The Mongol World

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The Chinggisid Legacy in the Middle East

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The Chinggisids’ impact on the history of the Middle East was profound and long lasting, despite the relatively short period that they ruled. Although just over a century elapsed from the first Mongol invasions against the empire of the Khwarazmshah in 1218 to the death of the last Chinggisid Ilkhan, Abu Sa‘id Bahadur Khan in 1335, many aspects of political, religious, and intellectual life in the Middle East were transformed by the Mongols. In what follows, we will examine some of these transformations, and the long-term consequences that the Chinggisids had on the Middle East, and particularly the territory of the Ilkhanate, between the Euphrates and Amu Darya rivers.

There were many examples of dramatic, often destructive encounters between the Mongols and the peasants, nomads, townspeople, and elites in the Middle East, which resulted in long-term material consequences. Cities like Balkh and Tus in Khurasan were erased from the map in the initial onslaught, although both of these places re-emerged as important shrine centers in the later years of Mongol rule. Other cities survived, but in new relationships to the world around them because of the Mongol conquests. Baghdad was transformed from the center of Sunni Muslim learning and spiritual authority under the Abbasid Caliphate, to more of a provincial center, second to Tabriz in terms of political importance to the Mongols, and second to Cairo in terms of importance to Islamic learning. And, of course, political dynasties were swept away and were replaced by Mongol khans.

**TEMPORAL POLITICAL AUTHORITY**

Beyond these immediate changes, the Mongols set in motion other less obvious and more gradual transformations in the political and religious life in the Middle East, which also had long-term consequences. One of the most important legacies of the Mongols in the Middle East was the way changes brought about by the Mongol conquests prompted new ideas about who had the right to rule and on what grounds they had such authority.
To understand this process, it is useful to consider the political situation before the Mongols. In the year 1200, before the first wave of Mongol armies arrived in the Middle East, political authority was generally held by rulers whose de facto military and political power was legitimized through a formal allegiance to and recognition from the Abbasid caliph, a descendant from the family of the Prophet Muhammad and member of a dynasty that had ruled since 750. Although shorn of much of his political power by the 13th century, the caliph continued to enjoy moral and ideological authority as the ‘Commander of the Faithful’ and head of the Muslim community. He had the final say on scriptural disputes concerning jurisprudence and was still nominally charged with the spiritual guidance of the Muslim world, enjoining the good and forbidding the bad. Recognition of this de facto situation defined the Sunni political order and had more to do with an acknowledgement of the political status quo than any religious doctrine. For Shi‘i Muslims, such an arrangement was theoretically illegitimate, for the only legitimate ruler from a Shi‘i perspective was the imam, who, for the majority Shi‘i sect, known as the Twelvers, was in occultation by the 10th century. Thus, for the rulers of the Middle East on the eve of the Mongol invasion, legitimate rule involved a condominium of sacred and worldly authority. A sultan, such as a ruler from the Seljuk dynasty, legitimized his rule as sultan through his relationship with the Abbasid caliph.

The Mongol conquest of Baghdad and overthrow of the caliphate in 1258 put an end to this pattern of sacralizing kingship in the Middle East. The Abbasid Caliphate did not go away; an Abbasid caliph soon reemerged in Cairo in 1261. This caliphate, however, was a creation of the Mamluk sultans who had seized power from the Ayyubids there in 1250 and was not recognized outside the Mamluk domains in Egypt and Syria. Thus, the Euphrates River, dividing the Mamluk Sultanate from the Mongol Ilkhanate also became the boundary between notions of legitimate authority during the Mongol period and after.

The end of the Abbasid Caliphate as a sacralizing genealogy in condominium with political, military authority opened the door to new solutions to the question of who has the right to rule and on what grounds. The eclipse of the caliphate as an instrument of public acknowledgement of universalizing political authority in the lands east of the Mamluk Sultanate meant that new ideas, symbols, and memories were used to explain why a sultan had the right to rule his subjects. Here is where we need to consider what John Woods has called the “era of great experimentation and innovation in political thought and practice.” Such experimentation was both a product of the Mongols’ own ideas about legitimate authority, as well as a product of the social and intellectual transformations that took place due to Mongol rule in the Islamic Middle East. What were some of the various alternatives to the caliph-sultan pattern that had existed in the Middle East before the arrival of the Mongols?

One alternative was a completely new genealogical basis for legitimate authority, based upon descent from Chinggis Khan himself. Everywhere the Mongols conquered, the Chinggisid principle followed; that is, legitimate rule belonged to a patrilineal descendant of Chinggis Khan. In the Ilkhanate, this meant descendants of Hulegu, the conqueror of Baghdad who established the Toluid ulus between the Oxus and Euphrates. Tension existed throughout the Ilkhanid period, between sons of khans and their uncles who could also claim legitimate authority and led to periods of civil war in 1282 and 1295. When Abu Sa‘id Bahadur Khan died in 1335, a new period
of unrest broke out which was never fully resolved. Or more precisely, a Chinggisid khan never again held power in the Ilkhanid ulus.

To what extent then can we speak of Chinggisid heritage as part of the legacy of the post-Chinggisid Middle East? In the immediate aftermath of the upheaval that followed Abu Sa‘id’s death, the amirs who sought control of the ulus claimed to rule in the name of the descendants of Chinggis Khan. These figureheads had little real authority, for power in the Ilkhanate had shifted from the khan to the amirs even before the Ilkhanate collapsed. Thus, for example, the Jalayirid amir Shaykh Hasan-i Buzurg ruled in Baghdad in the name of Muhammad Khan, a descendant of Hülegü’s son Möngke-Temür, and later in the name of a descendant of Gaykhatu named Jahan Timur. At the same time, the Chobanid amir Shaykh Hasan-i Kuchak claimed to rule in the name of Sati Beg, the daughter of Öljeitü, and then to Sulayman Khan, a descendant of Hülegü’s son Yoshmut.4

We might usefully ask why this happened and what the long-term consequences were for the region. Recently, scholars have questioned the conventional wisdom that the Ilkhanate collapsed due to the fact that Abu Sa‘id died without a son to succeed him. Charles Melville has pointed out that there was no lack of eligible Chinggisids in Iran in 1335, even if they were from other family lines, and thus there may have been other reasons for the conflict that followed Abu Sa‘id’s death.5 Melville builds on an idea developed most systematically by Michael Hope, that the upheaval after Abu Sa‘id’s death was more about a clash between two visions for the ulus, one traditional and decentralized and one more in line with the centralizing tendencies that the Ilkhanate had been undergoing since the period of Ghazan Khan and Rashid al-Din.6

The fact that the Ilkhanate did not suddenly transform into a centralized, agrarian, Islamic sultanate is only surprising if we accept the vision of the state and a narrative of history put forth by court officials like Rashid al-Din.7 For the qarachu amirs, or the non-Chinggisid elites, Chinggisid genealogies were not useful. However, appeals to a Chinggisid legacy, characterized by nomadic culture, military conquest, and redistributive economic mechanisms were extremely valuable to the military aristocracy for whom the Ilkhanid ulus was the framework for political action.

Military elites seeking to uphold Chinggisid tradition often expressed this tradition with reference to the yasa of Chinggis Khan. There has been a good deal of debate about the precise nature of the yasa.8 Although no single yasa document exists, we might usefully think of the yasa as the laws and decrees that Chinggis Khan promulgated during his lifetime and which were upheld by his successors.9 For many Mongols among the military elite, the yasa came to mean tradition, the way things used to be done, and thus the proper way to do things. Such sentiments could provide a shorthand for the grievances felt by members of the military elite who favored what Hope has called a “collegist” (collegial) approach to governance, characterized by consultation by the khan (with) his amirs, and the quriltai assembly as a mechanism to accommodate concerns among the elite, both military and civilian.10 The yasa as Chinggisid tradition appears in the sources as distinct from, and often in conflict with Islamic law (shari‘a). More broadly, proponents of the yasa resisted the centralizing reforms begun during the reign of Ghazan Khan, which included an attempt to limit the authority and consultative power of the amirs. Thus, post-Chinggisid rulers who sought the valuable support of the military
elite, but who could not claim Chinggisid descent for themselves, looked to an articulation of legitimate authority in which they upheld Mongol tradition and the yasa of Chinggis Khan.

Conflict over the law, about the primacy of yasa or shari'a, was sometimes a reflection of conflict about distribution of resources. We can see an example in the question of the legality of the soyurghal, a type of land grant that became common in the post-Ilkhanid period. A soyurghal was a grant of proprietorship over land revenue and peasant labor, with total tax immunity and freedom from any interference from state administrators. In the late 15th century, the Timurid Sultan Husayn Bayqara (r. 1469–1506) and the Aq Qoyunlu Sultan Ya'qub (r. 1478–1490) both tried to reform the decentralized, soyurghal-dependent land revenue system in their realms, through a return to Islamic law. Yet, the soyurghal persisted as a cost-effective way to reward members of the military aristocracy, even as it eroded central administrative control over territory.

Not all post-Ilkhanid rulers relied on Chinggisid genealogy or Chinggisid tradition, but instead sought to draw on alternative dynastic genealogies. The Chobanid ruler of Azerbaijan, Malik Ashraf (r. 1343–1357), ruled in the name of a certain Anushirvan, whose legitimacy seemed to be based on a pre-Islamic notion of Iranian kingship. The Muzaffarid ruler, Mubariz al-Din, attempted to base his claim to authority in Shiraz, Isfahan, and Kirman on recognition from the Abbasid caliph in Cairo. The Kart maliks in Herat recognized and paid tribute to Taghay Timur Khan, who, although he was related to Chinggis Khan (he was descended from his brother), was not technically a Chinggisid. Thus, among the military elite, several different legitimizing ideologies were employed, from Chinggisid lineage, Chinggisid tradition, as well as support for non-Chinggisid figureheads.

SACRAL POLITICAL AUTHORITY

Yet, however much the post-Ilkhanid rulers in the Middle East sought to convert their roles as conquerors into sultans, the sacralizing element that had formerly been represented by the sultan-caliph condominium was also reimagined in the period after the end of the universal caliphate in Baghdad. If the world order over which one rules is an Islamic one, where does Islam intersect with kingship? How does one rally the religious elites of society, and the rest of the populace along with them, without a clear conduit through which God’s will, law, and judgment can be known by his subjects?

A useful way of thinking about the intersection of kingship and religion is to consider notions of the acquisition and transmission of religious knowledge. How does one know what God wants him or her to do? Throughout Islamic history, there had been two basic ways to answer this question. The first was the answer of the traditional Sunni ulama, the religious scholars for whom the primary modes of intellectual activity were textual and legalistic. The main sources of knowledge were the Quran and the hadith, which in combination with rationality and tradition, could produce answers to the questions of how God wants us to live. We can think of this type of knowledge as exoteric, available to anyone able to read the texts and interpret their apparent meaning. The second was an answer shared by both Shi'is and sufis, for whom the sources of religious knowledge included not only the
Quran and the hadith, but also the esoteric understanding of their meanings, which could not necessarily be discerned by anyone simply reading words on the page. Real religious knowledge required understanding the hidden meanings of things, which were not necessarily accessible to everyone, no matter how much reading and studying they did.

There were some important developments that coincided with Chinggisid rule that contributed to an expansion of these modes of esoteric knowledge in the Middle East, and new ways of thinking about legitimate authority. One development had been underway before the arrival of the Mongols, which was the growth of sufism as both a mode of religious practice, as well as of social organization. Sufism promised a mystical connection to God, in which the direction of a spiritually excellent guide (shaykh, murshid, pir, etc.) could offer an alternative to the textual methods of the traditional ulama. Mystical knowledge of God through meditative or ecstatic communal rituals, in connection with the divine blessing (baraka) of a saintly shaykh was an attractive avenue for devotion and the spread of Islam. Through the 12th and 13th centuries, sufi devotion had more and more commonly come in the form of distinct brotherhoods, or paths (pl. tariqat) to mystical enlightenment. Sufi orders served as a form of social organization and hierarchy, with the shaykh at the top. The social functions of tariqat could include the provision of social services and charity. They could also provide the framework for authority parallel to that of the political-military elite of the sultan and his amirs. In fact, the succession to the leadership of sufi orders were commonly “dynastic,” with leadership passing from father to son. In the period after the eclipse of both the Abbasid and Chinggisid dynasties, the succession of shaykhs and the transmission of spiritual authority from father to son could offer an alternative to the sultan-caliph condominium of the pre-Mongol period.

Parallel to, and sometimes intersecting with this pattern of spiritual authority among sufi orders was the Shi‘i concept of rightful leadership of the Islamic community belonging solely to the imam. For Shi‘is, the imams’ claim to leadership was based on esoteric religious knowledge passed down from father to son, going back to ‘Ali b. Abi Talib. The sacred genealogy of the imams shared many similarities with the tariqa genealogies, and both offered a model for Islamic political leadership.

What were some of the real-world implications of these developments? Generally speaking, the post-Chinggisid Middle East saw a variety of attempts to combine esoteric spiritual knowledge with a charismatic genealogy. We have already indicated the ways in which Chinggisid descent offered a powerful basis for authority, especially when combined with command of tribal military forces. Yet, there were alternatives to the Chinggisid principle. Perhaps the most significant political development associated with the expansion of Twelver Shi‘i and sufi patterns of spiritual leadership was the appearance of messianic political movements in the post-Chinggisid Middle East. The messianic deliverer, the mahdi, was a figure who would appear at the end of time to bring justice and right religion to the world. The notion of the mahdi had a long history in Islam. Although Sunnis and Shi‘is at different times and places awaited the appearance of the mahdi, Twelver Shi‘is developed the most extensive theological account of the concept of the mahdi as messiah and identified him with the Twelfth Imam, who disappeared in the 9th century. By the
Mongol period, an expectation of the mahdi, as well as reverence for ‘Ali and his descendants, had become accepted among Sunnis as well as Shi’is.18

Individuals put forth messianic claims even before the end of the Ilkhanid period. In 1324, Timurtash, son of Amir Choban, who was the real authority in the Ilkhanate during the early reign of the young Abu Sa‘id, raised an insurrection and claimed the title of Messiah of the Age (“mahdi al-zaman”).19 In the period after the end of Chinggisid rule, a number of other mahdi-claimants emerged, all of whom led movements offering new ways of joining spiritual knowledge with political power and authority. In Khurasan in the 1330s, the successors to a sufi leader named Shaykh Khalifa, who were known as the Sarbadars, forged an alliance with the local Mongol military elite, as well as with crafts and artisan guilds, centered around the expectation of the imminent return of the mahdi.20 To the west, Fazlallah Astarabadi (d. 1394) claimed to be the mahdi, based on his esoteric understanding of the hidden meanings of the Persian-Arabic alphabet. His movement, known as the Hurufiyya (“lettrism”), posed a political challenge to Timurid rule in Azerbaijan.21

What accounts for such a rise in messianism in the post-Chinggisid period? In addition to the quest for an acceptable articulation of sacred political authority, as discussed earlier, religious speculation derived from the unitive cosmology of Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240) helped to open the door for individuals to claim to be messianic deliverers. Although Ibn ‘Arabi died before Hülegü came to Baghdad and did not live within the Mongol realm, he was probably the most influential thinker across the Islamic world in the period. Central to Ibn Arabi’s thought was the notion of wahdat-i wujud, or the oneness of being, an idea that involved a unity between the divine and the profane. God is not completely otherworldly because nothing exists apart from God, human beings included. Because humanity shares aspects of divine nature, it is possible that a person could achieve his or her full potential as a reflection of God, and as such become a “perfect person” (insan-i kamil).22

What does Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought have to do with the Mongols? Ibn ‘Arabi’s ideas suggested the possibility that esoteric knowledge of God was available not just to the hidden imam or to a sufi saint, but to anyone, including members of the military aristocracy and ruling elite. Furthermore, such a spiritually excellent individual had the potential to undermine the authority of the traditional ulama. How could a madrasa-trained scholar challenge the spiritual authority of the axis of the age, the messianic deliverer of the world?

The persistence of messianism as part of a political framework in the post-Mongol period is evidenced by its appearance in the legitimizing ideology of 16th-century Islamic dynasties. Shah Isma’il, who claimed the throne in Tabriz for the Shi‘i sufi order of Ardabil known as the Safavids (Safaviyya), took over as leader of a movement whose leaders had made messianic claims since the mid-15th century. By the time
young Isma’il became shah, he was making claims even more beyond the pale of mainstream Shi‘i theology, including an assertion of his own “divine nature.” Even after the zealotry of the Safavids’ Turkman followers was countered with the invitation of mainstream Shi‘i scholars in the early 16th century, the messianic strain remained. In 1593, the messianic Nuqtavi movement attempted to overthrow the Safavid dynasty. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, Cornell Fleischer has shown the ways in which Sultan Suleyman (r. 1520–1566) sought to suggest that he was the messianic ruler who would fill the world with justice. Suleyman cultivated an image and ideology that connected an emphasis on justice with expectations about the *mahdi*, at a time when many believed the Millennium (perhaps corresponding to the year 1000 in the Islamic calendar [1591–1592 CE]) was imminent.

### RISE OF CAIRO AS AN INTELLECTUAL CENTER

We have focused up to this point on the legacy of the Chinggisids within the territory of the Ilkhanate. Can we also speak of an impact beyond the regions the Mongols ruled? The lands west of the Euphrates were threatened by Hülegü’s army following the fall of the Baghdad caliphate, but after a decisive victory at Ayn Jalut in 1260 (in present-day Israel), the Mamluks prevented the Ilkhans from conquering Syria, despite a long period of war and tension. Parallel to this migration of Mongols to the west was the movement of intellectuals and seekers of religious education from the lands of the Ilkhanate to Mamluk territory. Part of this process was related to the Mongols’ conquest of Baghdad and the realignment of Ilkhanid priorities away from Iraq to Azerbaijan. In the centuries before the Mongol conquests, Baghdad had been a center of Islamic learning and patronage, even after the effective political power of the caliph had declined. Although Cairo was the capital of the Fatimid Caliphate from its founding in 969, Baghdad remained preeminent for Sunni Muslims who sought the study of religious and natural sciences, and the financial resources to support a life devoted to scholarship. This pattern began to change after the fall of Abbasid Baghdad and the establishment of Mamluk control over Egypt and Syria. Cairo became the new center of Sunni Islamic learning and patronage in the post-Chinggisid period.

The Mamluk amirs and sultans had an uneasy relationship with the *ulama* of Cairo and other Egyptian and Syrian cities. On one hand, they relied on the *ulama* to lend legitimacy to their rule. After all, the Mamluks were foreigners who had different customs, spoke a different language, and were converts to Islam. To strengthen their authority over their realm, Mamluk sultans and amirs forged ties with elite local families (*a‘yan*) through marriage as well as through distribution of offices (*mansabs*). On the other hand, the Mamluks often saw local elites as rivals for influence and resources and attempted from time to time to seize their wealth, which was often preserved in pious endowments (*waqf*). One of the strategies the Mamluks used to erode the influence of the local elites was to invite other foreigners, commonly Persian and Turkish speakers from Ilkhanid Iran, Iraq, and Anatolia, to Cairo to fill official positions as qadis and teachers in madrasas. These newcomers were often sufis who established *khanqahs* (lodges), institutions that expanded in
Egypt and Syria in the 14th century. Thus, the Mongol conquests provided impetus for sufis and religious scholars from Ilkhanid territory to seek new sources of knowledge and support in Mamluk Syria and Egypt. At the same time, the particular social and political dynamics in the Mamluk Sultanate provided ample opportunities for scholars from the east to find an education and a lucrative position in cities like Cairo and Damascus.

The movement of Persian and Turkish speaking sufis and others to the Mamluk realm illustrates the fact that despite the political boundary separating the Mamluk and Mongol (and later Timurid and Turkman) lands from each other, the entire region, from Cairo to Konya, Tabriz, and Baghdad, formed a common cultural and intellectual zone. Scholars moved between cities in search of a learned teacher or lucrative office. Networks formed among individuals who not only came from different backgrounds, regions, and polities but who also studied a wide range of subjects, from Hellenic medicine and astronomy to Islamic law, sufism, and even occult sciences. In many ways, this pattern was not new and had existed before the Mongols. Islam had long offered a cultural and spiritual realm common to people who lived under a variety of polities. However, the legacy of the Chinggisids in this process was the opening up of the range and variety of intellectual pursuits that could also find favor at royal courts and amiral households.

Consider the life of Badr al-Din Mahmud Simavi, known more commonly as Shaykh Bedreddin (d. 1416). Known mainly for the uprising he led against the Ottomans in 1416, Shaykh Bedreddin’s life illustrates the connectedness of the Islamic Middle East, as well as the wide range of religious and political networks and movements that existed in the post-Chinggisid period. Bedreddin was born to a Turkish family near Edirne in the middle third of the 14th century. He studied grammar in Edirne and later studied logic and astronomy in Konya. He then went to Mamluk Jerusalem to study hadith and Cairo to study logic and philosophy. From Cairo, Bedreddin traveled to Tabriz, then returned to Cairo, and eventually headed back to Ottoman Edirne, where he became a military judge under the Ottoman prince Musa Celebi in 1411. When Musa lost his bid for the throne in 1413, Bedreddin was exiled to Iznik and later raised a rebellion against the Ottomans, declaring himself sultan and caliph. He was captured and executed by the Ottomans in 1416. Bedreddin’s life encapsulates both the open possibilities for seekers of knowledge of all kinds, from Hellenic to Islamic to the occult (which he became acquainted with through his teacher in Cairo, Sayyid Husayn Akhlati), as well as the ways such a person could come to lead a political movement against a ruling dynasty.

Scholars from lands peripheral to the Mamluk Sultanate could attain an education, as well as the social capital that came with it, in Cairo, and then return to the periphery to disseminate their learning among non-Arabic speaking provincial populations. Sara Yildiz has traced the life of a religious scholar and physician named Hajji Pasha, who was educated in Cairo by Persian teachers from Iran and later served the Aydinid ruler ‘Isa Bey in western Anatolia, where he taught students at a madrasa in the town of Ayasuluk. We see from examples like Shaykh Bedreddin and Hajji Pasha that the post-Chinggisid Middle East was thus characterized by a great deal of intellectual activity, innovation, and opportunities for people of many educational, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.
Finally, we should also consider the Chinggisid legacy for artistic developments in the lands that they ruled in the Middle East. While Cairo became a center of scholarship, the courts of the former Ilkhanate became centers for patronage and production of a new style of painting, primarily used to illustrate books. Painting under the Mongols and their successors provided a model for so-called Persian miniatures under the Timurids, Ottomans, and Safavids, which, by around 1500, had reached a high point of technical refinement and splendor.

The Mongols’ role in the development of painting in the Middle East was as patrons of books, particularly of history and poetry. As Robert Hillenbrand has pointed out, all the illustrated books produced under the Mongols aimed to assert and promote either religion or heritage.36 In these books, which began to be produced following the Ilkhanids’ conversion to Islam under Ghazan Khan, the new rulers of Iran were expressing a new and public commitment to the religion and cultural heritage of the lands they had devastated two generations before. As the major architect of the Ilkhans’ Islamization and Persianization, Rashid al-Din played a major role in the project of connecting the Mongols to Persian heritage through book painting. His library workshop at his complex outside Tabriz produced an early example of this new style of painting in two surviving manuscripts of his monumental historical compendium, Jami’ al-Tavarikh.38 There was certainly something new and different about these illustrations. As art historian Sheila Canby has put it, the Jami’ al-Tavarikh paintings represent a conscious effort to produce a new genre.39 Although illustrated book production suffered when Rashid al-Din was executed and his library ransacked in 1314, by the end of the Ilkhanid period, Mongol patronage of illustrated manuscripts produced one of the greatest examples of Persian Mongol painting, in what has become known as “The Great Mongol Shahnama,” also known as the Demotte Shahnama.40 This manuscript no longer exists in bound form, its paintings having been removed, sold, and scattered around the world in the early 20th century. There has long been a debate about when and where it was produced. However, a widely held scholarly view is that the Great Mongol Shahnama was produced in the 1330s in Tabriz for a royal patron, most likely Abu Sa’d.41 Its paintings are remarkable for their size and vivid depictions of emotional scenes, as well as the way the artists drew on elements from other cultural traditions, including from Europe and China.42

Unfortunately, we know very little about the identities of the artists of most of the paintings from the Chinggisid and post-Chinggisid periods. The few clues we do have leave us with many gaps and a good deal of uncertainty. A well-known passage in a 16th-century history of Persian painting by Safavid royal librarian Dust Muhammad attributed the creation of the style of painting that was current in the Safavid period to a certain Ahmad Musa, who, he writes, “lifted the veil from the face of depiction, and the style of depiction that is now current was invented by him.”43 While little is known about the details of Ahmad Musa’s life, this passage does reveal an acknowledgement in the 16th century that the late Ilkhanid period represented a turning point in Islamic painting.

The new style of painting that began under the Ilkhans continued after the fall of the Chinggisids and was supported by 14th-century dynasties, such as the
Injuids, Jalayirids, and Muzaffarids. Baghdad, Tabriz, and Shiraz were major centers of illustrated book manuscript production and were joined by Herat under the Timurids in the 15th century. The flourishing of Persian manuscript painting between 1335 and the fall of Timurid Herat in 1506 can be considered part of the Chinggisid legacy in the Middle East. Political ties between the Ilkhans and the Yuan dynasty provided the opportunity for considerable cultural exchange between Iran and China. Artistic style was part of this exchange. It is difficult to miss the influence of Chinese painting on early Ilkhanid book illustrations, especially considering the fact that there were few examples of the kinds of depictions of people in Islamic art before the Mongols. Without the contacts the Chinggisids had with each other across Eurasia, and without their interest in patronizing Persian literature, poetry, and history, such works likely would not have been illustrated in the style that came to represent quintessential Persian miniature painting by the 16th century.

CONCLUSION

J. J. Saunders ended his 1965 book *A History of Medieval Islam* with a chapter titled “The Mongol Disaster.” Saunders characterized the Mongol encounter with the Islamic Middle East in this way:

At the opening of the thirteenth century . . . the Muslim world was in fact on the eve of its greatest disaster. The thirteenth century was the age of the Mongol conquests, the last and most dreadful of all the nomadic assaults on civilization. China, Europe, and Islam were all to suffer, but the appalling avalanche of destruction which rolled over a vast segment of the globe from Korea to Germany nearly engulfed Islam completely.44

In the more than fifty years since Saunders’ account of the “Mongol disaster,” scholarship on the Mongol Middle East has come a long way, even if the popular memory of the Mongols might still be an “appalling avalanche of destruction.” Destruction did indeed follow the Mongol armies’ campaigns, although we have a much more thorough and nuanced understanding of the Mongols’ military strategy and operations today than a generation ago.45 And yet, there are many other ways the Chinggisids shaped the history of the Middle East long after their rule came to an end. The Mongol conquests and the decisions the Mongols made after the conquests ended had a profound impact on several aspects of life, including questions of political legitimacy and the proper relationship of religion to political authority. Along with these questions, the Mongols also created circumstances in which sufism, Shi‘ism, and messianism all came to play a much more significant role in political life than they had previously. The Chinggisids also helped to reorient the center of Islamic learning away from Baghdad to Cairo, where the Mamluks sought to incorporate and manipulate to their advantage the learned Muslim elite, which, in the 14th and 15th centuries, came to include sufis in addition to traditional *ulama*. The Mongols also helped in the development of manuscript painting, beginning under the Ilkhans, and continuing to magnificent examples by the end of the 15th century and beyond, particularly at the courts of the Ottomans and Safavids, as well as the Timurids in India. Marking the Mongols’ arrival as a “disaster,” or the final chapter in the story...
of the medieval Islamic world is to discount the significant role the Chinggisids played in the creation of the late medieval and early modern Middle East.

NOTES

1 Momen 1985, 147–171.
2 See Broadbridge 2008.
4 Wing 2016, 84–88.
6 Hope 2016, 201 and passim.
7 Hope 2016, 199.
9 Jackson 2017, 304.
10 Hope 2016, 201.
11 İnalçık 2006, 112; Petrushevsky 1968, 520.
12 See Subtelny 1988, 123–151. On the reforms of Qazi ʿIṣa on behalf of Yaʿqub, see Woods 1999, 144–145.
13 The Ottomans preserved the soyurghal under the name temlikname. See İnalçık 2006, 115.
14 Broadbridge 2008, 159.
16 Roemer 1986, 17, 29.
18 On “ʿAlid loyalism” in this period, see Hodgson 1974, 203–204; Bashir 2003, 39.
19 Hope 2016, 192.
20 Masson Smith, Jr., 1970.
21 Bashir 2005.
24 Knysh 1999.
25 Minorsky 1942, 1043a.
26 Babayan 1994, 137.
29 Ayalon 1951, 89–104.
32 Levanoni 2010, 80–82.
33 Fernandes 1988, 12.
34 This account of Shaykh Bedreddin’s life is taken from Binbaş 2016, 123–128.
36 Hillenbrand 2002, 137.
37 Hillenbrand 2002, 137.
38 Two illustrated fragments of these early copies of the Jamiʿ al-Tavarikh survive, one produced in 1306–1307 and the other in 1314.
39 Canby 1993, 32.
40 There is some debate about the date of the Demotte Shahnama’s production. See Hillenbrand 2002, 155–167, and particularly 158 for discussion of questions of the date this Shahnama was produced.
41 Hillenbrand 2002, 158.
43 Thackston 2001, 12.

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