

CHAPTER 10

THE MONGOLS IN IRAN

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IRAN was dramatically brought into the Mongol sphere of influence toward the end of the second decade of the thirteenth century. As well as the initial traumatic military incursions, Iran also experienced the start of prolonged martial rule, followed later by the domination and rule of the Mongol Ilkhans. However, what began as a brutal and vindictive invasion and occupation developed into a benign and culturally and economically flourishing period of unity and strength. The Mongol period in Iranian history provokes controversy and debate to this day. From the horrors of the initial bloody irruptions, when the first Mongol-led armies rampaged across northern Iran, to the glory days of the Ilkhanate-Yuan axis, when the Mongol-dominated Persian and Chinese courts dazzled the world, the Mongol influence on Iran of this turbulent period was profound.

The Mongols not only affected Iran and southwestern Asia but they also had a devastating effect on eastern Asia, Europe, and even North Africa. In many parts of the world, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas in particular, the Mongols' name has since become synonymous with murder, massacre, and marauding mayhem. They became known as Tatars or Tartars in Europe and Western Asia for two reasons. Firstly, until Genghis Khan destroyed their dominance, the Tatars were the largest and most powerful of the Turco-Mongol tribes. And secondly, in Latin *Tartarus* meant hell and these tribes were believed to have issued from the depths of Hades.

Their advent has been portrayed as a bloody "bolt from the blue" that left a trail of destruction, death, and horrified grief in its wake. Contemporary accounts paint a consistent picture of the shock and awe experienced by so many on their first encounter with this "storm from the east." The Armenian cleric and historian Kirakos (d. 1272) describes the Tatars' arrival thus:



It seems to me that even if many other [authors] narrate the same events, they will nonetheless all be found lacking, for the evils which afflicted all lands are more than can be related. For this is the end of time; and precursors have spoken about the antichrist and the arrival of the sons of destruction.... [O]ur patriarch, saint Nerses prophetically spoke about the destruction of Armenia by the Nation of the Archers, destruction and ruin encompassing all lands, which we have witnessed with our own eyes.... A few years after the destruction of [Ganja], this fanatical and wily army divided up by lot all the lands of Armenia, Georgia, and [Azerbaijan], each chief according to his importance receiving cities, districts, lands, and fortresses in order to take, demolish, and ruin them. Each [chief] went to his allotted area with his wives, sons, and military equipment where they remained without a care polluting and eating all the vegetation with their camels and livestock. (Kirakos)

A medieval Russian chronicle from Novgorod vividly describes their impact on the region:

No one exactly knows who they are, nor whence they came out, nor what their language is, nor of what race they are, nor what their faith is... God alone knows.¹

A thirteenth-century Persian eyewitness succinctly summarized their initial impact in Iran: “They came, they sapped, they burnt, they slew, they plundered and they departed.”² The Arab chronicler Ibn al-Athir, though not an eyewitness, described his emotions on hearing of the Mongols’ advent in words that have echoed down through history and colored half the world’s future generations’ perception of the Eurasian hordes.

O would that my mother had never borne me, that I had died before and that I were forgotten [so] tremendous disaster such as had never happened before, and which struck all the world, though the Muslims above all... *Dadjdjal* [Muslim Anti-Christ] will at least spare those who adhere to him, and will only destroy his adversaries. These [Mongols], however, spared none. They killed women, men, children, ripped open the bodies of the pregnant and slaughtered the unborn.³

This negative and awesome impression created by the Mongol invasion was welcomed and probably deliberately created by the invaders. Chinggis Khan (1167–1227) even described himself as “the Punishment of God” and was happy that others saw him in this role. The Mongol period is noted not only for its supposed barbarity but also for the plethora of historians and chroniclers it produced, many of them writing in Persian. These many scribes, both within the Mongol camp and outside it, were happy to pander to the Mongols’ desire for notoriety and a reputation for barbarism and cruelty. However, since the renowned Princeton historian Bernard Lewis questioned the basis of the poisoned reputation of the Mongols in 1995, scholarly opinion has grown more sympathetic toward the legacy of Chinggis Khan.

By 1206, the Turco-Mongol clans of the steppe were united under the charismatic rule of Chinggis Khan. It was the size and unity of this force and its endurance that distinguished it from previous steppe armies. Prior to Chinggis Khan,



the tribes had often been manipulated by the Chinese and other settled peoples, and often the nomads' predatory raids had been at the behest of a hidden hand. In contrast, Chinggis Khan raided for the prestige he accrued on which to build his power, and for the booty with which to placate his rivals, satisfy his followers, and outwit any reckless challenge to his rule. The initial raids into northern China and then westward into Iran and Russia over the first decades of the thirteenth century were characterized by the barbarity and cruelty with which the name of Chinggis Khan and the Mongols have become inextricably identified. However, Mongol rule subsequent to this, during the reigns of Chinggis Khan's grandsons, Hülegü in Iran (r. 1256–65) and Qubilai in China (r. 1260–94), stands in sharp contrast to this earlier violent irruption. The "Storm from the East" arose from anger, a spirit of vengeance, and a need for the assertion of power.

Chinggis Khan, the leader of the "people of the felt-walled tents" and the "the peoples of the Nine Tongues,"⁴ had been born Temüjin and had endured a brutal and brutalizing childhood. His father was murdered when he was still young, and subsequently his mother and siblings were abandoned by their clan to survive in a very harsh and unforgiving environment. Compassion was not a valued virtue on the steppe. This was a society of submit or be challenged, fight or be beaten, and often kill or be killed.

Force of personality, military and physical might, and tribal alliances were the means through which tribal leaders of the steppe clans rose to power. They maintained power only by delivering on promises of wealth and plenty. If the promise did not materialize, the leader fell, or was forced to join an alliance with another leader who could meet the aspirations of the tribe. Steppe life was brutal, and knowing nothing else it was this ethos that the steppe tribes initially exported.

The Mongols themselves were few in number, but from the outset Chinggis absorbed other Turkic tribes, and later any conquered troops, into his armies. He used traditional steppe military tactics, with light cavalry, feigned retreats, and skillful archery, to conduct what were initially raids of pillage and plunder from bases in the steppe into the "sown." Terror, real and imagined, was an important element in the success of these raids. In 1211, the Mongols invaded the independent Jin of northern China, helped by renegade seminomadic Khitans, in a struggle that continued until 1234, after Chinggis's death. It was the defeat of the Jin capital, Zhongdu, the site of modern Beijing, that gave rise to one of the most notorious stories of Mongol atrocities.

[a envoy from the Khwarazmshah] saw a white hill and in answer to his query was told by the guide that it consisted of bones of the massacred inhabitants. At another place the earth was, for a long stretch of the road, greasy from human fat and the air was so polluted that several members of the mission became ill and some died. This was the place, they were told, where on the day that the city was stormed 60,000 virgins threw themselves to death from the fortifications in order to escape capture by the Mongols.⁵

Chinggis Khan then turned his attention westward in campaigns against the Khwarazmshah and the Qara Khitai, a seminomadic tribe originally from

northwestern China. The Qara Khitai were related to the Khitans of northern China, who had already helped the Mongols defeat the Jin or Jurchen, whom they viewed as oppressors and usurpers of the Khitans' ancestral lands.

It should be remembered that the first Turco-Mongol invasion, the “forgotten” Turco-Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century, was generally accepted and sometimes even welcomed by the Islamic world, and that the Qara Khitai had no problem recruiting Muslim Uyghurs to their infidel administration. Qadi Imam Ibn Mahmud Uzjandi, a Persian notable, “saw the rectitude of seeking connections with the Khitai”;⁷ while Arudi Samarqandi observed that “[the Ghurkhan’s] justice had no bounds, nor was there any limit to the effectiveness of his commands, and indeed, in these two things lies the essence of kingship.”⁶ The Qara Khitai leadership, though infidel, had always been sympathetic and supportive to their Muslim subjects, and hence they had always received the support and approval of the caliph and the rest of the Islamic world.⁸ However after the Qara Khitai leadership had welcomed into their court Küchlüg, the Naiman fugitive from the newly victorious armies of Chinggis Khan, their demise was inevitable. Küchlüg very quickly insinuated himself into the Qara Khitai royal family, exploiting their goodwill and his noble connections, and once a marriage had been established he conspired with the Qara Khitai’s neighbor, the Khwarazmshah, and seized the throne. Once in control, Küchlüg reversed the tolerant religious policies of his predecessors and instigated a reign of terror and oppression against his Muslim subjects, apparently unopposed by the Khwarazmshah, who considered himself a rival if not enemy of the caliph of Baghdad.

Well aware of this emerging situation in eastern Turkistan, the lands of the Uyghurs, Chinggis Khan dispatched his top general, the *noyan* Jebe, with a small force to hunt down the fugitive Küchlüg. The Muslims of the former lands of the Qara Khitai welcomed Noyan Jebe and his Mongol troops as liberators and it was not long before their hated oppressor, Küchlüg, was captured and subjected to a fitting end. He was dragged to the square in front of Kashgar’s Friday mosque and, in a reenactment of his own execution of the city’s imam, he was publicly crucified to the gates of the Jama mosque. The Mongols were welcomed not only by the Muslims of the province but by the Turco-Mongol Khitans, who as descendants of the Liao, the original exiles from northern China, saw the Mongols as their potential saviors and as liberators of their ancestral lands.

In 1125, the Liao dynasty, which had ruled northern China since 907, was overthrown by the Jurchens or Jin, along with the Chinese Song dynasty. The Song royal family fled south and established their capital in Hangzhou, whereas the Khitans, led by Prince Yelü Dashi, fled westward, eventually settling in eastern Turkistan, where after the decisive victory at the battle of Qatwan in 1141 against the Great Saljuq, Sanjar, they were accepted as part of the Dar al-Islam.

This initial victory of the Mongols over Küchlüg was greatly welcomed by both the Muslims and the Khitans, who saw the opportunities now opening for them. For the Khitans there was the opportunity to return in triumph to their ancestral lands, and for the Muslim Uyghurs there was the opportunity for positions in the

administration of the growing “empire” and as merchants and representatives on the trade routes between east and west. What should be stressed is that the Mongols’ first contact with the Islamic world was welcome and positive, and that those who took advantage of the opportunities on offer, such as Mahmud Yalavach and his sons Mas‘ud Beg and Ali Beg, were rewarded in the following years with power, influence, and prestige.

It was with reluctance and initial trepidation that the Mongols rode out against Khwarazm (present-day Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), the first Muslim state to experience the full fury of the Mongol onslaught. The Khwarazmshah Ala al-Din Mohammad (r. 1200–20) nominally ruled over an empire that encompassed modern-day Iran, Afghanistan, and much of Transoxiana. However, deep divisions rent his predominantly Muslim lands, and besides bitter external enemies, such as the caliph in Baghdad, the Khwarazmshah was surrounded by enemies within. Even his court was a dangerous pit of violent intrigue between his Persian supporters from the urban areas and the south and followers of his mother, often representing the Qipchaq Turks and other nomadic and pagan elements, from the north. It was marauding, bloodthirsty bands of these Qipchaq and other Turkic elements that had long instilled fear and loathing in the Persian and Arab lands to the south. Often the confrontation occurred in the south in the lands of Iraq between the caliph’s armies and the Khwarazmshah’s Qipchaq hordes, and it was widely believed that it was the caliph himself who “roused the Tatars’ ambition for the lands of Islam”⁹ by requesting the Great Khan’s help in ridding him of his troublesome neighbor.

The invasion by the Mongol forces of the Khwarazmshah’s Turco-Persian empire was in retaliation for the murder of a commercial and political trade delegation composed of Mongols, Chinese, and Uyghur Muslims. Chinggis Khan had hoped for an alliance between his forces and those of his seemingly powerful neighbor: “I am the sovereign of the Sun-rise, and thou the sovereign of the Sun-set.”¹⁰ But the suicidal arrogance of the sultan’s riposte to these peaceful overtures left only one possible Mongol response. As the self-proclaimed “Punishment of God,” Chinggis Khan unleashed the bloody invasion and merciless devastation on the Islamic west that have made his name synonymous with barbaric mass slaughter.

The trail of blood and massacres that followed the crumbling of the Khwarazmshah’s empire in 1220 led from Central Asia through Iran to the Caucasus and north into the plains of Russia. Bukhara and Samarqand, capitals of Persian culture, were emptied and their walls and buildings razed. The citizens were slaughtered, scattered, sold into slavery, or transported to other parts of the empire where their skills as artisans or artists were valued. The chronicles have told us that 1.6 or possibly even 2.4 million were put to the sword in Herat, while in Nishapur, the city of Omar Khayyam, 1.747 million were slaughtered. Though these figures cannot be taken literally, they indicate that the scale of the slaughter was unprecedented. The two Mongol *noyans* (generals) Jebe and Sübedei led an expedition in pursuit of the fleeing Khwarazmshah, demanding that the citizens of the



cities and towns in their path choose either submission, with possible employment as human shields for the advancing Mongol armies, or death, destruction, and slavery. Outside every town they came upon, the Mongols would deliver a chilling message: “Submit! And if ye do otherwise, what know we? God knoweth.” In fact there were few who did not fully know the implications of that ominous “otherwise.”

This epic cavalry mission of *noyans* Jebe and Sübedei is perhaps the greatest military reconnaissance trip of all time. It included not only intelligence gathering but conquest, massacres, and widespread pillaging in all the lands neighboring the Caspian Sea and beyond. In Iran and the Caucasus, the terror unleashed by those two generals ensured fear-filled obedience for decades to come. Jebe and Sübedei’s expedition of pursuit, terror, and reconnaissance represents the Mongols at their destructive peak, and thereafter their armies became, for those who fell under the shadow of their approach, both the invincible wrath of God and the emissaries of the biblical Gog and Magog.¹¹ The Mongols wore their notoriety like a *khil’at*, a traditional brocade robe of honor.

Khorasan in particular suffered grievously for the sins of the Khwarazmshah. The numbers of those massacred and the extent of the destruction might well have been exaggerated, but the trauma was very real and the devastation widespread. However, there was method in the Mongols’ madness. Artisans and craftsmen, with their families, were often spared the Mongols’ fury and, separated from their less fortunate fellow citizens, they were often forcibly exported east to practice their crafts in other parts of the empire. In Khwarazm (Khiva) in 1221, it is said that each of the 50,000 Mongol troops was assigned twenty-four Muslims to slaughter before being able to loot and pillage. It is also reported that Chinggis Khan personally implored the famed Sufi master and founder of the Kubrawiya Sufi order, Najm al-Din Kubra, to accept safe passage out of the condemned city. The saint refused but allowed his disciples to accept. Even at this early stage, the “barbarian” Tatars demonstrated a respect for and knowledge of scholars and learning.

There is a tradition prevalent among some Sufi sects that rather than suffering his fate silently in the rubble of Bukhara, it was Najm al-Din Kubra who actually unleashed the Mongols upon the iniquitous Khwarazmshah. Other similar traditions have a dervish leading the Mongol forces into Khwarazm, the holy man and spiritual guide, al-Khidr, assuming that role, and the Mongols enjoying divine protection and guidance as they rode out of the east.¹²

Though Chinggis died in 1227, his empire, unlike other steppe empires, survived through his progeny, who succeeded in maintaining and extending his power and territories. Chinggis Khan rode out from the steppe as a nomadic ruler intent on rapine, pillage, and booty. Combining these traditional steppe practices with dexterous political and military skills, he proved unstoppable. The devastation he inflicted differed only in its scale from the raids of other nomadic rulers before him. Cities were razed, walls consistently demolished, the *qanat* system of underground irrigation was both damaged physically and, perhaps more seriously, allowed to fall into disrepair through neglect. Though superlatives have been liberally applied to Chinggis Khan and his triumphant hordes, it is worth pausing to consider a recent



detailed study of the available sources that aims to uncover the reality beneath the adjectives and adverbs. Charles Melville's lecture at the Indo-Mongolian Society, New York University, on the impact of the invasion concludes that the devastation and brutality of the Mongol invasion has been much overstated and that this exaggeration was welcomed by the Mongols themselves, who enjoyed and benefited from their fearsome reputation. It should also be borne in mind that just as the Muslim former subjects of the Qara Khitai welcomed Noyan Jebe and the initial Mongol advance, so too did many of the merchants, local governors, and disgruntled commanders under the nominal rule of the Khwarazmshah welcome the embracing power from the east that would open up frontiers long locked in danger and warfare. Though devastating, much of the devastation occurred in the mind rather than on the ground.

However, Chinggis was astute enough to realize that continued pillage and killing in order to satisfy the material needs of his hordes would be counterproductive and would eventually succeed only in destroying the source of their wealth. He knew that the "sown" must be fed rather than just fed off. He had wreaked horror and destruction on an unprecedented scale and had achieved legendary status within his own lifetime. As long as he could deliver the riches to quiet his voracious followers, he and his progeny would reign unchallenged.

Chinggis was a man of vision. The blood and destruction, the plunder and the terror had been in the tradition of the age-old conflict between the steppe and the sown. Often apparent adversaries, the steppe and the sown had in fact a symbiotic relationship. Though the steppe seemed to have achieved an overwhelming victory, Chinggis knew that its future depended on the sown. The mean tents of his childhood had been transformed into the lavish pavilions of his kingdom. The ragged camps of old had been replaced by mobile cities of wealth, splendor, and sophistication. The infamy he now enjoyed served as his security.

In fact, the death tolls recorded and the descriptions of the desolation his armies had caused were beyond credibility. The province of Herat, let alone the city, could not have sustained a population of two million, and the logistics involved in actually murdering this number of people within a matter of days are inconceivable. Who would have maintained order as the victims awaited their turn for execution? How would knives and swords been kept sharp and clean for such an arduous task? Where would the mounting piles of bodies and their possessions been stored? Would the executioners have worked shifts and continued through the night? Would food and drink have been served to executioners and victims as the job proceeded? Chroniclers such as Ibn al-Athir, not an eyewitness himself, did much to perpetuate the mythology of the Mongol rule of terror.

A single one of them [Mongol] would enter a village or quarter wherein were many people, and would continue to slay them one after another, none daring to stretch forth his hand against this horseman. And I have heard that one of them took a man captive, but had not with him any weapon wherewith to kill him; and he said to his prisoner, 'Lay your head on the ground and do not move'; and he did so, and the Tatar went and fetched his sword and slew him therewith.¹³



These apocryphal tales and the exaggerated accounts of massacres and mayhem were believed as literal truth. This vision of the Tatars as a visitation from hell was readily accepted by religious zealots, both Christian and Muslim, who were able to shift responsibility for the carnage onto the sins and laxity of their faithful followers.

Before his death, Chinggis Khan had appointed his second son Ögödei as his successor and divided his empire among the other progeny. To Jochi (d. 1226), who died before his father, went the lands of the west; to Chagatai (d. 1242) the lands of what is today eastern Turkistan, including western China; Ögödei (d. 1241) received lands to the east of this encompassing the Altai and Tarbagatai mountains as far as Lake Baikal. The youngest son Tolui (d. 1232), as tradition dictated, was granted the ancestral homelands in Mongolia. By 1241, Batu, Chinggis's grandson, had overrun the principalities of Russia, subdued Eastern Europe, and reached the coastline of Croatia. The year 1256 saw the demise of the Assassins of Iran; 1258 witnessed the fall of Baghdad and the caliph of Sunni Islam, and another grandson, Hülegü, firmly established in Western Asia. Qubilai Khan was able to proclaim himself not only Great Khan but also, in 1279, the emperor of a united China. But the seeds of contention had also grown and spread their tentacles to the far reaches of the empire.

On Chinggis Khan's decree, Batu, son of the firstborn Jochi, had been granted all those lands to the west "trodden by Tatar hoof." This included Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus, but most controversially northern Iran, the rich pastures of Azerbaijan, and all those other lands that had been trampled under the thunderous hooves of the *noyans* Jebe and Sübedei during their infamous reconnaissance trip of 1222. In 1251, after a bloody and contentious election, Möngke Khan, oldest of the sons of Tolui, assumed the leadership of the Mongol Empire, and the splits breaking the unity of the empire became open. Möngke sent one brother, Qubilai, to rule in the East and another brother, Hülegü, to rule in the west. However, the lands that Hülegü traveled west to claim, the lands from the banks of the Oxus to the banks of the Nile, included those areas of northern Iran, Azerbaijan, and the Caucasus claimed by the sons of Jochi. Following the death of the universally respected Batu Khan in 1255 and Hülegü's assumption of power in Maragheh circa 1258, Berke Khan, Batu's brother and the new commander of the Golden Horde, declared war on his cousin Hülegü. This was not only a war over territory but also a war for the soul of the Mongol empire. The new rulers of Iran and China, the Toluids Hülegü and Qubilai, represented the new face of the Mongol conquerors. They were no longer the traditional steppe warriors of old. Many of the traditionally minded Mongols more aware of their nomadic roots did not like what they saw. It was this dichotomy that rent the Mongol Empire apart after the death of Möngke in 1259 and lay at the heart of the bitterly and bloodily contested civil war that followed, leaving Qubilai Great Khan of a fragmented empire.

War and conquest continued, but the nature of the conquerors and rulers had changed. Qubilai Qa'an (Qa'an is equivalent to "khan of khans" or Great Khan) is quoted in contemporary Chinese sources as declaring that "having seized the body, hold the soul, if you hold the soul, where could the body go?" to explain his support



and cultivation of Tibetan Buddhism.¹⁴ The new generation of Mongols were essentially settled nomads, living in semipermanent urban camps, educated, sophisticated, and appreciative of life's fineries and luxuries. Qubilai Qa'an has been described as "the greatest cosmopolitan ruler that has ever been known in history."¹⁵ His brother Hülegü and the Ilkhans in Iran received other plaudits for their rule and their justice, far-sightedness, and statesmanship. Both Toluid rulers represented the new face of the Mongols, and it was their economic, cultural, and political alliance that transformed both Iran and China and the lands under their sway.

Once in power, the Mongol princes avowedly sought to rule their subjects with justice and tolerance and for the prosperity of all. They ruled by the standards of the time, and contemporaries differentiate between the rude "barbarian" nomads of the past and their present masters ensconced in their fabulous imperial courts.

The ragged remains of the Khwarazmshah's army, led by the bandit king Jalal al-Din Mingburnu, inspired far more fear and loathing than did the disciplined Mongol troops. Though the Iranian statesman and historian Ata Malik Ala al-Din Juwayni portrayed Jalal al-Din Khwarazmshah as a hero bravely continuing the battle for "Persian independence" against impossible odds, the reality, as Juwayni well knew, was that the adventurer was battling solely for his own survival and his own selfish ends. This iconic Persian hero, "leaping like a stag"¹⁶ across the mountains and deserts of Iran, whose daring won the admiration of Chinggis Khan himself, met his end in the lonely mountains of Kurdistan in 1231, robbed and murdered by bandits who probably never knew who their victim was. Sightings of Jalal al-Din continued to be reported, and his questionable departure endowed him with an almost mystical and mythical status.

The Mongols had never targeted specific groups for persecution on religious, nationalistic, or ethnic grounds. When Baghdad was attacked, it was with the advice of Muslim advisers such as Nasir al-Din Tusi, and many of the supporting armies were led by Muslim rulers fighting under the banner of Islam. Co-option was the desired result of conquest or the threat of attack. Top administrators in all parts of the empire were Mongol, Chinese, Persian, Uyghur, Armenian, European, or Turkish. Loyalty and ability were prized above ethnicity or religion. A center of learning was established around 1260 in Iran's first Mongol capital, Maragheh. It attracted scholars from around the world who flocked, in particular, to see the observatory built for the court favorite, Tusi. The Syriac cleric, historian, philosopher, and writer Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) used the libraries, stocked from the ruins of Baghdad, Alamut, and other conquered cultural centers, to research his own acclaimed studies and his renowned history. The Nation of Archers had changed its priorities.

But the incorporation of the Iranian heartlands into the Mongol Empire proper was not a one-sided decision. The Persian notables of the various Iranian city-states had not been unaware of events and developments in the east. Westerners were not infrequent visitors to the increasingly opulent and cosmopolitan Mongol court. The accession of Möngke Khan witnessed an acceleration of traffic to Qaraqorum of supplicants eager to assure their place in the new world order. Among those eager



supplicants was an embassy from Qazvin, a city with strong links with the Mongol elite, that sought more than the usual requests for recognition, allegiance, and aid. The notables of Qazvin, and in particular the Iftikhar family, had long and close ties with the Mongol nobility, including a position as tutor to the young Toluid princes.¹⁷ This embassy from Qazvin, led by their chief qadi and including merchants, wished to capitalize on those links and finally “bring Iran in from the cold” and have their land incorporated fully into the empire, with a royal prince appointed to replace the corrupt and heavy-handed military governor, Baiju Noyan. The elite of Qazvin would have been fully aware of the success and prosperity of fellow Muslims and Persian communities elsewhere in the empire. Persians and Muslims were well represented in the *keshig* (imperial or Praetorian guard). The omnipresent *bitikchis* (administrative officials) were generally recruited from non-Mongols, and Muslims swelled their ranks.¹⁸

The likes of Sayyid Ajall Shams al-Din Umar al-Bukhari, long before his elevation to governor of Dali (in modern-day Yunnan, China), would have been an inspiration for those left in the anarchy of the Iranian Plateau. His grandfather, along with his troops, had surrendered to the Mongols after the defeat of the Khwarazmshah, and his son had entered the Mongols’ army of bureaucrats. The infant Sayyid Ajall was a “child of the empire” and grew up in the *keshig* before receiving postings around the Mongols’ expanding territory. A Muslim, Sayyid Ajall’s loyalty was to the state that nurtured him, gave him aspirations, and met those aspirations. He would have identified with the elite of that multiethnic and multicultural state. He was a Muslim and a “Persian” and a member of the ruling elite of the Mongol superstate. He was absorbed into the Mongol polity around 1220, and now the notables of Qazvin saw that their time had come and that with the raising of Möngke Khan, their former young charge, to Great Khan they should act now and seek a reassessment of their status vis-à-vis Qaraqorum. That a conspiracy was afoot when the delegation traveled eastward is made plain by later developments.

Ata Malik Juwayni recognized God’s secret intent in unleashing the Mongols onto the Islamic world not only in the annihilation of the Isma‘ilis but in the rise of Möngke Khan and the placing of the “keys to the lands of the world” in the “hands of the [Mongols’] power” (*dar dast-i qodrat*).¹⁹ Juwayni, having traveled east himself, was fully aware that Persians and Muslims were among those who exercised the Mongols’ power. The “conspiracy” envisaged the appointment of a royal prince who would establish a seat in the West and who could be co-opted and integrated into the political and cultural elite of Iran. That this was the unspoken agenda and long-term plan is made plain by the appearance of Qadi Badawi’s “pocket history,” the *Nizām al-tavārikh*, which hardly a decade after Hülegü Khan’s establishment of his seat of government in Maragheh was already portraying the Ilkhanate as a legitimate and entrenched Iranian dynasty.²⁰ The secondary aim of conversion of the Mongol leadership to Islam would not be realized for more than another four decades, but their gradual conversion to Persian culture was evident in the immersion of the Mongol elite grouped



around the Ilkhan in the cultural landscape, as exemplified by the Mongol *noyan* Suqunjaq (Suqunchaq).²¹

Juwayni had begun his history of the Mongols at the urging of his companions at Möngke's court, and his imagery drew from deep within Iran's rich mythological and cultural heritage to adorn and dress his Mongol heroes. Juwayni had begun a process that would cumulate in the magnificent creation of the Mongol *Shahnameh* (an illustrated manuscript often identified by the name of a former owner, Georges Demotte). Möngke's court receptions invoke the verses of Ferdowsi, while Sorqotani Beki, mother of the ruling Toluid brothers, Hülegü Khan, and the Mongol army are adorned in the words and images of Iran's defining epic, the *Shahnameh*. Juwayni was writing an unfolding history, and he must have been fully aware of the weight his words might bear and the echo his images would chime. He was painting the Mongols not so much as they wished to be seen but more as he and the Persian elite might wish them to become.

Hülegü's assault on the Isma'ilis' stronghold was widely welcomed, and there was little sign of opposition to the devastating attack on Baghdad, in which the Iranian local leaders were well represented. The Iranians had assessed the potential and outcome of the establishment of a Mongol regime and they knew that they had little to lose and possibly a great deal to gain. The caliph had failed on all counts. He had neither unified the Muslim world nor confronted its enemies in the form of the Isma'ilis and the Khwarazmian brigands. Their new ruler, Hülegü, had sought legitimacy from his subjects and had received a fatwa from the 'alim Ibn Tavus stating that a just infidel ruler was preferable to an unjust Muslim sovereign [ibn Tabatana, p. 14; ibn Taqtaqi, pp. 18–19].²² If the Persian notables had dared to envisage a partnership, Hülegü did not douse their optimism.

Hülegü was quickly adopted by the notables of Iran as a "legitimate" sovereign in that his position as king was fully accepted and recognized, and his new subjects were quick to realize that they were to enjoy a large degree of autonomy and joint rule. There was not the passive resistance of the intellectuals said to have occurred in Yuan China, the other half of the Toluid state, though the extent of this resistance has been greatly overstated [see Jay].²³ Even the ulema retained their positions of influence and prestige, and those high officials who took part in the Mongol administration never suffered rebuke or criticism from their compatriots. In the case of the Parvana of Rum, his own self-doubts were allayed and put to rest by the renowned Sufi poet and former leading member of the ulema, Jalal al-Din Rumi [*Fiyeh māfiyeh*, p. 23; tr. p.11].²⁴ Hülegü himself, now armed with a fatwa to legitimize his rule, encouraged those with ability, Muslim or otherwise, to seek the highest posts.

When Hülegü arrived in Iran, he did so at the request of a delegation sent to the Great Khan Möngke, his brother, in the Mongol capital Qaraqorum. The delegation was led by a religious leader, the Qadi of Qazvin, who in 1252 requested the Great Khan Möngke to replace the military governor of Iran, the *noyan* Baiju, with a royal prince, "to build a bridge" so that Iran might enjoy the rule of justice and law present in other parts of the empire.

A.Q: 2

A.Q: 3

A.Q: 4



O illustrious and magnanimous Qa'an we do not speak of a bridge made of stone, or brick, nor a bridge of chains. I want a bridge of justice over that river, for where there is justice, the world is prosperous. He who comes over the river Amu Darya [Oxus] finds the Qa'an's justice, and on this side of the river there is justice and a path. On that side of the river, the world is evil, and some people become prosperous through injustice.²⁵ [Mustawfi, *Zafarnāmeḥ*, vol.II, p.5]

A.Q: 5

Hülegü's arrival and welcome in Iran stands in sharp contrast to the arrival of the Mongol envoys thirty years before. For Iran, Hülegü represented the return of a king. Hülegü's establishment of a state in Iran toward the end of the 1250s marked an end to an enduring period of anarchy that had prevailed in the region since the early twelfth century. As he began his leisurely journey westward, he was waylaid by well-wishers and greeted by dignitaries and rulers from throughout the west.

There came willingly to his service a large number of the princes and generals. People came from every house and from by roads to praise him. At every halting place where they stopped, they received praise from those along the way.²⁶

A.Q: 6

[Mustawfi, *Zafarnāmeḥ*, vol.II, p.17]

Even the Isma'ili Khurshah sent representatives to earn his goodwill and pledge allegiance. Rulers such as Shams al-Din Kart had already proved their loyalty on the battlefield, and local kings and royals such as those from Cilician Armenia, Kerman, Yazd, Shiraz, and other Iranian, Caucasian, and Anatolian provinces had previously established their allegiance and "devotion" to the Mongols. Hülegü had little to fear from the country he was entering, and the opposition he expected, namely from the Isma'ilis, he was well prepared to greet. Even his later treatment of Khurshah was merciful, and it was not at Hülegü's hand or command that the Nizari Imam met his fate. This was not a man seeking vengeance and destruction. Hülegü Khan came westward to further Mongol overall hegemony over the Islamic lands and to establish his own power base in Iran and Iraq.

The scale and extent of his support on the ground is recorded by a contemporary, Qutb al-Din Shirāzī, writing in 1283. The writer's point is clear. Hülegü Khan operated with the support of the rulers of the whole country. The chronicle states that the Atabeg of Shiraz, the sultans of Rum, the kings of Khorasan, Sistan, Mazanderan, Kerman, Rustamdar, Shirwan, Gorjestan, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Arran, and Luristan and some other representatives all came. Others sent their brothers or relatives and they all sent men, military supplies, provisions, and gifts and placed themselves at his service.²⁷

That Hülegü had higher ambitions than the destruction and oppressive subjugation of a sedentary society is made obvious by his treatment of those who fell under his power and judgment. He was aware that he could not blindly trust even his own relatives and that the "locals" had to be cultivated at all levels and in all institutions. The Isma'ili governor of Quhistan, Naser al-Din, whose erudition was widely known, was quickly pardoned and honored despite his associations with the hated Isma'ilis, as was the renowned Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, whose denunciation of his former Isma'ili masters was instantly accepted. Nasir al-Din Tusi was almost



immediately installed in a place of honor and power in Hülegü's court, and yet his only prowess was his remarkable intellectual dexterity and scholarly reputation. In fact, it had been Möngke Khan who had assured Tusi a warm reception. Aware of Tusi's reputation as an astronomer/astrologer, he had requested that his brother entertain the eminent intellectual until such time as it would be convenient to send him eastward. Möngke wanted Tusi to build him an observatory in Qaraqorum, though the Great Khan died before Tusi had even thought of departing. Hülegü did not share his brother's passion for the stars, but he was prepared to indulge his acclaimed guest, since Baghdad's libraries to which Tusi had already laid claim were protected by a generous *waqf* whose implications were already being calculated by Tusi. The Mamluk chronicler, Ibn Aybak al-Safadi (1296–1363), reported the chagrin of the Baghdad ulema, angered at what they saw as the theft not only of their books but of the considerable funds from which the library's upkeep, salaries, and other expenses would be paid. After the fall of Baghdad, one of Tusi's first tasks was the establishment of his seat of learning in Maragheh containing his famous library of 400,000 books and hilltop observatory, a center for an international cast of academics, clerics, and scholars. Bar Hebraeus found sanctuary and peace in that haven of learning, and possibly chose the same site for a new church. Arguably, it is traces of this church that can still be seen today in Maragheh on the western face of a hill overlooking the city only thirty or forty meters beneath the observatory, the Rasad-Khaneh, only the foundations of which remain visible today.

Though destruction and looting were permitted if not encouraged during the assault on Baghdad, the destruction was not as great as has been claimed. In fact, heavy flooding in 1255 and 1256 coupled with the unremitting sectarian strife between the Shi'a and Sunni had already wreaked widespread damage to the city. Many buildings, especially churches and Shi'i mosques and the home of the Shi'i *alim*, Ibn Tавus, were spared, suggesting that the final assault and looting spree was not as unbridled and barbaric as has been claimed. The thinker and Shi'i divine, Ibn Tавus, together with other clergy and scholars were all spared the massacres of Baghdad, and like the Caucasus's leading Christian clerics and academics were soon co-opted into Hülegü's circle of apparent admirers. This was not the sparing of possible magic makers or spiritual interlocutors by the superstitious, the ignorant, and the naive, but the deliberate policy of a ruler with aspirations beyond his origins, a conclusion alluded to in Rashid al-Din's closing pages on Hülegü Khan. Though the vizier makes some disparaging remarks about Hülegü's trust and belief in the deceits and trickery of the alchemists on whom the Ilkhan squandered his resources, Rashid al-Din readily acknowledges Hülegü's keen interest in science and the disputations and discussions of philosophers and scholars and his generous allocation of pensions and stipends to these learned "hangers-on."

If in these early years of Mongol rule the countries and provinces enjoying Ilkhanid rule generally prospered and experienced a long-absent period of relative peace and security, the resurgence of patronage, the regeneration of an enriched spirituality, and the establishment of a cultural identity that has persisted until the present day were all fruits garnered as a result of that development. The period of



Ilkhanid rule is widely recognized as having been a period of great cultural creativity and even a golden age of artistic and spiritual expression, though the explanations for this renaissance differ greatly. Often portrayed as symptomatic of the spiritual malaise of a desperate people overwhelmed by the horror and hopelessness wrought by the Mongol invasions, the popularity of and interest in Sufism, which was enjoying a resurgence during the Ilkhanid decades, had in fact begun well before the Mongols appeared in the west. No longer so restricted by a legalistic and ritualistic Sunni ulema, Sufi lodges sprang up throughout Hülegü's domains and enjoyed the patronage of the ruling elite and the following of the masses. With travel relatively safe and unrestricted, wandering bands of *qalandars* (wandering, disreputable dervishes) became a familiar sight, while more traditionally minded Sufi *khanqahs* (religious hospices) offered lodging to more conventional travelers. In urban centers and in the royal *diwans*, Sufi masters of a more moderate bent than the antinomian *qalandars* or some of the patrons and organizers of the *khanqahs* offered their services to the ruling circles, Mongol, Turk, and Tajik, and in return received often lavish patronage.

Mongol involvement in the cultural life of this new kingdom was expressed at different levels, from Hülegü's commissioning of Nasir al-Din Tusi's observatory at Maragheh and his support of philosophers and thinkers to the great Suqunjaq's collaboration with Rashid al-Din in sponsorship of learning and the arts and local Mongol agents immersing themselves in the spiritual life of their provinces even when they perceived such contacts as a challenge to their own beliefs. This was the case with the Ilkhan Arghun's tolerance of his boyhood friend's desertion of the life of the *diwan* for that of the Sufi. The mystic poet Ala al-Dawla al-Simnani (d. 1336) was born into a leading Persian family of court officials with close links to the ruling circles of Mongol Iran. The young Simnani had been expected to assume high office in the Ilkhanid court, especially after his lifelong friend Prince Arghun became king. However, after a mystic vision in 1286, the young poet abandoned everything else in order to devote himself to his calling.

The Mongol ruling elite cannot be seen as a separate entity divorced from the land they ruled. Since they had first migrated across the Oxus, the *diwans* of the Mongols had increasingly harbored within their folds the young, the influential, and the powerful from among the "conquered" people. The sons and daughters of the local elites had been reared in, or with access to, these increasingly sumptuous *ordus*. The children of the progressively sophisticated Mongol nobles were reared alongside the progeny of their Persian, Turkish, Armenian, Khwarazmian, or Georgian administrators and commanders.

The nearly two generations and three long decades separating the initial Mongol invasion over the Oxus from the generally welcomed conquest of the hosts of Hülegü in the 1250s saw great changes in the nature of the conquerors and their retinue. The acculturation was gentle and the cultural borrowing mutual. The adoption of the trappings of majesty so dear to the Persians, with their ceremonial robes of gold and brocade, fell naturally onto the shoulders of Mongol tradition. The old guard was still there, but the face of the new regime was not the visage of



alien terror that had so troubled the world in the second decade of the century. If Chinggis Khan had been the punishment of God, his grandson Hülegü was “God’s secret intent revealed.”²⁸

The opening years of the Ilkhanid state saw, then, a widespread cultural blossoming of a knot of trends that had been slowly emerging from the early thirteenth century. The reasons for this renaissance are many, but it was the relative stability, the economic revival through trade, and a sudden reawakened confidence that surfaced after it became clear that the masters in Maragheh were there to stay, and it was this that provided the basis on which that trend would grow. The anarchy and disruption that grew and intensified after the irruption of the Mongols in the first quarter of the thirteenth century added to the already growing numbers of refugees heading westward. The Sultanate of Rum in Anatolia offered an early haven where the influx of poets, Sufis, and *qalandars*, along with merchants, exiled notables, and refugees, was welcomed, and many of these diverse people were soon assimilated into the multiethnic, pluralistic, and religiously and culturally tolerant sultanate. The Saljuq sultanate in Rum stood in contrast to the chaotic and anarchic lands to the east.

After Hülegü’s triumphant march across northern Iran to establish his capital in Maragheh in the 1250s, this situation changed. It was awareness of the change that Hülegü’s advent promised that prompted Sa’di’s return to his beloved Shiraz, as the poet himself informs his readers in the preface to his *Gulistan*. The remnants of the Khwarazmians had fled into Syria, the Isma‘ilis had been conquered and dispersed, the caliphate had been neutralized, the Persian ministates, such as Kerman, Shiraz, and Yazd, had pledged allegiance to the new king, and once again the roads of Iran were made safe for business and travel. Quite suddenly, Azerbaijan became the western hub of a vast land empire and Tabriz the emporium of a transcontinental trading network. For those first two decades, the new Ilkhanid state was able to enjoy the fruits of strong central government, relative internal political stability, and unfettered trade and cultural links.

The demise of the caliphate freed a blossoming spirituality from previous constraints, and the new effectively secular authorities did not interfere with these emancipated schools. Sunni Islam was able to cast aside the chains of its Arab roots and assume its more global Turco-Persian identity. The bureaucrats of the Ilkhanid *diwan* were Persians who had grown up in Mongol *ordus*, and their early companions and childhood friends had been Mongols as well as Turks, Armenians, Persians, Uyghurs, and Khwarazmians. They were a new generation, just as their Mongol overlords were a new generation at least one step removed from the harsh austerity and brutality of the steppe. If the unity and stability of the new regime began to unravel after Abaqa’s death and the political rivalries between princes and bureaucratic clans began to destroy what order and discipline Hülegü and his son had succeeded in implementing, this should not detract from the accomplishments of the new order or obscure the aims and aspirations on which the new order was based. If there was a return to partial anarchy and confusion in the last two decades of the thirteenth century, it should not be

forgotten that first three decades of the fourteenth century were to become a golden age for some.²⁹

It has long been assumed that it was the reign of Ghazan Khan (r. 1295–1304) and his remarkable prime minister Rashid al-Din Hamadani (d. 1318) that marked the transformation of the Ilkhanate from a “barbarian” nomadic state into a comparatively stable “civilized” society. This traditional analysis is not only simplistic and clichéd, it is manifestly wrong. Ghazan Khan was responsible for making Islam the official religion of the state, and he became a Muslim himself. His chief minister, Rashid al-Din, was also responsible for a number of wide-ranging and sweeping reforms in response to the political and economic chaos of the previous two decades. However, such changes, important though they undoubtedly were, cannot negate the achievements and popular rule of the first two Ilkhans, Hülegü and his son Abaqa (d. 1282). It was they who laid the foundations of the state that was to flourish until 1335 and whose legacy is still evident today.

Since the principal source for information on the reign of the “reforming” Ilkhan, Ghazan Khan, is his chief minister, the prolific Rashid al-Din, whose remarkable *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh* (“Collection of Histories”) describes not only the reforms themselves but the background behind their implementation, the question of bias, political maneuvering, and self-interest must be considered crucial to any interpretations, conclusions, and claims made by this powerful minister. The lengthy chapters detailing Ghazan’s years in power and his administrative reforms, in which this minister played such a critical role, form the core of Rashid al-Din’s voluminous work, and that his personal stamp is indelibly marked upon these pivotal pages is indisputable. His assessment of the Mongols’ legacy with which his master, the *Padeshah-i Islam*, was faced with dealing is damning, though its vehemence is reminiscent of the polemic of the politician.

When provinces and great cities were being subjugated [The Mongols] killed so many people throughout the length and breadth of the provinces that few were left, like Balkh, Shuburqan, Taliqan, Marv, Sarakhs, Herat, Turkestan, Ray, Hamadan, Qum, Isfahan, Maragheh, Ardabil, Barda‘a, Ganjah, Baghdad, Irbil, and most provinces attached to these cities.³⁰

This was known to be a blatant exaggeration of the reality of the invasions, only the first of which was predominantly destructive in nature. Such passages suggest that their writer was intent on the creation of an image for his patron through the use of rhetoric and that his presentation of the “facts” had an ulterior motive beyond his usual faithful recording of history.

That the Ilkhan Ghazan was a remarkable man and an exceptional ruler is widely averred, and his commitment to reform is not disputed. He was a patron of the arts and sciences, he was a linguist, he was according to Rashid al-Din and others an accomplished artisan of various crafts, and his keen interest in the traditions and legacy of his ancestors was undimmed by his enthusiastic adoption of Islam. It was his passion for knowledge of the past and the present that led him to commission his chief minister to embark on the remarkable compilation of histories, the

Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh, the first part of which ensured that the Mongols and their legacy and role in the history of the world would far outlive their corporeal presence. If he was physically rather unprepossessing and off-putting, this was amply compensated by his other well-attested gifts, succinctly expressed by the Armenian historian Hetoum:

And marvellous it was that so little a body might have so great virtue; for among a thousand men could not be so slender a man, nor so evil made, nor a fouler man. He surmounted all others in prowess and virtue.³¹

Ghazan's stature and special position in history as the ruler who restored the rule of the true faith to the Islamic world has embellished all contemporary and subsequent accounts of his reign and must be considered as an important factor when assessing the extent and effectiveness of his reforms and the contrasts drawn between his years in power and those of his pagan predecessors.

That there was a need for dramatic reform is indisputable, but as Wassaf, a contemporary historian and state accountant, pointed out, the dire economic situation in the country was due in no small degree to the chronic instability that had predominated immediately prior to Ghazan's succession and had emptied the treasuries:

no money remained in the treasury because in that year (1295) in the course of eight months three rulers had succeeded to the throne and twice in the far corners of the empire there had been large military expeditions, inevitably demands for payments in advance and extraordinary levies were made and *mavashi* had been taken at the rate of 20% in most of the tax districts, especially in Fars.³² [*Tārīkh-i Wassāf* p.326]

A.Q: 7

The reigns of Ahmad, Arghun, Gaykhatu, and Baydu between 1284 and 1295 saw the country lapse again into relative instability after the euphoria of Hülegü and his son Abaqa, who had brought both prosperity and security after so many years of chaos. There was the struggle for the throne, the scandalous depravity of Gaykhatu Khan, and the economic madness accompanying the introduction of paper currency, the *chao*, in imitation of the successful system operating in Yuan China. There was the horror of the outbreak of anti-Jewish riots and pogroms following the fall of the very competent Jewish vizier Sa'd al-Dawla and his replacement by Sadr al-Din Zanjani, whose imposition of the *chao* paved the way for Ghazan Khan, who had refused to force it on the people of Khorasan, where he was governor. Rashid al-Din, an adept political maneuverer, maximized the propaganda potential of the economic chaos prevailing in the country when Ghazan succeeded.

There was a battle for ascendancy between the traditional "uncooked" Mongol lords, whose contempt for their subjects accounted for their remorseless demands for crippling taxes and ultimately self-defeating ill-treatment of these same sedentary "dust-scratchers," and the reformers around Ghazan, who saw the lands of Persia as their future and perceived their own prosperity as intimately coupled with that of their settled subjects. Ghazan tried to convince his fellow Mongols that their practice of continual merciless exploitation of the peasantry was self-destructive,



since those same peasants provided the sustenance without which the Mongol hordes could no longer survive. In an oft-quoted speech that may or may not reproduce Ghazan's actual words, this reasoning is spelled out and provides the rationale behind Ghazan's reforms.

"I am not partial to the Tajiks. If it were in my interests to pillage them all, no one would be more able to do it than I, and we would pillage together; but if henceforth you expect to requisition supplies and meals, I will reprimand you severely. Just think—if you use violence on the peasants and take their cattle and grain or let your horses graze in their fields, what you will do next? When you beat or hurt their wives and children, just think how dear our own wives and children are to us. Their children are just like that to them; they too are human beings like us."³³

His closing remarks would doubtless have caused considerable unease, since they implied a rejection of the traditional belief in the nomad's inherent superiority to the people of the sown and were reflective of his adoption of Islam, the religion of the subject people.

How heartfelt his conversion to Islam was will always raise questions, since the wars with his fellow Muslims to the south, the Mamluks, continued unabated, as did his search for an alliance against the Egyptians with the Christian powers of the West and Anatolia. However, Ghazan saw himself as the legitimate leader of the Islamic world, and for him the Mamluks, as the sons of slaves without royal blood, were beneath contempt and certainly not worthy of being treated either as equals or as rivals.

His much-vaunted suppression of the Buddhists and Christians has been overstated, and in many cases it was certainly not instigated by him. In addition, many of the attacks on Christians and other non-Muslims were either the work of opportunists or were simply acts of violence interpreted in retrospect with the brush of religion. His appropriation of the trappings of Islam would have been necessary to capture the unquestioning loyalty and support of the majority population in order to carry out his reforms against the wishes of much of the Mongol old guard.

If Ghazan wished to cement over the divide between conquerors and conquered and end the estrangement existing between Mongol and Persian, conversion to Islam was a prerequisite. However, it is also true that increasing numbers of Mongols were converting to Islam, influenced no doubt by the large number of Turks in their ranks who had already converted. Since many of his harsher strictures against non-Muslims and un-Islamic practices were relaxed later in his reign, the sincerity of his Islamic fervor, adopted at the same time as he was making his play for the throne against the pagan rival Baydu, might have been in part tactical. The Islam that the Mongols embraced was not the austere faith of the Sunni clerics but more the folk Islam beloved of the Turkomans, which allowed the reverence and rise of such Sufi masters as Shaykh Safi al-Din of Ardabil (d. 1334). These charismatic Sufi masters would have bridged the gap between the rabbinical gravity of the traditionalist mullahs and the shamans of the steppe. The titles Ghazan adopted established him



as both a champion of Islam and a successor to the crown of the Iranian kings: “His Majesty the Padishah of Islam, the Sovereign of the Seven Climates of the World,” “His Majesty the Refuge of Caliphate the Great Khosrow of Iran the Successor of the Realm of the Kayanids.”³⁴ His adopted titles sought to forge a link with an ancient heritage and provide spiritual vindication. His reforms would be final proof of the advent of a new age and the birth of a dynasty of Mongol Iranians.

The reforms that Ghazan proposed were far-reaching and comprehensive. Taxation in general was to be regulated and the frequency and method of collection formalized. Landholdings and villages were to be registered and their taxability officially assessed. Disputes over landownership would be settled, and lapses of over thirty years would invalidate claims. The once-lauded *yam* (postal/relay) system was to be overhauled in an effort to end the widespread abuse of this courier service, and the activities and privileges of the *ilchis* (official envoys) would be severely curbed. The status, powers, and financing of qadis (Islamic judges) were to be formalized. In the bazaar, weights and measures would be standardized and the coinage reformed. To repair some of the damage caused by the years of economic disruption and population dispersal, incentives were to be proposed in order to attract cultivators back to land that had fallen permanently fallow or had been abandoned. To encourage population growth, it was proposed that the size of dowries be restricted, thus facilitating divorce and the ending of unproductive marriages. The vexing problem of the army was also to be confronted, and the traditional Saljuqid practice of the *iqta* (taxation rights to specific land) was to be reintroduced to pay a soldiery many of whom had been dangerously deprived of their established form of remuneration, namely plunder. Perhaps most significantly, Ghazan proposed ending the practice of issuing drafts on land and produce, with capital retribution for infractions. Taxes would henceforth be collected by centrally appointed officials in cash, not kind.

Rashid al-Din’s unique histories not only provide the details of all these proposals for reform but contain copies of the actual *yarlighs* (edicts) themselves. However, what all this proves is that Ghazan and his ministers were acutely aware of the sorry state that their lands were in and that the need for reform was crucial. It is doubtful that much could have been achieved in the few years that Ghazan was actually secure upon the throne before his untimely early death at the age of thirty-two, though he undoubtedly set in motion a trend away from the overly predatory practices of earlier years. By establishing a symbiotic relationship between the army and the land through the issuance of *iqtas*, Ghazan hoped to reduce the drain on the treasury and remove the soldiers’ excuse for pilfering the peasantry to compensate for their lack of supplies. However, once the pressure was relaxed, old habits would invariably resurface, and vigilance would have to be constant to avoid the excesses of the past.

Mustawfi Qazvini, as a *mustawfi* or audit official in the financial administration of the latter Ilkhanate, had credible access to figures pertaining to the state’s income. He states that revenue rose from 17 million dinars at the start of Ghazan’s reign to 21 million at the close, an increase of about 23 percent over the nine years. Such a figure



is of a modesty suggesting reality and certainly credibility. Mustawfi further adds that

at the present time [ca. 1340] it probably does not amount to half this sum, for in most of the provinces [of Iran] usurpation of authority is rampant with this coming and going of armies, so that the people even do withhold their hands from sowing the fields.³⁵

This suggests that any reforms that did take effect were of limited duration. That both Ghazan and particularly Rashid al-Din, who owned extensive tracts of land throughout the empire, had honorable intentions is attested to in most of the sources. Tabriz greatly benefited from the attentions of the sultan and his minister, who both rebuilt and added to large areas of the city. Ghazan constructed Mahmudabad on the Caspian coast and gave orders for the rebuilding of Ray, according to Mustawfi still devastated from the early irruption of the Mongols. Ujan, renamed Shahr-e Islam, was likewise rebuilt, and prospered as a foundation for charitable bequests instituted by Ghazan Khan. Under the Mongols there was an increase in the number and size of private estates, and Iranian civil officials, not just the Mongol ruling class, were able to accumulate vast personal fortunes based on the acquisition of land. These landowners had a personal interest in maintaining this land, reclaiming any “dead land” and exploiting to the maximum its agricultural potential, especially because the land could be passed down through their heirs, assuming their rivals or the state did not have alternative designs on it.

That any positive effects of the reforms were of limited duration is suggested by the chronicler of the *Tarikh-i Ruyan* writing in 1362, twenty-five years after the demise of the Ilkhanate. His rather nostalgic vision of an Ilkhan Golden Age perhaps says more about the anarchy and insecurity of his own time than the prosperity and tranquility of the eighty years of Mongol rule. He remarks in particular on the rule of Ghazan Khan, Öljeitü, and the last Ilkhan, Abu Sa‘id (d. 1335), as having been tranquil and free from the aggression of intruders: “in that time of [those Ilkhan] Kings, Iran was tranquil and free from the aggression of intruders, especially in the days of the sultanate of Ghazan Khan, Öljeitü Khodabandeh, and Abu Sa‘id Bahadur Khan.”³⁶ It was an age he even compared to an earthly paradise, “admirable and luxuriantly cheerful like the Garden of Paradise, tranquil and secure like the sanctuary of the Ka’ba.”³⁷ This view is echoed ca. 1360 by a historian of the Jalayirid dynasty (which ruled over Iraq and western Iran in the late fourteenth century), Abu Bakr al-Qutbi al-Ahari, who saw the turn of the century during Ghazan’s reign as a time of peace and justice: “During that time the whole of Iran was graced by the justice of the King of Islam, who held back the oppressor’s hand from (harming) the oppressed.” Al-Ahari added that this prosperity continued under the rule of his brother, Öljeitü Khodabandeh—“The country (was) flourishing and the army well organised”—but reached its apogee in the time of Abu Sa‘id: “The time of his government was the best period of the domination of the Mongols.”³⁸ However,



such views taken in hindsight and from a period of great political instability and economic chaos must be judged accordingly.

If it was Ghazan Khan who drew the battle lines between the old guard and the emerging Mongol Iranians and Persian “Mongols,” there is little to indicate that victory went immediately to either side. Whereas to the north, in the lands dominated by the Golden Horde, there were signs, such as Turkish-inscribed coins, that the Mongolian language had been superseded by Turkish as early as 1280, in the lands of Persia and Azerbaijan manuscripts and coins continued to be issued in Mongolian script at least to the end of the fourteenth century. The subjects of the Golden Horde were in the main Turks and fellow steppe nomads, whereas a far greater cultural divide existed between the sedentary and urbanized Persians of the Ilkhanate and their Mongol rulers. Resistance to Ghazan’s reforms would have been all the stronger because they could have been seen as an assault on the very fundamentals of the Mongol nomadic state and the Yasas of the Great Khan, Chinggis. Whether the program for reform was as serious and widespread as Rashid al-Din’s writing suggests is doubtful. Islamic Persia was a far greater threat to the Mongol identity and the continuity of their traditions than was the culture of the Qipchaq Turks of the Golden Horde.

The greatest source for our knowledge pertaining to the reforms of Ghazan Khan is the pages of the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārikh*, whose author was the architect of those same reforms. The history details the legislation and justification for their implementation. That Rashid al-Din felt the need for the creation of such an impressive manifesto suggests that he expected very great resistance to his recommendations. The fact that no major schism actually developed, that Ghazan died of natural causes and was succeeded relatively peacefully by his brother, and that no true polarization had become manifest even on the death of Abu Sa‘id in 1335 suggests that for all the rhetoric and posturing, no real attempt was made during Ghazan’s lifetime or later to forcibly carry out these radical proposals. On an individual level, certain towns, villages, or regions may have seen improvements in the lot of the peasants and town dwellers. As has been mentioned, Ghazan is known for his building work, particularly in Tabriz, and his brother, Öljeitü, is assured a worthy place in history for his construction of a new capital, the city of Sultaniya, with his remarkable tomb that has survived to the present time. Ghazan Khan’s attempts to reform the psyche of his army to give them a stake in the agricultural economy by the issuance of *iqtas* occurred late in his reign and would not have had time to have any dramatic effect. His minister claimed that the measures were popular and that the “eyes and hearts” of the new military owners were well satisfied, that they were desirous of taking up the practice of farming and owning their own estates. However, for many of the Mongol troops husbandry could never be a complete substitute for the more lucrative and enjoyable pastime of marauding, and despite the overwhelming victories of 1300, Ghazan Khan never substantiated his conquest of Syria, and the province continued to function as a sporting ground for his soldiery, hungering for blood and loot. That a program of radical reform was conceived and that there was some degree of implementation is attested to in various sources, but it is only



the reforms' architect, Rashid al-Din, who has dwelled to any great extent on their importance. If there was an economic upswing during Ghazan's reign, and to a lesser extent in the reigns of his successors, this would have been due to no small degree to strong and comparatively stable leadership. Ghazan's conversion to Islam would have been generally popular and would have led to an increase in cooperation from the subject people. How popular his *yarlighs* further tying the peasants to the land were with the *ra'iyat* (people) is difficult to judge, since the decree merely formalized a practice that had been a reality before. The lot of the peasantry has always been chronically miserable, and it is unlikely that their fortunes changed to any great degree even if their overlords did.

Ghazan Khan owed his reputation as the reforming Ilkhan to the pages of his court historian and self-propagandist Rashid al-Din, a prolific writer with overriding political, terrestrial, and financial ambitions. Without the heralding of the proposed reforms by his minister, Ghazan Khan would have been better known for his conversion to Islam and the comparative stability and resultant modest prosperity of his reign. The real importance of his conversion to Islam, far surpassing any supposed economic or social reforms, was the narrowing of the cultural chasm between the occupiers and the occupied. By declaring himself the *Padeshah-i Islam* and adopting the title of the ancient kings of Persia, Ghazan was committing himself to his adopted country and its people and pledging them to a common future and shared destiny. It has been suggested that the reason he commissioned Rashid al-Din to write his history of the Mongols is that he realized that the future would see the Mongols' ascendancy dissolved in the destiny of the majority and that he wished to assure their memory a worthy place in the annals of the future. His reforms were a vision probably formulated by his chief minister, but one that had little opportunity or real hope of ever becoming a reality.

The Ilkhans did not decline and fade away into degeneracy and decadence, nor did they suffer military defeat or internal rebellion. They simply disappeared at the height of their power and prestige when Abu Sa'id died and left no heirs to take his throne. In the ensuing scramble for power, the Ilkhanate empire split into various warring factions that within two generations were swept away by the destructive forces of Timur (Tamerlane, d. 1405).

During Abu Sa'id's reign, the confrontation between the old guard of Mongol amirs who still hankered after the traditions of the steppe and the reformers who had integrated fully with their adopted country came to a head, and a showdown between Abu Sa'id's chief minister, the Mongol *noyan* Chopan, who was effectively the ruler of the country, and the rebellious lords resulted in the strengthening of the young king's position. He forced a confrontation with Chopan, regarded by Abu Sa'id and other notables as far too powerful. Abu Sa'id had alienated the devout Muslim Chopan by insisting on the hand of his daughter, Baghdad Khatun, who unfortunately was already married to the aptly named Hasan-i Bozorg ("Big Hasan"). Abu Sa'id invoked the Mongol *yasa* that gave the ruler the right to claim the hand of any woman he wished, regardless of her marital status. He further antagonized his chief minister by arresting and then executing his eldest son, and



predictably the resulting ill-feeling gave way to charges of sedition and eventually confrontation. At the conclusion of this affair, Abu Sa'id's position seemed unassailable, and the country basked in the security, prosperity, and stability that the end of this period of strife had created. The king had even chosen a new young wife, Delshad, a niece of Baghdad Khatun. It was this last act that proved his undoing; Baghdad Khatun, in a fit of jealousy mixed with hatred of the man who had destroyed her marriage and murdered her father and brother, allegedly conspired with her ex-husband, Big Hasan (who later founded the Jalayirid dynasty, mentioned above), and together they poisoned Abu Sa'id. Baghdad Khatun was executed by Abu Sa'id's successor (chosen by Rashid al-Din's son, the vizier Ghiyath al-Din), Arpa Khan, who obviously chose to believe the accusation.

Arpa Khan (d. 1336), a claimant to the Ilkhanid throne through the youngest son of Tolui, Ariq Buqa, was an able army commander respected for his honesty, adherence to the law, and belief in traditional values. Arpa Khan was Abu Sa'id's designated heir, and he had agreed to three binding conditions set before him by the vizier, Ghiyath al-Din, namely, that first "he would not turn from truth, care, and justice for his people" and would not indulge in depravity or licentious behavior; secondly, that he would treat all subjects, whether Mongol or Persian, military or civilian, equally; thirdly, that he would show full respect for the sharia law, a condition thought necessary since he was not believed to be Muslim; and fourthly, that he allow the minister, Ghiyath al-Din, to retire. However, from the beginning, with his execution of Baghdad Khatun, Arpa Khan made enemies, and within two years he and the minister had been executed and the country dissolved into internecine strife.

In China, the Yuan dynasty was in decline after its golden years under Qubilai and his immediate successors. Bolad Agha, a leading Mongol administrator, statesman, and thinker, had traveled to Iran as the personal envoy of the Great Khan Qubilai and had forged a close working and personal relationship with Rashid al-Din. The Persian vizier had established his Rab-i Rashidi in Tabriz, which worked in tandem with the cultural institution in Khanbaliq, the Hanlin academy. Both institutions promoted culture and learning and encouraged in particular the writing of history. Rashid al-Din could not have completed his magisterial *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* without the close assistance of Bolad Agha, who revealed to him the secrets of the Mongol libraries and histories. The intimacy existing between these two Toluid states was reflected in the vibrancy and vigor of their courts. The Mongols as cultural and economic brokers rather than enablers encouraged trade and cultural exchange at all levels. Persians could be found throughout the Yuan administration. This was not because the Mongols did not trust their Chinese subjects, as has been suggested, but because Persian-speaking bureaucrats and merchants from Iran and Transoxiana were often linguists conversant in Turkish, Chinese, Mongolian, Arabic, Persian, and Uyghur. In fact, both states had become melting pots for artisans and workers from right across the vast Mongol empire. Just as Hülegü was responsible for the construction of Nasir al-Din Tusi's observatory in Maragheh, so Qubilai authorized the construction of the observatory, overseen by a certain Jamal al-Din,



that still stands today in the center of Beijing. Qubilai commissioned Ikhtiyar al-Din, another Muslim from the western Islamic lands, to assist in the design of his new capital, Dadu (Khanbaliq/Beijing). Astronomy, astrology, medicine, mapmaking, printing, agronomy, agriculture, historiography, cuisine, and geography were all branches of learning actively encouraged and pursued by the Mongol courts. Persian communities were dominant in some important Chinese cities, especially the eastern ports such as Hangzhou, Zayton (Quanzhou), and Guangzhou. Rashid al-Din records that Baha al-Din Qunduzi was governor of Zayton while Shihab al-Din Qunduzi was the *chingsang* (government representative) of Hangzhou. The full extent of this intimate relationship between Mongol China and Iran is only recently being rediscovered, and it heralds a major new direction for future research.

In Hangzhou, the mosque, rebuilt in 1281 by the Persian Ala al-Din, stands to this day, and the tombstones secured in the mosque's outhouse attest to the Persian community's illustrious past. Discovered around 1920, during excavations to build the road that now encircles Hangzhou's famous West Lake, a great number of tombstones still lay buried on the site of the old royal Jujing Gardens. The lakeside royal gardens of the Song emperors adorning the shore and hills outside the Qingbo Gate had fallen into disrepair, and then sometime after 1276, when the city fell to the Mongol armies, and before 1291, when they are mentioned by the chronicler Zhou Mi, the gardens were given over to the Muslim community to serve as a cemetery, this in itself indicative of the prestige in which the mainly Persian Muslim community was held at that time. Only twenty-one or so tombstones remain today, almost all held in the Phoenix Mosque, and their inscriptions attest to the status of the Persian community in the city under the Yuan when Hangzhou, though no longer the capital, retained its power and influence, particularly as a cultural center. Military figures such as the Amir Badr al-Din and the Amir Bakhtiar, important officials like Khwaja Mohammad bin Arslan al-Khanbaliqi, religious *alims* such as Taj al-Din Yahya ibn Burhan al-Din, and merchant *khwajas* such as "the pride of the merchants, famous in the cities, patron of the learned," Shams al-Din al-Isfahani and "pride of the merchants... famous in the cities... familiar among the princes of the regions of the coasts" Mahmud ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Simnani are just some of those whose tombstones, recording their deaths in the early fourteenth century, are only now being closely examined. Most of these figures are honored as martyrs, a term signifying that they died far from home. Hangzhou, or Khansa'i as it was known in Persian, received oceangoing vessels, often in collaboration with the nearby port city of Ningbo, but was also a river port connected to the canal and river network of inland China. Many of its Persian citizens, like the mosque's benefactor, Ala al-Din, would have arrived overland rather than by sea or, like another famous inhabitant of the Jujing cemetery, Sharaf al-Din (1256–1323), migrated to Hangzhou through promotion, having entered Chinggisid service through his father, one of those artisans moved from the "Western Regions" early in the Mongol conquests. Though written in Persian, the calligraphy was already showing early traces of what would become a very distinctive style, and the floral border designs were reflective of the blue and white glaze porcelain for which the Yuan period



became so justly famous. Local chroniclers like the stubbornly nationalist Zhou Mi (1232–1308) accepted the Persians as part of their community, though their descriptions often ignored their Persian and Muslim identities and instead emphasized their excellent Confucian traits and practices. Though examples of anti-Persian and anti-Muslim sentiments can be cited, such as in the writings of Tao Zongyi (b. 1316), the fact that a nationalist of Zhou Mi's stature could write without malice about these foreigners at the heart of his community and accept them into his very elite circle of art collectors says much for what these Persian emigrants achieved so far from their homelands.

Most of what is now known of the Mongols comes from non-Mongol sources, among them Persian, Arabic, Armenian, European, and Chinese observers and commentators. While recognizing their might and military majesty, these sources often betray a degree of anti-Mongol bias. Even in the writings of their most loyal servants, such as the Persian and Muslim Juwayni (d. 1282), there is sometimes a sense of disdain and condescension for these arrivistes. In many ways, the Mongols have become a victim of their own propaganda and success. The horrors they perpetrated have become the crown on the head that they managed to raise so high. Their impact was of such might that their achievements have sometimes been submerged in that initial sea of blood. However, the legacy of the Mongol decades should not be underestimated, and just as the unification of China and the establishment of Beijing as the Chinese capital are constant reminders of the Yuan dynasty, so too in many ways was the kingdom of Hülegü the precursor of the modern state of Iran. In China, the arrival of the Ming resulted in an exodus of many Mongol tribes back to the north. In Iran, no such exodus ever occurred; the Mongols arrived en masse in 1255 by invitation, and they formed a joint administration with the Persian nobility. Integration was the aim of the Persians and the desire of most of the Mongol elite. The Ilkhanate was a testament to that union, and the cultural synthesis achieved has formed the basis of the emerging Iranian identity. Links to Chinggis Khan continued to be the source of legitimacy for subsequent Muslim dynasties ruling a polity recognizably Iranian until the sixteenth century, when Shah Isma'īl Safavi arose triumphant, claiming that his descent from the revered Shi'i Imams gave him the right and the legitimacy to rule Iran.

NOTES

1. R. Michell and N. Forbes, trans., *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016–1471* (London: Camden Society, 1914) 64.
2. 'Atā Malik 'Alā al-Dīn Juwayni, *Genghis Khan: History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J. Boyle (Manchester: MUP, 1997), 107.
3. Ibn al-Athir, quoted in Bertold Spuler, *History of the Mongols*, trans. H. Drummond and S. Drummond (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1972), 29–30.



4. Urgunge Onon, tr., *The Golden History of the Mongols* [The Secret History] (London: Folio Society, 1993), 102.
5. Juzjani, *Tabaqat-I Nasiri*, vol. 2, tr. Raverty (London, 1881), 965.
6. Nizami-ye 'Arudi-i-Samarqandi, *Chahar Maqala, Four Discourses*, trans. Edward G. Browne (Luzac: London, 1900), 38.
7. Awfi, vol. 1, 194.
8. See Michal Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
9. Ibn al-Athir, quoted in Spuler, *History of the Mongols*, 205, 261.
10. Juzjani, *Tabaqat-I Nasiri*, 966.
11. Revelations 20.
12. See Devlin DeWeese, "Stuck in the Throat of Chinggiz Khan," in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).
13. See Nizami-ye 'Arudi-i-Samarqandi, *Chahar Maqala, Four Discourses*, trans. Edward G. Browne (Luzac: London, 1900), 430.
14. Cited in Sh. Bira, "Qubilai Qa'an and 'Phags-pa Bla-ma," in *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy*, ed. Reuven Amitai-Preis and David O. Morgan (London: Brill, 1999), 242.
15. Bira, "Qubilai Qa'an and 'Phags-pa Bla-ma," 241.
16. Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj, Bar Hebraeus*, vol. 1, trans. Ernest Wallis-Budge (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2003), 394.
17. Hamdu'llah Mustawfi-i-Qazwini, *Tarikh-i-Guzida, "The Select History,"* trans. Edward G. Browne (London: Luzac, 1913), 799.
18. Charles Melville, *Shanama Studies I* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 135–64.
19. Juwayni, *Genghis Khan*, 638, and *Tārīkh-i Jahān Gushā*, ed. M. Qazwini (London: Luzac, 1916), 139.
20. Charles Melville, "From Adam to Abaqa," *Studia Iranica* 30, no. 1 (2001).
21. George Lane, *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth-Century Iran: A Persian Renaissance* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).
22. ibn Tabatana, 14; ibn Taqtaqi, 18–19.
23. See Jay.
24. Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Fiyeh māfi yeh*, 23; tr. 11.
25. Mustawfi, *Zafarnāme*, vol. 2, 5.
26. Mustawfi, *Zafarnāme*, vol. 2, 17.
27. Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Akhbār-i-Moghūlān dar Anbāneh-ye- Quṭb*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Qom, Iran, 2010) 23–24.
28. Juwayni, *Genghis Khan*.
29. Mustawfi-i-Qazwini, *Tarikh-i-Guzida*.
30. Rashid al-Din, *Jama' al-Tavārīkh*, ed. Mohammad Roushan and Mustafa Mousavī (Tehran: Nesr Elborz, 1994), 1527; *Rashiduddin Fazlullah's Jami'u 't-tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles: A History of the Mongols*, trans. Wheeler Thackston (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1998), 756.
31. Hetoum, *A Lytell Cronycle*, ed. Glenn Burger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 54.
32. *Tārīkh-i Wassāf*, 326
33. Rashid al-Din, *Jama' al-Tavārīkh*, 1443–44, and *Compendium of Chronicles*, 714.
34. Rashid al-Din, *Jama' al-Tavārīkh*.
35. Hamdu'llah Mustawfi-i-Qazwini, *Nuzhat al-Qulub*, trans. Guy Le Strange (Leydon: Brill, 1919), 33.



36. Awliya Allah Amuli, *Tārīkh-i-Rūyān*, ed. M. Sutuda (Tehran, 1969), 178.
 37. Amuli, *Tārīkh-i-Rūyān*.
 38. Abū Bakr al-Quṭbī Al-Ahārī, *Tārīkh-i-Sheikh Ovais*, ed. and trans. J. B. Van Loon (The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1954), 48.

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