic, a vital bloodline for China. To travel further north to bypass the Mongol hostile middle-land was by way of the Arctic, an impossible option. The only direction left was to go east and southeast to sea, or much further south, over land. That meant a resumed campaign against the Southern Song.

Fig. 5. Kublai Khan as painted by his courtier Anige of Nepal, shortly after his death in 1294 (Source: Wikimedia)



Horsemen to Water: The Campaign in Southern China (1264–79)

In 1264, Kublai Khan decided to re-launch the Mongol campaign against the Southern Song. The previous one that he himself led in 1259 had to be abandoned, in order for him to return home to contest the position of Great Khan, following the sudden death of his brother Möngke. The war against the Southern Song proved to be another long campaign

as the Song at the time had more military advantages than the Mongols, in terms of weaponry and topographical knowledge. It turned out to be a fast-learning experience for the Mongol cavalry as they had to find ways to deal with formidable bodies of water in southern China. The climate was particularly bad for the Mongols. Even then, it was not much of a hazard when compared to the terrain itself. The tricky mountains, marshland and huge rivers prompted one of the Mongol commanders, General Aju, to admit that, as a cavalry force, 'the Mongols were particularly weak in marshes and mountainous areas' (Hsiao 1978:17, 137, note 128).

In terms of weaponry, it was the first time in the history of warfare that gunpowder was used in earnest and extensively in Asia. Gunpowder was invented, arguably in China, in the 3rd century but had been applied to other purposes besides warfare, entertainment being one of them (Wang 1947:160–178). It is not until the 10th century that it was first applied to military use, under the form of a flamethrower (*ibid.*). In the next century, gunpowder was included in the Chinese military arsenal when the *Huo Yao* or *Huo P'ao* was invented, and the formula for making the powder was standardised. Weapons, under the form of exploding bombs or hand grenades, flame arrows, and explosives launched by cross-bows and trebuchets, began its use as defensive tools during the early 13th century in northern China during the first wave of invasion by the Mongols under Chinggis Khan.

By the time Kublai Khan's campaign in southern China was underway, several types of weapons using gunpowder had been invented and put to use by the Song, more progressively and extensively as the war went on. Under the Song, a number of new types of weapons were invented or further developed. A report in 1257 by an officer sent to gather intelligence for the Mongols in Ching-Chiang, today's Guilin, spoke of *Huo P'ao* large and small, *Huo-chien* and *Huo ch'iang* (*ibid.*). All involved the employment of gunpowder or an igniting substance to create fire as the name *huo* (fire) implied. The matter as to whether the weapons were launched by a catapult or fired from a tube is still actively debated among historians.

Against the Mongol light cavalry bowmen armed with flame-arrows and stone-firing trebuchets as heavy weapons, the Song's exploding devices were vastly superior, at least at first. It did not take long for the Mongols to update their strategies to cope with the Song's firepower and to acquire the same, or similar heavy weapons. The best known of the new weapons was the *Hui Hui P'ao*, the giant trebuchets, or 'mangonels', from other parts of their empire, such as Persia and Uighur (Howorth 1876: 225). The Mongols, in fact, brought the giant catapults *Hui Hui P'ao* from the Middle East into Asia, via Muslim officials, who were called *Muhamaddians* by the Persian historian Rashid-al-Din (*Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, Part two, p. 450). In his account on how Kublai Khan acquired the weapon, Rashid-al-Din noted that 'there was no such catapult in Cathay (China) before' and a catapult maker called Talib 'from this land had gone to Baalbek in Damascus and his sons Abubakr, Ibrahim and Muhammad and his employees made seven large catapults and set out to conquer the city (Hsiang-Yang on the Yellow river)' (*ibid.*).

This weapon, indeed, has been credited as the main tool to break the defence of Hsiang-Yang on the Han river in 1274 CE when it was introduced into the battle, to counter the Song's *Huo Ch'iang* and *Huo P'ao*. It is still unclear whether this giant trebuchet launched heavy stones or exploding devices. However, after the success at Hsiang-Yang, it became the Mongols' weapon of choice. They took it with them, even by ships, in their subsequent campaigns in Japan and Champa (Wang 1947:175). With such sophisticated weapons and tactics being launched into the war, a ferocious contest lasted until 1276, when

the Song's southern capital at Hangzhou fell to Kublai Khan's general Bayan. Remnants of the southern Song, however, had escaped to Đại Việt during the siege (*Vietnamese Annals* [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư], pp. 39–40). The *Vietnamese Annals* recorded how the remnants of the royal Song arrived in the Viet capital Thăng Long as follows:

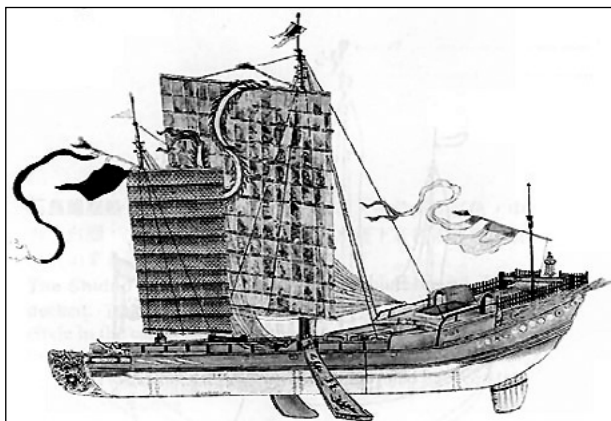
...winter, the tenth month, the Song family arrived to ask for asylum... They arrived with thirty ships laden with treasures and family members and were taken to the capital on the twelfth month, where they settled in Nhai-Tuân district. From then on, they lived by opening a market selling medicines and silk. (*ibid.*)

The war in southern China lasted another three years after that, and only ended altogether when the last of the Song's resistance, operating from the southernmost area, in the name of a Song emperor, was broken. The new Song child-Emperor committed suicide in 1279. After 15 years of war in southern China, Kublai Khan finally achieved the Mongol objective of controlling all of China.

THE MONGOL NAVY

The 15-year war in southern China taught the Mongol cavalry much about sophisticated weaponry, and, surprisingly, trained them on the techniques of boat building and how to cross large rivers. It was an entirely new concept for the Mongols whose operational mode of war was galloping on horsebacks and exercised their bow and arrow skills on land.

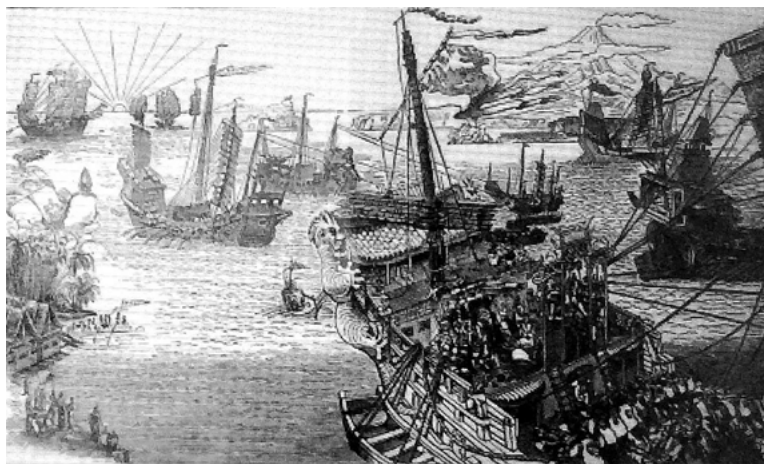
Fig. 6. A Song ship of the 13th century with its typical rectangular sails (Source: Needham 1986:469)



Up to the time the campaign against the southern Song was re-launched, the Mongols only had to deal with shallow streams in the north and a brief encounter with larger rivers in Yunnan. Even with their experience in Yunnan, Southern China was the first area that presented immense rivers that required proper bridges, or solid floating devices like boats and ships to cross. The Song navy, on the other hand, was one of the most advanced in Asia. According to the historian Jung-Pang Lo (1955:491), when the Mongols started advancing into southern China, this navy had already been organised into a 'permanent fighting force and its strength grew steadily with time'. By then, the Song navy could travel swiftly 'up and down different types of rivers and patrol the eastern sea to keep an eye on Japan and Korea' (*ibid.*). They had also mastered some sailing techniques that land-locked people, such as the traditional Mongols, who were

not familiar with these techniques, such as ‘sailing according to the direction of the trade winds’ and ‘with navigation aids such as the compass and the North Star’ (Chang 1974:347–359). It did not take long for the Mongols to redress the imbalance. Kublai Khan and his generals captured their first 146 Song ships in Sichuan province, during the early stages of the Mongol campaign in southern China. Their fascination with the versatility of water travel was further reinforced in 1270 when they saw how boats and ships could easily navigate the Yangtze and Han rivers to elude their blockades of Xiangyang and Fancheng in southern China for five years. The Mongols’ immediate reaction at the time was to build and capture ships for themselves. Even then, the Mongol cavalry advanced slowly and with difficulty until Kublai Khan appointed a naval officer, an old trusted general, Bayan, who had earlier built rafts for his men and horses to cross rivers in Yunnan.

Fig. 7. Artistic impression of Kublai Khan’s fleet as described by Marco Polo. Notice the Song square sails in the distance. (Source: Author’s own photograph taken from Henry Cordier’s 1903 edition *The Book Of Ser Marco Polo*. Vol. 2, p. 243)



Bayan came from Persia and became commander-in-chief of the operation against the Southern Song in 1274 (Cleaves 1956:185–303). Whether it was all thanks to General Bayan or not—this is still a debatable subject among historians—the battleground changed, for it was at that point that the Mongols began to use a waterborne force to complement their cavalry. The Mongol army now knew how to use the ships they captured from the Song, or to make their captive sailors work these ships on their behalf, to cross or to travel up and down the huge rivers of southern China. In addition, the Mongols recruited more boats and ships from transport fleets already operating in Chinese waters.

Before all that happened, though, in the year 1271, in the middle of their campaign in southern China, Kublai Khan proclaimed himself new Emperor of a new Chinese dynasty, the Yuan. It was just a matter of formalising Kublai’s status in China, for as early as 1264, he already started building his own capital Dadu, today’s Beijing, in northern China. From Dadu, Kublai Khan sent his envoys to demand tribute from Japan, and threatened reprisals should they not comply. The Japanese replied that their nation had its own divine mandate to exist and prepared for war. Kublai Khan, however, waited until 1274 to launch his first campaign against Japan (Shōji and Hurst 1990:418; Hsiao 1978:82). Preparations for the invasion began in the ninth moon (13 October–10 November) of 1273 with the conscription of prisoners of war into the expedition:

They (the prisoners) were released from shackles and spared capital punishment. They were allowed to establish squads for themselves in order to subjugate Jih-pen (Japan). In addition, officers were to be selected from Meng-ku (Mongol) and Han-jen (Northern Chinese) to command them. (Hsiao 1978:82)

The given reason for the expedition was that Japan refused to pay tribute to the Yuan court and did not submit to Kublai Khan. In reality, the riches of Japan were probably too tempting for the Yuan court to be ignored. According to Marco Polo, Kublai Khan had carefully obtained inventories of valuable products existing on the islands to the east and southeast of China:

The sea in which the island of Zipangu (Japan) is situated is called the Sea of Chin (China)... according to reports of experienced pilots and mariners who frequent it, it contains no fewer than seven thousand four hundred and forty islands, mostly inhabited... It is impossible to estimate the value of gold and other articles found in the islands... (*The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Vol. 2, p. 271)

Conquering Japan was also part of Kublai Khan's overall strategy of taking over the Song's tributary polities in Asia, for not only did he send letters to demand tributes from Japan, he also sent similar demands to Southeast Asian countries such as Pagan (today's Myanmar), Đại Việt, and Champa.

The base for the expedition to Japan was set in Korea, which they already controlled at the time. From there, it was a relatively short distance of open sea to get to Japan. Crossing this open stretch of ocean in 1274 was the first sea voyage undertaken by the Mongol army. It marked the birth of an active Mongol navy, and a significant development in their military tactics.

The Mongol navy set out with a combined force of 28,000 Mongol, Chinese and Korean troops, and a mixture of newly built and captured ships, estimated to be around 900 ships. The men were equipped with bows and arrows, and the ships with catapults and combustible devices (Wang 1947:175). They arrived at the southern edge of Japan, in Hakata Bay of Kyushu Island, an area off today's city of Fukuoka. Although it was not clearly documented, resistance appeared to be strong. Whether it was due to the strong resistance or the adverse weather conditions, or a combination of both, the Mongols were forced to retreat almost immediately. The given reason was that an overnight storm destroyed a large number of Mongol ships, and killed two-thirds of their men. They had no choice but to return to Korea.

This failed invasion of Japan, interestingly, did not discourage the Mongols from sailing out to sea again. It may even have had the opposite effect. The Mongol shipbuilding programme was greatly intensified after that. It might have seemed obvious to the Mongols at that point that a complement to the Mongol cavalry would inevitably have been a navy. It was an idea heartily endorsed by a former Chinese naval officer, Liu Cheng, who then actively got involved in the building up of a Mongol navy. A programme to acquire knowledge about water navigation was put in place, including a survey of the upper Yellow River that was completed in 1277–81 (Chang 1974:347–359). At the same time, from the year 1275 onward, the Mongol made a great effort to create a fleet of powerful ships. In fact, they proceeded with their shipbuilding project before they managed to establish full control over southern China and incorporated the Song navy into their armed forces.

In 1275, the Mongols began a production line at Jiangsu and Zhejiang shipyards to manufacture boats and ships, first to navigate on rivers (Lo 1955). In 1276, Bayan enlisted the help of two former pirates, Zhu and Zhang, who came with 500 ships to join forces with the Mongols at the battle of Hangzhou (Lo 1954:262–285). After the southern Chinese capital fell, the former pirates undertook to transport the loots of charts, books and other treasures to Kublai Khan in Dadu by sea. By using the sea route, they opened up a maritime transport tradition for the Mongols that they subsequently developed further, using the Song navy that they finally captured in 1279. The Mongol navy was thus born.

Fig. 8. A Japanese artistic impression of the Kamikaze that wrecked the Mongol fleet (Source: Kikuchi Yoosai 1847, Tokyo National Museum)



Fig.9. Scene at Zaytun/Quanzhou, the main Song/Mongol Port in southern China
(Source: 15th century painting in *Li Livres du Graunt Caam*)



MONGOL INVASIONS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA—THE LAND CAMPAIGNS

The study of the Mongols' activities in the region known today as Southeast Asia is a relatively new pursuit compared to the traditional research on the Mongols in Europe, China, Central Asia and the Middle East. Yet, what happened in the South China Sea/Bien Dong was extremely important as it marked a departure of the hitherto known Mongol strategies, dictated by Kublai Khan's need to access the rest of the world from China without going through the overland Silk Route. As previously mentioned, since his controversial election as Great Khan in 1260, his relationship with the rest of his Mongol family in Central Asia and Europe had been broken. The vast Mongol Empire was thus divided into four Khanates, some of them unfriendly, making it difficult for China to maintain a thorough trade link with the rest of the world. Without a pass through the overland Silk Route, China would be isolated from the lucrative markets of Europe and the Middle East. Kublai Khan had to find an alternative route. The maritime route that existed since the turn of the millennium might not have been his first choice, seen from the Mongol laborious efforts to open a route through Yunnan down to Pagan and eventually, India.

Mainland Southeast-Asia was not an unfamiliar arena for the Mongols when Kublai Khan sent his demands for tributes to Southeast Asian polities, following his coronation as Yuan Emperor of China in 1271. The Mongols had experienced the terrain and climate of this region much earlier in the original campaign against the Southern Song under the Great Khan Möngke. As part of the traditional military strategy, Möngke despatched Kublai Khan to Yunnan to open up a land route to the southern border of China via the land of the then Đại Việt, today's northern Vietnam. This move was meant to trap the Southern Song in the middle of two Mongol military forces. When Yunnan was finally secured in 1256, Kublai Khan had already returned to serve Möngke and the campaign to open a route through Đại Việt was left to his general Uriyangkhadaï.

The First Invasion of Đại Việt (1257–8)

In 1257 according to the Mongol traditional battle-plan, general Uriyangkhadaï was to proceed from Yunnan to southern China by what they perceived as the shortest and easiest route, across the northwestern region of Đại Việt, heading to Guilin, where they would join forces with Möngke and Kublai Khan. To ensure that this passage was safe, Uriyangkhadaï sent three letters to the Viet Emperor Trần Thái Tông during the autumn of the year 1257 (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 259, note 48).

Three envoys travelled from Yunnan to the Viet capital Thăng Long (now Hanoi) on three different occasions, starting in the eighth moon of the year of the Snake (September–October 1257). The *Vietnamese Annals* recorded that the arrival of the first envoy was signaled by the owner of a *trại*, the type of farm estate that the Trần established in outlying areas to form an outer defence perimeter for Đại Việt:

Autumn, in the eighth moon of the year of the Snake (1257 CE), Hà Khuất, the owner of Quy Hóa farm, alerted the court that a Mongol envoy had arrived in the country. (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 27)

The next Mongol envoy was sent to Thăng Long in the ninth moon, and the third in the eleventh moon of the same year (*ibid.*, p. 259, note 48). All three were put in jail in the capital (*ibid.*, p. 261, note 69).

Jailing the Mongol envoys could be understood as a bold gesture on the Trần's part, as holding diplomatic envoys was usually a hostile act, and often amounted to a declaration of war. Đại Việt performed this gesture not just once, but on three different occasions. One of the reasons for this was that at that point, the Trần still saw the Southern Song as a powerful ally, with whom they had excellent relations and to whom they paid 'tribute' every year (*Chu-Fan-Chi [A Description of Barbarian Nations]*, p. 46). At the time, trade between the Vietnamese commercial centre at Vân Đồn in Ha Long bay and southern China was intense throughout the 12th and early 13th centuries (Wade 2009:221–265). Meanwhile, the Southern Song bestowed on the Trần emperor the title *An Nam Quốc Vương*, which meant King of Annam (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 10).² As such, Đại Việt could not afford to be seen as lending a helping hand to the Mongols to attack the Southern Song. This would have been a dangerous move for the Trần as it would have inevitably led to war. They began to prepare for battle, immediately after imprisoning the first Mongol envoy.

On the last moon of the year of the Snake (January 1258), a month after despatching his last envoy, and still having no reply from the Trần court, general Uriyangkhadaï led a combined army of his own Mongol cavalry and the newly-submitted Yunnan troops to the border of Đại Việt and made camp there.³ From this location, the Mongol general launched his first incursion into Đại Việt. He

² This is the Chinese name for Đại Việt. The Han indicated this polity to the south of its border that it had managed to 'pacify'. It is different from the Annam used under the French occupation of Indochina in the 19th and early 20th centuries, which means the central part of Vietnam.

³ *Abbreviated Records of An Nam [An Nam Chí Lược]*, p. 85; *Glorious Chapters of the Viet People in their Struggle to Resist Foreign Imperial Aggression* (henceforth: *Glorious Chapters*) [*Những Trang Sử Vĩ Vang Của Dân Tộc Việt Nam Chống Phong Kiến Xâm Lược*], Vol. 1, p. 355; See Map 8 on p. 87.

despatched two of his generals to lead two forces of one thousand men each to proceed into Đại Việt (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 259, note 48).

When the envoy did not come back, Uriyangkhadai sent general Trechecdu (phon.) to lead one thousand men to travel down the Red River to enter Annam. He also sent his own son Aju to enter Annam to review the situation. He found that the Jiaochi (Việt) people had deployed a large force in waiting. Aju sent back this information. Uriyangkhadai then hurried down (into Annam) with Trechecdu leading at the front and Aju keeping the rear. The two armies then met up in the twelfth moon.⁴

The movement of the Mongol army again alerted the chief of Quy Hóa farm estate, who promptly reported it to the Trần court in Thăng Long. Emperor Trần Thái Tông then decided that the battle for Đại Việt's defence would be set a short distance from Thăng Long, at a river junction called Bạch Hạc, on the Red River (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 259, note 48).

When the Mongol army under the command of Uriyangkhadai arrived at this junction, in January 1258, they met with the Trần's advancing forces at a point described as Nỗ Nguyên in the pro-Mongol historical account *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* (p. 85) and identified by Vietnamese modern historians as Việt Trì on the Red River (Trần and Hà 1961:382). At this location, the Mongols found that the Trần army was ready with the Viet emperor riding an elephant:

The Lord of the State Trần Nhật Cảnh (Emperor Trần Thái Tông) arranged numerous elephants and a large cavalry force, supported by foot soldiers, on the opposite bank of the river. Uriyangkhadai then divided his army into three prongs to try crossing the river... (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol.2, p. 27, 259, note 48)

With the Mongol army occupying one river bank, and the Đại Việt army riding elephants on the other, the battle was set, but no immediate action was taken. It was probably a necessary pause for the Mongols to assess the battle formation.

Elephants were not a familiar factor for the Mongols at this stage, whereas, the deployment of elephants had been a common tactic in Vietnamese warfare for centuries, as remarked by Clarence-Smith (2003):

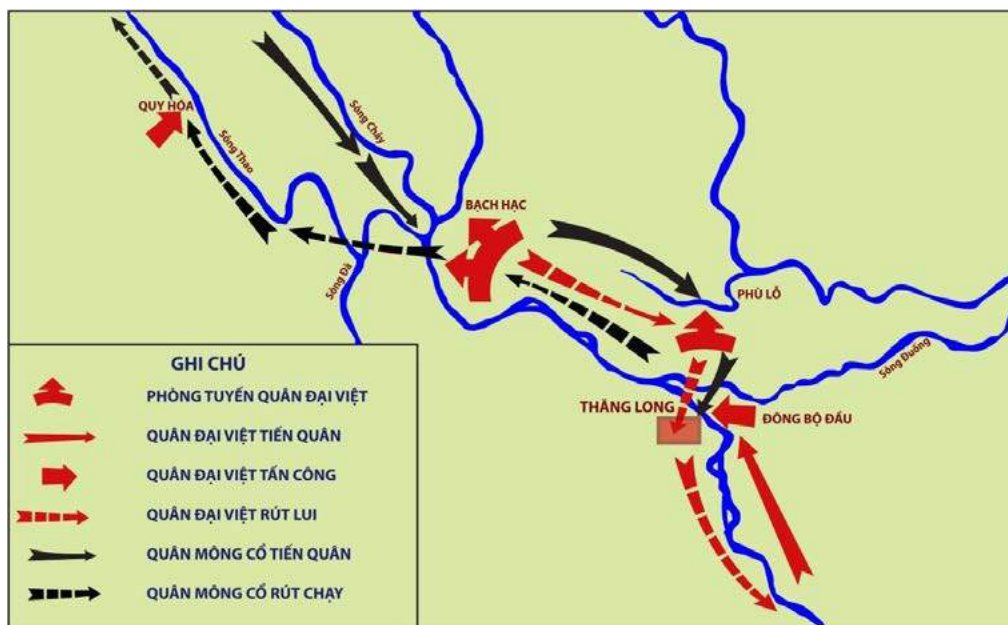
...they have been trained with a high degree of sophistication for many tasks, as working beasts, heavy-load carriers and in warfare from very early in our common era.

The Mongols' wariness of elephants in Đại Việt was recorded in both the pro-Mongol *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* and the *Vietnamese Annals*. It was an understandable predicament for the Mongols as they must have found it difficult to attack with their horses shying away from the larger beasts (*Abbreviated Records of An Nam*, p. 85). Water was another obstacle for the Mongols at that point, and an advantage for Đại Việt. The ruling Trần were originally fishermen living in the coastal area of Nam Định, south of the Red River delta and on the southern edge of the thriving Vân Đồn trading post. They were thus skilled in both river and coastal navigation:

4 *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* p. 85; *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, pp. 27, 259, notes 47–48.

(Their) boats were light and long, made of thin planks, the tails resembled a swallowtail, and they were powered by thirty rowers. Sometimes, they were powered by up to a hundred oarsmen, in such cases, the boats travelled as fast as if they were flying. (Trần and Hà 1961:377)

Fig. 10. The first Mongol invasion of Đại Việt in 1258 (Source: Wikimedia)



At this battle, the Trần positioned a number of boats further downstream as ready means of escape, in case the battle was lost:

Men, horses and elephants spread out along the bank. Boats were set up along the lower part of the river for a quick get-away, if necessary. (*Yuanshi*, in *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 259, note 48)

The Mongols soon found a way to deal with elephants:

Uriyangkhadai's son Aju ordered the bowmen to shoot at the feet of the Trần's elephants and the beasts ran amok, the Trần troops were routed. (*Abbreviated Records of Annam* p. 85)

Even then, the battle did not proceed well for the Mongols, for, instead of trying to capture the boats first, as planned by general Uriyangkhadai, the Mongol troops immediately attacked the Vietnamese once they managed to cross to the Trần's side of the river. The rest of the Mongol force followed in a less organised manner. In the mêlée, the Trần emperor and his troops were able to use the boats to escape (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 260, note 49).

The fighting resumed the next day at a point further downstream but after a fierce running battle to the East Gate of the capital Thăng Long, the Trần court decided to abandon their capital that night. Travelling by boats, their most preferred mode of transport, they escaped downstream to a smaller tributary river called Hoang Giang. Although it was recorded in the Vietnamese history books as an orderly retreat, it must

have been a chaotic flight as ‘some of the soldiers did not manage to bring their weapons’ (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 260, note 52). The task of re-arming them fell to the wife of the court’s supreme adviser who ‘even managed to salvage some weapons and gave them to the troops’ during the evacuation (*ibid.*:260, note 52). With the emperor and the royal family gone, Thăng Long was left open to the Mongols:

They entered an empty city and found their three envoys who were all trussed up in jail. One of them died from his ordeal and, on seeing this, the Mongols went berserk, killing all the people and destroying much of the capital. (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 260, note 52)

Nine days later, while the Trần emperor was considering an asylum in Southern China with the Song, the Mongols began to leave the capital Thăng Long. Both the *Yuanshi* and *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam* recorded that the Mongols suffered much from heat and humidity in Thăng Long:

...after nine days, the weather was too hot, (we) decided to withdraw. Uriyangkhadaï sent two envoys to Nhật Cảnh (Emperor Trần Thái Tông) to call him back. When Nhật Cảnh learned that his capital was devastated, he got angry, ordered his men to truss up the envoys and sent them back. (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 260, note 52)

The *Vietnamese Annals*, meanwhile, noted that many of the Mongols fell ill:

Not familiar with the climate, a large number of the (Mongol) troops fell ill. Uriyangkhadaï decided to withdraw and sent two envoys to the Trần’s refuge in the lower section of the Red river to offer peace terms...Knowing that the enemy was beginning to weaken, the Trần court ordered their men to tie up the Mongol envoys and launched a counter-attack against the enemy in Thăng Long, via the east gate. (Đào 2002:236)

The news of the Mongol sufferings must have quickly reached the Trần’s refuge further downstream and the Vietnamese emperor then decided to launch a counter attack. On 29 January 1258, Emperor Trần Thái Tông, accompanied by his Crown prince Hoàng, travelled by boat up the Red River to arrive at the eastern gate of Thăng Long, the scene of their hasty evacuation only days before. They then fought the enemy, thereby taking the city without much opposition (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 28).

According to the *Vietnamese Annals*, the Mongols withdrew back to Yunnan, along the same route they took to enter—by the banks of the Red River. When they again reached Quy Hoá estate, they were even stopped by the owner and his men, who engaged them in a hard battle. The Mongols were noted on this occasion as ‘so weak and demoralised’ that they just ‘went without even thinking of looting along the way’ (*ibid.*). This group of retreating soldiers then went down in Vietnamese history as ‘the Buddhist enemies’, a nickname local people mockingly awarded them for not looting or killing (*ibid.*).

What emerged from these three accounts—*Yuanshi*, *Vietnamese Annals*, and *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*—was that the Mongols left Thăng Long to return to Yunnan after only nine days, that they were ill and hungry, and that the Trần managed to regain their capital. According to the three accounts, the outcome of the first Mongol invasion of Đại Việt must have been a surprise for both sides, but ended mainly with

the sufferings of the Mongol troops. However, another factor contributing to the Mongol decision to retreat might have been the condition of their horses in Đại Việt. The traditional Mongols usually relied on local pastures and fields when they went to conquer Central Asia and parts of Eastern Europe. In Đại Việt, the capital Thăng Long did not have a large amount of food for both men and horses. Viet princes and princesses had their own farm-estates outside the capital and Vietnamese horses were kept on short, poor quality grass. Mongol horses, on the other hand, were notoriously difficult in their eating habits:

The mixed horsefeed composing of rice and rice straw did not suit these horses at all, they were usually fed with a certain variety of black beans and grass. (Pasquet 1986:208, note 4)

Humidity and heat also killed off Mongol horses as noted by a Qing official named Si Fan later in the 19th century when the Qing purchased Mongol horses for their own use. Pasquet noted that the horses did not adapt to the climate, often fell ill and died (*ibid.*). The unfavourable terrain for horses and lack of pasture in southern China have been noted by Morris Rossabi in his book *Kublai Khan, His Life and Time* when he related the Mongol conquest in southern China:

The Mongol horses faced innumerable obstacles. The warm temperatures and the forests were far more difficult environments than the steppelands, and the steeds could not really adjust to the heat. There was hardly any fodder for them to graze on, since the south crops were planted on every available plot of arable land. (Rossabi 1988:77–78)

With a setting similar to southern China yet located even further south, Đại Việt was similarly detrimental to a cavalry force. The heat, the lack of grazing land and fodder noted in southern China (Hsiao 1978:55), must have contributed to the sufferings of the Mongol horses there and probably led to the Mongol decision to leave to save both themselves and their horses.

In all fairness, the Mongol defeat in Đại Việt was due to a combination of fierce resistance, difficult terrain for horses, adverse climate, and tropical diseases. But it was a failure nevertheless. Most importantly though, by simply looking at the date, the first Mongol invasion of Đại Việt in January 1258, as documented by records on both sides and by the Persian historian Rashid-al-Din, was the first defeat of the Mongols worldwide (Vu 2008:86–105). This failure preceded their much better known defeat by the Mamluks at Ain Jalut in September 1260 (Morgan 1990:156). It also preceded the Mongol's more widely recorded failure in Asia that is the weather-thwarted invasion of Japan in 1274.⁵ This Mongol failure in Đại Việt has been a factual historical event obscured by the lack of cross-study between different scholarships on the Mongols until recently, when it was acknowledged by the *Encyclopædia Iranica*:

...that campaign had ended in disaster when Mongol troops had invaded Vietnam and had succumbed to diseases and guerrilla tactics from local Viet forces, leading to an ignominious retreat and the first major imperial defeat. (Lane 2011)

5 For full account and analysis of the Mongol invasions in Đại Việt and Champa, see Vu (2008).

The Mongols under general Uriyangkhadai retreated to Yunnan and later joined forces with Kublai Khan and Möngke for the campaign against the Southern Song that was interrupted by Möngke's sudden death in 1259 and Kublai Khan's endeavour to get elected as Great Khan.

Shuttle Diplomacy (1258–85)

In 1258, after his disastrous time in Đại Việt, Uriyangkhadai led the remnants of his army back to Yunnan. From there, he later joined Kublai Khan in O-Zhou on the Yangtze by taking an unknown alternative route. For the Trần, there began an intense period of shuttle diplomacy, and maintaining a balance between the Mongols and the Southern Song.

In the second moon of the year of the Horse (March 1258), the Trần emperor sent an envoy to make a report to the Southern Song. At the same time, he offered them a tribute of elephant and announced that he intended to abdicate in favour of his son, Prince Hoảng. In a petition with traditional humble wording, Emperor Trần Thái Tông claimed that he wanted to retire 'because he now had an able son to carry on', and that he 'tremblingly asked for the great emperor to accept his request' (*Abbrieviated Records of Annam*, pp. 135–136). In return, he 'would keep on being loyal to the Song court' (*Abbrieviated Records of Annam*, pp. 135–136).

The abdication of a senior king in favour of his chosen heir was a special feature of the Trần dynasty, for it was only an abdication in name. The senior king still ruled while his successor sat on the throne as a learner emperor. This practice created some confusion in both Vietnamese and Chinese historical accounts about the period, as Mongol official letters to the Trần court continued to be addressed to the senior king and called him 'Prince' because he was not appointed by them, while ignoring the reigning one altogether, because they had not yet approved the new king. This formality served as an excuse for Kublai Khan to put pressure on the Trần, by accusing the new ruler on a number of occasions of being 'self-appointed'. Because of this breach of protocol, Kublai Khan decreed that the new Trần king had seriously violated diplomatic rules and that Đại Việt deserved a severe punishment. This type of allegation was found in an imperial letter conveyed to the Trần's court by his envoy in 1278. The existence of two Trần kings also explains why the Vietnamese official annals often referred to 'the two emperors' in the account of events during the Mongol invasions.

The report to the Southern Song opened up more than two decades of three-way shuttle diplomacy between the Trần court, the Southern Song and the Mongol Great Khans (Möngke, then Kublai Khan). In 1258, despite the departure of the Mongols and their regaining of the capital, the Trần decided on a diplomacy of appeasement that they had employed for centuries with China:

On the 8th year of Möngke's reign, Trần Thánh Tông sent his brother in law (Lê Phụ Trần) to bring gifts. Uriyangkhadai sent them on to the Khan's camp location. Möngke despatched Nassir-Aldin to Đại Việt to explain the Mongol position: when peace envoys were sent to you, you kept them and did not allow them to return, that was why I launched an attack against your country. Because of this, your ruler had to escape to the countryside. Two more envoys were despatched for peaceful purposes but you trussed them up and sent them back. Now I am treating you with favour by sending another envoy to ask you to submit, if you accept, then your ruler must come to pay me respect. (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 261, note 69)

No formal submission happened and no Trần ruler went to pay respect to Möngke, instead, they sent envoys to Möngke to discuss terms of tributes. It was accepted and set at once every three years. All was well after that on the Mongol front, even after Kublai Khan took over from his brother as Great Khan in 1260. At the same time, the Trần emperor continued to pay tributes to the Southern Song as their approved King of Annam. Bilateral contacts with the Mongols were conducted through Yunnan while contacts with the Song were conducted through the Southern Gate at the Sino-Viet border.

The tone of Kublai Khan's communications with the Trần was warm and friendly from 1261 onward and he even promised not to enter Đại Việt:

...as you are sincere in your endeavour to submit, and to send presents and local products, I now send an envoy and a vice-envoy to your country. As for your usual customs and style of government, you can continue as before, there is no need to change anything, just like in the case of the king of Korea... I have ordered my generals in Yunnan not to violate your country, or cause trouble to your people again... on your part, everybody in your country, from the top mandarin to the ordinary people, should remain (in place)...⁶

The cordial situation did not last very long. From 1262 envoys began to be sent back and forth between Đại Việt and China regularly, almost yearly. With each visit, Mongol demands became harsher. In 1267 Kublai Khan's tone toward Đại Việt changed. Two imperial letters were despatched to Trần Thánh Tông this year. The first was sent on the seventh moon with a rebuke on the fact that, 'while offering tributes regularly, the Trần emperor did not come to Dadu to pay respect, did not submit a population register, nor send hostages, or contribute troops to the Mongol army', whereas 'these have always been among the *six requirements* of vassal states, not something invented specially for Đại Việt' (*Abbreviated Records of An Nam*, p. 52). The other two *requirements* were to pay taxes and accept a *Daruyaci*, a Mongol-appointed overseer. The imperial letter also complained that their *Daruyaci* Nasir-Al-Dīn had difficulty with the Việt court, and was refused meetings with the emperor. The second letter of the same year was briefer and reminded the Trần emperor of his duty toward the Mongols (*ibid.*:52–53).

In 1269, Kublai Khan began to apply more pressure on the Trần by sending two envoys in the twelfth moon to interrogate the Trần about the extent of the Vietnamese borders (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 38). Two Vietnamese envoys were despatched to Kublai Khan to answer. Next, the appointment of Nasir-al-Dīn was rescinded. According to Mongol traditions, a *Daruyaci* was a supreme overseer that had overall power over the local rulers of a Mongol conquered land. However, in Đại Việt, while he was treated as an ambassador with full honour and lavish gifts, he acted as a benign envoy, not a fierce and demanding representative of the Mongol court. This displeased the Yuan emperor and he decided to recall him. Đại Việt asked for him to come back but 'a new *Daruyaci* was appointed to Đại Việt in 1272 and he died there the next year' (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:112). By the end of 1270, Kublai Khan had plenty of ground to suspect the Vietnamese vassal's fidelity, and probably realised that the Trần's diplomatic courtesies toward him in the past 10 years were 'appropriate to the protocols of an independent state' (Wolters 1979:69–70). This realisation was reflected in an angry message that Kublai Khan

6 *Abbreviated Records of An Nam*, p. 51; cf. *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 28.

despatched to the Trần court, in which, he strongly rebuked the Trần for their 'haughty protocol' when they received the Mongol envoys (*ibid.*).

The Mongols' demands escalated in 1271, after Kublai Khan proclaimed his Yuan dynasty in China. In this year, he sent more envoys to ask Trần Thánh Tông to come to him in person to pay respect. The Trần emperor made an excuse that he was not well enough to travel (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 39). The next year, another envoy from the Yuan court was sent to Thăng Long to ask the whereabouts of a border mark, a bronze pillar erected during the Han Chinese occupation of the then Viet land of Jiaochi. The Trần replied that it had vanished with time and no longer existed (*ibid.*). Each time an envoy came to the Việt capital, he was received with full honour, and given lavish banquets with the emperor and his royal entourage.

Despite escalating demands from Kublai Khan, the Trần maintained their balanced diplomacy with both the Mongols and the Southern Song for 14 years, and the status quo remained until the Southern Song were defeated at the battle of Xiang-Yang in 1274. As the nearest land to southern China, Đại Việt became a refuge for many Song remnants. A large group of 'former Song people' was noted as arriving with thirty ships carrying their families and belongings. They were allowed to travel to the capital Thăng Long, where they 'opened an emporium selling silk and Chinese herbal medicines' (*ibid.*:39–40). This friendly gesture toward former Song people did not escape Kublai Khan's attention. In an imperial letter to the Trần court in 1275 Kublai Khan made his displeasure clear:

...according to my ancestors' decrees, all vassal rulers have the duty to come in person to pay tribute, send family members to be hostages, conduct census for tax purposes, contribute troops for military use and accept a *Daruyaci*. I have explained all these requirements to you in the past years, yet, after fifteen years of being a vassal, you have never come to my court to pay respect and have never acted upon the rest of the *Requirements*. Given that you regularly paid tributes, all that you sent were useless. I have left it (the issues) alone in the hope that you would realise your duty one day but you seem not to have woken up to the reality, so I am sending my envoy Alihaya to ask you to come to me. If for some reasons you cannot travel, you must send your family members instead. (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 53)

The letter then repeated Kublai Khan's demand for a population register in order to levy taxes, 'just in case the taxes were too high for a small population', and promised that Đại Việt troops would not be stationed further than Yunnan (*ibid.*). The Trần themselves had already had a book of population classification since 1228, when they made a detailed census of Việt people, soon after the coronation of the first Trần Emperor Trần Thái Tông. However, they would not divulge this fact to the Mongols, and continued to ignore Kublai Khan's request.

Kublai Khan's imperial letter of 1275 was a most revealing document about the play between Đại Việt and the Yuan court. Signs of open conflict began to appear after this. In the eleventh moon of the year 1275 defence guards at the Sino-Viet border alerted the Trần court that Yuan soldiers began to arrive in the area and appeared to inspect the land. The Trần then despatched two envoys to Kublai Khan in Dadu to ask for peace (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 40). The next year, the Trần sent an 'agent' disguised as a medicine buyer to southern China to gather information about the border situation (*ibid.*).

While open animosity between the Trần and the Yuan courts escalated to an alarming proportion for the Trần, by 1276 the Southern Song was defeated in their capital Hangzhou. Politically, the power that Đại Việt had been using as a counterweight in their balancing act with the Mongols was no longer available to them. Geographically, without the Southern Song, the Chinese southern border with Đại Việt was wide open. Đại Việt now found itself fully exposed to the Mongol threat from the north. They were however spared of an immediate invasion as the Mongols were by then preoccupied with another campaign in Pagan, today's Myanmar, which lasted from 1271 to 1287 (Coedès 1968:193; Howorth 1876:241–242).

Mongol Maritime Campaigns in East and Southeast Asia (1281–94)

The 13th century was a busy trading time for the South China Sea/Biển Đông. Large ships 'like houses' travelled back and forth on the east-west maritime route. Their sails were described by Chau Ju Kua, the trade inspector of the main Southern Chinese port of Quanzhou (Zayton or Zaytun in Arabic) as being 'like great clouds in the sky' (*Chau-Ju-Kua*, p. 33; Hall 1985:195). Plying their trade between the Straits of Hormuz and southern China, these merchant ships sailed close to the coastlines and used several stopovers along the route—the coasts of polities in the Indian Ocean, the Malay Peninsula, Champa, and northern Vietnam—to take in supplies and more products before docking at Quanzhou. Spices, silk, ceramics, scented wood, forest products, and rare animals were much valued at both ends of the maritime route—in the Islamic world, Europe, and China under the Song. Into this picture of thriving maritime commerce came the Mongols, once their campaign against the Southern Song was practically over in 1277.

The situation changed dramatically by that year. As soon as the Chinese eastern port of Quanzhou surrendered, four Mongol offices of maritime affairs were created in Quanzhou, Mingzhou, Shanghai, and Kan-pu (on the northern shore of Hangzhou bay) (So 2000:117). Military generals were appointed to head these bureaux, 'they were also charged with organising and promoting overseas trade and levying customs duties on these trades' (*ibid.*). The next year, on the 26 March 1278 Kublai Khan issued an edict to two of his generals in Fujian, Sodu (Sogatu or Sotu) and Mengutai, along with Pu Shougeng,⁷ a Muslim official in charge of maritime affairs in Quanzhou, to direct a *xingzheng* in Fujian and to assure peace on the coastal area (Pelliot 1951:103–104).

A *xingzheng* was a mobile administrative unit under the Yuan, usually set up in a war situation to prepare and execute a campaign, with power superseding that of the local administration. It did not confine its activities in one province alone (*ibid.*). On 18 September 1278, Kublai Khan issued another edict to this *xingzheng*, ordering them to send a mission to the coastal polities of the South China Sea, and 'the countries of the Indian Ocean' to promise that 'if these maritime trading partners came to pay sincere respect to me, I would show them favour and generosity' (*ibid.*). This mission was what Rashid-al-Din recorded as 'by boat, he sent ambassadors to most of the realms of India for them to submit' (*Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, Part two, p. 439).

At the time, the Mongol general Sodu was one of the most trusted men of general Bayan, the Commander in Chief of the Mongol campaign against the Southern Song. By

7 Sotu in Chinese or Sogatu in Maspéro (1928).

then, Sodu had just been awarded the title Military Governor of Zhedong, following the Mongol victory in Hangzhou (Woodman-Cleaves 1956:180–303). During the campaign against Hangzhou, he was seen as one of the favourites mentioned in the biography of Bayan in *Yuanshi*, as an aide and also, a person who had been invited to ‘share his quarters in order to humour him’ (*ibid.*:245). Sodu was also an important enough general in his own right to have merited his own biography in chapter 129 of the *Yuanshi* (Pelliot 1951:99). Pu Shougeng was an equally important official to the Yuan, in that he gave them Quanzhou and brought over to them its former Song naval force when he defected (Rossabi 1988:274). To entrust Sodu and Pu Shougeng with the mission of spreading his invitation to the maritime polities of Southeast Asia and India to resume trade, Kublai Khan showed that he placed trade and the region high in his list of priorities:

So Tu and P’u Shou-keng, the man in charge of maritime affairs in Ch’uan Chou (Quanzhou), were ordered to inform overseas countries of the establishment of the Yuan Empire and encourage them to pay tribute and to trade. (So 2000:117)

To travel to India, the Yuan missions would have to travel along the east-west maritime route. Sodu’s and Pu Shougeng’s trip was, in effect, the first of a series of missions sent by the Yuan emperor to the South China Sea, and on to India, each of them several times over. Indeed, between 1278 and 1290, Kublai Khan sent seven missions by sea to investigate the areas of Malabar (‘Ma’bar’ in the text), Ceylon, and Kawlam (Quilon today) in the Indian Ocean, each of them several times over (Jackson 1998:82–101).

By the time the conquest of southern China was over in 1279, the Mongol naval strength has grown tenfold, from 4 ‘wings’ in 1275 to 41 ‘wings’ in 1279 and it now had a commander, General Atahai (*ibid.*). An even more intense shipbuilding programme was put into action. Orders from Kublai Khan stipulated that ‘fifteen hundred ships were to be built in 1279’ (Lo 1955:491). With the building of more ships, old ships, merchantmen, and pirate ships were requisitioned and a transport fleet was added to the Mongol navy. The two former pirates Zhu and Zhang became commanders of naval units in charge of securing the area from pirates and the remnants of the Southern Song operating off the South China coast (Lo 1954:268). When the last Song fleet surrendered in 1281, the two former pirates were made Commanders in charge of maritime transport, operating out of Chiang-Huai.

In the same year, 1281, Kublai Khan ordered 3,000 more ships to be built and 4,000 ships in 1283 (Lo 1955:493). Shipyards were established in Chang-sha, Guangzhou, and even in Korea. The nearby islands of Quelpart (Jeju Island) and Taiwan and the Jehol uplands were ordered to supply wood for the ships. In one case, 17,000 men were mobilised to fell trees for timber and to transport materials to shipyards in Jehol alone (*ibid.*). At the same time, the Mongols put the captured Song and former Korean officers in charge of directing all shipbuilding activities and to train a new generation of Yuan/Chinese sailors.

Along with an intensified ship-building programme, the Mongols began to improve on the structure of the Song ships and built much larger models, based on the Indian designs that they had meticulously studied over the years, by sending agents to the Indian Ocean on a number of occasions.⁸ The ships that Kublai Khan built often carried more than the nine

⁸ Marco Polo: *Description of the World* [Marco Polo, *Le devisement du monde*], pp. 395–397; *The Book of Ser*

sails used by most of their contemporaneous models, some even carried twelve sails (*Chau-Ju-Kua*, pp. 32–33). Later Japanese archaeological research off the coast of Kyushu from 1991 to 2003 proved that the ships the Mongols built during those years had staterooms and watertight compartments for their cargoes and foodstuffs, with the food stored in earthen jars.⁹ From the archaeological finds off Takashima, the size of the Mongol ships was estimated as twice the size of their European counterparts (Delgado 2003). The ships were also equipped with explosive devices in the shape of ceramic bombs to be launched by longbows or catapults, a popular type of artillery at the time (*ibid.*). It is not clear if the catapult-bombs were thrown from the ships, or just transported by ship and then set up for use on the ground, such as during the second Mongol invasion of Japan in 1281.

This invasion, which took place in 1281, resulted in a disaster for the Mongols, who met fierce opposition by the Japanese and had a large part of their fleet destroyed by a storm, as already mentioned above. Although the attempted conquest of Japan ended in failure again, another expedition to Japan was planned for 1284 but it was eventually postponed when Kublai Khan directed his fleet south, to the main east-west maritime route of the South China Sea. From then on, the Mongols made every effort to launch and re-launch extraordinary campaigns to try establishing a foothold at a number of coastal and island polities, from Đại Việt, Champa to Java. All ended in great losses and bitter failures as events unfolded.

MONGOL MARITIME INVASIONS OF CHAMPA AND ĐẠI VIỆT (1283–8)

Kublai Khan probably realised in 1281 that he would have had to find an alternative route to maintain his links with the Middle East and Europe via Southeast Asia. This meant establishing a maritime supply network along the coastal length of the South China Sea to serve his new Mongol navy.

By 1282, Kublai Khan saw his own navy grow and fail in its two attempts to invade Japan in 1274 and 1281 but he did not seem to be deterred. The first location in the South China Sea to receive Kublai Khan's attention was Champa, a group of five small kingdoms situated in today's coastal central Vietnam. The five kingdoms, Indrapura, Amaravati, Vijaya, Kauthāra, and Pānduranga, took turns to be the most prominent polity, depending on their military and economic fortunes. In the 1270–80s, Champa was a strong federation, each kingdom ruled by its own king, the strongest then was the kingdom of Vijaya, which occupied today's Bình Định province, led by King Indravarman V and, later, by his son, Prince Harijit. The most important port in the South China Sea in the 13th and 14th centuries was Sri Banoy (Thị Nại in Vietnamese) situated in Vijaya, today's Quy Nhơn bay in Bình Định province. It was a gateway to the main centre of power at Vijaya and easy access to the maritime east-west trading route (Whitmore 2004). Trading activities at Sri Banoy had been noted since the middle of the 12th century, along with those at the Vietnamese trading post of Vân Đồn in the Hạ Long bay. Both had thrived through the trade between eastern Java and China, and appeared simultaneously as part of a chain of stopovers on the east-west maritime route, during a time when international trade

Marco Polo, Vol. 2, pp. 195–197.

⁹ Takashima-cho Board of Education, 'reports on project Takashima', from 1992–2003, <http://www.h3.dion.ne.jp/~uwarchae/project%20takashima.htm> (accessed 29/12/2007).

increased along the route to meet higher demands in Song China, as well as in the coastal realms around the Red Sea (Whitmore 2006:110; Wade 2009:17). The boom in foreign trade, in turn, led to 'political, social and economic changes throughout the region' (Wade 2009:5).

Geographically, Vijaya occupied a strategic coastal position in a Southeast Asian maritime trade route that had been on the rise since the 5th century (Hall 1985:39–44). However, it took until the 12th century for Vijaya to assume its prominence within the group of Champa kingdoms. Whitmore suggests that the change of Cham centre of power from Amaravati to Vijaya occurred in the middle of the 12th century. This allowed Champa to take advantage of the boom in international maritime trade along the east-west route (Whitmore 2004). Sri Banoy then became a new focal point for sea merchants in a 'trade that had been developing since at least the eleventh century and had become solidly established in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries' (*ibid.*). Before then, only the coastline between the ports of Kauthāra and Pānduranga had been listed in two early Arabic accounts, *Kitab al-masalik wa'l-mamalik* of Ibn Khurdadhbih, and the *Akhbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind*, dated around 890 CE (Southworth 2004:209–233).

In the 13th century, maritime trade followed a route that led ships to the Champa coast as noted by Tony Reid: 'all shipping between China and the rest of the world (except the Philippine archipelago and Japan) hugged the Champa coast at least for the five hundred kilometres between cap Varella and Culau Cham' (off today's Hội An port) (Reid 2000:44). This route was established from the time Guangzhou was re-opened to foreign trading under the late Chu in the mid-10th century through to the entire Southern Song's reign (960–1279). International commercial ships were called frequently at Cham ports, where the cargoes of the ships were inspected by a king's agent as soon as they arrived (Hall 1985:183). Once the inspection was over, 'the king's agents collected one-fifth of each kind of commodity in the name of their monarch before authorising the sale of the rest' (Hall 1985:183).

Improved navigation techniques also played a part in giving Sri Banoy its share in the maritime trade expansion in the South China Sea. Merchant sailors, by then, had known how to take advantage of trade (or monsoon) winds and the compass. It was said that 'such techniques have been available to Arab and Chinese traders since the 12th century (Chang 1974:347–359).

Trade between the Islamic world and China in the 12th and 13th centuries was intense as well. Politics around the Red Sea, such as Egypt and Yemen, began to increase their demands for luxury goods such as spices and silk from China. Such demands encouraged their merchants to travel to and interact with people from Southeast Asia and, at the same time, prompted Southeast Asian and Chinese people to travel to the major Islamic centres in the Middle East (Wade 2009:17).

In addition to the increased trade, the region saw the emergence of new trade ports and/or trade-based polities. These included that at Thị Nại (modern Quy Nhơn) in the Cham polity of Vijaya, the Viet port of Vân Đồn, and the state of Tambralinga on the peninsula, all in the 12th century (*ibid.*:22).

The *Abbrievated Records of An Nam* (p. 48) made an observation that Chinese ships 'travelling to outlying vassal states' usually stopped by in Champa, 'the biggest port-city in the South for water and firewood'. The *Vietnamese Annals* (Vol. 2, p. 89) noted a comment by a Vietnamese envoy sent to look at Sri Banoy at the end of the 13th century that 'Thị Nại port was an important place, where international ships gathered to trade'.

Ancient Arab and Persian documents also recorded that ‘the Cham supplied well water from the 8th to 14th centuries to passing international sailing ships’ (Lê 2002:290).

In 1279, Kublai Khan had established four maritime supervisory bureaux at Chinese main trading ports. The first bureau was in Quanzhou. By then, with their newly acquired Song navy and their new sailing experience, the Mongols began to expand their influence and activities into the South China Sea. The next major stopover on the east-west maritime route, Sri Banoy, became a choice location for the establishment of such a maritime bureau.

Sodu and Pu Shougeng began to despatch the Yuan emperor’s order in the year 1278 from Quanzhou. According to the wording in *Yuanshi*, and in Zhou Da-guan’s notes interpreted in Pelliot’s *Mémoires*, they did not make the voyage themselves but sent their own envoys instead (Pelliot 1951:105). This first mission opened the way for many embassies from the Yuan emperor to the countries of the ‘Southern Seas’ in the years to come. How many of those countries had been sent the imperial invitations from Kublai Khan, and exactly what they were, are unknown, but Champa was the first one. It was not clear when Kublai Khan’s first letter reached Champa but in the same year of 1278 Pelliot noted that Sodu was informed by his envoys, on their return from Champa, that the Cham King would like to be recognised as vassal to the new masters in China (Lê 2002:104). This can be interpreted in two different ways as events in Đại Việt and Champa later transpired. From the Yuan point of view, a vassal meant more than just a trading partner; it could mean a total submission to the Yuan. However, the Cham king’s intention might have been different. He might just have wanted to continue to be recognised as a trading partner, who earlier had offered the Chinese court regular gifts to keep relations running smoothly—a practice they had adopted throughout the 12th, and most of the 13th century. This kind of relations between Champa and southern China had always been good and beneficial to both.

Given this mutually beneficial relationship, Kublai Khan’s invitation of 1278 to Champa came as no surprise to the Cham king Jaya Indravarman V, now that the Southern Song were virtually defeated and the Yuan were in the process of assuming total power. It was probably in this spirit that the Cham king sent the first Cham embassy to the Yuan in 1279 to respond to Kublai Khan’s imperial letter of the previous year. This embassy brought to the Yuan court an elephant, rhinoceros and precious jewellery (Rossabi 1988:216). Pelliot noted that envoys from Champa and Malabar travelled together in this trip, presumably as the ship(s) from Malabar would dock first at the Cham port and the two envoys travelled together on to Yuan China. That was a remarkable factor to show that the travellers from the southern countries reached China through the maritime route, via Champa (Pelliot 1951:105). This route thus ‘gave Champa the power to disrupt or interrupt commercial or diplomatic relations between China and these countries, these were precisely the causes for the subsequent war between China and Champa’ (ibid.).

The Cham embassy arrived in China in August 1279 and it triggered a series of activities among the Yuan officials in charge. Sodu travelled to Dadu for consultation and was present when the Yuan Privy Council met early in the next year. On 26 January 1280, members of the Privy Council and the Academy held a discussion with him on the question of the relations to be established with the ‘barbarous countries’. It was noted that the discussion was solemn (ibid.). After this discussion, diplomatic activities between Yuan China and Champa became intense.

During the year 1280 Kublai Khan sent altogether three more letters to the Cham king. The *Yuanshi* notes that the first one was sent in January, the second in June and the third in December (*ibid.*:105–106). For his part, the Cham king sent two embassies bearing lavish gifts to the Yuan emperor during the same year. Bilateral exchanges were so intense that these back and forth missions must have crossed paths along the east-west maritime route at least once. The first letter of 1280 from Kublai Khan to the Cham king was a special edict, issued on the 27th of January, the day after the discussion at court with Sodu and the highest members of the Yuan administration. In this document, Kublai Khan ordered the Cham king to come to the Yuan court in person. General Sodu himself, with an accompanying high-ranking embassy, carried this imperial letter to Champa. The officials travelling with him were the vice-minister of war, and a military commander known as a *wanhou* in Chinese, or *miryarch* in Mongol military ranking (*ibid.*).

The presence of this *wanhou* in the entourage is a significant factor. It could mean that military pressure was now being exerted upon the Cham king to make him comply with Kublai Khan's *six requirements*. This mission travelled south to Champa around the same time that the Cham king despatched his own embassy to the Yuan court, for the Yuan embassy left in late January and the Cham embassy arrived in early March on a journey that usually took about a month. They must have crossed paths some time during February. The Cham embassy came to Dadu with a pledge of submission but without the Cham king (*ibid.*).

A second imperial letter from Kublai Khan was despatched to Champa in June of 1280 with the same demand according to *Yuanshi* cited in Pelliot's *Mémoires* (Pelliot 1951:105–106). The Cham responded by sending another embassy, along with a Malabar embassy, bringing valuable gifts, rhinoceros and elephant(s), to the Yuan emperor in September of the same year. Kublai Khan accepted the gifts but sent yet another summon to the Cham king in December 1280 to remind him of his duty toward the Yuan, and to send one of his sons to Dadu to live as hostage (*ibid.*; Rossabi 1988:216). These were the same demands that Kublai Khan had been putting to the Trần in Đại Việt, as part of the *six requirements* that he imposed on his 'vassals'.

Keeping hostages was a regular practice under the Yuan. Even within China itself, officials above the third rank serving in the south had to send members of their families as hostages 'to be used in the Court' (Hsiao 1978:41). Under Kublai Khan, the hostages served as members of the imperial guards or attendants at the court (*ibid.*:147, note 5). Kublai Khan must have extended this practice to countries he considered as vassals of the Yuan court. However, as both the Trần and the Cham did not consider themselves as 'vassals' in Kublai Khan's sense, neither complied with his demands, according to *Yuanshi* (Rossabi 1988:216).

In December 1280 the imperial letter from Kublai Khan was carried to Champa by the same two Yuan high-ranking officials, the vice-minister of war and the *wanhou* who undertook the first journey of this year. General Sodu, meanwhile, remained in Fujian, where he despatched envoys of his own to Java and Đại Việt in November of 1280 to demand their submission. As noted in the *Vietnamese Annals*, this summon and those sent previously by the Yuan emperor were not acted upon by the Trần court.

Champa continued to resist any Yuan attempt to establish a maritime bureau in Champa at the end of 1281. A year later, the son of the Cham King, Prince Harijit, was noted by the *Yuanshi*, as having detained envoys from Kublai Khan while they were on their way to Siam and Malabar. The following year, the Cham King and his son were both

identified as leaders of the resistance against the Mongols in Champa in 1283 (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:144). This means that the Cham king did not comply with any of Kublai Khan's demands from the year 1278 onwards.

The prospect of a Mongol invasion probably drove the Cham to look for allies in the South China Sea, and to tighten existing relations. A period of intense development in Viet-Cham relations soon followed. During the six years of hostile interaction between Champa and China, from 1276 to 1282, relations between Kublai Khan and the Cham king were conducted in a menacing manner, with regular threats being conveyed from the Yuan court to the Cham at Vijaya. Bilateral relations between the Yuan and the Trần did not fare any better. Đại Việt was subjected to the same intense threat from China, with envoys constantly carrying imperial letters from Kublai Khan to the Trần, demanding them to submit and threatening to send an army to punish them if they did not respond (*ibid.*). The persistent Mongol threat drove Champa and Đại Việt closer as they prepared to face the Mongol wrath. This began to materialise first in Champa.

The Mongol naval campaigns in the South China Sea began under the command of General Sodu. He was first despatched to Champa in 1281 to carry an imperial letter from Kublai Khan and, at the same time, tried to establish a Mongol maritime Bureau at Sri Banoy but the Mongol request was rejected by the Cham King Indravarman V and his son, the Crown Prince Harijit. From the Yuan perspective, Sri Banoy port would have been greatly beneficial to them, not just to make use of its good geographical position but also to eliminate any potential threat from Champa regarding possible disruption to the east-west maritime trade route between China, the Middle East, and Europe.

The Mongol objective was to establish a maritime bureau at Sri Banoy but the pretext was for them to punish the son of the Cham king for not submitting to the Yuan and also for seizing the 1281 Yuan mission to Siam (Vu 2008:115–140). Sodu was given the title 'Governor of Champa province' in 1282, just before he set sail in the eleventh moon (December) of the same year. The Mongol invasion fleet arrived at a point called 'Estuary of Champa' on 30 December 1282, a date noted by Pelliot as being omitted in *Yuanshi* but recorded in *Jingshi dadian* (*ibid.*:110–111, note 7). Sodu's fleet was made up of 350 ships and a force of 10,000 troops, including sailors, under the command of Sodu himself, former Song naval officer Liu Cheng, and a Mongol general, Alihaya.

On arrival, Sodu's troops disembarked on the south side of the deep bay of today's Quy Nhơn where, at the top of the bay, the Cham defenders faced them with a 'citadel and armed with one hundred *hui hui pao*' (Pelliot 1951:118, note 1). Similar to the situation in Japan, during the years that Cham-Yuan relations were steadily deteriorating, Champa had had plenty of time to prepare for their defence. The *Jingshi dadian* confirmed that the Cham faced the Mongols with a fortified citadel, and more than a hundred *hui hui pao* (Pelliot 1951:118, note 1; Hà and Phạm 2003:146), at the top of the bay. These were artillery pieces in the shape of giant catapults that had first been imported into Asia by the Mongols to cope with the fortified cities of southern China. It is not known how the Cham acquired the *hui hui pao* themselves and position them at Sri Banoy as recorded in *Jingshi dadian* and cited by Pelliot. The citadel at the top of the bay is likely to be the original defensive structure for the port of Sri Banoy, further fortified to cope with the Mongol attack. In 1986, archaeological excavations in Vietnam identified the ruins of a citadel at the top of Quy Nhơn bay. According to this description, it was a fortification built on a hill 'to oversee trading activities of Thị Nại/Sri Banoy port and guarding the gateway to

the capital Chà Bàn-Vijaya of Champa, fifteen kilometres further inland' (Lê 2002:228). The Cham also placed thousands of troops armed with bows and arrows, supported by elephants, ready for battle with the Mongols when Sodu arrived (*ibid.*).

After their landing at the south side of the bay, on the last days of 1282 Sodu proceeded to make camp on the shore, and despatched envoys to the Cham king to ask him to submit voluntarily. Sodu's demands brought no result (*ibid.*:119). *Yuanshi* recorded that he sent two envoys, travelling to the Cham camp seven times for over a month (*ibid.*).

The period of sending envoys back and forth was probably necessary for Sodu's force and their horses to recuperate after a long voyage at sea. The travel from Guangzhou to Sri Banoy was the longest seafaring attempt the Mongol army and navy had yet undertaken in their maritime campaigns. Although Mongol envoys had been sent by ships to as far as India in the previous years, the Mongols' earlier maritime invasions were only sent to Japan, across a shorter stretch of open water, respectively in 1274 and 1281. The month-long journey down the South China Sea was the first long sea-crossing the new Mongol navy had undertaken, and, inevitably, brought with it unknown problems. While Sodu camped on the beach to rest both men and horses, in January of 1283, he received a letter from the Cham king, in which the king said the Cham were ready for battle (*ibid.*).

On 13 February 1283, Sodu launched his first assault against the Cham. Sodu himself commanded the central force, two of his generals commanded the two flanking wings and all headed north toward the Cham defence line at the top of the bay of Quy Nhơn (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:149). It took all night for the Mongol ships to travel up the bay to arrive at the foot of the Cham citadel. Along the way, they were greatly hampered by 'high waves' (*Yuanshi*, in Đào 1962:149). Here, the Mongols were confronted by a large Cham force and dozens of elephants (*ibid.*). The battle was ferocious, however, once on dry land, it did not take long for the Mongols to defeat the Cham. By noon, the citadel was taken. Thousands of Cham were killed and the remaining Cham troops escaped further inland (*ibid.*). Sodu's army advanced toward Vijaya, 15 kilometres inland and captured it on 19 February 1283, according to the same entry in *Jingshi dadian*. The Cham royal family and their entourage escaped further into the jungle to the west of Vijaya. Sodu then made camp outside the city (*ibid.*) according to the Yuan Military Code, which stipulated that they should camp outside a build-up area, when there were not enough buildings to accommodate all of them and their horses in one place (Ratchnevsky 1972:52). Although they defeated the Cham and won their capital, the Mongols' victory did not last long. Their difficulties soon became apparent during the following month.

These difficulties were meticulously recorded in *Yuanshi*. According to which, Sodu was lured into several Cham ambushes in the jungle and the Mongol army suffered great losses as a result (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:151–162; Maspéro 1928:178–181).

The area that the Cham court and army fled to was the western plateau on the slope of the Trường Sơn cordillera, an area known today as the Darlak (Đắc Lắc) plateau. The western part of this area was a stretch of land that was notoriously known in later centuries as a 'rebel' hideout, highly suitable for jungle warfare and impossible to penetrate. The plateaux were guarded by narrow mountain passes and a secret network of land and river routes. In the 13th century, the network was known only to the *Water* and the *Fire* tribes, who were staunch allies of the Cham. The Cham at Vijaya and these highland tribes had been excellent commercial partners for decades, if not longer. The highlanders supplied their forest products for the Cham to sell to international traders at Sri Banoy to excellent profits for both.

Based on Đắc Lắc plateaux, the Cham conducted a diplomatic campaign that sometimes offered a fake surrender, sometimes supplied false information through ‘defectors’ (*Jingshi dadian*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:154, note 1). The Cham also sent envoys to ask Đại Việt, Zhenla (Cambodia), Java, and other Cham kingdoms, such as Pānduranga and Amaravati, for help (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:160).¹⁰ What became clear by 19 March 1283 was that Sodu’s army was in severe difficulties: ‘his troops being reduced, his situation critical, he had to send for rescue’ (Ratchnevsky 1972:60).

Fig. 11. Mongol invasion of Champa (1283–5) (Source: Wikimedia)



Apart from its difficult terrain, the jungle was infested with malaria and other tropical diseases (Brundage 2003:118–121), each was as deadly as those that the Mongols encountered in Yunnan, southern China, and earlier in Đại Việt in 1258. Even though the

¹⁰ *Yuanshi*, ‘Annam Chapter’ in *Cuộc Kháng Chiến*, p. 160.

Mongol force had been augmented by both northern and southern Chinese troops to help cope with the climate and terrain of the south, many still succumbed. It was no wonder that Sodu had to ask to be 'rescued' (Ratchnesvky 1972:60, note 5). Alihaya sailed home for reinforcement while Sodu camped on the beach.

The process of assembling a rescue force in China, however, was hard and entailed many incidents that required the Yuan military to set out new laws to deal with the problems. First, the Yuan Military Code recorded their decision to appoint Alihaya to lead the rescue of Sodu:

On the Ping-yin day of the fifth moon of the 20th year of the Yuan dynasty (10 June 1283), A-li-ha-ya received order to take 7,000 Han soldiers and 8,000 newly-incorporated soldiers to the rescue (of Sodu) (*ibid.*:60).

However, there was a mutiny among the troops being gathered for this mission. In a memorandum to Kublai Khan, the Yuan High Authority of Military and Secret Affairs reported that general Alihaya came to them with a problem: the 15,000 troops that he gathered to take to Champa for the rescue of Sodu ran away while they were marching along a road (Ratchnevsky 1972:60, note 5). They deserted in such number that the Yuan Military had to issue a Decree of High Order which set out the power that commanders had over these soldiers, and the punishment for the deserters: 107 lashes with stout sticks in some cases, and death in others. The death sentences were decreed to be carried out in front of a large assembly of troops (*ibid.*). The Yuan Military Authority then advised the commanders not to hesitate to execute the leaders of the deserters on the spot. The High Military Authority then submitted their decision to the Yuan emperor, and was informed that he deemed it 'just' (*ibid.*:61).

The fact that the Yuan military had to deliberate at the highest level and then sent their decision to the emperor showed that the problem of desertion during this rescue mission was serious. The long process of deliberation by the High Military Authority, and the troop desertion meant that Sodu was left without the reinforcement he needed in the meantime. Sodu's army camped on the beach until the following year, 1284. When no rescue arrived, Sodu left Champa and took his fleet further north, to a Cham area that he called Yueli in today's Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên provinces of Vietnam and made camp by a large swampy lake called Đại Lãng in Vietnamese. The Vietnamese historian Đào Duy Anh identified Đại Lãng lake as Phá Tam Giang in Thừa Thiên, *Phá* meaning a shallow lake that contains both fresh and sea water (Đào 1962:16–20). Here, Sodu 'defeated the local inhabitants, built a camp made of logs and ordered his soldiers to farm for their subsistence and stock up a rice depôt' (*ibid.*). The farming for subsistence, especially in areas where local inhabitants refused or were unable to provide them with provision, was also an established feature of the Mongol army, clearly set out in the Yuan Military Code:

In faraway areas that the troops were stationed for a long time, or where they passed through for a short time, the public would have to feed them. The soldiers were forbidden to abuse or rob among the local population, whether for agricultural products or other goods... Kublai Khan then established a system of agricultural colonies for armies on far away expeditions... (Ratchnevsky 1972:53–54)

It also meant Sodu intended to stay for a long time. He then recommended to the Yuan court that:

Jiaoshi (Đại Việt) was in a good location, being next to Champa, Yunnan, Zhenla, Siam, and Burma. To establish a secretariat there was advantageous, and saved the Yuan troops from having to use the sea route. Yueli area was also good to station troops to keep an eye on three fronts. (*Yuanshi*, in Đào 2002:240)

From Sodu's observation, it was clear that this area could be the Mongol mobile secretariat instead of Vijaya. Furthermore, it could be accessible by land via Đại Việt. It was an advantageous position for the Mongols to keep an eye on maritime activities in the South China Sea. Coincidentally, even before the advice reached the Yuan court or was acted upon, Đại Việt was drafted into the Yuan's rescue of Sodu. In October 1283, Kublai Khan ordered the xingzheng Champa to support general Alihaya in his capacity of Chief Commissioner of the rescue mission (*ibid.*:61, note 1). Alihaya then commanded the Vietnamese Emperor Trần Nhân Tông to let the Mongols travel through Đại Việt to advance to Champa, but Trần Nhân Tông refused (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, pp. 70, 86–87). The idea of travelling over Đại Việt to take Champa was shelved for now but not abandoned altogether.

Alihaya set sail from China to Champa with three *wanhou* (military commanders), one of them was Omar Batur, a major figure in subsequent Mongol invasions in Đại Việt (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:169, note 1). The much delayed rescue fleet arrived in Champa in April 1284 only to find that Sodu had just left the area. They re-embarked their ships and followed Sodu's traces north. This fleet then floundered in a storm near Sodu's new camp. We do not know how many ships were despatched this time, but according to Chinese and Vietnamese records, many of the rescue ships were lost (*Jingshi da dian* and *Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:170, note 2). Alihaya and Omar Batur travelled back to China without meeting up with Sodu who remained in his new camp until 1285 when he was ordered to sail north to Đại Việt to join a new Mongol campaign against the Trần, under the leadership of Kublai Khan's son, Prince Togan.

SECOND MONGOL INVASION OF ĐẠI VIỆT (1285–7)

The second invasion of Đại Việt was decided in Dadu after the Trần refused Alihaya's request to let the Yuan army cross over the Việt land to attack Champa in 1283. However, it did not get underway until much later, in January 1285. The Yuan at the time were having great difficulties in maintaining full control in southern China, four years after their conquest of this region. It was recorded that the general population did not show any loyalty toward the new emperor. At the same time, anti-Mongol groups formed into 'gangs' to actively fight the Yuan regime. In 1283 alone, there were more than 200 of such groups, termed as 'bandits' in the south (Hsiao 1978:51). By 1289 there were still more than 400 incidents involving these 'bandits' reported in southern China (*ibid.*). This meant that southern China was in a continuing restless state, albeit on a small scale, under the Yuan. The activities of these groups kept the Yuan busy and Yuan soldiers being sent in to form garrisons to keep peace in the south (of China) (*ibid.*).

In Đại Việt, the Trần made a bold decision not to let the Yuan cross over their country. This was not only for the Cham's sake: it was because its independence was at

stake. Once the refusal was passed on, the Trần knew that it would put Đại Việt on a war footing with the Mongols. They immediately started to prepare for war. At the same time, the Trần Emperor sent two envoys to Dadu to ask for peace, only to find that the Mongols had amassed up to 50,000 men, in preparation for an invasion of Đại Việt in the next year (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 50). The Trần Emperor then ordered a combined military exercise in the tenth moon of 1283, which he himself led. He also mobilised both land and naval forces to prepare for battle, and again appointed Prince Trần Quốc Tuấn to be Commander in Chief of this campaign (*ibid.*). Under his royal title of Hưng Đạo Vương, Prince Trần Quốc Tuấn deployed his units to crucial defensive positions, each headed by a general (*ibid.*). The Trần made an assessment that the sea route was particularly vulnerable now that the Mongols had a powerful navy, they could enter Đại Việt by way of Hạ Long bay, and travel inland on the Bạch Đằng river to join up with the Red River and reach the capital easily. To prevent this, the Commander in chief Trần Hưng Đạo or Hưng Đạo Vương himself was stationed in an area north of the capital, on a connecting river to watch over both the river and the land routes from China. To motivate the army, he issued a rousing appeal that painted a bleak picture of Đại Việt under the Yuan occupation, if Đại Việt were to be defeated. The troops were enraged to the point that they tattooed the characters *Sát Thát* (kill Tartars) on their arms (some sources say their foreheads). Trần Hưng Đạo also distributed a book on military strategy to his generals, which subsequently became a foundation text for many generations of Vietnamese strategists (*ibid.*). After that, the Việt waited for an imminent invasion from the north, which did not materialise until the end of the following lunar year (January 1285).

In China, once the preparation for the second invasion of Đại Việt got underway, the Yuan faced another problem. For this invasion, the Yuan emperor appointed his son, prince Togan *Zhen-nan-Wang* (King for the Pacification of the South) with Alihaya and Omar Batur as his deputies. The appointments were made in August 1284 (Hsiao 1978:203–204, notes 352 and 359). Alihaya was recorded in 1286 as being appointed as a Minister of the Left in the government set up for Annam (Đại Việt), and given the task of organising the next expedition to Đại Việt (Ratchnevsky 1972:62, note 1). However, the recruitment of soldiers to accompany Prince Togan did not proceed as smoothly as expected. A Yuan imperial decree was issued in the eighth moon of 1284 to ask a unit of northern Chinese soldiers ‘to follow Prince Togan on the military expedition to pillage, or wish to be disbanded temporarily to return home’, the soldiers all replied that ‘they wanted to go home to rest’, and their wish was approved (*ibid.*:87). The ‘newly-incorporated’ Southern Chinese soldiers were recruited instead for this expedition (*ibid.*). In addition, as in the case of earlier expeditions, including the campaign in Champa, an unknown number of prisoners under death penalty were taken out of prisons to join this campaign. The given reason was that, as they were going to die anyway, they should be given a chance to die in battlefields (*ibid.*:63, note 2).

The second invasion of Đại Việt finally got underway in January 1285. The Mongols crossed into Đại Việt by two different border gates. Prince Togan, who led the central force, followed behind the East wing:

On the twenty-first day of the twelve moon, the troops stationed at the border with Annam began their offensive, the West wing under a *wanhou* travelled by the Khâu Ôn pass, and the East wing under another *wanhou* by the Nội Bàng gate, Trần Hưng Đạo's troops were deployed here. (*Abbreviated Records of An Nam*, p. 86)

Six days later, the Mongol east wing and the central force under Prince Togan launched a massive attack through Nội Bàng border gate. Trần Hưng Đạo directed his troops to block his advance but they failed and had to withdraw further south (*ibid.*, *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, pp. 262–263). The account of *Yuanshi* noted that, at that point, Togan sent a letter to Trần Hưng Đạo to ask for his surrender, and to open the way for the Yuan troops. When the Trần commander refused, the Yuan army continued their attack and the Vietnamese army was chased to a site called Vạn Kiếp. Both sides seemed to come to a halt at this point. Trần Hưng Đạo's army withdrew to recoup and to prepare for the next battle. Togan had to stop his advance because he then had to cross over, or navigate, the many small rivers in that area. Unlike in 1258, the Mongols now have mastered the river navigation skills learnt in the Southern China campaigns. Togan ordered general Omar Batur to establish a boat yard using local materials (*Glorious Chapters*, p. 384). When they had enough boats, Togan and Omar resumed their attack with a combined force of cavalry and foot soldiers travelling by boats to cross over the rivers in their path. The Mongols took the Vạn Kiếp defence post, Trần Hưng Đạo withdrew toward the southeast. This wing of the Yuan force advanced further south, while their West wing took another border gate, the Chi Lăng (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 86).¹¹ Chi Lăng was a crucial defence post for Đại Việt in today's Lạng Sơn province. It was a narrow pass between two steep mountains, convenient for ambushes. Many battles against the Chinese occurred in the past in the Lạng Sơn province (*ibid.*).

When the Emperor Trần Nhân Tông received news of the string of defeats, he travelled by a small boat to Hải Đông, in today's Quảng Ninh province, and sent for Trần Hưng Đạo. At this meeting, Trần Nhân Tông asked if he should surrender, Trần Hưng Đạo advised against it, and issued an order to the royal princes in their *Điền Trang* (farm estate) to contribute their private armies, to which they responded in the thousands (Đào 2002:243). The farm estates formed an inner defence perimeter for the capital Thăng Long and had been in place since 1266. This would be the first time that their private armies were mobilised to join the main force under Trần Hưng Đạo. By then, Togan's force was fast approaching the capital, making it necessary for the Trần to activate this inner defence perimeter.

On the Yuan side, the campaign of Togan in Đại Việt in 1285 was meticulously planned. The Mongols had learned their lesson from the previous failure of 1258 under General Uriyangkhadaï. Not only were the Mongols accompanied by Chinese doctors on this new expedition, but Togan also established a network of support posts along the advance route. A string of depôts was set up from the Chinese border to follow the troops to Thăng Long to maintain a steady flow of supplies and communications with his rear-base at Siming across the border in China. There were 'hundreds of posts stationed at thirty *li* (about 15 kilometres) apart', and also 'special posts for horses', at sixty *li* (30 kilometres) apart (*Glorious Chapters*, p. 390). The continuous line of supplies helped to keep Togan's army moving swiftly south. The Vietnamese commander Trần Hưng Đạo then decided to break this line by ordering the farm estate armies to attack behind Togan's advancing force.

Even then, on the ninth day of the first moon of the year of the Rooster (15 February 1285), Togan's army came face to face with Trần Hưng Đạo's at Bình Than defence post, the last crucial defence position for the capital either by road or by boat. It was a long-running

11 Also see map 10 in *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 158.

battle, on the many small rivers but it proved to be inconclusive. It was a situation similar to a massive game of hide and seek, involving cavalry forces and foot soldiers on land and thousands of river boats of both sides (*Vietnamese Annals*, p. 53). On the Vietnamese side, the emperor Trần Nhân Tông led a naval force himself, as commander of his imperial guards, said to amount to thousands of men (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:214). Omar finally managed to defeat both Trần Nhân Tông and Trần Hưng Đạo by using captured boats (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 86).

Remnants of the Trần army now retreated further back to defend the capital Thăng Long. Togan pursued close behind and made camp on the northern bank of the Red River, opposite the Viet capital. On the twelfth day of the first moon of the year of the Rooster (18 February 1285), the Trần Emperor sent an envoy, Trần Khắc Chung, to the Mongol camp to negotiate peace terms. The meeting between the Trần envoy and Togan was noted in *Vietnamese Annals* as a tense interview, in which the Vietnamese had to explain to Togan and Omar why the Việt soldiers had tattoos of *Sát Thát* (kill Tartars) on their arms, and convinced them that it was not a national policy of hate against the Mongols, but a 'patriotic gesture' from the troops (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 53). The meeting concluded with Togan refusing the Trần emperor's peace proposal.

The use of Trần Khắc Chung, a commoner, and a number of non-royal mandarins was a special feature of the Mongol invasion in Đại Việt. As Mongol envoys regularly came to chastise the Trần Emperors, from 1257 onwards, the court needed a new style of diplomacy that Trần princes were not able, or willing, to undertake. As a result, a new breed of well-educated and articulate commoners was elevated to high ranks to deal with the wrathful Mongols. It was said that 'their courageous and resourceful performances enhanced the literati's professional prestige' (Wolters 1988:5). However, as an accidental by-product of the Mongol intervention, the unhappy mixture of royal princes and commoners at court became a source of animosity which, in turn, undermined the Trần family-run court in the decades to come.

As soon as Trần Khắc Chung left the Yuan camp the next day, on 19 February 1285, Togan's army chased him and met with the Trần army on the bank of the Red River. The two armies engaged in another fierce battle, during which, from the south bank of the river, Đại Việt's bombardment against the Yuan force on the north bank was described as 'deafening' (*Yuanshi*, in Đào 1962:219).

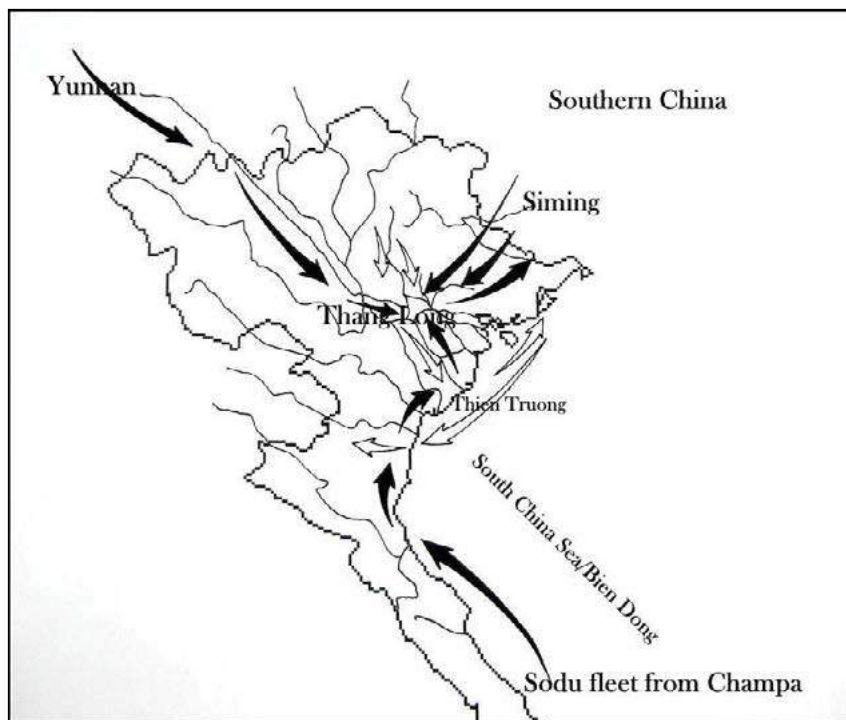
The Mongols won in the end and once again, the Vietnamese withdrew from their capital Thăng Long. Trần Hưng Đạo escorted the two Vietnamese emperors, one senior and one reigning, to Thiên Trường, the Trần's original estate before they arrived in Thăng Long to join the Ly and finally took over the court and installed their own king. The estate was maintained as their second seat of power. Togan entered Thăng Long and gave a great banquet there (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 86). Again, the Mongols massacred the remaining citizens (Đào 2002:244).

From Thăng Long, Togan summoned General Sodu who was camping in northern Champa and ordered him to move north, to squeeze the remaining Đại Việt army and trap the elusive emperors in the middle. Sodu arrived at the southern province of Thanh Hóa in Đại Việt and 'formed a southern front there' (*ibid.*). A Trần prince was sent to stop his advance but he failed.

The raging war and the seemingly hopeless defence of Đại Việt prompted many Trần men to surrender to both Togan and Sodu during April-May 1285. Among them, the most well known was prince Trần Ích Tắc, a younger brother of Emperor Trần Nhân Tông,

surrendered to Sodu in Nghệ An Province. As the highest royal member to surrender to the Yuan, Trần Ích Tắc was made 'King of Annam' by Kublai Khan when he eventually arrived in China in 1286 (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88). He became an active collaborator of the Yuan court and acted against the Trần until his death.

Fig. 12. Second Mongol invasion of Đại Việt (1285) (Source: Author's own map)



As Sodu continued to move north, Emperor Trần Nhân Tông despatched yet another prince to try stopping his army (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 53). When this force was also defeated, the Trần emperor ordered a prince named Trần Kiện to stop Sodu's advance, but after a series of battles 'without being reinforced', Trần Kiện surrendered to Sodu (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, pp. 88–89).

While Togan was still advancing toward Thăng Long and Sodu was in Champa in February 1285, a third Yuan force entered Đại Việt from Yunnan under the command of Nasir-al-Dīn. They defeated another Prince named Trần Nhật Duật, and proceeded to join forces with Togan (Hà and Phạm 2003:223–224). Nasir-al-Dīn was the Yuan's appointed *Daruyaci* in Đại Việt in 1262 but was replaced in 1272 after the Trần court did not acknowledge his appointment and only treated him as an envoy. Nasir-al-Dīn then assumed a military role, first in the Mongol campaign in Pagan in 1277, and in Đại Việt.

The situation on 19 February 1285 was still volatile, even though the Mongol army had succeeded in capturing the Vietnamese capital of Thăng Long, with Prince Togan occupying the royal palace. The Trần emperors now took refuge in Thiên Trường, while remnants of the Vietnamese army gathered around them. However, the gains and losses of either side were inconclusive at that point, because it was then that the Trần policy of establishing farm estates began to pay off. In response to Trần Hưng Đạo's order, their private armies began to take action, as soon as Togan's army went past their areas on their way to Thăng Long.

The estate armies launched repeated raids against the Yuan force from their estates behind Togan's army. Now that the estate armies had entered the war, the Yuan army and the Vietnamese forces became entwined in a deadly mixture of Mongol cavalry and different Vietnamese forces. One of the tactics the Vietnamese farm estate armies employed was to dig holes on the roads and in the fields to trap Mongol horses, making the Mongol cavalry advance with great difficulty. Another tactic was to conduct regular night raids against the Mongol camps (*Glorious Chapters*, p. 397). The terrain of Đại Việt was already highly unsuitable for a cavalry force to begin with, with many rivers and small paddy fields. Now, with holes dug everywhere to trap horses, the Mongols found it extremely difficult to move around, let alone to conduct the swift attacks that they were renowned for. Even then, Đại Việt was in a dire state, the capital was lost, the emperors and their remaining troops were being trapped in the middle of three wings of Yuan armies with nowhere to go, except out to sea.

On the sixth day of the third moon, year of the Rooster (April 1285), the Emperor Trần Nhân Tông made another attempt to discuss peace terms with the Mongols. He despatched an envoy to take his youngest sister, Princess An Tư, to offer to Togan 'in the hope that this action would ease up the suffering of the country'.¹² Togan reacted by sending an envoy to Trần Nhân Tông to ask him to come himself to surrender, but he refused (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 53). Princess An Tư was not heard from anymore.

The Trần now resorted to escape by boats. It was the mode of travel the Yuan troops had found difficult to cope with in their previous invasion of 1258. When Togan's force eventually advanced toward Thiên Trường, the Trần emperors and their entourage had gone north by travelling on inland waterways and along the coast to a small island called Tam Trĩ in Hạ Long bay. In Tam Trĩ, on the ninth day of the third moon (April 1285), the Trần emperors narrowly escaped but were captured by the pursuing Yuan force, by resorting, once again, to their navigation expertise on the coastal areas. In their haste, they left behind a wealth of treasure, men and women that the Yuan captured.¹³

On the Trần's part, after their escape from Tam Trĩ, Emperor Trần Nhân Tông and his entourage travelled south again, on foot and by boat on small waterways, still in April 1285 (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 53). It was not known where they were at this stage, but they could be at a position behind Sodu's force, as, by then, Sodu had advanced north beyond this province, after he received the surrenders of several Trần princes and their families. The surrenders of the royal Trần Princes Trần Ích Tắc and Trần Kiện in April 1285 left Thanh Hóa and Nghệ An provinces in the hands of Sodu's force (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 87). With the Trần royal party in the south, behind Sodu, the battlefield along the length of Đại Việt looked like a multi-layered sandwich, starting with Mongol support forces at the Chinese border, the Trần estate armies next, then Togan's force in the capital, then an unclear mix of battling forces, then Sodu, and lastly the Trần royal army.

What happened next was hazy, as both the *Vietnamese Annals* and the *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam* did not record specific events, other than noting that the war was still being fought in the country, the capital was occupied by Togan and the two Trần emperors were still on the move. By the fifth moon of the year of the Rooster (June 1285), with battles still raging in many areas of Đại Việt, prince Togan ordered Sodu to return to

12 *ibid.*; *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 53; *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 87.

13 *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 53; *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 87.

his camp in northern Champa, while he himself decided to leave Đại Việt to go back to Siming, on the north side of the Sino-Viet border, because ‘the weather was too warm and humid’ (*Yuanshi*, in *Toàn Tập*, p. 99).¹⁴ *Yuanshi* recorded this string of events in a section on Togan’s activities:

...as the weather was sometimes rainy, sometimes hot, diseases were everywhere, the (Yuan) troops wanted to go back north. Togan ordered Sodu to go back to Yueli. (*ibid.*)

The fifth moon of the lunar year was the height of summer in Đại Việt. With the beginning of the monsoon season, heavy rain and high temperature wreaked havoc among the Yuan ranks. The air was poisonous for the Mongols, their troops were ill and many of them died, according to *Yuanshi*. The Mongols also had to cope with floods which inundated their camps on several occasions.

According to the *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam* (pp. 87–88), Sodu travelled south only as far as Thanh Hóa when he heard that Togan was retreating toward China. He then turned back from Thanh Hoá to go north, in search for Togan. Along the way, going north, Sodu had to fight many battles, ‘day and night without rest’, against the Trần troops (*ibid.*). During this period, several armies, both the Yuan’s and the Trần’s, continued to move constantly around and among each other, making it difficult for historical records from either side to pinpoint accurately who was where at any given time. It appeared that for a while during this month, the two armies were travelling sometimes by rivers and sea, sometimes on land.

Sodu then stationed his troops in Tây Kết, on the Red River to rest while waiting to catch up with Togan’s force (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 55). Omar was despatched to join up with Sodu, while Togan himself was 200 *li* away (about 100 kilometres). From opposite accounts of these events, it appeared that Togan’s force had retreated further north, while Sodu and Omar were travelling with their ships, and got as far as the Red River when they stopped for a rest.

The Trần next launched an attack against Sodu under the command of two princes, Trần Nhật Duật and Trần Hưng Đạo, supported by a mixed army of regular and farm estate reservists. The Trần army confronted Sodu and Omar, and won a decisive battle at Hàm Tử port on the Red River on the twentieth of the fifth moon (24 June 1285). According to the *Vietnamese Annals*, a remarkable feature of this battle was the participation of former Song troops, dressed in their old southern Chinese attires. These men had been incorporated into the force of Prince Trần Nhật Duật when remnants of the Song court arrived in Đại Việt to ask for asylum in 1276. As a result, ‘the Mongols were greatly confused when facing these Song troops and were routed’ (*ibid.*). Sodu was killed during this battle and Omar escaped back to China. The Trần captured thousands of Yuan troops (*ibid.*; *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88). *Yuanshi* recorded Sodu’s death in its description on Togan’s activities:

During the retreat, Sodu’s and Omar’s fleet was involved in a naval battle on the Red River on the twentieth of the fifth moon (twenty-fourth of June, 1285). Sodu was killed and Omar escaped back to China. (*Yuanshi*, in *Toàn Tập*, p. 99)

14 *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông* (Henceforth: *Toàn Tập*) [Complete collection of writings by Trần Nhân Tông].

With the death of Sodu, in the middle of a hot and rainy summer, the war took a decisive turn for the better for the Trần, and the worse for the Yuan in Đại Việt. Trần Hưng Đạo's main force now was greatly reinforced by another prince's army. By the beginning of the sixth moon (July 1285), local reservists from the areas between Thăng Long and the Chinese border began to move south. The Yuan army was now trapped in the middle while being on their retreat northward. A fierce battle took place at Chương Dương port, on the Red River, the Trần army routed the Yuan troops and finally regained their capital Thăng Long.

Referring to this episode, *Yuanshi* recorded that Togan left the capital Thăng Long and went north of the Red River because 'the Mongol troops and horses could not exercise their familiar skills in battles there, the Yuan ranks were confused and a large number was killed' (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003: 252). The *Abbrievated Records of An Nam* (p. 87) noted simply that 'in the summer, taking advantage of our lax defence, Annam troops attacked and retook the capital La Thành (Thăng Long)'. This account also referred to the heat and diseases prevalent in Thăng Long at the time as another reason for the Trần to be able to retake their capital (*ibid.*:211).

Togan withdrew toward the Chinese border with difficulty, as his army met with many obstacles along the way. At Vạn Kiếp, he had to confront Trần Hưng Đạo's main force, who travelled by river and reached this defence post at the same time as Togan's cavalry force. After a battle with a high number of casualties on both sides, the Việt continued to pursue Togan as his army retreated further north.¹⁵ Togan then met several ambushes at the border mountain passes.¹⁶ The Yuan general Li Heng lost his life to a poison arrow during these battles. Togan was said to have been put into a bronze container to protect him from poison arrows, and carried by cart to Siming, on the Chinese side of the border (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 56). The Mongol force under Togan returned to China with only a fraction of his troops (Hsiao 1978:204, note 358). The second Yuan invasion was over for Đại Việt.

Champa, meanwhile, had got rid of the Mongols for a while. Paradoxically, as a campaign waged under the pretext of sending troops to Champa in order to 'pacify' this polity, the Yuan invasion of Đại Việt actually liberated the Cham. Following Togan's order to move north from Champa in February 1285, Sodu took the Yuan force with him. The pressure of a Yuan army in the Cham northern territory was thus removed, the Cham group of kingdoms could now go back to a normal life. Kublai Khan also abandoned his plan to occupy Champa soon after, to concentrate on taking Đại Việt:

From the second moon of the year of the Dog (February–March 1286), the *King-hou* Champa was no longer mentioned in the principal annals of *Yuanshi*. Instead, this *King-hou* now assumed the responsibility of mobilising 60,000 troops from the armies of Kiang-Tcho, Hou-Kouang and Kiangsi for a campaign against Annam... The invasion of Champa was definitely abandoned and the Mongol troops were pulled back from Champa. (Ratchnevsky 1972:61, note 1)

15 *Abbrievated Records of An Nam*, p. 87; *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 55.

16 *Abbrievated Records of An Nam*, p. 87; *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 55.

With Sodu and Li Heng dead, Togan and Omar returning in defeat, Kublai Khan was so enraged that he set Champa aside and ordered another campaign against Đại Việt only a month later. In August 1285, he ordered a new campaign to get under way with:

4,000 soldiers, both from the Han army (northern Chinese) and the newly-incorporated (southern Chinese), are set aside for an expedition against Annam. (*ibid.*:66, note 2)

There was no mention of how many Mongol troops would be participating and how many from other parts of the country, but it was a decision that caused alarm to the Yuan court who advised him against another campaign so soon, on the ground of the bad climate in Đại Việt:

It was a poisonous land, its climate was full of diseases, the nasty air killed more people than knives and swords, a campaign in the seventh month was bound to kill off many soldiers through diseases... (*ibid.*:274)

Kublai Khan agreed and postponed the campaign against Đại Việt for a few months (Đào 2002:249). In the ninth moon of the same year (October 1285), the Yuan emperor issued a decree on the fate of the returning soldiers from their failed campaign in Đại Việt:

Among the 500 men of the Meng-ku Chun (Mongol army) and the 2,000 men of the Han chun (northern Chinese army) campaigning against Chiao-Chih (Đại Việt), except 100 men of Meng-ku and 400 men of the Han chun who were to be retained as bodyguards of the Chen-nan-wang (Togan), the rest were all to be released to go home. (Hsiao 1978:88, note 361)

THE THIRD MONGOL INVASION OF ĐẠI VIỆT (1287–8)

In the winter of 1285–86, the Viet Prince Trần Ích Tắc and his entourage arrived in Dadu to be warmly welcomed by the Yuan court. Kublai Khan appointed him *King of Annam* in the third moon (April–May) of the year of the Dog, 1286 (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88). The Yuan preparation for another war against Đại Việt, by then, had been put in motion for a month. On the second moon of the Year of the Dog (March–April 1286), Kublai Khan ordered the generals Alihaya and Omar Batur to formulate a plan to conquer Đại Việt, and to organise a force from Yunnan. At the same time, Kublai Khan appointed Alihaya as Minister on the Left of the (future) government of Annam (Ratchnevsky 1972:62, note 1). There was no record of what rank Omar Batur was awarded at this stage.

On the third moon, after appointing the defected Trần prince as *King of Annam*, Kublai Khan ordered 60,000 men from southern China to gather in Guangxi to prepare for an invasion of Đại Việt (*ibid.*:61; *Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:266–267). They were to invade under the banner of the *King of Annam* Trần Ích Tắc and escort him back to Đại Việt to place him on his ‘rightful’ throne in the next year (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88). During the fourth moon (May–June 1286), Kublai Khan sent an envoy to Thăng Long with a letter to Emperor Trần Nhân Tông, written in the same threatening style as those preceding the second invasion. In this letter, Kublai Khan recounted all the ‘misdeeds’ of the Trần, such as ‘not helping the Yuan in their conquest of Champa’ (*ibid.*:55–56). Because of these, Kublai Khan now informed Trần Nhân Tông:

Togan and Alihaya engaged with your army and both sides suffered casualties and losses. Your relatives Trần Ích Tắc and Trần Tú Viên came to submit in order to preserve your country and your people, I now pronounce Trần Ích Tắc 'King of Annam', Trần Tú Viên as his deputy, and send Togan along with his army to your country to pacify it. It was all your fault, the people need not worry... (*ibid.*)

There was no record of Trần Nhân Tông's reply to the warning, except that he sent more envoys with tributes to the Yuan court and returned the Yuan prisoners of war (*ibid.*). All the envoys were detained in Dadu.

In 1287, Kublai Khan ordered Togan and Alihaya to proceed with a new advance into Đại Việt. For this campaign, the Yuan emperor put great emphasis on the use of a navy. Since the previous year, 1286, Kublai Khan had ordered 300 warships to be built. In 1287, he again ordered 200 more warships. They were to be ready by the eighth moon of the same year (*ibid.*:268). Two *wanhou fu* were established at Shanghai and Fuzhou on the 24 June 1287 'to control activities of maritime transport vessels of Shabuqing, Wu-ma-erh (Omar) and others' (Woodman-Cleaves 1976:181–203). The organisation of the naval force was entrusted to General Omar Batur who had failed to rescue Sodu earlier in Champa and, again, in Đại Việt. This time, he took with him hundreds of ships, a third of which were warships. He also enlisted a transport fleet of 70 ships manned by the son of the former pirate Zhang Wen-hu. Zhang's task was to carry 170,000 piculs of rice, about 10,000 metric tonnes, to support the Mongol troops while they were advancing toward the capital Thăng Long, today's Hanoi. The Yuan navy and the transport ships were to enter Đại Việt by way of Hạ Long bay (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88).

In fact, it took longer for the war to begin. Alihaya died on 18 June 1286 from illness or suicide. Some Chinese versions listed him as dying from illness, others 'from taking poison' after he became the subject of an investigation by the imperial censor (Ratchnevsky 1972:62, note 1). Omar's fleet did not leave Hobei, under the overall command of Togan, until the ninth moon of the next year (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88).

In Đại Việt, once again, the Trần got on with their preparations for war, as soon as the Yuan envoy left. Kublai Khan's harsh words in his imperial letter left them no doubt that war was again looming. The appointment of Trần Ích Tắc as the approved *King of Annam* meant that he was now obsolete in Kublai Khan's eyes. Under Trần Hưng Đạo's command, the Việt army again launched themselves into military exercises, built ships and manufactured weapons (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 58). In the second moon of the lunar year of the Pig (March–April 1287), Emperor Trần Nhân Tông ordered a general amnesty. In the fourth moon, another military exercise took place (*ibid.*:59).

To defend the coastal area of Hạ Long bay, another Trần prince, Trần Khánh Dư, was appointed deputy commander of the army in charge of Vân Đồn, the main maritime trading post of Đại Việt (*ibid.*:60). The geographical location of Vân Đồn made it a crucial point of defence for Đại Việt in this Mongol invasion. The island Cái Bầu, where Vân Đồn was situated, occupied a position near the mouth of Bạch Đằng river, the main waterway leading to the capital, and onto other smaller but navigable tributaries of the Red River. This advantageous location was the main reason why it was chosen as an international maritime trading post for the Lý and the Trần in the 12th and 13th centuries. The location was called 'the heart of the Tonkin trading zone between Hainan and Quinzhou' (Li 2006:83–102). To enter Đại Việt by the sea route from China, Vân Đồn would be the first stopping point, or the first obstacle that any invader would have to negotiate. Further upstream on Bạch Đằng

river was the defence post of Bình Than, guarding the waterway to the capital and a watch post for any movement, on land or by the river Thương, from the north:

The Bạch Đằng river was a crucial defence point for all our (the Vietnamese) struggles against the enemy from the north, the throat to be protected from (being strangled). (Đào 2005:255)

As a defence post, Vân Đồn did not feature in the preparation, or the actual fighting, of the two previous Mongol invasions in 1258 and 1285. However, after the two Trần emperors succeeded in eluding the pursuing Mongols by travelling along the coast and hiding among the many islands of Hạ Long bay during the second Mongol invasion of 1285, the importance of the sea front became obvious to both sides. The focus for maritime activities now fell on Vân Đồn and Hạ Long bay.

The third Mongol invasion of Đại Việt began with the entire expeditionary force being mobilised, on land and at sea (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88). On the fourteenth day of the eleventh moon (December 1287–January 1288), the Vietnamese western front spotted a Yuan force from Yunnan moving down from the border to attack Phú Lương area on the Red River (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 59). They arrived ahead of the main land force under the command of Togan.

The Mongol central force also travelled by land, under Togan and General Abatri, with the Trần Prince Trần Ích Tắc among them. This prince was to take over the Trần throne, once their victory was assured (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88). His former Trần entourage was also travelling with him, and among them there was the author of the *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, who recorded:

All the officials who surrendered (to the Yuan) had been awarded titles according to their ranks. (Lê) Tắc was given the title of *accompanying recorder*. In the year of the Pig (1287), all the former (Trần) officials were given money, clothing, bows and arrows and saddles to travel back to our country with the *Zhen-nan Wang*. (*ibid.*:303)

They started their journey from Guangxi and divided into two groups near the border. One group arrived in Siming on 18 December 1287 (*ibid.*:303–304). 2,500 men were left here to protect the rear base. According to the Mongol plan, the Vietnamese party with Trần Ích Tắc and the historian Lê Tắc also stayed behind in Siming when Togan proceeded into Đại Việt (*ibid.*).

Togan's central army arrived at the border town of Lạng Sơn on 29 December 1287 and split into two wings to travel along the same routes they took in the previous invasion, the west one via Chi Lăng gate and the east one via the gates of Khả Lợi and Nội Bàng, under Togan's own command. The West wing fought 17 battles with the Trần defenders, and won in all of them.¹⁷ At the same time, the Yunnan wing travelled down the Red river, similar to previous occasions, fought and defeated the Trần force to proceed toward the capital. The Trần lost two of their generals in this battle. All Mongol wings aimed to gather at Vạn Kiếp, the strong base manned by Trần Hưng Đạo, where they were routed on their retreat in 1285.

¹⁷ Yuanshi, in Hà and Phạm 2003:285; *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 266, note 106.

The Mongol fleet under General Omar Batur set sail in the winter of 1287 and entered Hạ Long bay two months after the Mongol land force ran out of supplies. The Yuan naval force of around 18,000 men, 500 warships and 70 supply ships entered the bay in an area near Móng Cáy town, the north-easternmost point of the Vietnamese border, on the eleventh day of the eleventh moon (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88). The mention of Móng Cáy meant that the Mongol fleet travelled by the passage to the north of Hainan island to get to Hạ Long bay. This stretch of sea was once treacherous and full of dangerous submerged rocks which were removed under the Tang to clear up the maritime passage from Guangzhou to Vân Đồn (Li 2006:83–102). A Tang general Gao Pian was credited to the successful task of breaking up the submerged rocks (Vu and Sharrock 2014:52). Now it became an easy gateway for the Mongol ships to head for Đại Việt. The Mongol fleet then met with the Vietnamese navy, under the command of Prince Trần Khánh Dư, who had been stationed at Vân Đồn since 1286, in anticipation of an attack.

Fig. 13. The third Mongol invasion of Đại Việt (1287–8) (Source: Map displayed at the National Museum of Vietnamese History, Hanoi)



Omar immediately launched his attack on Vân Đồn and defeated the Vietnamese.¹⁸ Having won his first victory, Omar proceeded at great speed toward Thăng Long while the laden supply ships lagged behind and were attacked by the Vietnamese navy. After 11 of the 70 Mongol transport ships were sunk, Zhang Wen-hu fled with the remaining ships to Hainan island, leaving the Mongol land troops without supplies altogether.

After his victory against the Vietnamese navy at Vân Đồn, Omar went on ahead without realising that the supply ships behind were lost. Having got past the post of Vân Đồn, he travelled into Đại Việt by the Bạch Đằng river, the main waterway linking Hạ Long bay with the Red River and, eventually, Thăng Long. On this route, Omar did not go

18 *Abbrievated Records of An Nam*, p. 88; *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2. p. 60.

directly to the Vietnamese capital, he turned north at some point on the many rivers in this part of Đại Việt, and proceeded to meet Togan at Vạn Kiếp.

The loss of supplies was a massive blow for Togan's and Omar's forces in Đại Việt, for not only human foodstuffs were sunk, but hay and fodder for their horses were lost as well (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 60). As noted in their previous invasions of Đại Việt, the use of horses was a problematic feature of Mongol campaigns in southern areas such as Đại Việt. Apart from the tricky terrain, the horses needed supplies, not just for the journeys, but also at local destinations. Mongol horses were bred and raised in the northern part of Central and East Asia, they would find it difficult to survive on local short grass, stringy leaves, or rice straw, and even these were scarce in a small country like Đại Việt. For the Mongols, who relied heavily on their horses, and valued them as much as humans, the lack of food and large-scale pastures for their horses in Đại Việt continued to be a disadvantage for them in this invasion, as much as it had been during the two previous ones in 1257–1258 and 1285.

By January 1288, all Yuan forces gathered at Vạn Kiếp, former base of the Vietnamese commander-in-chief Trần Hưng Đạo. Here, Togan formed a field base on the left bank of the river Lục, and amassed supplies, since the supply ships had not arrived by sea as planned. At this point, as 'all the food was lost', Togan ordered Omar to launch raids against the Trần force to get supplies for his army (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 89).

On the twenty-third day of the twelfth moon, the year of the Pig (27 January 1288), Togan began his advance south toward Thăng Long, and the Mongol and the Trần's armies fought a running battle on land and rivers from Vạn Kiếp to the north bank of the Red River. Similar to the previous invasion, as soon as the Yuan force advanced, the Trần main force and private estate armies moved in behind them. It was a futile exercise, as 'the Vietnamese side tried to block the mouth of the Bắc Giang river, set up ambushes in the forests, but they were defeated in the end' (*ibid.*).

At that point, it appeared to the Mongol group left behind in Siming that their force was advancing well toward Thăng Long, they could begin to follow them with the Vietnamese party. When this group got to the Nội Bàng border gate, they were confronted by the Trần force. Lê Tắc's eyewitness account described the battle at this point, on the twenty-eighth of the twelfth moon (January–February 1288):

All the houses were burned and poison arrows flew in all directions, the battle was lost, Tắc (myself) led a group of 60 horsemen, one of them was carrying the nine-year-old son of the King of Annam (Trần Ích Tắc), to escape (back) toward the northern land, while Annam troops were pursuing close behind. Unfortunately, we ran into more Annam troops waiting ahead of us, and had to fight our way out in a near-death situation. The battle lasted from midnight to dawn, but we escaped (back to the north side of the border, in China). (*ibid.*:303–304)

Further south, on the north bank of the Red River, opposite the capital Thăng Long, the war continued on both eastern and western fronts, and on the twenty ninth day of the twelfth moon (January–February 1288), the Vietnamese emperors were defeated (*ibid.*; *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 60). Togan took Thăng Long on the same day, and the Trần emperors escaped toward Thiên Trường.

The beginning of the year 1288 saw the victorious Mongols in Thăng Long and the Trần emperors, again, on the move, with both Togan and Omar in hot pursuit. Again,

the Trần were saved by their expertise in river navigation. They managed to elude both Togan's cavalry on the river banks, and Omar's boats by using small boats to travel along the intricate tributary system of the Red River. Togan then left the pursuit to Omar and went back to Thăng Long.

The Mongols have won the capital but still without supplies at this stage. The country continued to be a vast battlefield. Battles were raging on many locations as local farm estate soldiers now coordinated with the Trần main forces to launch repeated raids against the Yuan camps. It was another massive mêlée, similar to the previous Mongol invasion of 1285. The extent of the damage and destruction was stated clearly in an imperial letter from Kublai Khan to Emperor Trần Nhân Tông later in 1288, in which, he blamed the Trần emperor for 'the people to be massacred, the country to be devastated' (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, P. 56).

The Mongols, ironically, did not fare any better than the Việt. Still without supplies, Omar Batur sent for help from China. Kublai Khan again appointed Zhang Wen-hu as commander of another transport fleet to carry supplies to the Mongols in Đại Việt (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 89). The second Mongol transport fleet went into Hạ Long bay in the (early) summer of 1288, they carried not only rice for the troops, but also hay and fodder for the Mongol horses. Omar was tasked to travel out to Hạ Long bay to escort them but arrived too late. Zhang Wen-hu's ships had again been attacked by the Vietnamese and many were sunk. Once more Zhang Wen-hu escaped back to China in a light vessel. The Việt annals record the capture of 300 Mongol ships while *Yuanshi* notes that the Vietnamese side only had 30 ships at first but 'the Vietnamese increased their number of ships at the mouth of the river Lục, the Yuan ships were too slow to move because they were laden with supplies, (the Yuan decided) to throw rice into the sea to lighten the ships to help them escape' (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 267, note 113). Omar returned to Thăng Long with meagre supplies that he took from villages along the way.

By then, although Prince Togan was occupying the capital, he still faced formidable foes in the shape of the hot and humid weather, the lack of food, and the spread of tropical diseases. Most of all, he had had enough of the unreliable Mongol navy. The Mongols now found themselves in serious difficulty in Thăng Long, where frequent raids by the Trần took their tolls on the Yuan troops. Togan was furious with their predicament and wanted to burn down Thăng Long but his generals persuaded him not to.

By the third moon, (April–May 1288), Togan and his generals decided that Annam was 'too hot, humid and the troops were too tired to stay, they should withdraw' (*ibid.*). They could not count on the Mongol navy as they had repeatedly failed in Hạ Long bay, their supply fleets having been twice lost (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. 88). Togan's naval commanders suggested that they should burn all their ships, and travelled back to China by road. Togan was tempted to accept this suggestion, but his aides advised him against it (*ibid.*). According to the Mongol plan of retreat, Omar was to travel by the Bạch Đằng river out to sea, Togan and the rest were to travel overland back to Vạn Kiếp and then on to his rear-base in Siming, on the north side of the border.

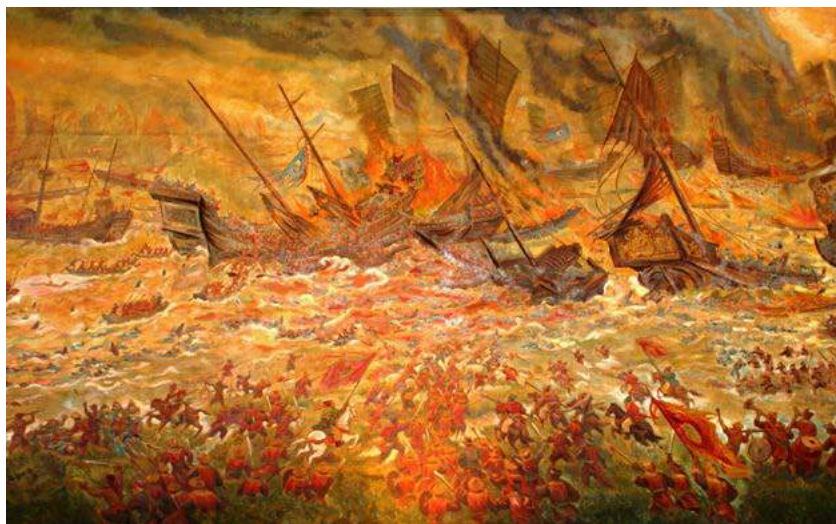
By the edge of Ha Long bay, the Mongol ships were confronted by the Việt navy in a battle later known as the famous battle of the Bạch Đằng river. Using the same tactic as their predecessor, Ngô Quyền's, to repulse the Han Chinese in the 10th century, the Trần navy drove stout sticks onto the bed of the Bạch Đằng river estuary ahead of Omar's arrival. When the tide was high, they used small boats to lure the Mongol ships to the ambush area and then escaped into the reed beds when the tide went down. Being bigger and heavier,

at low tide, the Mongol ships were trapped by the stakes and floundered. The Vietnamese captured 400 ships and many troops, according to both the *Vietnamese Annals* (pp. 61–62) and the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* (p. 90). Omar Batur was captured. An unknown number of Mongol ships escaped back to China.

Togan did not have a better time on land. His retreat began on the third day of the third moon (April 1288). His travel toward Nội Bàng border gate met with frequent ambushes, while the crossing of many rivers was difficult. The bridges had been destroyed earlier by the Trần troops. Even when he reached the south side of the border, Togan found that Trần soldiers had been deployed all along the border passes. The losses of both sides in the ensuing battles were high, according to opposite historical accounts. At the border, Togan learned that the Trần troops had dug trenches, embedded with pointed sticks, ready to trap Mongol horses (*ibid.*). He had to send for the Siming governor to guide him across the border by another route. After a running battle, Togan managed to cross into China and arrived back in Siming (*ibid.*; *Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 62). Remnants of Togan's army were disbanded the next month, the fourth moon (May–June 1288), according to the Yuan military records:

The soldiers who followed the imperial son Togan, as well as 10,000 under Liu Erh Pa-tu (Liu Erh Badur) were disbanded to go back to (their) various camps. (Hsiao 1978:116)

Fig. 14. An artist's impression of the battle of Bạch Đằng (Source: Vietnam National Museum of History)



The third Mongol invasion of Đại Việt was over but the experience was not easily forgotten. Many years later, the Persian historian Rashid-al-Din recorded that it was a surprise defeat for Togan:

Once he went with his soldiers against the cities on the coast, took them, and stayed on the throne one week. Then, without warning, their army sprang an ambush from the sea, forests, and mountains and attacked Toghan's soldiers who were busy collecting booty. Toghan got out and is still in resident in Lukin Fu. (*Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, Part two, p. 447)

Togan, in fact, did not choose to live in Lukin Fu in southern China to keep watch on the ‘foe’ Đại Việt, as subsequently recorded by Rashid-al-Din (*ibid.*). He was said to be banished from Dadu after his failure to conquer Đại Việt. His father Kublai Khan refused to see him again after his second defeat in Đại Việt (*ibid.*). This same fact was noted also in the chapter on Kublai Khan of *Yuanshi*:

Togan était en disgrâce; Son père Qubilai ne consentit jamais à le revoir après les désastres de la campagne qu’il avait menée en Annam. (Hambis 1945:126)¹⁹

For the rest of his life, Togan lived in Yangzhou, one of the main commercial southern cities, as head of one of the twelve Yuan administrative units, equivalent to a large province.

POST-MONGOL INVASIONS OF ĐẠI VIỆT

The end of the Mongol third invasion did not mean trouble was now over for Đại Việt. Kublai Khan still continued with his plan to take over the Vietnamese land and to command the maritime route along the South China Sea.

In Đại Việt, almost on the heels of Togan’s retreat, on 27 May 1288, Emperor Trần Nhân Tông sent an envoy to Dadu to ask for peace (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:326). It was to be the first of many embassies being sent back and forth, in another protracted diplomatic wrangling between Đại Việt and Yuan China, similar to the situation that followed the first Mongol defeat of 1258. In 1288, ambassador Trần Khắc Dụng was entrusted with the dangerous mission of appeasing a furious Yuan Emperor. His arrival was noted in Chinese records:

The great army has just returned home, envoys have not been despatched, yet, the Trần had sent an embassy with tributes (*History of Viet*, p. 84).²⁰

The Vietnamese envoy took with him a petition from the Emperor Trần Nhân Tông, in which, he apologised to the Yuan emperor and explained that he was wrongly accused of committing an act of rebellion by the Yuan generals. In reality, the letter was a list of cruel deeds committed by the Yuan generals in Đại Việt. Alihaya was first singled out as the main culprit who was ‘going against the Yuan emperor’s decree in attacking Đại Việt’ (*Toàn Tập*, pp. 458–460). Next came the veiled complaint that:

The great Yuan army and navy burned temples throughout the country, desecrated tombs and graves of our ancestors, massacred people indiscriminately and destroyed properties.... It was such a frenzied attack that no cruel act was spared... (*ibid.*:459)

Omar’s actions were cited as the last straw for the Vietnamese people, who ‘like trapped animals, they had no choice but to fight back’ (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, Trần Nhân Tông now asked to be forgiven. At the same time, he made a sarcastic excuse that his

¹⁹ Togan was in disgrace, his father, Kublai Khan, never agreed to meet him again after the disastrous campaign that he led in Đại Việt. (tr. Vu Hong Lien)

²⁰ *The Imperially Ordered Annotated Text Completely Reflecting the History of Viet* (henceforth: *History of Viet*) [*Khâm định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục*].

country did not have much to offer the Yuan Emperor this time because ‘it had just been through a war’, and ‘Kublai Khan would have to wait until the winter for his gifts’ (*ibid.*). There is no record of the Yuan Emperor’s immediate reaction.

Five months later, Emperor Trần Nhân Tông sent another embassy to Dadu (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 63). This time, Kublai Khan replied in a lengthy letter, soon after the Vietnamese delegation arrived, in the twelfth moon of the year of the Rat (January–February 1289). In the *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam* (p. 70), Kublai Khan despatched a delegation of high-ranking officials to escort the Vietnamese envoys back to Đại Việt with this letter. Among the members of the Yuan mission there were a judiciary official, a protocol mandarin, and a military *wanhou*. The wording of Kublai Khan’s letter was surprisingly mild. In this, the Yuan Emperor rebuked the Trần Emperor for not doing as told when he was ordered to let the Yuan borrow a passage to Champa. Kublai Khan continued that the Trần did not build roads, repair bridges, supply food and chose to resist the Yuan army instead. Because of that, he (Kublai Khan) had to punish them to maintain the Yuan superior position. It was the fault of the Trần Emperor that the Vietnamese people were massacred and the country was devastated (*ibid.*:56–57). Kublai Khan then summed up what Trần Nhân Tông had expressed regrets about and for which he had asked for forgiveness:

One: did not come to pay respect when the Emperor ordered him to do so. Two: did not welcome Prince Togan when he arrived. Three: obstruct General Sodu in his duty. (*ibid.*)

Because of these ‘misdeeds’, Kublai Khan’s letter went on, the Trần now offered to ‘send tributes of local products, beautiful women, and a son to live in Dadu as hostage’ (*ibid.*). Kublai Khan concluded his imperial letter by stating that, as the Trần Emperor appeared to have shown his repentance by sending envoys to plead on his behalf, all he had to do now was to come to Dadu to pay respect. At the same time, the Yuan Emperor asked Trần Nhân Tông to release the captured generals, Omar and Sodu, and that they should be returned by ships. In Kublai Khan’s words, ‘once that was done, all would be forgiven. Otherwise, the great Yuan force would be sent again’ (*ibid.*). The inclusion of Sodu in this demand is an interesting factor in the continuing diplomatic battle between China and Đại Việt. While knowing that Sodu was dead, Kublai Khan still demanded for his release in order to put pressure on the Trần. As the Trần would not be able to reply explicitly that they had killed the Mongol general while they were still asking Kublai Khan for forgiveness, they would do something to appease him, or, perhaps, increase the amount of gifts they were sending him.

The Yuan imperial letter was conveyed to Trần Nhân Tông by the said high-ranking Yuan embassy, who travelled to Đại Việt with a delegation of 24 Vietnamese officials that Đại Việt had sent earlier to Dadu. The large group arrived in Thăng Long on 21 March 1289 (Hà and Phạm 2003:329). Trần Nhân Tông duly accepted Kublai Khan’s letter and entertained his embassy lavishly. Two days later, he wrote a letter of thanks, and despatched another embassy bearing fifteen types of gifts to the Yuan Emperor and his Queen (*Toàn Tập*, pp. 458–460).

Immediately after the Yuan mission left Đại Việt, the Trần court acted to respond to Kublai Khan’s demands. The Vietnamese emperor continued to resist the demand for himself to come to Dadu to pay respect, but he complied with the last request with a sinister twist. In 1288, after Sodu was killed, the Trần captured three Mongol generals

at the Bạch Đằng naval battle, among them, Omar was the most feared and hated, as he himself was said to have performed many cruel deeds against Đại Việt. One of these was to desecrate the tomb of the Trần ancestor at Chiêu Lăng; the worst insult a person can perform against another, according to Chinese and Vietnamese customs (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 62). The Trần were not to let him get away with this. Ten days before their re-occupation of Thăng Long, after Togan had left, the Senior Emperor Trần Thánh Tông and the reigning Emperor Trần Nhân Tông conducted a solemn ceremony at the desecrated tomb of Trần Thái Tông, the first Emperor, to present their war booty, Omar was one of the captured generals they offered in this ceremony (*ibid.*).

Acting on the Yuan emperor's request, the Trần then decided to return Omar by ship in the second moon of the year of the Buffalo (March–April 1289). Midway to China, his ship was scuttled, presumably on the order of the Vietnamese Commander-in-Chief, prince Trần Hưng Đạo, and Omar drowned. The Trần emperor then explained to Kublai Khan that Omar was too heavy to be rescued when the faulty ship took in water (*ibid.*:63; *History of Viet*, p. 85). It was an obvious lie that Kublai Khan decided to ignore. The diplomatic dialogue seemed to continue, and the Trần continued to send envoys with tributes to the Yuan court in the following years. The Mongol menace, however, still hovered above Đại Việt for many years. Military preparations continued in China while the Yuan emperor continued his verbal harassment of Đại Việt with repeated demands for the Trần emperor to come to Dadu in person.

In 1291, following the death of the Vietnamese Senior Emperor Trần Thánh Tông, Kublai Khan sent another demand to the reigning Emperor Trần Nhân Tông, asking him to come in person to Dadu. The imperial letter began with a threatening reminder that 'any country that disobeyed the Yuan *requirement* for its ruler to come to Dadu to pay respect would run the risk of being destroyed' (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, pp. 57–58). The letter then went on to recount the past actions of the late Trần Thánh Tông and held these as the reasons for the Yuan to invade Đại Việt twice. Significantly, the letter also admitted that the Yuan force also suffered losses during the fighting (in Đại Việt), and that the failure of the Yuan was due to Togan's young age and inexperience in warfare that 'he listened to Omar and Sodu to use a naval force' (*ibid.*). The result, expressed in Kublai Khan's letter, was that the Trần got the upper hand and Trần Nhân Tông has been left alone until now (*ibid.*). Kublai Khan concluded his letter with a promise that, as all the wrong doings had been committed by his father, all would be forgiven if Trần Nhân Tông came to Dadu to pay him respect. Kublai Khan then gave a further promise that, once that *requirement* was fulfilled, he would be happy 'to award the Trần emperor with his own seal and leave Đại Việt and its people in peace forever' (*ibid.*).

Trần Nhân Tông responded by despatching his own envoy to the Yuan court in the next year with the excuse that he could not travel because he was in mourning (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, pp. 68–70). Kublai Khan again despatched his own embassy to Đại Việt at the end of the lunar year of the Cat (Rabbit in the Chinese horoscope) (January–February 1292). This time, the visit was recorded in great detail in the *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*. According to this account, the journey of the envoy Zhang, a high-ranking protocol official of the Yuan court, took three months to get to the Vietnamese border and stopped at Khâu Ôn gate. A Vietnamese delegation then travelled to this border post to greet and entertain the Yuan group. The arrival of a Vietnamese delegation from Thăng Long to meet the Yuan envoy here is a significant factor in the Trần-Yuan relations. It shows that the Trần had taken care not to repeat an earlier act of defiance, when, in 1282, they

did not send any welcoming delegation all the way to the border to greet the Yuan envoy Sabuqing, resulting in worsening an already bad situation. This time, having met up, the two groups travelled together to Thăng Long to present Kublai Khan's letter to the Trần emperor. The event was only briefly mentioned in the *Vietnamese Annals*, but elaborated with minute details in the *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*. According to this source, the Vietnamese emperor went to the embassy to greet and hold a discussion with the Yuan envoy Zhang. Again, the arrival of the Vietnamese emperor at the Yuan embassy was another gesture of appeasement toward the Yuan, as, according to courtly protocol, the envoy should have come to the emperor. Even then, on this occasion, there was a dispute over a point of protocol: whether the Vietnamese emperor should face north, as a gesture of respect for the Yuan, or south, to show his care for his own country, as he sat talking with the envoy. In the end, it was decided by both delegations that the Yuan envoy and the Vietnamese emperor would face east and west respectively (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, pp. 71–75).

In the account of the *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, a number of issues were raised on this occasion, including, interestingly, complaints from the Vietnamese side about the extent of destruction that the Yuan wreaked in Đại Việt during the invasions. Equally interesting, the Yuan envoy referred to what happened in Pagan in his reply. He said that the King of Pagan first escaped when the Yuan force came into his country, but later came back to submit, all was well after that, and the Vietnamese should do the same. This particular discussion ended abruptly when the Yuan envoy left in anger at a remark deemed to be inappropriate from a Vietnamese courtier. However, after the Trần courtier apologised, he returned and both the Yuan delegation and the Vietnamese emperor went to the Vietnamese royal palace for the ceremony of presenting and receiving the Yuan imperial letter. The ceremony was again described in great detail by *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*. After the ceremony, the Emperor and the Yuan envoy held another discussion on the Yuan's demand for the Trần emperor to come to Dadu. The talk centered on Kublai Khan's demand and the reasons for the Trần emperor to refuse it. The Trần again offered lengthy excuses for the emperor not to travel to Dadu. The discussion ended with the Yuan envoy asking the Vietnamese to write down what he had just explained to him so that he could present it to the Yuan emperor upon his return (*ibid.*).

The elaborate account of this visit is significant for several reasons. The recorded events not only painted a comprehensive picture of past disputes between Yuan China and Đại Việt, they also showed the position that Đại Việt occupied, in relation to Yuan China at that point in time. It was apparent, through the verbal exchanges between the Yuan envoy and the Vietnamese emperor, that the Yuan admitted their defeat in Đại Việt in 1288, and that, by then, the Yuan only wanted the Vietnamese to fulfil one of their *six requirements*, that is for the Trần emperor to come to Dadu to pay respect. This implies that the Yuan now accepted Đại Việt, not as a vassal that had to fulfil all *six requirements*, but as a lesser polity who had to show respect. The *Abbrieviated Records of An Nam* did not specify what purpose Kublai Khan had in mind for the Trần emperor in Dadu, other than paying him respect. However, to put aside the *requirement* for Đại Việt to pay poll-tax to Yuan China is a significant factor indeed, for this is a fundamental rule laid down by the first Great Khan Chinggis, in all territories that the Mongols subdued, from East to West.

To respond to the demand for the emperor to travel to Dadu, the Trần adopted the same approach they used during their previous diplomatic campaign of 1258–1276,

by professing their loyalty to the Yuan, while continuing to resist their demands. During the visit of the Yuan envoy Zhang, the Emperor Trần Nhân Tông also performed various acts of humility toward the Yuan delegation by 'arriving at the Yuan embassy house', and sending his men 'to the border to greet the Yuan envoy' (*ibid.*). Later, his courtiers even travelled on foot to present themselves in front of the Yuan envoy' in Thăng Long (*ibid.*).

The reply that the Trần emperor sent to Kublai Khan this time, on the advice of the Yuan envoy, was lengthy and elaborate but, essentially, he made an excuse that he was an orphan who could not travel according to Vietnamese customs, and promised that he would continue to respect the Yuan, just like his father and grandfather had done (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 68). On this occasion, Emperor Trần Nhân Tông also reminded Kublai Khan that he himself promised in 1260 that he would let Đại Việt continue to follow its own traditions and that the Yuan would not invade again (after the failed invasion of 1258) (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, pp. 121–123).

In the middle of the diplomatic tussle, Trần Nhân Tông abdicated in favour of his son, Prince Thuyên, in the following year, 1293. The new Emperor Trần Anh Tông's first task was to face a new embassy from the Yuan court. This time, the Yuan envoy brought with him yet another letter from Kublai Khan, in which, he again demanded the Trần emperor to come to pay him respect in Dadu. Trần Anh Tông reacted by despatching his own ambassador, Đào Tử Kỳ, to the Yuan court with an excuse for himself, and offered gifts to the Yuan Emperor (*ibid.*:90–91). At this point, Kublai Khan's patience seems to have run out. He detained the ambassador, established a new Expeditionary Secretariat, and charged it with the task of launching another military campaign against Đại Việt. The Yuan expeditionary force was poised to attack 'in the autumn of the next year' (*ibid.*:91).

Underneath the protracted shuttle diplomacy was Kublai Khan's intention to have a foothold on the coast of today's Vietnam. As soon as the remnants of Togan's army returned to China, Kublai Khan ordered the Yuan army to exercise and prepare for another campaign against Đại Việt either in 1288 or 1289 (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:334); even though, by then, Kublai Khan had more pressing problems to deal with.

Internally, southern China continued to be restless with 400 'banditry' incidents reported in 1289. Soldiers had to be moved from other areas to newly established garrisons in the south (Hsiao 1978:51). To prepare for the next military campaign, the whole of southern China was mobilised to provide both men and logistical support, to the extent that the province chiefs of Honan and Guangxi felt bold enough to protest. They petitioned Kublai Khan twice to ask him to stop using their meagre resources for warfare. It was a desperate cry that the Yuan Emperor seemed to heed for a short while. He soon resumed his campaigns in the 'South seas', regardless (*Glorious Chapters*, p. 379).

In addition to the protest of the province chiefs, throughout the 1280s, southern China was embroiled in a series of rebellions by local chiefs and their people. They were unhappy with high taxes and demands imposed on them by the Emperor's expensive campaigns in the 'South seas' and took up arms to vent their anger. In the middle of Sodu's campaign in Champa in 1283–1285, the Yuan army had to halt their plans to re-supply him, in order to deal with a series of rebellions in Guangzhou province (*Yuanshi*, in Hà and Phạm 2003:166)

Externally, Kublai Khan's relations with members of his family ran into serious trouble. In 1287, animosity within his family still lingered on from the disputes surrounding his ascension to the position of Great Khan in 1260. According to Rashid-al-Din, as late as 1287, Kublai Khan personally went to war against his own uncle or senior cousin, Prince

Nayan. On this occasion, it was recorded that ‘because of his poor health, instead of riding a horse according to Mongol tradition, Kublai Khan rode on a platform supported by four elephants for comfort’ (*Jami’u’t-Tawarikh*, Part two, p. 454). In Pagan, another attempt at conquest by the Yuan force from Yunnan had just concluded with temporary victory for the Yuan, in the same year 1287. However, the Mongols, led by Kublai Khan’s grandson Yesen Timur, suffered ‘considerable losses’ (Coedès 1968:194).

His health deteriorating, his attempts at conquering Southeast Asia met with fierce resistance and abominable climate, while discontent in southern China was raging unabated, Kublai Khan, nevertheless, started planning another campaign in Đại Việt and also Java. Indeed, Kublai Khan’s ambition in the South China Sea was known and well recorded. He was particularly interested in the area called ‘the Indian sea’²¹, where he sent ambassadors to ask ‘the realms of India’ to submit (*Jami’u’t-Tawarikh*, Part two, p. 439). Kublai Khan finally had a chance to test the travel from China to Persia in 1291 when he ordered a fleet to take a bride named Princess Cocachin to his ally, the Il-Khan. The journey was claimed by Marco Polo in his Travels as having been entrusted to himself.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE MONGOL INVASIONS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

Following Togan’s defeat in 1288, Kublai Khan did not give up his plan of establishing maritime bureaux along the coastal areas of the South China Sea. As early as July 1288 Kublai Khan ordered the Mongol army to practice naval warfare along with Chinese troops in preparation for another expedition to Đại Việt in 1293–4, but all attempts to invade Đại Việt and the rest of the region were abandoned after his death in 1294. Fifteen years of trying to conquer Southeast-Asia, nevertheless, resulted in the reshaping of many polities bordering and in the South China Sea/Bien Dong, and left lasting consequences in social geographical and economical terms for the region.

The after effects of the Mongol invasions of Đại Việt were numerous. The polders and dykes that both the Lý (1009–1226) and the Trần had carefully maintained were destroyed leaving the Red river flow to its own device. The shattered polders and general infrastructure brought on years of bad crops and famine for the population at large while the Trần court went through a period of fragmentation. The Mongol wars brought into the previously exclusive domain of Trần’s family members a new literati class who had been given titles and high status to deal with the Mongols (Wolters 1988:5). The perilous tasks of facing the Mongols required able scholars to receive and entertain the Yuan envoys when they arrived in Thăng Long. Ambassadors were also needed to undertake long, arduous journeys to and from the Yuan court in Dadu. Once there, they still had to face the further danger of trying to appease an often furious Yuan emperor. The high positions of commoners at court were treated with contempt and resentment by royal courtiers, once the immediate prospect of a Mongol military retaliation receded into the background. The Trần court slowly disintegrated into factional groups of political rivals who were working unhappily side by side. The courtiers even took turn to pass the blame

21 The Yuan ‘Indian sea’ of the 13th century was a vast body of water that stretched from the South China Sea, through the Straits of Malacca, to as far as the Straits of Hormuz. In the Yuan geographical calculation, this ‘Indian sea’ was divided into several parts, the part called ‘Lesser India’ included ‘Gulf of Keinan’(today’s Gulf of Tonkin), ‘Chamba’, ‘Sondur and Condur’, ‘Locac’, ‘Java the greater’, ‘Malaiur’, ‘Java the less’ and ‘7449 islands producing aromatics’ (*The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Vol. 2, pp. 187–209).

back and forth among themselves for Đại Việt's inability to cope with consecutive natural disasters. Petty squabbles and general animosity at court were regularly recorded in the *Vietnamese Annals* during this period, and continued well into the reign of Trần Anh Tông's successors in the next century.

The unhappy co-existence between commoners and royal courtiers was exacerbated further by the princes' own loss of income from their poorly harvested farm estates, which turned into an open verbal war at court about the cause and effect of the nation's disasters. In addition, the princes now found that their power had been eroded and their voices often unheard by the emperor, who now preferred to listen to his favourite commoner courtiers, especially when it came to foreign affairs. The open animosity eventually brought on the demise of the Trần dynasty in the late 14th century when the throne was seized by a courtier, an outsider named Hồ Quý Ly. The presence of the Hồ provided a cause for the Yuan successor, the Ming in China, to interfere in Đại Việt with the excuse of trying to restore the throne to a legitimate Trần heir. The Ming eventually sent in an army to defeat the Hồ and occupied Đại Việt for 20 years, from 1407 to 1427 when they were repulsed by the next Việt emperor, founder of the Lê dynasty (1428–1788).

In 1285, the Yuan's demand for a passage through Đại Việt to occupy Champa resulted in two consecutive wars in Đại Việt, and, paradoxically, the freedom of Champa. The invasions, although failed, created a strange situation between these two polities by first drawing them together to deal with the massive Mongol menace but pitting them against each other when the menace was gone. The Mongol interest in an area north of Champa, today's Vietnamese Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên provinces, turned this area into a land of contention between the two former allies. The resulting military and diplomatic activities included a brief marriage between the Trần princess Huyền Trân and the reigning Cham King Jayasimhavarman III (Chế Mân in Vietnamese), formerly Prince Harijit who staunchly resisted the Mongol invasion of Champa. It also entailed an occupation of this area by Việt immigrants who came to settle under the Trần protection, after it was officially stated in the *Vietnamese Annals* that the Cham king had given this territory to Đại Việt as his bride-price.

The Viet-Cham marriage did not last long. Jayasimhavarman III died only a few months after his marriage to the Trần princess. His death and the Vietnamese belief that the Viet princess would be sent to the pyre according to Cham customs brought the Viet navy to Champa to rescue her. The 'rescue' resulted in mutual animosity and is still shrouded in mystery but the Viet princess was, and is still, hailed a national heroine who had gained this precious territory for Đại Việt. The occupation of Đại Việt's settlers and troops in this territory happened alongside a period of 19 years of Việt 'protection' of Champa while the kingdom(s) was ruled by a Cham king chosen by Đại Việt. All of these incidents were recorded in the *Vietnamese Annals* but all the official statements did not add up or make the situation any clearer. The facts surrounding Viet-Cham relations during this period are still deemed questionable by modern historians. Whether it is the case of historical negligence or an incomplete truth remains to be further investigated. The intense events wreaked havoc in both polities throughout the next century. It even brought their armies into each other's capitals many times, each time, people died and properties were destroyed. Most importantly, it spelt the beginning of the end for the group of Cham kingdoms along the coast of central Vietnam. The land of today's Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên that Sodu highly recommended to Kublai Khan in 1284–5 was passed back and forth between the two polities, by diplomatic means or by military force. The

hostility means that neither Đại Việt nor Champa enjoyed peace with each other again. Even though the so-called Vietnamese ‘Nam Tiến’ (Southern Push) did not get underway systematically until the 16th century, the animosity between the two former friends became a bitter legacy of the Mongols and, eventually, resulted in the gradual demise of the Kingdoms of Champa in the 18th–19th centuries. The Cham race today lives in small villages tucked away in remote areas of central Vietnam, some in the Mekong Delta by the border with Cambodia, their language and culture largely forgotten.

The strategic location of Quảng Trị province again made it a land of contention 700 years later, when another bitter war was raging across the Vietnamese partition line of the 17th parallel. It was on this piece of land that the United States began to enter one of the most devastating wars of the 20th century, the Vietnam War that involved not only the Vietnamese but also the then Soviet Union and China. It was here, in this province, that the (in)famous Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was created, with the hope that all combat parties of the Vietnam war would do their best to keep the peace on both sides while being armed with the most sophisticated weapons imaginable at the time.

The Mongol fleet bound for Persia arrived at its destination successfully but not without difficulties. It was a hard and eventful journey as recorded by Marco Polo. Most of the passengers died en route, only one original Persian envoy, Coja, survived, along with the intended bride for the Il-Khan Arghun, the Princess Cocachin. Her subsequent marriage to Ghazan, son of the intended groom Arghun, as Arghun had died during her journey, was noted by secondary sources such as Woodman-Cleaves (1976). Evidently, Marco Polo himself also arrived safely to retell his time in China and the long maritime journey. According to Marco Polo’s descriptions peppered through Volume 2 of Henri Cordier’s *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (1903), he had made an inventory of everything along the way for Kublai Khan. Unfortunately, Kublai Khan did not have a chance to see any of this and Marco Polo never had another opportunity to return to China. With this inventory, though, Kublai Khan could have had enough data to establish a maritime link with his ally, the Il-Khan of Persia and gained access to the lucrative Arab and European markets beyond, without having to rely on the disrupted overland Silk Route.

APPENDIX: NOTES ON HISTORICAL SOURCES

To assess the activities of the Mongols in Southeast Asia, especially in Đại Việt and Champa where they were most ferocious, at least three sets of basic documents in different languages were needed to present a balanced view of all parties involved. Not only that, for this paper I applied a multi-disciplinary approach to compensate for the paucity of written documents on Champa, and the multi-lingual requirement for the study of this period. This meant using geographical assessments, interviews, conference lectures and inscriptions.

The first paper source is the *Yuanshi*, a History of the Yuan Dynasty, compiled by a committee of scholars led by a former official from southern China, Song Lian (1310–81). The first Ming emperor, Ming Taizu, commissioned this work after he has overthrown the last Yuan ruler in 1368 with the purpose of legitimising his action in order to claim the Mandate of Heaven, as per traditional dynastic practice (Wang 1999:285–305). The work on the *Yuanshi* began in 1369 and it took only two years to complete. The content was based mainly on the ‘veritable chronicles’ of the 13 Mongol reigns, except for the last one, which was not included (Ratchnevsky 1972:v). The full text of the *Yuanshi* is divided

into four sections, the principal annals, the monographs, the genealogical charts and the biographies.

No full translation of *Yuanshi* exists in any language, but passages of a section, and parts or full chapters of it have been translated into Japanese, French, English and Vietnamese. Aspects of a biography or a part of a section have also become subjects of scholarly discourses. For example, one chapter relating to the genealogical charts of the Mongols (Hambis 1945), and two chapters covering the economic and military aspects of the Yuan dynasty have been translated and discussed in English and French (Schurmann 1956; Ratchnevsky 1972). The biography of general Bayan, the commander in chief of the Mongol campaign in southern China, has also been the subject of an extensive paper by Francis Woodman-Cleaves (Woodman-Cleaves 1956). Likewise, the biography of general Sodu has been partly translated by Hà Văn Tấn and Phạm Thị Tâm into Vietnamese (see Hà and Phạm 2003). They either cite the translation in their work, or present it fully in the endnotes. As a non-Chinese reader, I relied on different versions of the passages and chapters of the *Yuanshi* in translation, compared them and interpreted the events concerned.

The most relevant parts of the *Yuanshi* for the present article are the 3 chapters on foreign relations, tomes 208, 209 and 210, which deal with Korea and Japan, Annam, and Southeast Asia including Champa. Apart from these, the biographical section of *Yuanshi* provides some useful information on the activities of the Mongol generals involved in all three invasions of Đại Việt and one in Champa, such as Uryiangkhadai and Sodu.

To draw a picture of the Mongol invasions in Southeast Asia, seen from the Mongol perspective, I refer to the *Yuan Military Code of Yuanshi*, translated into French by Paul Ratchnevsky (see Ratchnevsky 1972). This French translation is supplemented by a publication in English on the same *Code* by Ch'ing Hsiao, who supplied his own interpretation on some passages (see Hsiao 1978). The *Yuan Military Code* is a document based on the Mongol administrative practices contained in the only intact record that existed at the beginning of the Ming reign, *Jingshi dadian*, compiled at the beginning of the 14th century. Paul Pelliot stated in the preface to the French translation of the *Yuan Military Code*: 'no doubt that the Section on Law of King-che ta-tien (*Jingshi dadian*) had become the Chapter CII [of *Yuanshi*]' (Pelliot 1951:iii). In the introduction to his translation, Ratchnevsky explains that the *Yuanshi* version of the Code uses an extremely difficult language because many of the terms are directly translated from the Mongol language (Ratchnevsky 1972:v–xvii). This shows that some of the information contained in the chapter may actually have been taken as a whole from its original versions. As a document, the *Yuan Military Code* starts from the year 1260, after Kublai Khan became the Mongol Great Khan, and does not have much information about the period before then. However, it contains many relevant details about the Mongol army in general and their tactics. All of this became formalised under Kublai Khan and included in the *Yuan Military Code*. From 1260 onward, the *Code* reveals many details on how the Mongol army dealt with its foreign expeditions, to Japan, Champa, and Đại Việt for example. It also shows how unstable the situation in southern China was during the years under Kublai Khan's rule, by revealing that local commanders had to request for more garrisons to be established in the south to cope with 'rebellions'. In plain language, these incidents of unrest could be popular uprisings in support of the late Southern Song. Likewise, the *Yuan Military Code* provides an insight into the difficulties that general Sodu met with in Champa, and the difficulties Prince Togan had in trying to recruit soldiers to go on his

expeditions to Đại Việt (Hsiao 1978:87).

Many relevant passages of the *Yuanshi* also appear in the *Vietnamese Annals* (Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư) and the pro-Mongol *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* (An Nam Chí Lược). Both of these primary sources were written by Vietnamese courtiers who presented their contrasting views, in Chinese characters. As Chinese was the script and language of scholarship in Vietnam in the 14th century, it was natural for both to consult and include Chinese documents in their compilations. Both were later translated into modern Romanised Vietnamese and their cited passages of *Yuanshi* were also rendered into modern Vietnamese. Chinese script and its simplified version, Nôm, were the official scripts for Vietnam until 1919, when the Vietnamese court in Huế decided to adopt the Romanised version of Vietnamese language (Quốc Ngữ) as the national writing system, and, to cease holding mandarin recruitment exams in Chinese characters in 1919 (*Réalités Vietnamiennes*, pp. 57–58). This western version of Vietnamese script is still in use today, while the study of Chinese characters lingers on as a specialist pursuit for learned scholars.

The *Vietnamese Annals*, only four volumes of which have survived to the present, is a chronicle of events in Vietnam, from the time of Hồng Bàng of the second millennium before our common era to 1675 CE, when Vietnam was under the Lê dynasty. The original set of thirty volumes (or chapters) was written by the court historian Lê Văn Hưu, who was commissioned by the Trần court to compile the first known comprehensive history of the Việt. Lê Văn Hưu's work covered the period from 207 BCE to 1225 CE, the year the Trần began their rule (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 1, p. 39). Although written in Chinese characters and, at times, resorting to Chinese conventional scholarly ways of historical presentation, this document shows an unprecedented Vietnamese perception in the way Lê Văn Hưu compiled them. In his discussion on this perception, O.W. Wolters notes that it was a way to assert Vietnamese independence in a tricky diplomatic game, during a difficult time when the Trần had to face Kublai Khan's wrath (Wolters 1979:86). The next historian to continue the chronicle was Phan Phu Tiên, who followed Lê Văn Hưu's account to 1446 CE. Both of these sets of chronicles were subsequently lost. During the Lê dynasty, under the reign of Emperor Lê Thánh Tông, another historian, the courtier Ngô Sĩ Liên was commissioned to reproduce the volumes of *Vietnamese Annals* in 1479 CE. For this, he used sources from China, local records and eyewitness accounts of events in Vietnam. Ngô Sĩ Liên also added his own frequent comments in the same conventional style as his contemporary scholars. Later on, another Lê court historian, Phạm Công Trứ, was commissioned to edit and elaborate on some events listed in Ngô Sĩ Liên's volumes. Like the original *Vietnamese Annals* by Lê Văn Hưu, all of these volumes were written in Chinese characters.

The four volumes of *Vietnamese Annals* in existence today have been translated into Romanised Vietnamese by the Vietnamese Sinologist Cao Huy Giu and edited and annotated by the historian Đào Duy Anh in 1967. This is the set I used for this paper, while later editions have been re-published inside Vietnam in 1971, 1992, 2004, and online. The reason for me to use the 1967 edition is that it contains a full translation of relevant passages of the *Yuanshi*, which can be compared and verified with those translated into French and English elsewhere.

As a set of historical documents commissioned by different Vietnamese courts to promote Vietnamese identity and nationalistic ideals, the *Vietnamese Annals*, in its present form, cannot escape being a patriotic account, especially when it is about Vietnam's relationship with China and other foreign polities. While accepting the reality that the

historical contents of these volumes were mainly an argument about Sino-Vietnamese, or other foreign relations, certain passages pertaining to the events of the period covered in this paper can be read against the grain of its nationalistic overtone. Once identified, I can compare these with the same events recorded in contemporaneous documents such as the *Yuanshi* or the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam*. They can also be critically assessed by the fact that there were sometimes clumsy attempts to excuse certain failures on the Vietnamese part, or, to present all non-Chinese relationships as being of a tributary kind to Đại Việt.

To present a balanced picture of the events of the thirteenth century, the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* plays an important role in my assessment of the bilateral relationships between Đại Việt and Song China, Đại Việt and the Mongols, and the complex interaction between Đại Việt, Champa, and the Mongols of Yuan China. The *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* is a document of remarkable quality, as a part of it was written from an eyewitness point of view. The author, Lê Tắc, or Lê Trắc, was a Vietnamese mandarin who served the Trần court for ten years before he followed his master Trần Kiện to defect to the Mongols, during their second invasion of Đại Việt in 1285. The original work of Lê Tắc was written in China, in Chinese characters. It was composed during the last years of the 13th century and the first decade(s) of the 14th century, and is one of the earliest known historical accounts of Vietnam. The reason for this vague time span is that the author Lê Tắc lived in exile in China from the time of his defection in 1285 until his death, sometime after 1335 when he wrote the autobiography included in the text. In this section, the author describes his own origin and, more importantly, his own eyewitness accounts of what happened during the third Mongol invasion of Đại Việt in 1287–8. These events occurred while he was accompanying the Mongol Prince Togan to move into Đại Việt. The main body of the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam*, therefore, must have been written after this period, that is between 1288 and approximately 1328–1329 when it was first presented to the Yuan court to be used as the basis of a ‘supplement’ on Annam, according to the annotation of the Committee of Translators of Huế University in 1962 (*Abbrieviated Records of An Nam*, p. xiii). The Committee suggested that the original 20 chapters of the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* were included in *Jingshi dadian*, one of the main documents used to compile *Yuanshi* at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, but admitted that they could not find any other document to confirm this, apart from relying on the various explanations included in the text. By the Qing dynasty, the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* is thought to have been entrenched in Chinese historical documents based on *Jingshi dadian*, but, for unknown reasons, only 19 chapters of it survived (*ibid.*). This is the manuscript in circulation today, in different countries like China, the United Kingdom and Japan.

The earliest full manuscript in existence in the West probably dates from the eighteenth century and is kept at the British Library.²² The 19 chapters of the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* preserved in Chinese historical documents are the only working text of this important document, but, similar to other ancient records, it is impossible to ascertain that this manuscript is the exact copy of its original, and to know what happened to the chapter still missing. However, as the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* was considered to have been kept as part of Chinese historical documents up to the Qing dynasty shows that it could have been written from a Chinese perspective to present the events occurring

22 The British Library, ‘Dreams of Vietnam’ Exhibition, (June–August 2002).

during the Mongol invasions of Southeast Asia between 1258 and 1294. It, therefore, offers a contrasting view to what was recorded in the *Vietnamese Annals*.

The 19 chapters translated into romanised Vietnamese were re-assembled from the manuscripts kept in Japan and the British Library by The Committee for the Translation of Vietnamese Historical Records at Huế University, and published in 1962. This publication contains three types of scripts: Han Chinese, a Nôm (simplified Chinese characters) transcription of the original Chinese, and a translation into Romanised Vietnamese. It is also annotated by the Huế University Committee of Translators. For the Mongol activities in Đại Việt and Champa, I cite this source as an opposite view of the same events recorded by the official *Vietnamese Annals*, in order to present a balanced picture of events. Apart from its value as a historical eyewitness account, the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* also contains a number of imperial letters written by the Yuan and the Trần emperors on matters related to events happening during the Mongol invasions of Đại Việt and Champa. Sometimes, these royal exchanges showed a reality different from the official events listed elsewhere in the same volume, and, as such, concur with *Vietnamese Annals*. It is a remarkable revelation in an account written from the Mongol perspective.

Rashid-al-Din's *Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, translated from Persian by W.M. Thackston in 1998, is another document relevant to the period discussed in this paper. It is a well-known primary source on the Mongols in Europe, the Middle-East and Central Asia, but is rarely used for Mongol activities in China and Southeast Asia. Rashid-al-Din's description of many locations in China and in Southeast Asian is rather vague, but on the workings of the Yuan court and the actions of the emperor Kublai Khan, he was more informed than many contemporary Chinese or Vietnamese historians. For, even when vague, the people and events that he mentioned serve as clues to be expanded and compared with other accounts elsewhere, in more geographically informed documents of the region. One example is his assertion that Đại Việt was never a vassal state of Yuan China, even though they 'tried to conquer it a few times' (*Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, part two, p. 447). Another example is his description of how Prince Togan was treated by Kublai Khan on his return, after failing to subdue Đại Việt twice (*ibid*). The reason Rashid-al-Din's account is well informed about the Yuan dynasty is that, after Kublai Khan became the Mongol Great Khan, the Il-Khan of Persia was the only brother Kublai Khan was still in good terms with. As a valued courtier at the Il-khan's court, Rashid-al-Din then had access to many of the letters exchanged between the two Khans, even though he never visited China.

For the purpose of comparing views on the Mongols under Kublai Khan, I briefly refer to a controversial work published in several manuscripts and attributed to Marco Polo, on his alleged time at the court of Kublai Khan. The version I use is *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 1 and 2 by Henry Yule, after consulting other versions in both French and English. For example, this version illustrates the Mongols' view of the elephant. This animal, and the Mongols' reaction to it has been specially mentioned in a number of accounts such as Rashid-al-Din's *Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, *An Nam Chí Lược*, and Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư, but the Marco Polo manuscripts were the best-known texts that brought the Mongols' view on the elephant to attention in the West. Thanks to this, it has been thought that the Mongol first encounter with this animal was in Burma in 1283, whereas, in fact, the Mongols had met the elephants 25 years earlier, in Vietnam, in 1258 according to *Yuanshi* (*Vietnamese Annals*, Vol. 2, p. 27, and note 48, p. 259) and the two contrasting texts of *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* (p. 85), and *Vietnamese Annals* (p. 259, note 49) on the same event.

Documents about Champa are rare. A number of written materials collected by Vietnamese and international scholars on Champa were scattered during the recent war and when the Vietnam War was over in 1975. Some international ones went into private archives, or were buried in forgotten depots. At the same time, some Vietnamese Cham people took their family records to their new homes, in the Western hemisphere as well as in Southeast Asia. When the Cham exiles in Cambodia were persecuted by the Khmer Rouge in the latter part of the 1970s, more materials went missing. Meanwhile, the documents left in Vietnam were not very well preserved for two reasons. First the Cham ethnic group is considered to be only one of the 54 ethnic minorities of today's Vietnam, and second, that it has been almost totally assimilated into Vietnamese culture. Matters related to Champa are thus treated as having minor interest. That said, another reason is simpler but much more destructive; the old records were destroyed by the Cham families themselves, to get away from their duty of organising costly annual cleansing and praying ceremonies, according to Cham practices.²³ The passing of time, the destructive nature of war, and the typical humidity of the region contributed further to the loss of Cham documents. To date, there are very few Cham manuscripts in existence, and all of them pertain to the period following the fall of Vijaya in 1471. As such, they do not pertain to the events assessed in this paper. To assess what happened in Champa during the Mongol invasion of these kingdoms, I rely on the Cham inscriptions on stones, some said to have been made by Prince Harijit himself. I also rely on accounts in Vietnamese and Chinese records. Many inscriptions have been translated into French by various French scholars such as Louis Finot and compiled by Claude Jacques.

To assess the terrain and situation at the time of the Mongol invasion of the Vijaya part of the Cham kingdoms, I consulted a number of maps and road surveys by the French architect Henri Parmentier and army officer Lunet De Lajonquière, and, later, by the U.S Army operating in the area (Parmentier 1936:30; De Lajonquière 1902–11:xxii–xxx).

A surprising document that contributed to this paper is a new and relatively unknown Vietnamese text. It exists in the form of a comprehensive report on a Vietnamese survey of the Bình Định province, where Vijaya, the main centre of power for Champa in the thirteenth century, was situated (Lê 2002). The bay of Quy Nhơn in Bình Định province was also the location of the Mongol invasion of Champa in 1283–4. This is a little-known text outside Vietnam, and is kept in the archives of the Historical Museum of Saigon. In this collection of reports on Bình Định province, compiled during the late 1990s, many Cham sites are identified and assessed by Vietnamese historians and archaeologists. It helps to give a geographical context to places mentioned vaguely in earlier Chinese and Vietnamese publications, such as Sodu's biography in the *Yuanshi* and events during the Mongol invasion of 1283–5, chronicled in *Vietnamese Annals* and *Abbreviated Records of An Nam*.

23 Văn Môn and Professor Thành Phần of University of Ho Chi Minh city, discussion at 'Manuskrip Campa' Seminar in Kuala Lumpur, December 2004.

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