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Heavenly appointed conqueror or millennial prophet? A study of the 'Islamization' of the Mongols and the reproduction of culture and power in premodern Central Asia

Loveniers, Elise

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Heavenly appointed conqueror or millennial prophet? A study of the 'Islamization' of the Mongols and the reproduction of culture and power in premodern Central Asia

Master's Thesis Religious Studies

Elise Loveniers

S2856646

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The conversion of the Mongol ruler Ghazan Khan in 1295 is seen as the pivotal point of the Islamization of the Mongols. His 'reign was long seen as the crucial moment for Mongol assimilation and adaptation to Islamic society' (Forbes Manz 2010, 150). This thesis questions the narrative that the Islamization of the Mongols is a process with a clear beginning. It does so by situating the conversion to Islam from Buddhism of the Ilkhan ruler Ghazan Khan into a larger history of interaction between the Mongol and Muslim traditions, showing that the two traditions were mutually shaped by their interactions over time.

As argued by Pollock (2008), to understand the current processes of globalization, one needs to have a clear grasp of earlier forms of globalization. Those most historically significant are usually referred to as Indianization, Romanization, Sinicization, Christianization, Russification, Islamization and so on. It is on this last process – Islamization – that this thesis focuses on. It will focus on the realm of the Ilkhanate and specifically on the conversion of Ghazan in 1295. The events leading to the formation of the Ilkhanate will be briefly reviewed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Pollock (2008, 10) described these early processes of globalization, what he also calls 'cosmopolitan transculturation', as ways of participating knowingly in translocal cultural and political networks.

The Islamization of the Mongols has puzzled researchers in academia for the reason that Mongol practice and tradition is often conceived as fundamentally incompatible with its Islamic counterparts. This observation is based on their beliefs, with Mongol shamanistic beliefs, embodied in Tengriism, opposed to the tenets of Islam; their practices, in particular related to food, and in their systems of law, with the Mongol *yasa* opposing the Islamic *sharia*. A change in participation in these translocal networks therefore raises the question of the relationship between power and culture, as raised by Pollock (2008). In the case of the problem of the Islamization of the Mongols, one might ask how 'culture', in the sense of the dominant religious beliefs, cultural practices, and loyalty networks of a society, relates to the political order of that society. Specifically, this thesis aims to answer the question: what does the conversion to Islam of Ghazan Khan tell us about the link between 'culture' as defined above and power in pre-modern Central Asian society?

1.1 Power organization and reproduction in premodern Central Asia

Ghazan Khan's conversion is frequently understood through the contemporary western political theory of legitimation, as a strategy to secure Mongol power by securing popular consent. As a result, the Islamization of the Mongols is perceived as a strategy for power maintenance by the Mongols. However, this means that an early process of globalization that took place in Central Asia is approached through conceptual frameworks that emerged in modern Europe. 'Premodern' is understood here as before the emergence of the nation-state in the region. As this thesis will show, this leads to ahistoricity and reductionism. This also raises the question on whether the use of terms such as 'state', 'ideology' and even 'empire' are relevant lenses of analysis for studying Central Asian historical and religious developments, since these carry assumptions on the way power is reproduced and organized.

Chapter 2 of this thesis describes the formation of the *Yeke Monggol Ulus*, and its later division into separate khanates or *uluses*. The term '*ulus'* is often translated as a 'people' or 'nation', which is also the current meaning of the word, (Sneath 2004, 63). A more accurate translation would however be 'patrimony (Morgan 1986, 95) or 'domain' (Jackson 2005, 367). These reflect more accurately the organization of power that followed different networks of loyalties between elites and the ruler in the highly stratified society of the time (Jones 2023). *Yeke Monggol Ulus* is often translated as the Great Mongol State. This paper will also adopt the translation of 'state', as it implies a centralization of power, which was, as will be shown, if not the result, the intended goal of political organization embodied in the Chinggisid principle. It sought to foster loyalties that were centered around the ruler. This is different from the organization of power in a nation-state, which will be described below.

In practice, the organization of power in the Great Mongol State followed more than of an 'empire' following Pollock's (2008) framework, due to the vast territory it came to encompass. In 'empires', power is projected across a vast geographical area with less centralization. Through this organization of power, different regions are integrated into the empire through a shared cultural order. This order materializes and is reproduced through a shared language, literary productions, cultural practices such as clothing or hairstyles and religious rituals, architectural design, and so on (Ibid).

Additionally, the reproduction of power in Central Asia when integrated into 'empires' is unique due to the region's geopolitical characteristics. It can be described as a 'vast exposed zone' as it was historically very susceptible to interaction and exchange of goods, peoples and ideas, but also to conquests from external agents, the inner Asian societies that followed a nomadic way of life ((Liebermann 2008; 2009). As a consequence, historical developments in the region were not as continuous in comparison to other regions such as in mainland Southeast Asia, Japan, northeastern Europe and western Europe. These were more geographically shielded and allowed more 'vertical cultural unity', in other words allowed indigenous elites to have a monopoly on power and integrate their own linguistic, ethnic, and religious norms (Liebermann 2008, 702). In contrast, Central Asia was characterized by a higher dynamism than those geographically shielded regions, visible in the flexible and adaptive strategies of Inner Asian conquest elites who regularly reshaped political and cultural orders in response to changing external and internal pressures. This system was moreover exacerbated during the time of the Mongol conquests, as the Mongols were famously 'connectors' on top of being 'conquerors' who actively promoted inter-cultural exchange (Biran 2004). As a result, the time of the Mongol Empire was a time of increased interaction and exchange between different traditions that shaped each other reciprocally. This is different from more vertically cultural united societies, where cultural influence was usually more one-directional and linear. This mode of power reproduction as dynamic and relational is difficult to conceptualize in contemporary western political thought.

1.2 Assumptions on the reproduction of power as 'either/or thinking'

Legitimation theory, where power is theorized as reproduced through the cultivation of belief in its legitimacy among the public, to whom it is accountable, is central to the capitalist order, 'the first political economic and cultural order to theorize its own emergence' (Pollock 2008, 33). It assumes the organization of a nation-state where power, or sovereignty, is located in the people. Paul Geiss (2003, 245) for example defines legitimation as the relationship between political community and normative order, writing that 'enduring political stability within the republics will also depend on the ability of the political elites to relate communal commitment to the political culture of these states'. It derives from Weberian thought, for whom the state is defined by the use of political force for domination. As Weber writes, for its continuance 'every such

system [of domination] attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy' (Weber 1978, 213).

This idea was present in the Western social imagination from long before, from the writings of Rousseau on popular sovereignty or Machiavelli's *Prince* to constitutional debates of classical antiquity through the Socratic method. As Gillespie (2008) demonstrated, early medieval Christian theological debates, themselves inspired by Platonism, shaped the modern Western idea of any order as immanent or constructed, and the understanding of human agency as 'voluntaristic and instrumental' (Rengger 2013, 143). As a consequence, the western political imagination is characterized by internal inconsistencies. Rengger (2013, 144) writes: 'Can one coherently have a fully and only constructed and artificial sense of agency and society and a belief that anything is universal?'. His argument suggests that the endeavors of many thinkers from the social sciences are driven by a desire for resolving this internal inconsistency. This desire is characterized by a constant need for drawing clear boundaries, and especially the constant need to justify the existence of these boundaries *post res* because nothing is universal or pre-given, i.e. nothing is ontologically certain by itself. This results for example in the idea that one can identify and fix a clear beginning in history, with clear boundaries between the new and old. As Pollock (2008, 22) writes, this 'quest for origins […] cannot escape circularity: an absolute historiographical beginning has already organized the evidence required for its own justification.' This is evident in how the organization of power is conceived of in modern European political thought, through theories of civilization or of nationalism that both imply clear spatial and temporal boundaries. Pollock's critique of the search for beginnings shows how through the latter both theories are self-reinforcing because the evidence used to prove an origin has already been selected to fit that very claim.

Unfortunately, alternative conceptualizations are extremely limited. In his historical analysis of Buddhist and Muslim interactions along the Silk Road, Elverskog (2010) refuted the mainstream, modern narrative that the Buddhist and Muslim traditions are perceived as diametrically opposite, and by association incompatible. He sought to 'challenge some of the conventional divisions that shape our understanding of the world – such as the notion of East-West, and Middle East-East Asia, as well as the modern phenomenon of the nation-state – all with the aim of exploring how these conceptualizations potentially distort historical realities'

(Elverskog 2010, 7). Notably, as he demonstrated, these 'conventional divisions that shape our understanding of the world' derived from the writings of Western travelers, who perceived irreconcilable differences between the two traditions who were, at this point in time, alienated. As a result, for a long time the history of Buddhist-Muslim interaction throughout Central Asia was centered around the fall of the Buddhist monastery of Nalanda, India as a result of Muslim invasion, crystallizing these divisions into a legitimizing narrative. The result is a tendency for black-and-white ways of thinking, especially when related to questions of identity, ethnicity and other communal affiliations. These have become the mainstream way of thinking globally, as Elverskog (2010) showed in the case of India, and are also frequent in studies on Central Asia as the result of nationalist historiographies from Central Asian states (Cummings 2012). To understand the formation of the Mongol Empire, its disintegration, and the way it was impacted by the Islamic tradition, one needs to overcome the 'either-or' way of thinking that characterizes most approaches to cultural and political changes.

Studying the story of Mongol Islamization while being aware of these presuppositions will allow to achieve a greater understanding of early, large-scale historical processes of globalization. What this thesis seeks to shed light on, in particular, is how two 'cultures' as defined above are never fundamentally incompatible; rather, the origin of this fundamentalism lies in contemporary western ways of thinking about the way power is reproduced. Rather, this thesis aims to show that the Islamization of the Mongols is not a process with a specific beginning. By situating the conversion to Islam from Buddhism of the Ilkhanate ruler Ghazan Khan into a larger history of interaction between the Mongol and Muslim traditions, it aims to show that the two traditions were mutually shaped by their interactions over time. To do so, the next chapter (Chapter 2) will briefly review the formation of the Mongol empire as a 'Great Mongol State', as well as the disintegration of the idea of it as a state as central power weakened and it fragmented into separate khanates. Chapter 3 and 4 will analyze the interaction in one of these khanates, the Ilkhanate, between the Mongol tradition embodied in the Chinggisid principle or ideal, and the Islamic tradition. Chapter 3 focuses on the Ilkhan ruler Ghazan Khan's conversion to Islam. Chapter 4 will analyze the impact the Mongol tradition had, in turn, on the Islamic tradition. Chapter 5 ends with concluding thoughts.

Chapter 2: A brief History of the Formation of the Mongol Empire and the Ilkhanate

2.1 Mongol 'statecraft', immanent and transcendent perspectives on sacral kingship

2.1.1 The 'ideology in reserve'

The Mongol empire followed the same 'political-religious ideology' as earlier steppe empires that emerged in Mongolia (Biran 2004, 340; Golden 1982). These were the Xiongnu (3rd-4th ct BCE), the Turks (6th-8th ct BCE) and the Uighurs (744-840). It served as an 'ideology in reserve' even after the collapse of these earlier empires (Biran 2004, 341). When employed, this 'ideology' fostered unity among groups of different steppes and consequently allowed for a high military organization. It consisted of two elements.

First, a belief in a supreme god, *Tengri*, the 'eternal sky' or 'heaven'. *Tengri* conferred divine support or good fortune, *qut*, to the group of a particular steppe to rule the world (Jones 2023; Biran 2024). As stated in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, and often mentioned in the Mongol's ultimatums to leaders in Europe, the rise of Chinggis Khan was predicted in a prophecy delivered from heaven to a shaman named Teb Tenggeri (de Rachewitltz 2004, 1:168; 2:869-73).

Members of this group could then exclusively become *Kaghan*, and represent the central political and military authority. The Kok Turk Khanate in particular played an important role in systematizing and popularizing this idea (Biran 2004). It also has parallels with the Chinese Mandate of Heaven and similar concepts of Iranian or Indo-Aryan origins (Sanping 2002).

The *Tengri* Mandate was supported by shamanic religious practices and rituals, and by shamans themselves. A way of conceiving of 'shamanistic' religion can be via the theoretical differentiation between 'immanent' and 'transcendent' religious traditions. This theoretical framework derives from scholarship on the 'Axial age' or 'Axial revolution' (Jaspers 1953; Eisenstadt 1986; Taylor 2012; Sahlins and Henry 2022). The scope of this thesis does not allow to delve deep into the processes that led to this observed revolution and the reasons why it happened. Relevant here is the distinction between 'immanent' and 'transcendent' perspectives. Scholarship on this subject is concerned with shift in human religious imagination from the former to the latter, which they locate in the time of the Axial age, and which is said to have taken place in the middle centuries if the first millennium BCE throughout the world (Ibid).

As per the argument of this thesis, while one can observe trends in history, this 'quest for origins' can lead to reductionism (Pollock 2008). Central Asian historical developments do not fit into these preestablished spatial and temporal boundaries, due to the region's particular geography, political and social characteristics turning the region an 'exposed zone' (Lieberman 2008; 2009) Therefore, the trend observed during the Axial age from 'immanentism' to 'transcendentalism', while plausibly shared in those vertically-culturally united areas, is not as plausible in societies in Central Asia.

In contrast, Central Asia, following a system of reciprocal interaction and exchange between different traditions, did not witness the linear transition from immanentism to transcendentalism but rather a dialogue between the two that took place over a larger period of time. As this paper will show the Mongol conquests facilitated this dialogue. The Mongols as active cultural 'connectors' brought under their rule a vast territory where many different forms of transcendentalism and immanentism were present and influenced each other reciprocally (Biran 2004).

Immanentist traditions are opposed to transcendentalist traditions because they shape a religious imagination where the supernatural or the sacred is embedded in the same world where humans live. As a consequence, ritual activity, which can also be described as shamanistic practice, is centered around engaging with the sacred. The goal of rituals is to harness the supernatural's power, usually (but not always) to enhance one's current life or help solve an issue an individual or a community is facing (Sahlins 2022). Ritual efficacy is measured by the extent to which results are observable empirically (Strathern 2017).

Hence the second key element of Mongol 'political-religious ideology', that the Mandate should be confirmed by success in battle, as *Tengri* did not grant his favor to every generation of a ruler's lineage. In other words, it was not enough for a ruler to be said to possess divine support. This divine support had to manifest visibly in the real world.

From a more historically accurate perspective than the concept of 'ideology', which derives from modern western political theory, the idea of the Tengri Mandate can also be understood as the source for the charisma that was given to (and sought for in) a leader in Mongol culture. This created particular loyalty networks which guided behavior at the time of the Mongol empire (Jones 2023; Welsford 2013). 'Charisma', or *qut* in Mongol culture, played an key role in motivating

individual support to authority at the time. It did so more than other forms of individual loyalty to a ruler, such as clientelist loyalty (supporting whoever can best serve one's personal goals) and especially loyalties of self-interest such as what Welsford (2013) calls 'inertial loyalty' (supporting a current ruler even if one disagrees, as changing the current system costs more than it would benefit an actor individually). This is different from the way a modern political subject's loyalty functions with regards to a political ruler because the political and social imagination of individuals at the time functioned from a radically different paradigm. The ruler was not just a political leader but the center around which society was organized. He could rule because of divine favor, and so he embodied the meaning of a society's existence. This again relates to an immanentist perspective of sacral kingship where the king possesses a 'divine' or 'cosmic' quality (Oakley 2006; Strathern 2017). This meant that they functioned as the link between this world and the supernatural world, or *Tengri*, allowing Tengri's powers to pass from the latter to the former.

This reflects a particular imaginary where power is centralized. It materializes in the seemingly paradoxical decision by the Mongols, who lived a nomadic way of life, to establish a Mongol capital, Qaraqorum. It served as the symbolic center of the empire, and consequently as the high center of the world, which the Mongols believed they were sanctioned by Heaven to rule. People's loyalties were also centripetal. As subjects of the ruler, they understood themselves as part of a sacred narrative, enacted by the ruler. So, loyalty decisions were more often motivated by principle than personal gain, what was believed to be 'right' or 'wrong' in relation to this imaginary. Moreover, common subjects' conception of time and history itself were also based around a religious-political center, what Anderson (1991, 24) calls medieval 'simultaneity-along-time', or an understanding of temporality where 'history' and 'cosmology' are identical. Most people at the time were illiterate, living in a highly stratified society, so there was no differentiation between the two spheres and only one 'history'. 'History' and cosmology, manifesting as political theology, was mediated by historians, often sponsored by the rulers. Their role was to fit the rulers' history into the larger sacred narrative that gave meaning to reality at the time. This does not mean that these premodern histories do not have historiographical value. On the contrary, as Pollock (2008, 7) argued, 'elite representations' (the history of rulers) do capture what was 'believed to be true by the actors in that world'.

2.1.2 The death and mythologization of Chinggis Khan

Chinggis Khan held a unique position in the Mongol political imagination after his death. As the greatest conqueror in the world, he possessed the highest status possible for a Mongol ruler. This led him to take on a god-like status after his death: he became 'an avatar of vengeance, a god of war, and a creator hero who brought writing and stability to the Mongols […] As a result, his words were sacred' (May 2018, 70). This led to the establishment of the *yosun*, traditions based on the words and actions of Chinggis Khan (Ibid, 145). Chinggis Khan also introduced the *yasa,* which became the legal system of the Mongols. It implemented the norms and principles articulated by the *yosun* in the form of decrees (*jarliqs*), mixed with those deriving from traditional Mongol customary law, the *törü*. (May 2018, 145). The *jarliqs* of a ruler's predecessors were generally approved by that new ruler (Ibid). Chinggis Khan's legacy was therefore also transmitted as an ideal that the next rulers of the Mongol Empire upheld. This ideal shaped Mongol societal norms and relations, in a sense parallel to the constitution of a state. Loyalty to Chinggis Khan was therefore still present after his death in the form of 'ideal' or 'idealistic' loyalty (Welsford 2013).

This shapes a religious-political imagination that does not fit into the previously described immanentist framework. The textualization and doctrinalization of ideals is a characteristic of transcendentalist traditions (Strathern 2017). The *yosun* is for example often parallelled with the hadiths in Islam (May 2018, 145; Forbes Manz 2010). Before the *yasa* and *yosun*, Mongol customary law was primarily transmitted orally (Pochekaev 2016; Munkh-Erdene 2018).

The death of Chinggis Khan therefore created a transcendentalist vision of sacral kingship in the Mongol political imagination. In the latter, kings are rendered 'righteous' and power or legitimized in moral terms. (Strathern 2017). This shift happened organically as it was a direct consequence of the ideas and beliefs of traditional Mongol religion, Tengriism, which emphasized empirical evidence of a ruler's immanent power and good fortune, or *gut*. This led to Chinggis Khan's mythologization, as his conquests took on a symbolic meaning, turning him into the mythical creator god of the *Yeke Monggol Ulus*. This does not mean that the Mongols converted into a transcendentalist religious tradition; only that in the process of forming and consolidating a Mongol state, it made sense to conceive of Chinggis Khan's sacral kingship from a more transcendentalist perspective. This perspective indeed frequently emerges in processes of state formation and can therefore be interpreted as a natural development in this context (Strathern

2017). However, Mongol succeeding Khans, by remaining adherent to the Chinggisid principle, kept adhering to an immanentist tradition.

To conclude, in the early post-Chinggis Khan Mongol world, loyalty decisions were primarily based on ideals and 'charisma'. The latter was determined by descent from Chinggis Khan. The former was determined by the extent to which a ruler was considered to rule in accordance with the Chinggisid *yasa* and *yosun*, and to some extent Mongol customs. Together, these formed the Chinggisid legacy or 'principle' that was at the core of Mongol statecraft (Biran 2004). These motivations behind popular support for a ruler, guided by a particular religious imagination, are an essential framework through which to understand the unification and disintegration of the Mongol Empire. As will be shown in this paper, the Chinggisid principle, in particular the elements fostering ideal loyalty towards the values embodied by Chinggis Khan, interacted with other religious ideals, including those of the Islamic tradition, shaping each other reciprocally.

2.2 The formation of the Mongol Empire

2.2.1 Early state formation and political organization

The Mongols were a recent arrival to the Mongolian steppe. They moved from the forests of Siberia between the 7th and 10th ct CE. At the time of Chinggis Khan's birth in 1162, then named Temujin, the Mongolian steppes were divided into the Kereyid, Merkid, Tatar, Jürkin, and Tayichi'ut (Sneath 2004, 61). These were later subjugated and incorporated into a unified Mongol khanate in 1206. That year, Temujin received his title as Chinggis Khan, meaning 'firm', 'fierce' or 'tough' ruler of the Great Mongol state in a *quriltai* (May 2018, 23, 39; Forbes Manz 2010, 131). The *quritai* played an important role as a Mongol traditional institution maintaining the Chinggisid legacy. It functioned as a meeting of the Mongol elites (shamans were often present too) where key political and legal decisions were taken, and so it mattered greatly who was present (or not) during these gatherings (Morgan 1986).

At this time, he still faced external and internal threats. To deal with the latter, he enacted a social revolution that would allow him to have centralized control. Sneath (2004, 183) described how at this time, Mongolian steppe society was stratified into classes of aristocrats, who belonged to the *chaghan yasun* ('white bones') and held 'institutionalized rights over both resources and

people', and the commoners or subjects, *qara yasun* ('black bones'), subordinate to the *chaghan yasun*. Chinggis Khan established his own family as the *altan urugh* ('Golden Kin'), or the imperial family, who became the new aristocracy, while the old existing (non-destroyed) aristocracy was downgraded as part of the *qara yasun* (May 2018). Most famously, he organized his new empire into decimal units, used both for military organization and civil administration (Morgan 1985, 89-90). The division into decimal units was not new; what was new is the appointment of Chinggis' trusted allies as *nökers* or leaders of these units based on personal merit and loyalty (Biran 2004). These *nökers* could come from any group from the Mongolian steppes, and by so doing, Chinggis weakened previously established diverse identities and created a new elite group, again unified under the *Yeke Monggol Ulus.* 'The soldiers' loyalty was thereby transferred from their tribe to their commander and beyond him to the Chinggisid family' (Biran 2004, 346). This again shows the importance of individual loyalty to the ruler in the formation of the Mongol Empire. The Great Mongol State was organized so that these loyalties would be centered around the ruler. Some *nökers* became commanders of larger military units and adopted the title *noyans*, which provided a higher social status. These *noyans,* or military aristocrats were rewarded with territories, troops and cities to rule. This was part of a system of regional administration in which Chinggis Khan assigned territories (*ulus*) to his family members and trusted followers. The Empire was divided into four main *uluses* among his sons Jochi, Chaghadai, Ogodei and Tolui (Forbes Manz 2010, 135-136).

What was new about this new Mongol state as compared to its predecessors (the Xiongnu, Turks and Uighurs) is that it was comprised of both nomadic populations and a high number of sedentary ones (Biran 2004; May 2018). This form of political organization originated previously in Central Asia and in the northern part of what is now China, where the coexistence between nomadic and sedentary populations was more common. It included the Liao Dynasty, followed by the Jin Dynasty and the Qara Khitai towards the East, and the Qarakhanid Khanate and the Saljuq and Khwarazmian Empire towards the West (Biran 2004). The Jin, Qara Khitai, Khwarazmian and Seljuk Empire who eventually also became part of the Mongol Empire, provided the Mongols with officials, governors, and bureaucrats that had experience in mediating 'mixed' (sedentary-nomadic) populations (Biran 2004, 345). Again, the Mongol Empire distinguished itself by placing under their control a much higher number of sedentary populations than nomadic ones, so much so that it came to link the Eastern steppe, usually under Chinese influence, and the Western steppes,

under the influence of Islam, and so united both usually separated forms of political life under a single empire. This led to significant change in the culture of these regions as it fostered interaction and exchange between traditions that were previously alienated (Elverskog 2010). In also fostered exchanger between the Mongol tradition, embodied in the Chinggisid principle, and other religious traditions that embodied particular ideals, leading to what has been described as the Islamization of the Mongols.

2.3 The Great Mongol State's fragmentation into khanates and the formation of the Ilkhanate

Chinggis Khan died in 1227, and the empire continued to expand under his successors. His son Ogodei was elected to succeed him as Great Khan, or *kaghan* in 1229. He furthered conquests and made Qaraqorum the empire's capital in 1235. The death of Ogodei led to succession struggles and instability, in particular during the regency of his wife Töregene Khatun. These succession struggles were put to an end with the 'Toluid revolution' (May 2018, 144). This was an important power shift within the Mongol Empire that resulted in the rise of Möngke Khan, a son of Tolui, ending the dominance of the Ogodeid line of the *altan urugh* in 1251. It led to divisions among dynastic lines, between the Toluids, the Jochids and Chaghataids, who were also purged along with their supporters following the coup (May 2018, 146).

A consequence of this was that charismatic descent from Chinggis Khan continued to symbolize central authority, but was not enough anymore as the sole basis for loyalty or support. Rather, individual support for a ruler now became based on a cost/benefit analysis which included the extent to which the ruler upheld the Chinggisid principle. This is a key shift in the political imaginary of the time. As Jones (2023, 142) writes, '[d]escent from Chinggis alone was not sufficient for rulership in the different khanates. One also had to be the *right* type of Chinggisid.' This shift in aspirations implies a further distancing from immanentist ways of thinking of sacral kingship, where an individual ruler embodies power and is the center through which members of a society understand and relate to reality, as was the case during Chinggis Khan's rule. According less importance to the principle of lineage-based Chinggisid universal rule meant moving away from Mongol heaven, Tengri, which made Chinggisid lineage sacred. It implies a shift towards a transcendentalist religious and political imagination that emphasizes the continuity of a larger, abstract principle or ideal. This new moral order guided decision-making, including loyalty decisions. It also shaped a new political theology, reflected in the written histories of that time in

the Ilkhanate, for example in in Rashīd al-Dīn's *Compendium of Chronicle*s in the volume on Mongol history, the *Tārīkh-i Mubārak-i Ghāzānī* (*The Blessed History of Ghazan*). As will be shown in the next chapters, historians like Rashīd al-Dīn went to great lengths to fit their sponsors, the rulers, into this new mold for sacral kingship, portraying the king as 'righteous' or 'just' according to this ideal.

Möngke also played an important role in expanding the empire, in particular through his census reforms which served to mobilize troops (Allsen 1987, 166). In 1252 he sent his brother Qubilai to conquer China to the East, and Hulegu to conquer the Middle East. Hulegu's campaigns included the destruction of Baghdad and the end of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258 was under Möngke's orders (Ibid). The subjugation of the Middle East's main powers was a success, with the exception of the Mamluks in Egypt who rose to power in 1259, restored local rule in Syria and prevented the Mongol conquest in Egypt. The two Mamluk victories against the Mongols, at the battle of Ayn Jalut and that of Homs, was significant in giving prestige to their new state. In 1261 the Mamluks hosted a fugitive Abbasid, acquiring a 'shadow' or symbolic caliph (Forbes Manz 2010, 144). From this point onwards, the Mamluks portrayed their rule as the defenders of Islam against infidels (Ibid). After Möngke died in 1259, a civil war broke out between Qubilai and his brother Ariq Böke over who should be the next Great Khan (Jackson 1999). His brother Qubilai succeeded him as next *kaghan*. By the 1260s, the empire split into independent khanates. Qubilai ruled over the Yuan Dynasty in what is now China. Hulegu founded the Ilkhanate in today's Iran, and later Azerbaijan and Iraq, and received the title of Ilkhan. However, the Jochids and Chaghataids refused to accept Toluid dominance, leading to another change in the dynamic of loyalty in the Mongol world (Jones 2023, 142). The Jochids in particular were considered enemies of the Ilkhanate by their association with the Mamluks (Ibid, 192).

The formation of the Ilkhanate is addressed in Aṭā Malik Juvainī's *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushā*, written under Hulegu, and in Rashīd al-Dīn's *Compendium of Chronicles*, written under the sponsorship of the Ilkhans Ghazan and Oljeitu. Jones (2023) notes that both attempt to portray the formation of the Ilkhanate as the wish of Möngke, to legitimize the Toluid line. It is however unclear the extent to which Hulegu possessed autonomous power. The division of the empire in this way and the growing rivalries between the khanates demonstrate a weakening of central power, undermining charismatic loyalties (Jones 2023). In other words, individual loyalties gravitated less

towards the center (Ibid). This was also the result of the two Mongol defeats by the Mamluks. This development led to an enduring conflict that characterized the dynamic of power within the Ilkhanate, between the Kaghan and his ministers on the one hand, and the military aristocracy, or *noyans*, and later *amirs*, on the other (Hope 2015, 451). The regionalization of power is generally seen as the reason for the empire's ultimate disintegration (Ibid, Forbes Manz 2010). It weakened the Chinggisid tradition by for example making the *quriltai* more difficult (Jones 2023, 197). As shown above, it also reduced the importance of Chinggisid lineage for claims to power and replaced it with more abstract ideals that a ruler should follow. Weakened central power played an important role in Ilkhanate politics, where non-Mongol elites gradually replaced the command positions that Chinggisid princes previously occupied (Hope 2016, 5)

The vast territory that the Mongols tried to unite under one Great Mongol State was a difficult endeavor and one that required, as most states do, a coherent narrative for the meaning for its existence. As explained, this has similarities with legitimation theory of modern western political thought. However, there are differences, primarily deriving from the fact that society at the time was highly stratified and mostly illiterate. So it was less about justifying authority among the public, to whom modern nation states are accountable to. It was instead at the time more of an elite project of articulating a coherent enough narrative of continuity, in other words a tradition, that could be referenced to later in time. These references were made textually, in written history, but also and mostly through other material mediums, since again people back then could not read this history. It took the shape of symbols, language, oral narratives transmitted by religion, which were then translated and embodied as norms and practices, enshrined in architecture, visualized in paintings and iconography, and other more concrete and tangible aspects. As such these were accessible to the lower, illiterate classes who in turn kept that narrative alive and passed it down to later generations.

That narrative's coherence waned after the Toluid revolution, as the Chinggisid tradition lost in credibility. So, it seems like there was a conscious or (probably) unconscious decision to adopt a new framework to fit current political events in reference to a more coherent tradition. This may explain the turn to more transcendentalist modes of thinking about the Chinggisid principle, in terms of ideals, which are by definition less bounded to territory, lineage and so on, and therefore more adaptable. As this paper will show, this influenced later civilizations of Central Asia. The

next two chapters will analyze the interaction between the Chinggisid principle and the Islamic tradition during the time of the Ilkhanate.

Chapter 3: The Chinggisid and the Islamic ideals, two incompatible traditions?

As previously mentioned, the Islamization of the Mongols is usually located in the conversion of the Ilkhan Ghazan Khan (Forbes Manz 2010). For this reason, this chapter focuses on Rashid al-din's portrayal of this event. Using this primary source will give a greater understanding of what was believed to be true by the actors of this time (Pollock 2008). Historians' portrayals of rulers were exercises in political theology, grounding a ruler's authority in a sacred narrative. Analyzing these narratives will help make sense of the 'puzzle' of the Islamization of the Mongols. The first section of this chapter will briefly review Ghazan's predecessors to contextualize the situation that led to his enthronement.

3.1.1 Ghazan's predecessors and the context before Ghazan Khan's enthronement

Rashid al-din's portrayal of Abaqa, Hulegu's son and successor, in the *Compendium of Chronicles* further confirms the turn towards a transcendentalist framework for historical descriptions of sacral kingship. He attempted to shape Abaqa's image as an ideal type of ruler to aspire to according to Mongol tradition, and therefore to generate ideal loyalties towards him as charismatic loyalties were waning. This was done by emphasizing Abaqa's knowledge and respect for the yasa and the *törü* (Jones 2023, 155). It was strengthened as Abaqa was enthroned by Qubilai in 1270 (Thackson 1998, 3:535).

Abaqa's successor and brother Teguder, who changed his name to Ahmad, was the first of the Ilkhanid dynasty to convert to Islam. The Ilkhanate's Muslim elites welcomed his rule, while some Mongol *amirs* and princes saw him as betraying Mongol tradition. Already during the time of Hulegu there were tensions between Mongol military elites and the elites of sedentary Persian Muslim cultures. These were primarily because of developments in the style of governance that increasingly implemented modes of functioning influenced by sedentary, mostly Islamic populations that lived under Ilkhan rule (Brack 2016, 41). This development was a result of the gradual weakening of the charismatic loyalties associated with the Chinggisid lineage detailed in the previous chapter as a result of the Toluid revolution.

Teguder's eventual overthrow is primarily interpreted in primary sources and contemporary scholarship on the subject as the result of these tensions (Jones 2023, 164-165). However, Islamization was already widespread in the Great Mongol State before Ahmad's rule (Pfeiffer 2013; Forbes Manz 2010). Ahmad Teguder's murder by his nephew, Arghun, can be explained better by his actions and policies as a Mongol ruler which further weakened charismatic loyalties towards him from Mongol elites, such as disrespecting a decision made during a *quriltai* regarding the relations with the Mamluks, or the execution of Qongqortai, a Chinggisid prince (Jones 2023, 125). In other words, Islamic beliefs were not necessarily viewed as incompatible with Mongol tradition; the boundaries between the two only became important when Ahmad Teguder's political decisions created grievances among the elites. He was later murdered by his nephew who was enthroned by his place.

Arghun's reign, in turn, saw an increase in random, 'paranoia-driven' executions (Jones 2023). He was responsible for the death of sixteen Chinggisid princes, excluding Ahmad Teguder. This further weakened the Chinggisid line and provided opportunities for *amirs* to gain more control over the Ilkhanate (Jones 2023, 171). Consequently, loyalties towards Arghun were very weak and temporary, and his attempts to centralize power again were answered by revolts from aristocrats and *amirs* (Ibid). The rebellion of one of these *amirs*, Nawruz Aqa, in the region of Khurasan, will be analyzed next.

3.1.2 Nawruz's rebellion

Nawruz Aqa was the son of a prestigious statesman of the Ilkhanate. He became governor of Khurasan in 1284. He rebelled in the region between 1290 and 1295 due to Arghun's erratic punishments towards people Nawruz knew personally, including the former vizier Buqa (Hope 2015, Biran 1997; Jones 2023, 180). As stated by scholars, his rebellion further exemplifies the increasing failures of Chinggisid Ilkhans to foster loyalty in their subjects (Hope 2015; Jones 2023). But it is a more significant event in the history of the Ilkhanate than a rebellion as a result of weakened central power. It also illustrates the gradual shift in thinking about justice, kingship, and the sacred that was taking place in the region. Hope's (2015) and Biran (1997) provide historical details about the rebellion. Relevant here is that his rebellion was distinct from earlier uprisings in the Ilkhanate. Before him, rebellions by *noyans* or *amirs* were justified by anchoring them in Chinggisid political traditions of *yasa*, *yosun* or the *quriltai* (Ibid). Nawruz, however,

tapped into a ‘new hybrid political philosophy’ that blended Chinggisid and Islamic traditions (Hope 2015). He for example used both Islamic titles such *as al-sulṭān al-aʿẓam* (meaning the greatest sultan) and Mongol titles, such as Khan or Ilkhan together in addressing rulers he allied with during the rebellion, such as Baidu, or engaged in Islamic ceremonial practices mixed with Chinggisid court practices (Ibid, 460). In this way he could get support from nomadic and sedentary populations of the region. The latter consisted of native Persian bureaucracy and urban elites who supported him because he presented himself as the protector of the urban Muslim population against unbelievers (Ibid).

This shows a further development of transcendentalist modes of thought surrounding conceptions of sacral authority in the Ilkhanate, namely, grounding it in a moral framework, articulated in terms of ‘righteousness’ or ideals of just kingship characteristic of the Islamic and Iranian traditions (Strathern 2017; Markiewicz 2015, 330-341; Darling 2013). In scholarship on the Axial Age, it is said that the creation of exclusivist group identity formation is characteristic of transcendentalist thought (Taylor 2007, 171-176; Strathern 2017). Without making too big of a generalization, the concern with upholding a moral order can lead to ingroup-outgroup dichotomies (of those considered morally righteous and those who are not), and consequently to conflict. Conversely, when there are conditions for conflict, conflict may be justified in terms of upholding this moral order, as is the case with Nawruz’s rebellion. This is again the result of Central Asia’s particular geopolitical conditions as an ‘exposed zone’ with, at this point in time, weak centralized power (Lieberman 2008; 2009). Because of the regionalization of power, loyalty decisions were also more based on individual interest and self-preservation rather than on ideals, which also fostered conditions for conflict.

What is interesting to note is that this rebellion happened before the Ilkhan Ghazan’s decision to convert, which is often marked as the origin for the Ilkhanate’s integration into the Perso-Islamic world. Notably, Ghazan was sent by his father, Arghun, to deal with the rebellion, For a variety of factors, Ghazan could not succeed, mostly because of the strong local connections that Nawruz possessed, and later after Arghun’s death, the lack of support Ghazan received from the new Ilkhan Geikhatu (Hope 2015). The Ilkhan following Geikhatu’s death in 1295, Baidu, was still unable to ‘unite the realm’ (Jones 2023, 181). Ghazan and Nawruz joined forces to overthrow Baidu and make Ghazan the new Ilkhan (Thackson 1998, 3:608, 620). This makes Ghazan’s

conversion not only a decision for gaining legitimacy but the decision of a ruler to adapt to a conflict situation, in other words it could be interpreted as a peacebuilding strategy or a strategy of 'theological diplomacy' (DeWeese 2009, 132).

His conversion as a political strategy for power consolidation is a common interpretation in scholarship on the subject (Melville 1990; Amitai 2013). As stated in the introduction, this functionalist interpretation derives from modern western (Weberian) political theory, which has a tendency to look for societal 'origins'. What should be emphasized is that it was not only a top-down strategical decision, but an answer to popular grievances and waning loyalties for different reasons by supporters of Ahmad Teguder or Arghun. So, it was a reciprocal process, or a component of a larger dialogue between power and culture specific to Central Asia and its historical conditions as an 'exposed zone'. Acknowledging this allows for a conception of the Islamization of the Mongols that is less narrow than the conventional one-way integration of Mongol ideas into an Islamic framework through Ghazan's conversion.

Ruler conversions approached in this way parallel societal origin myths (Strathern 2017). They follow Sahlins' (2008) 'stranger king' myth: a powerful outsider arrives, somehow defeats or impresses local peoples, becomes their king, and integrates in the established societal order. As argued by Anderson (1991, 31), in religious communities (in particular those following a transcendentalist framework that promotes conversion through proselytization), human identity is 'sacrally malleable'. Anyone can be remade or spiritually reborn. He opposes religious communities to nationalism, as the religious impulse toward conversion is inherently universal and inclusive (again, this is true for transcendentalist traditions), while the nationalistic drawing of boundaries is particular and exclusive (Ibid). Stranger king origin myths are also present in nationalist social imaginaries, notably in those democratic nation-states. They are embodied in the foreign lawgiver of Rousseau's social contract and present in contemporary political thought, but discussed as a paradox, as 'foreignness' has developed negative connotations (Honig 2001, 74-76). It presents a threat to the fixed, homogeneous identities that nationalism attempts to protect by drawing boundaries (Ibid). This contemporary perception of foreignness also imbues interpretations of historical ruler conversions, and could be an additional factor making Ghazan's conversion 'paradoxical'. Why would a ruler 'originate' a new society founded on religious ideals that were foreign to his own, and therefore in conflict with his own, henceforth erasing the

historical narrative of his lineage by absorbing it into a new tradition? Ghazan's conversion understood this way almost implies the ruler having himself conquered by Muslim 'ideology'. In this understanding, there are clear boundaries: before Ghazan's conversion, and after. To fix this contemporary paradox, a contemporary solution is applied: legitimation theory. If one looks at the larger historical context, however, one can see that transcendentalist ideas have been influencing Mongol political theology long before as a way to resolve 'legitimacy' dilemmas, or rather the coherence of the political-theological narrative that weakened after the death of Chinggis Khan. So, Ghazan's conversion should not be interpreted as the origin for the Islamization of the Ilkhanate or the Mongol 'empire' in general; this is objectively untrue, as there were ruler conversions to Islam before his reign, such as Ahmad Teguder's conversion, and much earlier in the other khanates (Pfeiffer 2013; Forbes Manz 2010). It is also untrue from a historiographical perspective, as will be shown below. The conversion of Ghazan Khan was placed into a larger Islamic narrative by Muslim historians such as Rashid al-Din. Pfeiffer (2013) for example argued that the explosion of production of Islamic historiographies after Ghazan's conversion showed how Islamic time restarted, after it was interrupted with the destruction of Baghdad. This exemplifies again the 'simultaneity-along-time' of medieval historical consciousness, as cosmology and temporality are one and the same (Anderson 1991, 24). This means that in the popular imagination of the time, there was no radical break from before and after Ghazan's conversion. As will be shown, acknowledging this also sheds light on the influence that the Mongol tradition had on Islam. These reciprocal influences reflect the geopolitical conditions of the Ilkhanate as an 'exposed zone' with multiple ethnicities, religious traditions, and historical memories, opposed to 'culturally vertically united' societies where influence was more one directional, and top-down (Liebermann 2008, 2009).

3.2 The conversion of Ghazan Khan

3.2.1 The main historiographical tradition of Ghazan's conversion

The main historiographical tradition of Ghazan's conversion is the following (Melville 1990). Ghazan received the support of Narwuz. The vizier then asked Ghazan if he saw himself become Muslim. When he received a positive reply, he presented Ghazan with a ruby. A few weeks later, Ghazan converted. It is reported as having taken place in one of his pavilions, where Nawruz and Shaikh Sadr al-Din Ibrahim were present. He got dressed in clothes that the Shaikh gave to

him, and he repeated the Islamic profession of faith in front of his army. After this, there was a great feast, and the whole army converted to Islam too.

It is reported in most primary sources how Ghazan began his reign with a purge, executing five princes and thirty-eight *amirs* in only one month (Brack 2018; Jackson 2017). These are not ignored by Rashid al-Din, but countered by the vizier's playing up of Ghazan's justice and Islamic good deeds, as emphasized in secondary sources (Melville 2003; Jackson 2017; Brack 2018). In this way, Rashid al-Din reflected the trend of most Persian historiographies fitting Ghazan into a Perso-Islamic mold, presenting him as a new kind of Iranian, Muslim ruler, not only converting to Islam but actively promoting Islam (Melville 2003). These historiographies are prevalent in the sources addressing the conversion because of the fact that the Ilkhanate bureaucracy was mostly Persian (Amitai 2021; Brack 2018). As a consequence, most scholarship on the subject focuses on the way in which the Ilkhanate's imperial culture and governmental norms were influenced by Ghazan's conversion towards a 'Perso-Islamic synthesis' (Melville 1990). The title of the Pādshāh-i Islām, which he was the first ruler to adopt after his conversion-enthronement, is taken as main symbol of this synthesis, most famously by Melville (Ibid).

3.2.2 The Perso-Islamic synthesis as a transcendentalist ideal of sacral kingship

This 'synthesis' manifests as a particular conception of justice and virtues that fits into a transcendentalist political and religious imagination. It is visible through the criticisms made by Rashid al-Din of previous Khans' misgovernment, in turn weakening the Chinggisid legacy (Jones 2023, 173). The Khans the vizier was most critical of were, as one would expect, the first Ilkhan to convert, Ahmad Teguder, and the previous Ilkhan in power before Ghazan's accession to the throne, Baidu. So, Rashid al-Din presents Ghazan as a just king, by contrasting his rule with that of the more unjust predecessors, notably, the ruler right before him, which he was therefore also justified in overthrowing. The ideal of just kingship is said to derive from a pre-Islamic (meaning Persian) idea of Iran and its royal glory, emphasizing how a ruler should be concerned with justice, protecting the weak, rule of law, prosperity for the people and so on (Darling 2013). It relates to a transcendentalist perspective of sacral kingship: sacral authority does not emanate from the ruler solely because of his position as the center around which society is organized. It derives rather from the way in which that ruler corresponds to an ideal. This ideal is authoritative by virtue of being part of a tradition, which can be referred to as a model of rulership. This is visible through

the textualization and doctrinalization of this ideal, for example in religions that rely on sacred texts such as the *Quran*, the Bible and so on. In short, Rashid al-Din aligns Ghazan with Persian governmental norms by alluding to Iranian ideals of just kingship, which Ghazan restores through his accession to power.

Ghazan's restoration of justice is further elaborated as Rashid al-Din describes the Ilkhan's treatment of the peasantry (Thackson 1998, 3: 703). The latter, due to the 'mismanagement' of previous rulers, had 'abandoned their homes and settled in foreign parts' and 'had developed an antipathy to that great realm' (Ibid). This is significant at the time of a society in which movement of the general population was extremely limited, and this description functions as a strong indicator of popular grievances (Jones 2023). While debated by historians, this historiographical narrative of a restoration of justice which was lost is also central to the strategy of Rashid al-Din to place Ghazan into a larger Islamic sacred narrative. There is a messianic quality that is attributed to Ghazan by portraying him in this way. Rashid al-Din is known for experimenting with the *mujaddid* tradition in his portrayal of other Ilkhanid kings such as Oljeitu in other written histories (Brack 2018). The Islamic title of *mujaddid* has strong eschatological connotations and signifies 'renewer' (Ibid). It refers to a person believed to appear at the beginning of each Islamic century to revive and renew the faith. While not explicitly cited in the *Compendium of Chronicles*, there is reason to believe that this was the framework Rashid al-Din worked with. This is so especially as the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols fostered a sense of apocalyptic foreboding in the Muslim imaginary (May 2018, 315-335), of which Rashid al-Din, as a Muslim convert, was certainly aware.

Through Rashid al-Din's criticisms of Ahmad Teguder, Ghazan's beliefs are positioned as superior or more 'authentic' and Ghazan as a more righteous Islamic ruler. His conversion is described as 'true, sincere, and free of any taint of hypocrisy, for with all his might, majesty, and dominion, compulsion was out of the question, and given his lack of need and necessity, hypocrisy was not a possible factor' (Thackson 1998: 3, 621). This was also central to the political theology of the time due to the tensions between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks. As mentioned, the Mamluks' establishment of a shadow caliphate led them to portray themselves as the defenders of Islam against infidels (Forbes Manz 2010, 144). The conversion of Ghazan and his promotion of Islam throughout the Ilkhanate certainly gave these tensions a strong religious component, made

stronger through Ghazan's decisions to not engage cooperatively with the Mamluks, which can be contrasted with Teguder Ahmad's more friendly stance towards them (Jones 2023).

The decision of Ghazan to pardon Nawruz and convert is presented as of his own free will (Thackson 1998, 3:608, 620). This is also part of Rashid al-Din's portrayal of Ghazan as a pious ruler with authentic beliefs, who makes decisions for the benefit of the realm, demonstrating 'theological diplomatic' skills (DeWeese 2009, 132). Other histories do not always show the decision to convert as the idea of Ghazan but rather as the result of an ultimatum posed by Nawruz in exchange for his support and influence (Jones 2023, 182). Rashid al-Din's account again exemplifies a trend visible in most primary sources emphasizing Perso-Islamic ideals. These shape a transcendentalist image of sacral kingship by focusing more on intellectual debates about truth, doctrine, and belief and emphasize the role these played in the Khan's conversion. This is not new as Mongols were known to hold debates between representatives of different religions as a form of entertainment and as a method of settling religious disputes within the empire (May 2018, 122-143; 156-159). It could be argued that this was the result of the mythologization of the persona of Chinggis Khan in Mongol imagination, as somebody possessing supra-human intelligence and 'intuitive, divine knowledge' which he achieved thanks to his unmediated connection with heaven, or *Tengri* (Brack 2018, 1164). This also lends to comparison with prophetic figures, notably Muhammad. Several Mamluk accounts suggest that the idea that Chinggis Khan had prophet-like qualities was quite popular (Biran 2007, 114-121; Amitai 2004). In turn it is interesting to note how this unmediated connection that led the Mongol tradition to take on transcendentalist qualities, is distinctively immanentist, since it is opposed to a connection to the divine mediated by sacred texts, and religious specialists as their interpreters (Strathern 2017). This demonstrates again the dynamism and nonlinearity of historical developments of Central Asian religious thought. What are usually described as completely opposed paradigms of thought, in the Mongol case, are embodied in the same tradition to imagine an ideal of sacral kingship.

The inclusion of Ghazan into Islamic salvific history as a *mujaddid*-like figure, or into the cyclical tradition of Iranian monarchy as the restorer of justice, imply the beginning of a new phase or cycle of these traditions' histories. It is no surprise therefore that this shaped an understanding of ruler conversion as an origin myth. There is some truth to this view, as per the argument of this paper, 'elite representations do capture what was believed to be true by the actors in that world'

(Pollock 2008, 7). Moreover, there is a lot of material evidence supporting this view, in history books, as mentioned, as well as in book illustration and architectural design (Krawulsky 2011, 43-51; Irwin 1997, 126-127; Melville 2002. Only, this new phase being described as Perso-Islamic, or as the 'Islamization' of the Mongols, obscures the fact that there is also evidence of the opposite, in other words of the way in which Mongol imperial culture impacted Islamic ideals through developments in the Ilkhanate. So this linear, one-way view of cultural influence can be criticized for being reductionist. Amitai (2021) for example criticizes scholarship that suggests that the Mongols actively embraced Iranian imperial ideology to gain legitimacy in Iran. He writes that while pre-Islamic ideas about Iran and kingship were present in the Ilkhanate in 'scholarly, official and artistic circles', the author found no evidence for 'a conscious […] policy to adopt the name Iran as a political notion and a conception of the state becoming a major ideological prop of the regime'. (Ibid, 235). This was in opposition to views held in mainstream scholarship, as those of Krawulsky (2011). Rather, Amitai (2011) argues that was more 'wishful thinking' among Perso-Islamic elites. In other words, it was an *ideal* to strive towards, reflecting transcendentalist thought, but not a reality (yet) on the ground. Instead he makes the argument that the main sources of Mongol legitimacy were a combination of traditional Mongol imperial 'ideology' and of Islamic 'legitimacy', which he defines as the use of Islamic titles and institutions (Ibid). This was not without, as he argued, 'dissonance' between both types of 'legitimacies' (Ibid). But if one used a different unit of analysis, more historically contextualized and relying less on Weberian theories of legitimacy, these two traditions do not present as dissonant.

3.2.3 Ghazan's 'syncretic' Islam

Amitai (2021) argued that instead of emphasizing a former glorious Iranian past, there is more focus on traditional Mongol culture, formulated as an imperial 'ideology' as defined in the beginning of this thesis and, to a lesser extent, Muslim forms of political legitimacy, such as the Mongols promoting themselves as the defenders of Islam, or referring to their rule as *Padshah-i Islam* (the 'Emperor of Islam'). He grounds this in material evidence that includes coins and royal inscriptions, and records from the Mamluks.

Because he views adherence to these traditions as forms of legitimation, Amitai (2021) views them as incompatible. But the evidence he gives for this clash does not exemplify a case where the two are 'dissonant', as he phrases it. For example, he describes an episode where

following Ghazan's enthronement, the ruler married Bulughan Khatun according to the Muslim *sharia*, even though she had been the wife of his deceased father, which is illegal according to Islamic law. According to his evidence, the *ulama* offered a solution: since his father had been an unbeliever, his marriage was illegal, and Ghazan could therefore marry her without consequence. He even writes that: 'Ghazan did not see any inherent contradiction between his new religion and the traditions and laws of the Mongols' (Amitai 1996, 1). In other articles, again, mirroring arguments made by other scholars such as Raff (1973), he exemplifies what he describes as Ghazan's 'syncretic Islam' with a decree from Ghazan to the Mamluk Sultan where Ghazan demands the Sultan to surrender (Amitai and Morgan 1999; Amitai 2009). Even though he uses Islamic terms and rationalizations, the demand itself is clearly influenced by the Chinggisid principle, ordering unconditional surrender or facing complete destruction. In decrees addressed to his Mongol troops, Ghazan would also begin with praising the Chinggisid yasa (Morgan 1986, 172). In other words, loyalty was demanded on the grounds of Ghazan's charisma, which derived from belief in the *Tengri* mandate (Raff 1973; Ibid). This 'syncretic Islam' is theorized to be likely shared among most Ilkhanate Mongol elites (Amitai 1999). There is evidence that traditional shamanistic rituals and beliefs were still common among the Mongol nobility after Ghazan's conversion (Jones 2023).

The political strife between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks also reflects the transcendentalist tendency towards exclusivist group identity thinking from the side of the Mamluks. It follows the same process as Nawruz's rebellion, as the Mamluks provide a justification for conflict on moral grounds. This justification follows an Islamic rhetoric in Mamluk sources, possibly influenced by Persian ideals of justice (Forbes Manz 2010). But in the case of the Ilkhanate, as scholarship has shown, the justification also follows a Chinggisid political imaginary.

So, the incompatibility or irreconcilability between the two traditions are the product of the analysis of secondary sources, that apply their own interpretation and understandings. What seems to have been the case, instead, is that people at the time of the Ilkhanate had a more 'liquid' understanding of communitarian identities than is the case today. This does not mean that it was not possible for religious boundaries to become perceived as more important in certain circumstances, as shown by Ahmad Teguder's murder. Rashid al-Din's playing up of the

authenticity of Ghazan's faith, in particular, implies a strong exclusivist group thinking: 'Continuity and close observance of [Islam's] obligations and strictures lead one to God, while the worship of idols is sheer insufficiency and alien to reason and knowledge. For a rational person to place his head down before an inanimate object is utter ignorance and stupidity, and to one who possesses spirit and intelligence it appears horrible' (Thackson 1998, 3: 620). But to restate, ruler-sponsored historiographies posit an ideal and often not an objective recalling of events. The negative conception of the so called idol-worshipping outgroup is just as constitutive of the Islamic transcendentalist ideal as the positive qualities attributed to those part of the moral order it promotes. This is the case for most transcendentalist traditions but the implementation of this logic in practice, for example through holy war or *jihad*, does not happen continuously. It is often the result of specific political developments creating conditions for conflict, such as the conflict with the Mamluks, or the personal beliefs of a particular ruler affecting their policymaking. Chaghatai Khan is for example known for his own strong adherence to the Mongol *yasa* and *yosun* which led to discriminatory policies towards the Muslim population of the Chaghataid Khanate (May 2018, 94-121). This shaped an understanding of Mongol identity in this Khanate as the rejection of Islam (Elverskog 2010, 189). In the Ilkhanate, however, Ghazan is described as possessing profound knowledge of and devotion to the *yasa* and *yosun* throughout his whole life, even though he was raised a Buddhist and converted to Islam (Morgan 1986, 172). To exemplify further how this was not seen as a contradiction, this is also reported by Rashid al-Din on the early life of Ghazan (Ibid). This shows that this was considered something that portrays the ruler in a positive light at the time.

3.2.4 Conclusion

Contemporary scholarship on ruler conversion among the Mongols in the context of their 'Islamization' is approached with a conception of identities as 'Mongol' and 'Muslim' as 'pregiven, stable, and sharply defined' and that therefore interact in 'thinglike ways', in Pollock (2008, 113)'s words. As this analysis has shown, they are actively produced, not pregiven, for example through historical literature, as shown with the above analysis of official histories of the time. Particular representations are consciously and carefully crafted by historians such as Rashid al-Din as a response to time and location-specific developments and therefore also constantly moving, not stable. Moreover, the difficulty in locating an 'origin' of Islamization during the time of the Great Mongol State implies that this movement is not linear with a clear before and after.

Lastly, in practice, it seems that generally in the Ilkhanate, by virtue of following a more transcendentalist framework of political theology, the Islamic and Mongol tradition did not present mutually exclusive, divergent visions of the world. Instead, they complemented each other, influencing their respective perspectives on sacred kingship. The boundaries between the two were therefore far from sharply defined. Elverskog's (2010) work demonstrates how this was also the case between Islam and Buddhism, implying that this was the mentality at the time. According to Elverskog (2010), in the post-Mongol period (1400-1650 CE), because of political developments as those in the Chaghataid Khanate or the Mamluk Sultanate, *sharia'*ism became more prevalent among not only Muslims but also Buddhists of Central Asia, leading to an era of *jihad* and theocracies across the region. Interestingly this is attributed to the weakening of the Chinggisid principle to a point that led to the fusion of religious and political power, eliminating the khan/lama or khan/caliph distinction (Ibid, 216). The next chapter questions the extent to which the Chinggisid principle declined in significance in the post-Mongol era. It also will analyze the influence it had on ideas of rulership in later empires, and on the Islamic tradition specifically.

Chapter 4: How the Mongols helped the formation of a distinctive central Asian islam

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate continuity between the Mongol Empire and later premodern, and even contemporary 'empires' or national forms of political organization. It does so in order to show a pattern of power reproduction that is dynamic, and relational with that of cultural reproduction. The 'Mongol tradition' is itself not a clear cut category but one that evolved as socio-political conditions changed, providing new constraints and affordances in, for example, conceptions of what consists of sacral authority. This is visible in their shifting back and forth between 'immanentist' and 'transcendentalist' frameworks to interpret the religious and political reality of the time.

As established, as a consequence of the mythologization of Chinggis Khan, the Ilkhanate's political theology and sacral kingship came to be set into an Islamic scriptural, transcendentalist framework. This was visible in written histories of the time shaping a transcendentalist image of sacral kingship, for example highlighting the intellectual debates about truth and doctrine that led to Ghazan Khan's conversion. In this way their political theology aligned easily with Islamic political theology: both are grounded in discursive legislative systems, which textualize and

doctrinalize abstract moral ideals such as 'righteousness', which derive (at least partly) from pre-Islamic, Persian ideals of just kingship (Darling 2013). It also made it possible draw parallels between the Prophet and Ilkhan rulers. This allows for a reunderstanding of the conversion of the Mongols to Islam not as a 'puzzle' but as a more organic historical development resulting from Central Asia's geopolitical conditions.

However, looking only at the discursive forms of a tradition preserved and transmitted in texts can lead to an understanding of Islam as a fixed and pregiven, primarily transcendentalist category of thought that the Mongol tradition was assimilated in. It ignores 'the more malleable and differentiated meanings' Islam took on in popular thought at the time (Moin 2012, 16). Islam is often only studied as this 'discursive [scriptural] tradition' (Asad 1986, Moin 2012, 16). Historical analyses of post-Mongol Islam for example emphasize the development of *sharia'ism* and the rhetoric of *jihad* (Elverskog 2010, 180-216). *Sharia'ism* responded to the 'syncretic' Islam the Mongols practices by promoting an ideal of a 'pure' form of Islam that should be upheld. In this way it can be considered a movement informed by a more transcendentalist vision of the Islamic tradition, leading to ingroup-outgroup dichotomies. A source often analyzed for this Islamic response to the Mongols are the anti-Mongol *fatwas* issued by the Damascene Sunni scholar Ibn Taymiyya (Aigle 2007; Raff 1973).

However, these criticisms remained primarily in the sphere of Sunni theological debates, preserved in texts. It can be parallelled to the elite projects from Persian elites during the time of the Mongol Empire that posited an ideal to strive towards, but not a reality in social memory and popular practice; if it were, criticisms such as Ibn Taymiyya's would not exist. The implementation in practice of *jihad* would happen when conditions for conflict emerged as a result for particular political developments, detailed by Elverskog (2010, 203-224). But it was not a continuous occurrence, and treating it as a dominant historical pattern lead to a reductionist view of what Central Asian Islam consisted of following the Mongol Empire. Instead, paying attention to the way that Mongol statecraft influenced Islam gives rise to a conception of Central Asian Islam as distinctive to Western or Middle Eastern forms of Islam (Yemelianova 2017). If Mongol imperial culture impacted Islamic ideals through developments in the Ilkhanate, this would also imply that the Islam that took shape following the Great Mongol State is distinctive from other, non-Central Asian forms of Islam, which is often overlooked in scholarship on the region.

Central Asian Islam was also historically shaped by dynamism and interdependence with other cultural traditions present on the ground, shaping and shaped by particular organizations of power (Ibid). The Mongol conquests, by bringing under their rule a vast territory where many different forms of transcendentalism and immanentism were present, increased this dynamism (Biran 2004). Hence, Islam in central Asia was also shaped by Mongol statecraft. A way to approach this influence is by analyzing the emergence of an immanentist form of Islamic political theology that was facilitated by the Mongols. It enabled a new model of sacral kingship that came to inhabit the Islamic 'monotheistic' or transcendentalist world (Brack 2018). Prior to Mongol rule, Islamic political authority was grounded in a more transcendentalist framework based on moral authority or knowledge of religious law. This changed as a consequence of Ilkhanid experiments with Mongol notions of sacral kingship, which provided a new 'formidable yet flexible repertoire of religio-political constructs, symbols and titles' routinely deployed by court authors, historians, and intellectuals across the Timurid, Savafid, Mughal and Ottoman empires (Brack 2018, 1168-1169).

4.1 Shedding light on immanentist manifestations of Islam

The Mongols fostered more cultural connection and exchange, and at the same time created disruptions of established orders, political cultures and religious modes of organization. They did so most famously through the destruction of Baghdad by Hulegu under the orders of Möngke in 1258, ending the Abbasid Caliphate. This led to the rise of Sufi networks, who became institutionalized and spread widely across Central Asia between the 13th and 16th centuries. It shaped an immanentist social imagination, shaped by a language that came from the Sufi traditions of 'mysticism' and 'sainthood' (Moin 2012, 8). Islam's sacred authority was consequently experienced as 'concrete and embodied rather than abstract and textual' (Ibid). To come back to the observed rise of *sharia'ism*, it could be argued that impositions of juridical forms of Islam can be better explained through an immanentist framework rather than as the enactment of exclusionary religious policies. The destruction of shrines and grave desecration by Savafid Shi'ites, often used as evidence for their strong heterodoxy (Sarwar 1975), should be interpreted more as the destruction of 'the body of the local ruler/holy site' following an 'immanentist logic of imperial conquest and of what consists of sacred sovereignty' (Moin 2012, 80). This argument

was also made for the ('Sunni') Mughal destruction of Hindu temples by Eaton (2000), showing how this was the mentality of the time.

As Islam is often only studied as a discursive tradition, those immanentist popular practices such as consultations of astrologers, visiting shrines of holy men and so on, are explained away by religious historians and political scientists as superstition. As argued by Moin (Ibid, 16), if at the time such actions were 'socially marginal' or 'transparently political' in the eyes of the public, 'the sacrality of kings would not have appeared to be part of the natural order of things'. Popular practices instead reflect the categories, symbols, narratives and mores that shaped the collective imagination at the time, of both elites and commoners. This aspect of history deserves analysis if one wants to appreciate the continuity that exists from the Mongol period to later empires. This continuity manifests in the field of the religious (and as a consequence, social and political) imagination.

4.2 The Mongols facilitated the emergence a new islamic political theology characterized by millenarianism

When mystical brotherhoods came out of their monasteries and started engaging with local populations, it created competition and collaboration between rulers and mystics (Moin 2012, 16). This development can therefore be viewed as another manifestation of the merging process of political and religious authority previously mentioned by Elverskog (2010), which led to the rise of theocracies, and which he attributes to the decline in relevance of the Chinggisid principle. Attention to immanentist forms of Islam, however, sheds light on how the rise of Sufi networks between the 16th and 18th centuries led to the emergence of millenarianism in the Mughal (Gommans et al 2022), Safavid (Mitchell 2009, 17-46) and Ottoman (Fleischer 1984; Cristea et al 2020) empires' political theologies.

Millenarianism is characterized by 'metaphysical traditions about the nature of the soul, cosmological ideas about time, historical eras and the age of the world, and astrological techniques for predicting changes of religions and dynasties' (Moin 2012, 9). Islamic political authority became grounded in a 'science of the millenium', where rulers were experienced as both 'saintly and messianic', 'a figure who would set right the unbearable order of things and inaugurate a new era of peace and justice' (Ibid, 1). Hence, it shaped an immanentist perspective of sacral kingship where the king possesses a 'divine' or 'cosmic' quality (Oakley 2006; Strathern 2017).

This kind of 'cosmological knowledge' was present in pre-islamic traditions of India, Iran and Greece, and even before in those of Sumeria and Akkadia (Pingree 1962; 1963; Kennedy 1962). However, it became present in the Islamic tradition to interpret political authority only after the Mongol era.

As demonstrated in the last chapter, millenarianism was present already in Ilkhanate historiographies. It was for example visible in Rashid al-Din's use of the *mujaddid* tradition and other messianic portrayals of Ilkhanid rulers, notably that of Ghazan (Ibid). Ghazan's conversion and title of Pādshāh-i Islām, literally meaning 'king of Islam', also reflects the immanentist idea of submitting to the monarch as both saint and king. This was continued in the Timurid model of kingship, which followed that of Muslim kingship developed in Ilkhanate Iran, which itself was grounded in Mongol myths and imperial tradition (Forbes Manz 1988; Brack 2018).

4.3 Islam's reunification

Under Timur, a 're-achieved Islamic unity' emerged, resulting from the rise of Sufi networks who brought together Sunni and Shi'i communities under a common religious imagination shaped by devotion to Ali (Moin 2012, 40; Amoretti 1968, 616; Bagci 2005). Uzun Hasan, an officially Sunni ruler of the Aqqoyunlu dynasty of western Iran, for example, was portrayed with the same messianic/prophetic qualities as Timur and his sons (Woods 1976). This 'reunification' was possible because of the disruptive and connective forces released by Mongol statecraft. Moreover, as demonstrated, the Mongol tradition, over time, came to embody both transcendentalist and immanentist paradigms of imaginations, shaping an ideal sacral kingship where it was not 'incoherent' to be described as *Padshah-i Islam* while simultaneously continuously engaging in Mongol shamanistic practice. Similarly, Uzun Hasan being a Sunni ruler did not mean that religious devotion to Ali was 'incoherent' or that mystical practices were idiosyncratic in popular thinking. Islamic polities in 16th century Savafid Iran and Central Asia and Mughal South Asia exhibited similar models of sacral kingship (Moin (2012, 56-210). This is so even though the Savafids originated under the rulership of a leader whose messianic charisma derived from strong devotion to Twelver Shi'ism (Mitchell 2009, 17-46), and the Mughals adhered officially to Sunni Islam (sources). In the 16th century Sunni Ottoman empire, too, intellectuals came to reframe political authority through the lens of millenarianism, influenced by Ibn Khaldun, a historian and astrologer whose portrayal of Timur was central in shaping his messianic legacy

(Fleischer 1984). This shows how attention to collective imaginations that shape common cultural practices demonstrates the 'liquid' understanding of so-called religious 'identities' that characterized societies living in a more 'exposed zone' (Liebermann 2008; 2009). The fixed categories of 'Sunni', 'Shi'i', 'Sufi' and so on should be transcended for a historically accurate analysis of the 'composite and multidimensional picture' of Islamic kingship that emerged after the emergence and disintegration of the Mongol empire (Moin 2012, 96).

To conclude, the fragmentation and later so-called 'reunification' of the Islamic cultural order was possible only after the Mongol rulers' notorious 'cosmopolitan' and 'pragmatic' or 'tolerant' political practices created new possibilities in the field of the imagination for translation and adaptation of diverse beliefs embodied in different traditions (Cristea et al 2020, 59; Biran 2024, 245). This capacity for identifying a 'common ground' over the boundaries of different religious traditions is also inherent in the Tengri tradition and the Chinggisid political theology, which emphasized unity and which allowed for the integration of their heaven-derived authority into diverse religious and political frameworks (Biran 2024, 233; Brack 2021, 2022; Strathern 2019). This later paved the way for new 'composite' possibilities of articulating sacral kingship. Wasiucionek (2020, 249-271) also showed parallels between the 'universalist' or world-conquering political theologies to rulership of the Mongols and Ottomans, and how these manifested in Ottoman political practice as well.

The Timurid, Savafid Mughal and Ottoman Empires were also, like the Mongol Empire, characterized by a higher mobility of people and because of their geographical size, great diversity in ethnicity, religion, and language. This could explain the need for articulating a coherent narrative providing a shared cultural 'order' following Pollock (2008).

4.4 Integrating into a tradition

In turn, acknowledging the similarities in styles of monarchies of later empires sheds light on how these empires share a similar history of rulers who attempted to fit into a larger tradition or narrative. The Mughal and Savafid Empires' rulers for example attempted to pour themselves into the mythic mold that Timur came to symbolize after his death (Moin 2012). It is interesting to note that Timur was mythologized after his death in a similar manner as Chinggis Khan, at that thus mythologization partly derived from tapping into Chinggisid ideals. This is most famously illustrated in the engraving of his tomb after his death by his grandson Ulugh Beg tracing his

genealogy to Chinggis Khan (Woods 1987; 1990, 102. Moreover, his messianic title of 'Lord of Conjunction' was also attributed by historians to Chinggis Khan before him (Fleischer 1986, 281). To this were added articulations of more Islamic forms of sacredness shaped by Sufi social institutions and practices, which are the result of Mongol conquests and their aftermath. Hence, the tomb engraving also traced Timurid genealogy to Ali (Woods 1987; 1990).

This focus on aligning with a larger tradition or sacred narrative is also illustrative of the simultaneity-along-time' of medieval historical consciousness (Anderson 1991, 24). The connections made between rulers and prophets shows how popular conceptions of time parallelled religious imaginaries, in other words how 'history' and 'cosmology' were interrelated in popular understandings of reality. The latter, in the time of the post-Mongol 'Islamic' era, was shaped by historians as much as astrologers, who functioned as political theologians. These actors were not concerned with historical accuracy, but with tapping into collective processes of imagination, memory and meaning-making. Millenarianism, for example, by pertaining to the idea of the restoration of a lost order, directly taps into this collective social memory. In the words of Lévi-Strauss (1996, 21): 'Mythical thought […] builds ideological castles out of the debris of what was once a social discourse'. Similarly, the attention to genealogy by Mongol political theology was about creating a narrative of noble descent and continuity (Sneath 2007, 61).

Hence, the 'quest for origins' criticized by Pollock (2008) is indeed an ahistorical frame of analysis. It should be reversed because 'legitimacy' projects of rulers, if one were to use that word, were never guided by a desire to originate something new; instead, it was about claims of continuity, done by aligning themselves with the imagined, mythical memory embodied in a tradition. This does not imply total assimilation into a fixed, preestablished order, as a tradition is inherently dynamic and constantly adapting and transforming; this supports its survival over time (Asad 1986). The idea of a prophetic, millenarian ruler, as an immanentist idea of kingship, becomes the center around which to organize those geographically vast and highly diverse and mobile societies by embodying the memory and therefore the meaning of that society's future existence, the basis for their common cultural order.

So there an argument to be made for the emergence of a shared Islamic order, if one accepts the idea of a 'unification' of Islamic imaginative possibilities under a Sufi framework, as argued by Moin (2012). However, it does not imply the complete assimilation of Mongols into this order

through Ghazan's conversion, or that their legacy was 'conquered' by Islam through of the emergence of *sharia'ism*. Rather, both the Mongol and the Islamic tradition influenced each other reciprocally.

4.5 Other manifestations of Mongol influence

There is further evidence the continuity that characterizes the post-Mongol Islamic world argued in this chapter. The scope of this thesis does not allow a detailed description of these. However, it is implied here that by virtue of looking at how the Mongols reshaped Islamic political theology, these new imaginaries were enacted into all kinds of political, social, economic and other practices, some of which are for example listed in Biran (2004, 360), in turn systematically reproducing the Mongol legacy over the next generations. As argued by Durkheim (1995), the sacred reproduces social and economic structures.

Jones (2023, 3) for example argues that Mongol loyalty networks were also taken on by later dynasties, as 'many of the same issues surrounding loyalty cropped up again in later states', due to their geographical size and tendency to regionalize while attempting to keep a unified cultural order. This is most evident in the Timurid empire's adherence to the *törü*, the older steppe customary law, and the *yasa*, the Mongol legal code (Subtelny 2007, 16-18). Biran (2004, 359) and McChesney's (1996, 123-128) found a more implicit continuation in relevance of the *yasa* and the Chinggisid principle in the Moghul and Ottoman empires up until the 18th century based on where it 'was authoritative in political and criminal matters as well as in determining court ceremonies and protocols, while the sharia prevailed in dealing with cult, personal status and contract'. Fleischer (1986, 272-279) and Foltz (1998, 12-51) develop this further.

The Mongol's legacy also permeated political structures of later non- Islamic empires, where many elements of Mongol statecraft were also explicitly continued, including military practices and institutions such as the *keshig* (imperial guard) in China and Russia (Serruys 1957, 144-148; Halperin 1983, 246-250; Taylor 1979, 93-109). Ostrowski (2000) and Halperin (2000) demonstrate different degrees of Mongol influence on the political structure of the Muscovites. Haplerin (1987, 92-101) also observed how the Russians used the Chinggisid principle to in their diplomatic practices and to their actions against the Golden horde, presenting themselves as successors of Chinggisids by adopting the title *tsar*, which was a title exclusively used to describe the Chinggisid Qipchaq khans. The principle was also present up until 18th century East Asia such

as the Ming empire, even though Mongol rule was greatly condemned by later rulers (Robinson 2008, 365-421.

Finally, as argued above, acknowledging Mongol continuity allows to conceive of a 'Central Asian' Islam practiced in modern nation-states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyztan and Tajikistan, which is distinctive from other European or Middle Eastern forms of Islam. Yemelianova (2017, 250-251) lists the influence of the Mongols as having helped the formation of 'a Turco-Mongol and Persian Islamic cultural synthesis' distinctive to this form of Islam. It takes a more immanentist form, focusing on 'orthopraxy' rather than 'orthodoxy', and enacted in practices such as shrine worship, celebrating life-cycle events and so on (Cummings 2012, 97-98). This also leads practices like consuming alcohol or pork do not necessarily negative one's Muslim 'identity' because they are often perceived as social or cultural issue rather than a religious one (Ibid, 96). For this reason these forms are often described as 'popular Islam' because they do not fit into mainstream, scriptural interpretations imported from Middle Eastern Islamic practice but are more 'fluid' and 'adaptive' to other local traditional legacies (Ibid). Yemelianova (2017) for example observed in Tajikistan that Sufism is so intertwined with more 'orthodox' forms of Islam that the majority of believers cannot distinguish between the two. One could argue that these are remnants of the immanentist political theology shaped by Ilkhan experimentations with Islamic rulership, informing imaginative possibilities enacted in local social practices up to the contemporary era.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and further thoughts

By situating Ghazan's conversion to Islam into a larger history of interaction between the Muslim and Mongol traditions, this paper has showed how the two traditions reciprocally shaped each other by their interactions over time. Changes in participation in translocal networks from the political leadership or elites is therefore approached here not as the 'origins' of their assimilation into those networks, here Islam, but rather shows a pattern of power reproduction that is dynamic, and relational with that of cultural reproduction.

Because this paper analyzes traditions, 'culture' as the dominant religious beliefs, cultural practices, and loyalty networks of a society, was reproduced discursively and in embodied forms through practice. As showed, this switches the framework of analysis of 'premodern' cultural and

power reproduction to looking for continuity instead of 'origins'. Referring to a tradition allowed those in authority to tap into collective processes of imagination, memory and meaning-making and in this way reproduce their power. These references were done through material productions; in history books, in architectural design, and so on, and manifested in shared imaginaries, enacted and reproduced in daily practice. As argued by Spencer (2007), the political manifests in located social practices and imaginative possibilities. In this way, power and culture mutually reproduced each other in pre-modern Central Asia.

The 'quest for origins' is instead a 'modern' or post-nation-state phenomenon characterized by political ideas that locate sovereignty in the people. A crucial difference with such political thought is that it seeks to explain the basis for the nation-state, which posits an ideal of clear spatial boundaries shaped by a coherent, linear history with clear temporal boundaries and which seeks to legitimize its exclusions and inclusions of who belongs and who does not through historiographical 'origin' narratives. This produces static, pre-fixed categories of ethnicity or religious identities which are used to support these narratives. In turn, it allows to conceive two different traditions as 'compatible' or 'incompatible' since these are crystallized as static entities. A relational understanding of power and culture instead provides an understanding of cultural traditions that are never fundamentally incompatible, as boundaries separating them can be intensified or dissolved according to different historical conditions. In analyses of Central Asia, a geographically 'exposed zone', this understanding is all the more important.

A last point which deserves attention is that this quest for origins does not only take place top-down at the elite level, but in individual imaginations in quests for self-understandings in relation to the contemporary sociopolitical world. This could be a development of the rejection of the use of tradition for the use of legitimation by political leadership, leading to an internal readjustment of imagination. As Anderson's (1991) work argues, this was a result of several developments, including scientific revolutionary discoveries, and the development of rapid communications, resulting in decline of internal 'certainties' such as the simultaneity-along-time. Societies built around tradition could no more reproduce coherently, creating the imaginative possibility of the nation-state.

In modern individual imaginaries, at least from the 'western' 'disenchanted' world, every day is a new 'origin' because modern sociopolitical self-understandings are shaped not by norms

founded upon traditions, which are referenced to produce an idea of continuity, but by a constant flow of new, sometimes contradictory information. This results in differences at the individual level of what is morally right and wrong, of what is 'good' or 'bad'. The implications for this shift are deep far-reaching. One aspect of it in the sphere of politics is the emergence of reactionary movements, where the 'quest for origins' turns into a quest for a tradition which was lost. But this is a hopeless pursuit as a 'tradition' is not a fixed 'thing-in-itself' that can be located and transferred to the present context. As shown in this paper, tradition was something that was experienced in the lived reality of the people at the time. Our contemporary understanding of time does not provide the imaginary possibilities to experience tradition in this way. Moreover, quoting Pollock (2008, 22) again, a quest for origins 'cannot escape circularity', as the evidence used to prove an origin has already been selected to fit that very claim. What this means for the contemporary subjective condition cannot be answered here. Becoming aware of this internal conditioning, however, might provide greater understanding of other perspectives and ideas that are in appearance incompatible with ours, as they all derive from the same individual processes of imagination, memory and meaning-making that characterize the 'modern' world.

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