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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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Nargum, Persian envoy to Muscovy, to Usbek in Paris

Of all the nations on earth, my dear Usbek, there is none that has surpassed that of the Tartars, either in glory or in the grandeur of its conquests. [1] That people is the true dominator of the universe ; all the others seem to be made to serve it. It is equally the founder and destroyer of empires ; at all times it has given to the earth signs of its power ; in all ages it has been the scourge of nations.

The Tartars have twice conquered China, [2] and they still hold it under their obeisance.

They hold sway over the vast countries that make up the empire of the Mogul.

Masters of Persia, they are seated on the throne of Cyrus and of Gustaspes. [3] They have subjected Muscovy. Under the name of Turks they have made immense conquests in Europe, Asia and Africa, and they hold sway over these three parts of the earth.

And to speak of more distant times, it is from them that have come almost all the peoples who overthrew the Roman empire. [4]

What are the conquests of Alexander, in comparison to those of Genghis Kahn ?

The only thing this victorious nation has lacked is historians to celebrate the memory of its wonders.

How many immortal acts have been buried in oblivion ! How many empires which they founded, whose origins we do not know ? This bellicose nation, focused solely on its present glory, sure of conquering in all eras, had no thought for standing out in the future by the memory of past conquests.

Moscow this 4th day of the moon of Rebiab I, 1715

[1] The Tartars or Mongols are commonly presented as destroyers of civilizations : "The Asiatic Tartars have a strong inclination for war, and are reputed the best archers in the world. Their disputes generally end in the ravaging and desolation of the enemy's country." (Collier 1701). Montesquieu's principal source here is doubtless the *Histoire du grand Genghizcan* (1710) by Pétis de la Croix (1622-1695).

[2] Genghis Khan took Beijing in 1215, and his son Koublai unified China under his authority in 1279. The Mongol domination in China lasted until 1371. A new series of "Tartar" invasions (modern historians identify these invaders as Manchus), beginning in 1619, permitted establishment of their emperor in 1642, a child of six, Xun-Chi.

[3] See letter 65.

[4] Notably the Huns.