

**Triplicated Triplets: The Number  
Nine in the *Secret History***

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The T'o-pa, Tü-chüeh, Kitan, and Mongol Qaghans submitted to ceremonies of investiture which included nine sun-wise revolutions on a carpet held aloft (Boodberg 1939: 243). Gifts of animals and other items of wealth were presented in units of nine and tokens of submission were presented in the same number. As recently as Manchu times, the Ch'ing emperor continued to be presented tribute in the form of nine white animals by Mongol chieftains. Mongol customary law after the seventeenth century provided for punishments in terms of nine, either payments of fines or corporal punishment (Riasanovsky 1965: 165)

There is, thus, a long history of the significance of the number in both religion and politics. At some time in the past there may have been a blending of religious shamanistic numerology and chancellery practices in different eras in Inner Asia. In the earliest Mongolian historical record, the *Secret History of the Mongols* of the thirteenth century, the occurrence of the number nine [*yisün*], or certain of its combinations with three [*qurban*], gives evidence of being used to deliberately indicate that the events described carry special if not sacred meaning. In this paper, I am attempting to explore those events in the

times in the numbers 13, 30, 1300, and 3000 (de Rachewiltz 1972: 342).

him out of the text. They also describe the rendering of tribute in multiples of nine, acts which are not recorded for any other ruler conquered by Mongols, at least in the *Secret History*. The use of nine is thus greatly circumscribed.

What follows is a survey of the occurrences and an examination of the events surrounding each occurrence.

Nine (*yisün*) is used in the first two paragraphs concerning Chinggis, paragraphs 60 and 61. Although paragraph 59 describes his birth, the author moves immediately in paragraph 60 to events which took place supposedly at age nine, rather than a straight narrative of the years in between:

60. From Hö'elün of Yisugei-ba'atur were born the four sons:  
Temüjin, Qasar, Qasir, and Temüjin. When Temüjin was nine

refuge on the Terevne Heights of Burgan. The heights were \_\_\_\_\_



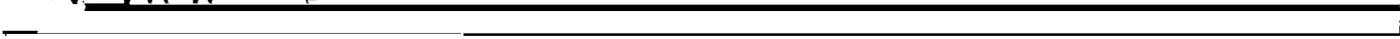
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I climbed the Burqan  
On a hobbled horse, following deer tracks;  
A hut, built of elm twigs,  
I made my home.

Thanks to Burqan-qaldun  
I saved my life, a louse's life.  
Fearing for my life, my only life.

I climbed the Qaldun  
On one horse, following elk tracks;  
A hut of broken willow twigs  
I made my home.

Thanks to Qaldun-burqan  
I shielded my life, a grasshopper's life.

But I was never frightened. From morning I will sacrifice to

left the new Mongol-ruled confederation. This challenge was met by

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