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The Islamization of the Mongols

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THE ISLAMIZATION
OF THE MONGOLS

Ishayahu Landa

INTRODUCTION

“[E]very light that shineth because of the darkness is exceeding marvelous and wonder-ful”, wrote ʿAla al-Din ʿAta-Malik al-Juvayni, a leading Chinggisid Persian official in the introduction to his Tarikh-i Jahangusha in the mid-13th century, “[and f]or this reason the Banner of Islam is raised higher and the candle of the Faith lit brighter; and the sun of the creed of Mohammed casts its shadow over countries whose nostrils had not been perfumed by the scent of Islam.” While both Juvayni’s family and he himself occupied respectful positions at the Chinggisid courts, ʿAta-Malik, a believing Muslim, was uneasy with the Chinggisid invasion. As seen from the previous quotation, he aimed at overcoming this uneasiness with the Chinggisid occupation of much of the Dar al-Islam by arguing that it opened new areas for the faith through the Muslim migrations eastwards. When Juvayni finished his compendium in ca. 1260, nobody could imagine the long-term consequences of the Chinggisid occupation of two-thirds of Eurasia. One of these was the dramatic dispersion of Islam across the continent, not least due to mass conversions of the Chinggisids and their nomadic subjects.

The unification of the tribal and ethnic groups of Mongolia under Temüjin started around 1196 and culminated in 1206 with his proclamation as Chinggis Khan (r. 1206–1227). While we cannot exclude the possibility of an Islamic presence in the Mongolian steppes at this period, it is due to this gradual expansion of Chinggisid domination over the Eurasian Islamic societies that the time of the United Empire should be seen as a foundational phase for the subsequent conversion of most of the Chinggisid family and their nomadic armies to Islam. The first five decades of Chinggisid rule in Eurasia were characterized by two crucial interconnected phenomena. Firstly, the conquests not only brought hundreds of thousands of non-Muslim nomads to the Dar al-Islam but also facilitated a hardly quantifiable migration between various parts of the Eurasian continent. The Muslims constituted an important part of those moving along the postal and trade roads, both on land and on sea. Some professional groups can be clearly identified
in this context, such as merchants, religious personnel, intellectuals, bureaucrats, military and, of course, artisans and slaves. Of even greater importance was that, quite early on, leading Muslim officials and scholars rose to positions of power all across the Chinggisid domains and became responsible for the formation and the functioning of the Chinggisid administration. Second, the migrations brought significant Islamic and non-Islamic populations closer. This rapprochement (to use Pfeiffer’s term) of the two groups especially in Western and Central Asia created the necessary preconditions for the broad nomadic conversion. No major “royal” conversion before the 1260s is reported. At the same time, especially starting with the early 1240s, an increasing number of conversion cases among the Chinggisid military are mentioned, especially in Iran, Iraq and Transcaucasia. Even though various contemporary sources claim that Islam spread quite extensively among the Mongols, it is not clear how predominant the “active” conversion was at this time. What seems much more probable is that the Chinggisid military and the members of their households engaged in intensive social networking with the Islamic culture and the Muslim populations. Continuously exposed to Islam through the webs of professional contacts, marriages, adoptions, intellectual exchanges, friendships and patron–client symbioses, they gradually entered the civilizational abode of Islam. While conversion could certainly occur among the first generation of incomers, it was more often the second and third generations which underwent this process. The United Empire thus paved the ground for later processes in the post-1259 uluses.

THE ILKHANATE

In the case of the Ilkhaniid domains, the first seeds of the gradual conversion of the Chinggisid nomadic armies were sown during the first decades of Chinggisid control in Western Asia. While the sources do not give deeper perspectives on the daily experiences or religious environment of the broader nomadic population in the future Ilkhaniid domains, they mention a small number of notable military figures, mainly participants of the first or second conquest waves, who had converted to Islam during the late 1230s to the 1250s. The very fact, however, that the sources mention those cases explicitly seems to indirectly indicate that conversion to Islam remained an exception during this period. As the case of Arghun Aqa (d. 1275), an important Oirat governor of Western Asia since the early 1240s, exemplifies, the decades that preceded the establishment of the Ilkhaniid rule under Hülegü (r. 1260–1265) did not immediately visibly increase the speed of the Chinggisid conversion. In fact, one of the few indicators of the growing influence of Islam is the prevalence of certain culturally
and religiously specific personal names in the larger population throughout a certain period of time. Following Bulliet’s and Woods’ quantitative analysis of the onomastic information preserved in the biographical dictionaries and similar literature for the early Islamic and Timurid contexts, Judith Pfeiffer studied the percentage of “Perso-Muslim” names in the list of commanders ascribed to each of the Ilkhans in the Shuʿab-i panjganah, the famous biographical compendium by Rashid al-Din. In her research, Pfeiffer suggested the slow but steady increase of such names’ percentage among the top commanders of the first four Ilkhans (Hülegü, Abaqa [r. 1265–1282], Ahmad Tegüder [r. 1282–1284] and Arghun [1284–1291]), reaching its peak of 13% under Arghun. Pfeiffer also noticed a sudden jump in the numbers, up to 30.4% (i.e. 14 out of 46) under the fifth Ilkhan, Gaykhatu [r. 1291–1295], a phenomenon she ascribed to the preferential relations of the third Ilkhan Ahmad Tegüder with Sufi circles. Pfeiffer explained the rise of personalities with “Perso-Muslim” names after Ahmad, especially under Gaykhatu, with reference to Ahmad’s Islamic activities. However, the onomastic data is hardly representative in such a short period of time as in the current study. On the one hand, while in some cases the conversion to Islam clearly led to the change of a personal name, in some other cases the personalities otherwise known to have had strong linkages to Islam (even though there is often no information on official conversion) kept their former names. Thus, Chinggis Khan’s maternal grandson Togha Temür, anQonggirat, who continuously appears in the sources since the mid-1250s as “Musa Güregen”, i.e. by the name given to him by a certain Islamic teacher after his conversion to Islam, stands for the first category. At the same time, the Great Amir Baytmish Aqa (Baytmish Qushchi, “the falconer”), presumably of Qipchaq origin, who is known to have established a waqf, a pious Islamic foundation, close to Ardabil in eastern Transcaucasia in the late 13th century, falls into the second. Further on, Pfeiffer mentioned (but did not further investigate) that, based on the Shuʿab-i panjganah, the number of Ghazan’s commanders with “Perso-Muslim” names was lower than that of Gaykhatu’s, namely, 21% only, 4 out of 19. In fact, the Shuʿab-i panjganah is not fully representative in Ghazan’s regard. While the Muʿizz al-ansab counts 70 commanders of Ghazan, it lists only ca. 20% (14) with potentially “Perso-Muslim” names. As mentioned, however, Ghazan’s rise to power is clearly connected with the dispersion of Islam among the Chinggisid military towards the mid-1290s. Thus, with regard to the first generation (and, possibly, even the second), names are a rather unreliable source as indicators of religious affiliation.

Another approach is to pay attention to the changes visible on the top layers of the ruling Chinggisid family concerning its relations with Islam. It is tempting to depict a linear development of the Hülegüid-Islamic rapprochement. Indeed, the first Ilkhans were either clearly non-Muslim or at least reluctant towards the Muslim faith. The first Ilkhan, Hülegü, was buried with human sacrifices. Even though the sources do not mention such explicitly steppe-rooted shamanistic features in the following decades, few of the Ilkhanid Chinggisids are known to have converted to Islam before Ghazan’s rule. In addition to Shamanism, Syriac Christianity and Buddhism are two main religious identification and belief systems that were widespread among the ruling circles before 1295. The conversion of Tegüder Ilkhan (originally raised by his mother as a Christian) to Islam at some point before his ascension to the throne in 1282, as well as the role of his Islamic beliefs in his
deposition and execution in 1284 have already been discussed. Generally, Islamic beliefs do not seem to have been widely entrenched among the top layers of the Chinggisid family and the supreme commanders until the late 1280s. The religious and cultural change in question might have been more relevant for the lower, less well-documented, levels of the Ilkhanid military, the ones that held special relevance for Ghazan during his fight for power against Baidu (r. 1295). Since Ghazan, Islam became the dominant religion of each of the following Ilkhans, even though researchers have suggested that political motivations outplayed personal convictions in the case of Ghazan and up to some degree, Öljeitü (r. 1304–1316). Ghazan’s conversion and the following restrictions and countermeasures against the non-Islamic traditions and rituals in the Ilkhanid domains on the verge of the 14th century spurred further Islamization across the Ilkhanid domains. It is hard to know how many non-Muslims remained among the Ilkhanid Mongol and Turkic population towards the Ilkhanid collapse in the mid-1330s, as the sources remain silent on this issue. Close analysis of the Ilkhanid political ideology, tangible through textual data and material culture (primarily architecture, epigraphic, numismatic) attests to the leading role that Chinggisid ideology and pre-Islamic Iranian mythology played in the self-perception and self-representation of the Ilkhans well into the 14th century, even if strongly complemented with Islamic elements. Thus, the Islamization of the Chinggisid rulers in Western Asia did not mean the abandonment of the pre-conversion ideological foundations, but rather a rapprochement with the new cultural setting. Nevertheless, in the long-durée-perspective, Islam won. The infiltration of the Islamic faith and identity markers became so widespread among the lower levels of the nomadic populations, especially during the second half of the Ilkhanid period, that the collapse of the latter in 1336 saw massive purges of the Ilkhanid elites and the almost complete disappearance of the Chinggisid principle in most of the Ilkhanid domains except, notably, the Jalayirid areas.

While the general course of Ilkhanid Islamization is more or less clear, the landmarks on its way are less easy to detect. Putting aside the question of the broader mass conversion of the Chinggisid military, one can try to identify the major agents behind the conversion process. The Sufi circles have often been considered central. Indeed, multiple sources mention close relations between the Ilkhans, even those clearly non-Muslims, and Sufi teachers. The role of Shaykh Sadr al-Din Ibrahim al-Hammuya (1246–1322), one of the important Kubraviyya teachers, in Ghazan’s conversion, is one good example. Interestingly, it appears that the major Sufi supporters and clients of the non-Muslim Chinggisid elites belonged to a more systemic and orthodox branch, even though the travelling dervishes and various non-systemic religious teachers of the “antinomian” type (possibly closer in behaviour and clothes to the shamanistic spiritual leaders) appear to have gained influence after Ghazan’s conversion. Thus, while the interest in and respect to religious teachers of various kinds characterized the Chinggisid rulers from the very beginning of their expansion, it appears that the claim that the Mongols were fascinated by the Sufis due to their similarity to the shamans does not hold true in most cases. As stressed by Jackson, Chinggisid “religious tolerance” was more Realpolitik. It is plausible that the multiple patronage networks established by the Ilkhans and their courtiers with Sufi tariqas from Khurasan to Asia Minor since the beginning of Hülegüid rule reflected the practical approach of the Ilkhans to governing and
Two other interconnected factors appear to have been of importance for the gradual rapprochement of the Ilkhanid family and their elites with Islam. First, the Sufi activity itself would not have been effective enough if not supported by the multiple personal networks of the newcomers for a longer period of time before Ghazan’s conversion. The personal networks in question could be of various types: friendship and courtly relations, patron-client relations of various types, mentioned already, or those based on matrimonial ties. The role of the nomadic women who converted to Islam as well as those of Muslim background that entered the nomadic households should not be underestimated. This seems to be of special importance, unlike the rulings concerning Muslim males, who were allowed to marry non-Muslim women, the shari’a clearly forbids Muslim women to be married to non-Muslim men. Second, time itself played a role in the conversion process. The longer the Chinggisids and their nomadic subjects stayed in Western Asia, the higher was their exposure to the Islamic environment, the tighter became the personal and patronage linkages established between them and the local population and the more children of originally nomadic families were born in the new environment.

Until recently, research into the Ilkhanid conversion has concentrated primarily on the top layers of the Ilkhanid society, first on the Chinggisid “royal” conversions and, since the late 1990s, among the highest echelons of the Mongol military, not least due to the scarcity of sources concerning the Islamization of the lower levels of the nomadic population. The question of what occurred beyond the visible layers of the Ilkhanid society remains. Based on a comparison to cases from the other uluses, one could assume that the lower strata of the Mongol military had also become significantly exposed to Islam (with or without “active” conversion) towards Ghazan’s enthronement to support his claim to the khan’s seat. However, as shown by the case of Türaqai Güregen’s armies on the Iraqi–Anatolian border in the late 1290s, it would be wrong to assume that this was the case for the majority of the nomadic armies. The expulsion of the Buddhist monks from the Ilkhanate after Ghazan’s enthronement and the destruction of the Christian churches in the first two years of his reign, conducted under Nawruz’s guidance, mentioned earlier, might have played a role in the conversion processes after 1295, but it was probably through the generally increasing domination of the Islamic faith, strengthened by intermarriages and the activity of the travelling dervishes among the newer generations that the process was completed during the first half of the 14th century. It is, however, important to note that the Mongol conversion to Islam did not mean the disappearance of Chinggisid nomadic identities.

THE JOCHID ULUS

The Islamization of the uluses was crucial not only for the dramatic expansion of the religion across the Eurasian Steppe belt but also for the post-14th-century ethno-genesis of Central Asia and the later Russian Empire. Thus, specifically in the Jochid case, two parallel processes are intertwined in the ethnic and religious history of the ulus – that of the Turkification of the Mongol newcomers from Inner Asia to the Dasht-i Qipchaq on the one hand and the gradual infiltration of Islam into the
Islam had been present in the territories of the future Jochid ulus, be it along the Volga, in the territories of Volga Bulgaria or across the Dashti-i Qipchaq up to the Northern Black Sea, long before the Chinggisid invasion. Nevertheless, it was through the unification of all the areas from Eastern Siberia up to Crimea and the continuous spread of Islam across the Jochid ruling and military circles that it became the dominant religious unifying factor of these areas. Different from all other Chinggisid domains, the Jochid ulus had its first Islamic ruler, Berke (r. 1257–1266), Jochi’s third son, very early. It is difficult to pinpoint the time of Berke’s conversion (or the depth of his beliefs), even though it seems that his rapprochement with Islam started quite early, maybe in his youth. Since his enthronement, Berke clearly positioned himself as a Muslim, being arguably the first Chinggisid ruler to have appropriated the title “padshah-i Islam”. Sincere or not, his Islamic self-representation helped strengthen his position in Mongol Eurasia vis-à-vis his Chinggisid relatives. Starting with the early 1260s, Berke encouraged close Jochid–Mamluk diplomatic and trade relations, aimed primarily against the Ilkhanids. Nevertheless, although two of Berke’s brothers, as well as some other members of Berke’s family and his commanders, also accepted Islam, it did not become a leading religious characteristic of the ulus or of the ruling family. It took 50 more years, until Özbeg Khan’s conversion, for Islam to become widespread in the ulus, which was still not completely converted after his death.

Nevertheless, even if judged by the number of allegedly Islamic rulers or converts from the Chinggisid family of the pre-Özbeg period, the Islamic influence on the top layers of the Jochid family were clearly visible during the second half of the 13th century. Noqai (d. 1299), a Jochid prince and de facto autonomous ruler of the ulus’ westernmost domains close to the Black Sea, is well known, not least due to his alleged conversion to Islam, which he claimed in his direct communication with the Mamluk Sultan Baybars (r. 1260–1277) in August 1270. Similar to the Ilkhanate, allegiance to the Islamic faith did not (necessarily) mean the break with the convert’s previous identity framework, especially in the case of the Chinggisid nobility. Thus, according to an Ilkhanid source, Noqai sent a Buddhist relic (sharil) to Ilkhan Arghun in 1288, while a Franciscan missionary in Crimea claimed Noqai’s wife had been christened a Roman Catholic a year before. A ruler’s transition from non-Islamic to Islamic faith cannot always be clearly defined. A puzzling example is the Jochid khan Toqto’a (r. 1291–1312), the last khan before Islam became the ulus’ official religion under his nephew Özbeg. Toqto’a’s religious affiliation is debated in sources and research (varying from shamanism to Buddhism and/or even Christianity). Nevertheless, a limited number of sources, both written and numismatic, recently led to the thesis that Toqto’a may have converted to Islam in his later years. Petrov and Uskenbay based this assumption on coins minted in Ukek in 706 CE, and in Sarai al-Mahruša, a capital minting location, since 710 CE with the laqab “sultan al-ʿazam ghiyath al-dunya” as well as al-Mufaddal’s (sole, as far as I am aware) claim that Toqto’a converted to Islam. Other mints of Toqto’a’s time are known to have kept the traditional legends (“khan al-ʿadil” etc.). If this thesis holds true, it would shed new light on the co-existence of various legitimacy modi of the Jochid ruling house in the last years before the ulus’ conversion.

Özbeg’s coup d’etat after Toqto’a’s death adds an additional dimension to his conversion narrative. Özbeg (similar to Ghazan) came to power mainly due to the
support of a certain “Islamized” faction among the Chinggisid family and military.57 While this group is less visible from the sources, the new khan’s anti-Buddhist, and possibly anti-shamanistic, measures arguably indirectly indicate ideological confrontations between his supporters and other religious and political groups of influence.58 The sources also speak of Özbeg’s demands to impose Islam on a number of members of the Jochid family; even this may have been a masquerade for the new khan’s policy to stabilize his rule against other lineages of the clan.59 It is not completely clear whether Özbeg converted before his enthronement, as earlier historical narratives claim, or afterwards, as later ones suggest, explicitly emphasizing the role of his Sufi teachers and their miracle working.60 While the sources evaluate the degree of state Islamization during Özbeg’s period differently, especially when compared with the (allegedly) more intolerant rule of his son Janibeg (r. 1242–1357), Özbeg’s conversion can be seen as a crucial point in turning the Jochid ulus (at least its Right [west] Wing) into a predominantly Islamic political entity.61 Similar to the Ilkhanid case, however, the state conversion to Islam did not mean a break with the Chinggisid legitimacy framework. After Batu’s lineage came to an end with Berdibeg’s death in 1359 and the beginning of the Jochid Great Crisis (ca. 1359–ca. 1380), it was the Chinggisid, much less the Islamic identity of the aspirants to the khan’s throne in Sarai, that really mattered.62

The previous information relates mainly to the Jochid Right Wing, i.e., the areas around the Lower Volga basin and those stretching from the Volga westwards, towards the Don and Dnieper. Unfortunately, the information on the Left (east) Wing is so scarce that any conclusion is hard to draw, even though Allsen suggested that the Islamic influences among the ruling (Ordaid) family can be observed from the rule of Irzan, Sasi Buqa’s son (r. 1320–1345), thus quite late.63 The information on the Right Wing also includes multiple records and observations on the increasing Islamic architectural activities in multiple urban settings dating from the mid-13th century at the earliest. In addition to the increasing appearance of “usual” Islamic architectural elements, such as mosques, madrasas and zaviyas, the increase in Islamic-styled necropolises ascribed to the Jochid elite located near the major urban complexes along the Volga has been noted – a process that took place throughout most of the Mongol period in Eurasia.64 The broader question, namely, that of the Islamization of the nomadic masses, is, however, left open for both Jochid wings.

THE CHAGHADAIDS

The Chaghadaid domains were long seen as the most anti-Islamic of the Chinggisid polities. Referring to an idea of nomadic “conservatism”, scholars based their assumptions partly on the very late conversion of the prominent members of the Chaghadaid family – way into the first half of the 14th century in the western part of the ulus and towards the early 1350s in its eastern domains at the earliest. Additionally, proponents of this thesis recalled the anti-Islamic sentiments of significant parts of the Chaghadaid family and military recorded well into the 14th century.65 Recent research has differentiated this picture.66 The Chaghadaid domains can, despite a substantial lack of sources, be considered the best “laboratory” case for the complexity of nomadic–Islamic interactions in Mongol Eurasia.67 The specific location of the Chaghadaid dominion, stretching from Eastern Iran to eastern
Central Asia, and the ulus’ geographic, economic, cultural and demographic diversity means that no singular clear pattern of these interactions can be singled out. The ulus included both old sedentary centres of high Islamic culture, especially in the core of its western part, as well as broad steppe areas, especially in its east and south, where the growing influence of Islam towards the 13th century is negligible, with the exception of specific urban locations. Moreover, it is precisely through its location on the crossroads of the major transcontinental trade routes (that often significantly preceded Mongol Eurasia) as well as its being “squeezed” between the other Chinggisid domains that the Chaghadaid areas were in a state of permanent transition, be it in the political, demographic or ideological sense. This dynamism appears to have been the main constant in its history.

It is always alluring to approach the Islamization of premodern political entities through the prosopography of their ruling strata. Similar to Ghazan’s and Özbeg’s conversions, Chaghadaid history allows us to identify one ruler, Tarmashirin, son of Du’a (r. 1331–1334), whose reign and personal conversion prior to his enthronement are credited with spurring the conversion of the ulus’ western part to Islam. The strong pro-Islamic tendencies of Tarmashirin’s politics seem to have strengthened the antinomy of his non-Islamic subjects and partly explain his deposition.

Tarmashirin was, however, not the first of the Chaghadaid family to have developed close relations with Islam. While it is usually mentioned that Mubarakshah (r. 1266) was the first of the Chaghadaids to have converted, one should not forget that Mubarakshah’s mother, Orghina Khatun, was said to have developed an inclination to Muslims and their faith. Mubarakshah’s successor, Baraq (r. 1266–1271), Chaghadai’s great-grandson, primarily known for his unfortunate participation in the Battle of Herat (22 July 1270), is said to have converted to Islam shortly before his death. Nevertheless, neither his nor his predecessor’s conversion seem to have played any role in the overall Chaghadaid Islamization. The following decades before Tarmashirin’s enthronement witnessed several other Islamic rulers, such as Naliqo’a (r. 1308–1309), Bürü b. Chaghadai’s grandson, whose mother originated from Kirman and possibly influenced his faith, or contenders to the throne, such as a certain Yasa’ur, Naliqo’a’s great-nephew. Notably, the onomastic analysis yields few results in the Chaghadaid case, as only in rare instances do the genealogical compendia offer information on name changes after conversions or of Islamic names in a family for more than one generation.

Only from the early 1340s can we witness a continuing succession of Islamic rulers on the Chaghadaid throne. Since the Chaghadaid split of 1347, the western part of the khanate, the so-called Ulus Chaghadai, went through a phase of political instability, aggravated by factional conflicts and the lack of one political centre. This period ended with Temür’s rise to power in 1370. While Islamic identity became one of the leading components of Timurid legitimacy, and the Chinggisid principle remained intact, the Chaghadaid family itself basically lost its political relevance in the west (and even the Timurid puppet khans originated mainly from the Ögödeid family). It seems plausible that much of the ulus’ nomadic military underwent a gradual conversion to Islam towards this point (i.e. the second half of the 14th century), even though some tribal lineages appear to have been particularly influenced by Islam already in Tarmashirin’s time. It is possible that the mass conversions among the Chaghadaid military helped the Islamic rulers consolidate and keep
power in Mawarannahr since the mid-14th century, but a quantitative and qualitative assessment of these processes remains difficult.

The eastern parts of the Chaghadaid domains, Moghulistan, seem to have been much less influenced by Islam until the mid-14th century at least. During the course of the Chaghadaid split, Du’a’s alleged grandson, Tughluq Temür (r. 1347–1363), was enthroned by the eastern commanders in Aqsu, a location in today’s northwestern Xinjiang, possibly as a reaction to the Qaraunas overthrowing Qazan, the last Chaghadaid khan. At some point during his rule Tughluq Temür is known to have converted to Islam. While it is assumed that the new ruler took this step to strengthen his legitimacy vis-à-vis the already existing Islamic base among his military, the much later Tarikh-i Rashidi (1546) claims that no fewer than 120,000 of his followers converted with him. The same author stresses, however, that “most of the tribes of the Moghuls”, thus the majority of the nomadic population of the eastern Chaghadaid domains, came to Islam at a much later point, during the reign of Muhammad son of Khizr Khwaja (r. 1408–1415). The Buddhist presence in Turfan was completely eliminated only in the 1430s. This and the attempt of Namun, a Chinggisid in-law, to enthrone a Chaghadaid khan with clearly no Islamic connotation through Ming mediation in 1380 strengthens the assumption that the eastern parts of the Chaghadaid ulus (in both its nomadic and sedentary areas) remained mainly non-Islamic throughout most of the 14th century.

Islamic and non-Islamic features, traditions, and legitimacy seem to have co-existed among the Chaghadaids during a much longer period than in the other khanates. Recent scholarship shows that the Islamic governmental and religious elites had already become an indivisible part of the ulus during the United Empire. The first conversions to Islam among the Chaghadaid family occurred in the 13th century, yet, unlike the other uluses, the converts exerted much less influence on the khanate as a whole. Similarly, the first conversions took place among the Chaghadaid military relatively early. While it remains unclear how broadly Islam spread among the Chaghadaid military before Tarmashirin’s conversion, it appears that it was more intensive than in the western Chaghadaid domains than in their eastern locations. While the Sufi circles are known (or said) to have exerted significant influences on a number of leading Chaghadaid personalities, nothing similar to the Ilkhanid-Sufi patronage networks in Tabriz or Anatolia seems to have existed in the major Chaghadaid urban centres at least until Tarmashirin’s time. While the discussion of this peculiarity lies beyond the limits of this overview, one should stress the importance of the ulus’ geographic characteristics. Neither the Ilkhanate nor the Jochids had a direct connection to the eastern trade routes leading to Mongolia and China, so the Chaghadaid domains can be seen as some sort of transitory zone between China and Iran, both in the geographical and the cultural sense. In addition to their control of the urban centres along the trans-Eurasian trade routes (especially Bukhara, Samarqand and southern Khwarazm), the Chaghadaids also had a direct connection to China and Mongolia, their eastern domains being much closer to Daidu and the Orkhon Valley than to Tabriz, Sarai and Damascus. The Buddhist pilgrimage networks, closely dependent on the postal road system linking the eastern Chaghadaid domains with Chinese Dunhuang and Gansu, for example, continued long after Buddhism disappeared in the western khanates.
MONGOL EASTERN EURASIA

While neither the Ögödeid ulus nor the Yuan were significantly influenced by Islam, much less converted to it, one should keep in mind another significant development related to Chinggisid Eurasia, i.e., the massive influx of Muslims to Inner and East Asia during the 13th and the first half of the 14th centuries. While the first important Muslim migrations to the Chinese territory occurred under the Tang, it was Chinggisid control over Eastern Eurasia that had a considerable impact on the formation of the Islamic communities (or strengthening of the already extant ones) and the spread of Islam from today’s Xinjiang to the southern shores of China. Different from the other Chinggisid uluses, Eastern Eurasia was not characterized by a sizable Islamic population until the Mongol domination in most of its parts.

Compared with the three western khanates, neither the Yuan nor the areas under Qaidu’s domination (incorporated mostly into the Qa’an’s domains in the early 14th century) underwent systemic Islamization on the administrative or cultural levels. It would, nevertheless, be wrong to ignore the Muslim presence in the territory of both uluses. More is known about the Qubilaid domains. Scholarship has underlined the extensive employment of the “Semu” (up to a high degree Islamic) intellectual elite in the Yuan governmental bureaus and administrative hierarchies throughout the Yuan period – a phenomenon that started with the leading role of the Islamic governors of Central and West Asian origin in the administration of North China in the first half of the 13th century. Despite some limited and short-term instances of discrimination against Muslims (such as the prohibition of Islamic slaughter under Qubilai in 1280), all in all the Qubilaid were positively oriented towards their Muslim subjects so long as they remained loyal. This favourable attitude also reflected the significant dispersion of the newly arrived Islamic communities and their settlement across most of the Yuan domains. Being forcefully brought to China or coming voluntarily (e.g. as merchants, both via land and sea routes), the Muslims entrenched themselves in the urban centres of the Yuan, building mosques and establishing communities from Gansu and today’s Inner Mongolia to the southern and south-eastern coast of Fujian and Guangzhou. The Islamic presence was particularly visible in the south-western areas, in Sichuan and Yunnan, both located on the important trade routes leading to South and South-East Asia, primarily Myanmar, Annam, and India.

While the Islamicate cultures went through some sort of renaissance in China under the Chinggisids, the religious activity of the newcomers rarely led to massive conversions to Islam – be it of the local non-nomadic populations or the Chinggisid family and their armies. One interesting case is Yunnan, under the control of Sayyid Ajall Shams al-Din (1211–1279), a Qubilaid governor of Bukharan origin, since 1274. Yunnan provides an example of the long-term Islamization of the originally mostly non-Han population. As a rule, while the Islamic communities were dispersed almost everywhere in China, it was only in the north-western areas, primarily along the Hexi corridor, particularly in Gansu province, that the impact of Islam both on the Han population and on the Chinggisid nomadic population became tangible. Since the first aspect reflects more of a long-term development, it is the second development that should be touched upon. Most of the nomads in Mongol Eastern Eurasia remained untouched by Islam, as the Church of the East
and Tibetan Buddhism were widespread among the Chinggisid military under the Yuan. While the Yuan armies incorporated a number of Islamic military units, it remains unclear how intensive the communication networks between the Muslims and other parts of the military (comparable to western khanates) were in the Yuan case. Similarly, not much is known about the members of the Golden Lineage who converted to Islam. One remarkable exception is Ananda, Qubilai’s grandson, who is known to have been fostered, still as a little boy, by a Muslim “Semu” family. Manggala, Ananda’s father, who controlled most of north-western and western China, had a significant number of Muslims in his domains, including the members of his own personal guard. While Manggala himself is not known to have converted to Islam, his son Ananda did so at some point. During the factional war after Temür Öljeitü’s death in 1307, Ananda failed to gain power and was executed the same year. It remains disputable how broadly Ananda’s conversion influenced the standing of Islam in Anxi. A Persian source recalls that a “hundred fifty thousand” converts followed the prince into the new faith, more plausible would be something like a few thousand. No similar case is known from the Yuan. As Islam was not a leading identity marker of the Yuan elite and ruling family, it is only in the vicinities with a high number of Islamic communities, such as Gansu and Yunnan, that one may expect more long-term traces of the conversion of the Chinggisid troops to Islam.

Turning to the (original) Ögödeid ulus, the shortage of sources become even graver. The Islamic communities constituted a significant part of the urban population of the original Ögödeid appanage. Qayaliq, Qaidu’s personal appanage since 1252, is a good example. Qaidu’s expansion westwards, towards the Ferghana Valley, significantly increased the number of Muslims under his control. Qaidu’s army, however, seems to have been predominantly of tribal Mongol and Turkic origin. Little can be said about the religious composition of its ranks. Some indications of Christian troops (e.g. of the Bekrin tribe) exist, but it is plausible to assume that, similar to Qaidu himself, most of his troops were shamanistic. Following Qaidu’s expansion westwards, a number of Muslims probably entered his service as auxiliary troops. Similarly, the expansion westwards brought Qaidu and the Ögödeids into close contact with the Central Asian, predominantly Muslim, urban intellectual and governmental elites. Nevertheless, the direct Islamic influence on the Ögödeids under Qaidu or their military appears negligible. As far as I am aware, almost no Ögödeid conversions to Islam under Qaidu are known, and no Islamic conversions among his military have been recorded. Be it due to the short lifespan of the independent Ögödeid ulus, the lack of significant contacts between the Chinggisid military and administrative elites and the urban Islamic population or the still shallow entrenchment of the missionary Sufi networks in Qaidu’s domains, the Ögödeids under Qaidu remained tolerant of the multiplicity of religions in their territory and never went through systemic Islamization.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Contrary to the sources’ tendency to picture the Islamization process in a clear-cut linear fashion, Islam remained but one of the major identity markers appropriated by the Chinggisid families and their nomadic military, even after the conversion
of most of the Chinggisid entities. Thus, the Chinggisid principle itself remained basically intact across Eurasia as long as the Chinggisid political structures existed, even though this changed from location to location, starting with the crisis-decades of the mid-14th century. Similarly, tribal identities remained of crucial importance both for the Chinggisids and their military. This can clearly be seen from our sources, and not less important, from the “retribalization” processes visible across Eurasia during the Chinggisid Crisis. While it remains an open question to what degree the ethnic entities behind the tribal labels (Jalayirids, Oirats, Barlas) of the mid-14th century emerged from the entities with the same names of the early 13th century, it seems quite clear that Islam did not replace the already extant identity markers.

Islam spread only slowly and gradually among the Chinggisid family and the Mongol populations in general. It took presumably more than 150 years for the conversion of the majority of the Chinggisids and their military to Islam. Islamization probably was not fully completed in any of the Chinggisid and ex-Chinggisid domains (the Yuan case being different anyway) up until the early 15th century at least. In this regard, the almost exclusive attention paid by the sources to the major cases of Chinggisid conversion is unfortunate, as it decisively diverts our attention from the broader social reality. But what role did these “royal” converts play in the general development of the conversion processes? It appears that in all three major case studies (the Ilkhanate, the Jochids and the Chaghadaids) the conversion of the rulers could be instrumental for a top-down institutional Islamization of the khanates. However, it remains without doubt that in none of the uluses did those conversions play the decisive role in turning most of the non-Islamic nomadic population to Islam. On the one hand, the conversions of the rulers were in the first place mostly motivated by the increasing Islamization of their own nomadic military – and in this case, the conversion was more a result of political considerations regarding legitimacy or power acquisition than personal conviction. On the other hand, other vectors of the conversion appear to have been of major importance for the continuous, generation-long conversion of the Mongols to Islam: both the geographical expansion of the Islamic missionary networks and charismatic teachers as well as the “domestic” rapprochement of the nomads with the Islamic environment (e.g. through friendship or marriage).

As shown, Islam caught on in the Chinggisid successor states at different speeds and with various effects, the Ilkhanate standing for the (comparatively) quickest penetration of Islam, the Yuan remaining non-Islamic until its collapse in 1368. Nevertheless, as stressed in the beginning, the Chinggisid unification of most of Eurasia led to the significant expansion of Islam across the continent, within the empire and beyond its limits. While the migrations of the Islamic populations were crucial for this phenomenon in East Asia, the conversion of the Mongol nomadic masses to Islam everywhere outside China, Mongolia and Manchuria appears pivotal for the decisive conversion of the Eurasian Steppe and the deeper infiltration of Islam in western Asia and the Caucasus. Though originally unintended by the architects of the Chinggisid empire, this phenomenon is one of the major legacies of Mongol Eurasia. Therefore, at least in this regard, the period of Chinggisid rule could be counted as a formative phase of the early modern history of most of the continent.
NOTES

1 This research was made possible by the German Research Foundation (DFG project no. 429873935).
2 HWC, 13.
3 A clear indication of this is that al-Juvayni avoids mentioning the fall of Baghdad and the violent death of the last Abbasid caliph al-Musta’sim bi’llah.
4 Lane 2015, 183–186.
5 Note that, for the sources, “conversion” often means the change of practice rather than of religious affiliation (see Jackson 2017, 329–332). Note Eaton’s criticism of the term “conversion” as wrongly assuming “a sudden and total change” (Eaton 2017, 389).
6 Note Allsen 2015.
7 Allsen 1997.
8 Pfeiffer 2006.
10 Landa 2018a, 90–99.
11 Two such examples are Körgüz, an Uyghur governor (basqaq) of Khurasan under Ögödei Qa’an (HWC, 505), and Baiju, the Chinggisid governor in Asia Minor in the late United Empire (Baybars al-Mansuri 1998, 42).
12 Lane 1999; Landa 2018a.
14 Pfeiffer 2006, 374, 383–388.
15 See Biran 2002a, 750 for a similar claim in the case of the Chaghadaid conversion.
16 RDM, II, 971; Pfeiffer 2006, 372–373.
18 Pfeiffer 2006, 374. For the original source, see SP, fl. 148b.
19 MA, fl. 74a–75a.
20 Wassaf 2010, 101 [text], 97 [transl.]. For a discussion of the Steppe burial rituals, see Barthold 1921, 68.
25 Note, however, that some qamis, i.e., shamans, were active in the Ilkhanate during Öljeitü’s rule.
26 Amitai 2021; Brack 2018; Blair 1983; Whaley 2003.
27 Landa 2016b, 170–171 on the Oyirad example.
29 Amitai 1999; Pfeiffer 2006.
30 Melville 1990.
31 Amitai 1999, 39–42.
33 Köprülü 1929; Fletcher 1986, 44.
34 Amitai 1999, 38.
36 Pfeiffer 2006, 376–388.
38 De Nicola 2017; Brack 2011.
40 e.g. Melville 1990; Amitai 1996; Amitai 2001.
44 For a long-term perspective, see Bregel 1991, 60–61.
50 One could also name Berke’s great-nephew Töde Möngke (Jackson 2017, 353). Also recall al-Mufaddal’s claim that Toqto’a converted, recently supported by Russian and Kazakh scholars based on numismatic data (see later in this chapter).
52 RDRM, II, 1163–1164; Jackson 2017, 353.
54 Petrov and Uskenbay 2010; Petrov and Uskenbay 2013.
59 Jackson 2017, 354.
61 But note Hautala 2018, 73–76, who calls for a more differentiated approach to the immediate effects of Özbek’s Islamizing policies.
62 For more on the Chinggisid Crisis, see Morgan 2009; Safargaliev 1960; Spuler 1965, 109–136. Note, however, the exceptional case of the Nangudauds, the local ruling family of Qonggirat origin (Landa 2018b, 219–224).
63 Allsen 1985, 32.
64 Jackson 2017, 355; Garustovich 2011.
66 DeWeese 2009; Biran 2002a; Biran 2007–8; Biran 2009; and Jackson 2019.
67 DeWeese 2009, 128.
68 Biran 2009, 66.
69 Biran 2002a.
70 Biran 2002a, 748–750.
71 Jackson 2017, 355; Landa 2016a, 179, fn. 91.
72 Biran 2015, 43; Biran 2002b.
73 None of Mubarak Shah’s children, mentioned both in the SP (fl. 120b) and the MA (fl. 36b–37a) appear under a Muslim (or potentially “Perso-Muslim”) name. Such names appear only in the generation of his grandsons.
74 Bartold 1943, 59–60. On the different ruling years of Naliquo’a, note MA, fl. 31a.
75 Biran 2002a, 750; Jackson 2017, 356.
76 Jackson 2017, 356.
79 Woods 1990, 12.
81 DeWeese 2009, 132.
83 Haidar 2012, 21.
84 Elverskog 2010, 203.
85 Kim 1999.
86 Biran 2009, 63–65.
87 Biran 2002a, 750–751.
88 Biran 2002a, 751.
91 Matsui 2008.
92 Rossabi 1981.
93 Park 2012, 20–55; George 2015.
94 Allsen 2015, 143, also 151, fn. 136.
95 “Semu ren” (色目人, lit. “people with colored eyes”), is a general term used in the Yuan administration for the broader social group of the Western and Central Asians in the Yuan domains (Haw 2013–14; Brose 2013, also Lee 2016, 107 and see a critical perspective on the term in Funada 2004).
96 Rossabi 1981, 207ff for a general discussion of Muslims at the early Qubilaid court; as well as Yang 2019, 399–408 on the astronomers and Allsen 2002, 269–272 on the transfer of military specialists and technologies.
98 Allsen 2015.
99 Lane 2018; Chaffee 2006; Chaffee 2008; Mukai 2016.
100 Sen 2006; Forbes 1986a, 174–175; Forbes 1986b, 386–387.
101 YS 125, 3064. For the Yuan conquest activities in the Southeast (Yunnan and Annam), see Fiaschetti 2017.
103 On these areas, see Dunnell 2014; Shurany 2018; Landa 2021, 224–227.
105 We hear more of the “Sinicization” of the Eastern Central Asian population in the territory of today’s Kyrgyzstan (Ili Valley) as a by-product of the Han resettlement. Allsen 2015, 130–131.
106 Farquhar 1990, 259 [§48.19], 265 [§48.32].
110 YS 22, 478.
111 Dunnell 2014, 190.
112 The major study remains Biran 1997.
116 Biran 1997, 84.
117 Biran 2013, 265–269.
118 This does not mean that such conversions did not happen.
120 Togan 1998, 13; Landa 2017, 1203, esp. fn. 81.

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HWC, See List of Abbreviations.


