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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Chinggisid pluralism and religious competition: Buddhists, Muslims, and the question of violence and sovereignty in Ilkhanid Iran

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Abstract

This article argues that the Mongol empire's famous religious tolerance cannot be explained solely through its adoption of Inner Asian imperial political traditions of ruling over ethnically and religiously diverse subjects. Instead, this pluralism can be ascribed to a wider religious pattern of the Mongols. The first part argues that the analytical category of immanentist religions explains not only the inter-cultic transparency exhibited by the Mongol courts, but also the few explicit instances where the Chinggisid rulers reacted with 'religious' violence. The article further explores the strategies employed by the religious vectors, mainly Buddhists and Muslims, to address, accommodate, and subvert the Chinggisids' patterns of religiosity and primarily their pluralism, and the Mongols' deified mode of sacralizing kingship. Focusing on the Mongol-Ilkhanid court in Iran, the article examines how religious representatives used conceptual affinities and equivalences between the Mongol traditions and certain principles of their own religious frameworks to gain influence and favour, and persuade the khans to convert or retain their earlier commitment to the new religious affiliation. Employing this assimilative approach, they manoeuvred within the religious, immanentist paradigm of their nomadic patrons while moulding and manipulating it to their own religious, transcendentalist ends. The article further demonstrates how this 'translation' process of Chinggisid patterns became an arena of Buddhist–Muslim rivalry and competition, but also cross-cultural fertilization.

Keywords: Mongol empire; Iran; Islam; Buddhism; religious pluralism

Introduction

The Mongol empire's (1206–1368) religious policies have fascinated Western historians ever since the eighteenth-century English historian Edward

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Gibbon famously commended Chinggis Khan's tolerant attitude towards the religions of the conquered populations.[1] For Gibbon, the khan's 'tolerant' policies—protecting his subjects' freedom of religious practice and guaranteeing tax exemptions to their religious clergy—signalled the barbarian conqueror's high-minded, relativistic approach to all religions.[2] Historians have since provided varied explanations, from the Mongols' 'steppe pragmatism' and their religious indifference,[3] to more nuanced approaches that explored Mongol policies as historically contingent, based on an evolving set of imperial edicts and ad-hoc precedents.[4] They have furthermore drawn attention to the Inner Asian roots of the thirteenth-century Mongol empire's pluralism, arguing that it represented a key feature of nomadic statecraft and empire building, honed through centuries of nomadic rule over religiously and ethnically diverse populations. Inner Asian empires accommodated 'sectarian differentiation' in order 'to keep power dispersed by broadcasting favor among competing groups'.[5] Under Chinggis Khan's successors, such expressions of confessional impartially were reformulated and elevated to a nearly consecrated principle of the Chinggisid dynasty and, furthermore, anchored in the *yasa*—the Mongol code of law attributed to Chinggis Khan.[6]

Whether arguing it was derived from Mongol indifference or pragmatism, from Inner Asian statecraft, or Chinggis's evolving edicts to the conquered populations, these historical approaches to the Mongols' religious pluralism have suffered from a similar shortcoming. We lack a clear and effective definition of the relationship between the Mongols' own 'domestic' religious worldview and their imperial religious policies. An important exception to this is Christopher Atwood's work. He draws a link between Chinggis Khan's 'pluralistic' edicts, the Mongols' perception of Heaven and its divine mandate, and the cherished service of diverse clergy able to pray effectively for the khan's health and the longevity of his reign.[7] In this special issue, however, Atwood argues in favour of the Mongols' 'separation of spheres', according to which 'adherence to a religion on the part of the rulers was legitimate, but only if it did not influence governance'.

[1] As Gommans and Huseini further show in this special issue, intellectuals of Mughal India debated the issue of Mongol religious 'tolerance' long before 'Western' interest.

[2] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York, 1833), p. 249.

[3] David Morgan, *The Mongols*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 37–8; Richard Foltz, 'Ecumenical mischief under the Mongols', *Central Asiatic Journal*, 43 (1999), pp. 44–5.

[4] Christopher Atwood, 'Validation by Holiness or Sovereignty: Religious Toleration as Political Theology in the Mongol World Empire of the Thirteenth Century', *The International History Review*, 26 (2004); Wonhee Cho, 'Negotiated Privilege: Strategic Tax Exemptions Policies for Religious Groups and the Mongol-Yuan Dynasty in 13th Century China', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 63/1–2 (2019).

[5] Pamela Kyle Crossley, *Hammer and Anvil: Nomad Rulers at the Forge of the Modern World* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), pp. 207–8.

[6] Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), Chapters 11–12.

[7] Atwood, 'Validation by Holiness'. Elverskog explores the Mongols' 'political theology of divine right' and their sacralized conception of statehood: Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism, and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), pp. 52–4.

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This article takes a different approach to this question. Instead of arguing that the Mongols' religious impartiality was akin to 'secularism', thus removing 'religion' from the sphere of Mongol or Inner Asian statecraft, I seek a better theoretical consideration of what constituted Mongol religiosity. I suggest adopting an analytical framework that foregrounds the complementary nature of the Mongols' religious mode and their imperial policies, such as the one proposed by Alan Strathern. He argues that 'religion' must be understood as consisting of two distinct and contrasting tendencies, towards transcendentalism and immanentism.[8] The first part of the article explains how this theoretical perspective accounts for the Mongols' religious pluralistic attitude, as well as instances of imperial demonstrations of 'religious intolerance'.

In the second part, I focus on some of the strategies employed by religious vectors of the transcendentalist traditions, mainly Buddhists and Muslims, to jostle for favour and influence over the Mongol rulers. They sought to persuade the Mongol khans to convert or adhere to religious creeds and their accompanying rituals. We can broadly identify a threefold approach. This entailed first identifying and highlighting to the Chinggisids the affinities and conceptual equivalences between the Mongol tradition and certain principles of the new religious framework for which religious representatives were advocating; second, demonstrating to the Mongol patrons how the adoption and appropriation of these new religious concepts could reinforce and reaffirm Mongol claims, for example, of Chinggisid universal and sacral authority; finally, this assimilative and accommodative approach was exploited to manoeuvre within the immanentist paradigm of their nomadic patrons while moulding and manipulating it to the religious vectors' own transcendentalist ends. The Buddhists appear to have been quite successful in emphasizing such religious parallels, particularly with regard to the Mongols' pluralistic attitude and model of Chinggisid sacral kingship. How did Muslims respond to Buddhist success? I explore shortly the strategies employed by three individuals from the court of the Ilkhans, the independent Mongol dynasty that ruled Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Anatolia (1258–1336): an aspirant Sufi devotee, a Jewish vizier employing Islamic discourses, and a Persian vizier and theologian. Two of these individuals were active at the Ilkhanid court during the height of Buddhist influence over the Mongol ruler at the time, the Ilkhan Arghun (r. 1284–1291). The third individual, however, rose to power mainly during the two decades following the Ilkhans' official embrace of Islam and was thus engaged in overcoming the lingering influence of Buddhism over his Chinggisid patrons.

Mongol immanentism, sacral kingship, and religious pluralism

Transcendentalist religions (such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, philosophical Hinduism, and so on) are oriented around individual salvation and universal ethics, and institutionalized via scriptural canons and formal doctrine.

[8] Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Changes in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

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Immanentist religions (often regarded as tribal, traditional, temple, cosmotheistic, or archaic), in contrast, are primarily concerned with harnessing forces, supernatural or otherwise, that can assist in the here and now: healing the sick or securing fertility, abundance, and victory over the community's enemies. While transcendentalist religions are committed to 'particular all-important truth claims which are held to be superior to rival' religions, immanentist traditions are interested in the proven, empirically observable efficacy of rites, gods, and clerisies. They seek to gain means of worldly power, to maintain and improve their communal well-being, rather than achieve liberation or salvation in the hereafter.[9] I describe these as ideal types; however, historically, religions and societies often exhibited varied syntheses of the two, differing in the degree to which they featured either kind. Buddhism, for example, is conceptualized in 'uncompromisingly transcendentalist' terms. Yet, it also accepts and yields to certain immanentist pulls, for example, by leaving 'the sphere of relations with metapersons to proceed largely as it always did', by promoting, as in the case of Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha's own deification and the cult of his relics, or as in Tantric Buddhism, where ritualized transgression and inversion become the means of gaining supernatural force, albeit under the umbrella of a transcendentalist and profoundly intellectualized rationale.[10]

This conceptual division between transcendentalist and immanentist tendencies is furthermore aligned with two distinct modes of sacralizing kingship: the divinized and righteous. Immanentist societies deify kings by considering them as equivalent to gods, whereas in transcendentalist religions, kings are endorsed by a religious hierarchy. The latter presents kings as righteous 'guardians of a system of truth-ethics-salvation'. In the transcendentalist framework, kings therefore must negotiate their sacralized status with a religious clergy that draws its authority from the same moral sphere.[11]

The Mongols subscribed to the model of deified kingship. They claimed that Eternal Heaven (Mongolian, *tenggeri*), their supreme sky deity, provided Chinggis Khan with its blessing, protection, and mandate of universal conquest.[12] Like Chinggis Khan, his successors possessed a special good fortune that reaffirmed their unique affinity with Heaven and the family had a

[9] Alan Strathern, 'Global Patterns of Ruler Conversion to Islam and the Logic of Empirical Religiosity', in *Islamisation: Comparative Perspectives from History*, (ed.) A. C. S. Peacock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 25–6.

[10] Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 92–5.

[11] Alan Strathern, 'Sacred Kingship under King Narai of Ayutthaya: Divinisation and Righteousness', *Journal of the Siam Society*, 107 (2019), pp. 50–1; Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, Chapter 3.

[12] Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*, pp. 50–2. The mandate from Heaven to Chinggis Khan was an evolving concept and scholars question whether it was already being used in Chinggis Khan's time. Peter Jackson, 'World Conquest and Local Accommodation: Threat and Blandishment in Mongol Diplomacy', in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods*, (eds) Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), p. 10.

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heavenly lineage.[13] Chinggis Khan and his successors were believed to have a superior 'empirical insight' as well as a unique, intuitive, divine-like knowledge which encompassed all religions.[14] As argued in Moin's framework article in this special issue, this immanentist worldview also overlapped with the rituals of sacral kingship in both the caliphal and the post-Mongol Islamic periods.[15]

Transcendentalist and immanentist religions also differ in their conception and treatment of religious difference. Transcendentalist traditions establish clear boundaries between religions; they even regard other religions as 'false' (though in some cases, Buddhism may consider other traditions as merely inadequate). Transcendentalism is primarily based on religious truth claims. As such, these religions invest in elaborate mechanisms for challenging, invalidating, and eradicating competing 'truths'. As Strathern explains, there is an 'offensiveness' inherent to transcendentalism.[16] These religions employ theological justification for violence against religious Others. Immanentist traditions, on the other hand, exhibit a pattern of religious inclusiveness, or at least do not concern themselves with proving the falseness of other religions—there is no concept of mission or conversion. Unlike transcendentalist religions that use true versus false, the more elaborate forms of immanentism use purity taboos—'pure versus impure'—to evaluate religious actions. In certain cases, immanentist religions develop a 'means of intercultural translation' and communication.[17] While immanentist societies might socially differentiate between 'our cult' and 'their cult', they have little difficulty in finding equivalences and parallels between their own pantheons and those of others.[18]

The immanentist Mongols also embraced inter-religious translatability. In their ultimatums warning of the dire results of resistance to Mongol domination, Eternal Heaven (*tenggeri*) is translated as Deus, Allāh, Khudā, or Tian, depending on the audience.[19] Furthermore, they were in no rush to abandon their religious transparency after their conversion as well: in the coins of the Muslim convert, the Ilkhan Ghazan (r. 1295–1304), *tenggeri* appeared on the reverse, and Allāh and Muḥammad on the obverse.[20] An expression of this inter-religious translatability is found in William of Rubruck's audience with the Mongol Qa'an (Great Khan) Möngke (r. 1251–59). Following the Franciscan friar's performance in the multilateral court debate in 1254,

[13] Igor de Rachewiltz, 'Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundation of Chinggis Khan's Empire', *Papers on Far Eastern History*, 7 (1973).

[14] Jonathan Brack, 'Disenchanting Heaven: Interfaith Debate, Sacral Kingship, and Conversion to Islam in the Mongol Empire, 1260–1335', *Past and Present*, 250 (2021), pp. 41–5.

[15] See also A. Azfar Moin, 'Sovereign Violence: Temple Destruction in India and Shrine Desecration in Iran and Central Asia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 57 (2015).

[16] Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 61–3.

[17] Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 3.

[18] Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 46–7.

[19] Jackson, 'World Conquest'.

[20] The reverse reads *coinage of/Ghāzān Maḥmūd/by the power/of Heaven*. Chinggisid good fortune, however, was replaced by the *shahādah* and Muḥammad (on the obverse). Judith Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran: Chingiz Khan to Uljaytu 1220–1309* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 323–6.

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Möngke advised the friar that the Mongols believed that 'just as God has given the hand several fingers, so he has given mankind several paths'.[21] This 'transcendentalist transability' of *tenggeri* (and by extension also the 'translatability' of the Chinggisids' sanctified affinity with heaven) might have further stemmed from the Mongol cultic system veering towards a form of henotheism with the empire's expansion and consolidation. Strathern observes how the immanentist process of state building can push 'ambitious rulers towards the exaltation of an overarching deity of the sun or skies' supporting their political claim to universal domination mirrored in the 'metapersonal reality' of one principal deity. The Chinggisids may have similarly focused on *tenggeri* as this overarching, superior deity that reflected and thus reinforced the sacral kingship and expansionist ambitions of the Chinggisid house.[22]

I suggest we consider the empire's pluralistic attitude to the religious beliefs and practices of the conquered population as the natural extension of the Mongols' religious-immanentist logic. In this paradigm, violence was simply not sanctioned on grounds of religious orthodoxy or truth claims, as in the transcendentalist religions.[23] Instead, the Mongols viewed other religions through the prism of cultic efficacy and evaluated their 'power holders'—human or metapersons—according to their empirically proven grades of ritual and spiritual potency. The interfaith debates, which the khans were keen on orchestrating and hosting at their courts, served, therefore, as significant arenas for evaluating the efficacy, potency, and heavenly support of the participating contenders, as well as the religions and metapersons they represented.[24] Religious contenders in the debate might be aware of the Mongol religious logic of the court contest but view their disputation over truth a worthy endeavour regardless. It was an opportunity for the literati to induct their Mongol patrons in a discourse of truth claims, scriptural investigation, rational argumentation, and intellectual disputation—all of which informed the transcendentalist-salvific mindset. The Mongols, however, did not view the debates chiefly as a means of refuting and disproving the truth claims of rival religions.

In accordance with their immanentist worldview, the Mongols may deem a deity, a shrine, or a priest to be worth procuring and reserving for their own

[21] Peter Jackson, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), p. 236.

[22] In other words, banking on the 'universal qualities of immanentism'. Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 132–4. Baumann suggests that the Mongols exhibited the Eurasian 'non-exclusive concept of henotheism' and polytheism 'with specific deities for specific times and purposes'. Brian G. Baumann, *Divine Knowledge: Buddhist Mathematics according to the Anonymous Manual of Mongolian Astrology and Divination* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 49–51.

[23] Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, (trans.) Robert Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 16, 18.

[24] Brack, 'Disenchanting Heaven'; George Lane, 'Intellectual Jousting and the Chinggisid Wisdom Bazaars', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 26 (2016). For the Mughal inter-religious debates, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Disputations: Catholics and Muslims in the Court of Jahangir (1608–11)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 46 (2009); Corinne Lefèvre, 'The *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* (1608–11): Dialogue and Asiatic Otherness at the Mughal Court', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 55 (2012); A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

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service. In contrast, they could also deem them too dangerous to be in the 'possession' of others, and thus require their removal or even 'violent' elimination. Moin has recently shown that the same religious-immanentist logic informed the Timurid and Mughal emperors' attitude to shrines and saints: they employed violence to examine, evaluate, and even eradicate competing power. In the instances that they destroyed saintly shrines and temples—Muslim, Hindu, or others—they did so, not to categorically deny or eradicate the threatening truth claims these sites or deities represented, but to eliminate the threat to the Mughal sultan's own claim to superior spiritual force or ritual effectivity.[25]

Jackson notes that despite their alleged religious 'tolerance', the Mongols 'did not simply permit the observance of all faiths without let or hindrance'. Under certain circumstances, they also 'enforced steppe custom or prohibited practices that contravened' the subject population's religion.[26] This seemingly paradoxical approach to the religious practices of their subjects stemmed from the Mongols' immanentist worldview. In general terms, under immanentism, 'sin' was merely any action that prevented the smooth operation of the cosmos; that is, any taboo action that prevented divine blessing and nurturance from reaching the land. This religious logic in which the breaking of ritual or purity taboos was heavily punished could, therefore, be exhibited in stark displays of violence and 'intolerance' by the Mongols.

Recorded cases of 'religiously motivated' violence by the Mongols indicate that the Mongol rulers might furthermore respond harshly to what they considered representations of exclusionary practices by their subjects—that is, passive or 'negative intolerance'. Unlike the active persecution of the religious Other ('positive intolerance'), 'negative intolerance' refers to the refusal to 'perform "intolerable" actions demanded by others'—often in relation to bodily consumption and procreation.[27] This produced the uniquely transcendentalist phenomenon of martyrdom. The Muslim refusal to participate in—or, rather, accept—oaths on non-biblical deities due to the untranslatability of divine names of biblical monotheism, as discussed in Moin's framework article in this special issue, is an example of 'negative intolerance'. The 'intolerable' actions demanded by the Mongols included abiding by Mongol taboos (the prohibition on washing in running water, thus contradicting Muslim ablutions), certain social-legal practices (the Mongol enforcement of their practice of levirate marriages), and participation in rites at the Mongol courts. Refusal to abide by or participate in them was deemed to be an offensive infraction and, in some instances, a defiant act against Chinggisid supremacy. Further, it signalled a danger to the khan's safety from malicious spirits.[28] A public reluctance to comply with, and conform to, such Mongol 'rules' could be severely punished.[29] In 1246, the Christian Rus' Prince Michael of Chernigov was

[25] Moin, 'Sovereign Violence'; Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, p. 241 (see 'warrior iconoclasm').

[26] Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World*, p. 304.

[27] Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, pp. 20–1.

[28] Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World*, pp. 308–18.

[29] As Jackson notes, 'a distinction was made, for instance, between the public and the private performance of the Muslim slaughter-ritual'. Ibid., p. 310.

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executed at the court of Batu Khan. His offence was his refusal to pass between two fires—a ritual conducted by the Mongolian shamans to ward off malicious spirits seeking to harm the khan—and also his refusal to kowtow to an 'idol' of Chinggis Khan on the grounds of his Christian faith.[30]

Complementing the Mongol khans' potentially violent and harsh reaction to displays of 'negative intolerance' was their equally negative response to any attempt to deny them access to the spiritual (or other) resources and skills of the conquered (or 'to be conquered') population. For example, in his 1290 response letter to Pope Nicholas IV, the Mongol ruler of Iran, the Buddhist-leaning Ilkhan Arghun (r. 1284–1291), declined the Pope's invitation to baptism. In his response, Arghun rejected the notion that a specific, exclusive confessional rite might be needed to guarantee God's/Heaven's blessing and support (or, alternatively, that a religious cult could confessionally bind Heaven's will and exclude the Mongols). Instead, Arghun argued that prayer to Eternal Heaven and righteousness are tantamount to baptism.[31] As Atwood explains it in his article in this special issue, Arghun advocated for 'the validity of both ritual activity and moral behaviour' and, moreover, that the Mongols are free to 'enter sectarian rituals [and thus enjoy their expertise] as Heaven determined'.

It is unlikely that the Mongols viewed 'righteousness' in the same way that the Christian Church did. For the Mongols, 'righteousness' had a strong 'demonstrative'-occupational aspect to it, expressed in one's prayer to a supreme god and adherence to certain ascetic (concrete and embodied) practices such as fasting and a particular way of life—externalized behaviour that pleased Heaven. What is important, however, is that this concept of 'righteousness' or 'moral' conduct had no universal salvific value; rather, it related to worldly flourishing and, therefore, to the field of statecraft.[32] It was also linked, then, to the way the Mongols classified 'religious' behaviour (and thus defined tax-exempted clergy), as Atwood explains in his contribution to this special issue. From the Mongol point of view, the lines between ethnic and religious

[30] Giovanni Di Plano Carpini, *The Story of the Mongols whom We Call the Tartars*, (trans.) Erik Hildinger (Boston MA: Branden Publishing Company, 1996), p. 43; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 314; Peter Jackson, 'The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered', in *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, (eds) Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 259–60.

[31] Atwood, 'Validation by Holiness', p. 253; Antoine Mostaert and Francis Woodman Cleaves, 'Trois documents mongols des Archives secrètes vaticanes', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 15 (1952), pp. 450–2.

[32] Immanentist systems do not develop 'systematic sets of ethical principles … They have not made the internalization of such abstract ethical codes a central function of religious life'. Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 37–8. Chinggis Khan is depicted in the *Secret History of the Mongols* as a virtuous and just leader, ruling in accordance with the *törü*, which encompassed steppe norms related to state-building and communal relations. Abidance by the *törü* guaranteed *tenggeri*'s favour. These norms, however, were not related to the religion's salvific goal and thus were different from the transcendentalist 'righteousness', even perhaps being seen as espousing a kind of 'political' morality or 'natural law'. Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene, 'The Rise of the Chinggisid Dynasty: Pre-Modern Eurasian Political Order and Culture at a Glance', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 15/1 (2018), pp. 39–84.

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identities, as well as between occupation (service to the empire) and religious-clerical service, were blurry at best.[33] This too can be assigned to their immanentist tendencies: immanentism lacks a division between the mundane and the divine, between inward faith and the external actions or ideology, and between the social and the cosmic.

In their 'imperial immanentism',[34] the Mongols 'strove to mobilize and monopolize the spiritual forces of the realm … those possessed by ritual specialists, artisans, and scholars', explaining their 'intense interest in diverse religious teachings and traditions' and in staging interfaith disputations.[35] Hindering Mongol access to the spiritual forces of the conquered or 'to be conquered' was deemed therefore an act of transgression or disobedience towards Mongol domination. The Mongols, put differently, enforced their own non-exclusionary (immanentist) patterns on their 'exclusionary' subjects.

The Mongols viewed all religious cults and pantheons as mutually translatable. Hence, they appropriated the religious and ideological tools and innovations of conquered populations that they deemed beneficial to and compatible with their own conceptions and religio-political patterns.[36] And they did so all the while claiming an unbroken continuity with the Chinggisid tradition.[37] The efforts of interlocuters from transcendentalist traditions to persuade and convert their Mongol patrons also entailed, therefore, the accommodation, manipulation, and reinterpretation of their Mongol patrons' own immanentist patterns. Establishing and reinforcing conceptual parallels and equivalences between the Mongol tradition and the new religion was a particularly important method for gaining material and political favours from the ruling elite and for advancing their religious affiliation and adherence.[38] On the one hand, reversion—the presentation of the new religious affiliation as the return to, rather than the departure from, one's ancestral belief—became a prominent strategy for religious vectors who were seeking to convert the Mongol rulers or were jostling for favour and influence as it fitted in with the Mongol logic of cultural and religious appropriation.[39] On the other hand, the same empirical tendency prompted, if not demanded, religious agents to explicitly

[33] C. Atwood, 'Buddhists and Natives: Changing Positions in the Religious Ecology of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty', in *The Middle Kingdom and the Dharma Wheel: Aspects of the Relationship between the Buddhist Samgha and the State in Chinese History*, (ed.) Thomans Jülch (Leiden: Brill, 2016), p. 315.

[34] Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 124–7.

[35] Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 200.

[36] Ibid., pp. 203–9.

[37] Alan Strathern, 'Transcendental Intransigence: Why Rulers Rejected Monotheism in Early Modern Southeast Asia and Beyond', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49 (2007), p. 365; Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 310; Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*, pp. 48–62.

[38] Worldly incentives and empirical demonstrations of immanent powers (miracles and healing feats) often accompanied, even preceded, the conversion of rulers from immanentist traditions to transcendentalist religions. Strathern, 'Global Patterns'.

[39] Christopher P. Atwood, 'Explaining Rituals and Writing History: Tactics against the Intermediate Class', in *Presenting Power in Ancient Inner Asia: Legitimacy, Transmission, and the Sacred*, (eds) Isabelle Charleux, Grégory Delaplace and Roberte N. Hamayon (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 2010).

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'comment' on the political implications and applicability of their religious traditions, to an extent to which they might have been less 'comfortable'.

Buddhism in Ilkhanid Iran

A major paradox of the Mongol 'moment' is that the same nomadic conquerors who laid waste to the caliphate in Baghdad—the 'sacred icon' of Sunni Islam[40]—and conquered the Buddhist monastic centres of Tibet and China, also facilitated the expansion and flourishing of the same religions in the post-conquest period. Islam and Buddhism were the religions that benefited most from the Mongol integration of Eurasia through the mass mobilization and circulation of religious specialists, manuscripts, artefacts, and knowledge. The Buddhist efflorescence under the Mongols is evident in the religion's 'return' to Iran under Mongol aegis, centuries after it was largely erased from the Persian-speaking world with the spread of Islam, beginning in the seventh century. While the Mongols were known for their religious impartiality, expressed for example in their tax exemptions for the religious clergy (above), specific rulers or households were also known to be supportive of or affiliated with certain creeds, an association that could also be ideologically and politically motivated.[41]

Around the mid-thirteenth century, the united Mongol empire dissolved into four independent regional khanates or *uluses* (in China, Iran, Central Asia, and the Volga region) ruled by contending Chinggisid scions. The two Toluid (from Tolui, Chinggis Khan's youngest son) branches headed by Hülegü (r. 1260–65), founder of the Ilkhanate in Iran, and Qa'an Qubilai (r. 1260–94), ruler of Yuan China and Mongolia, formed a political alliance that was also expressed in their shared interests, including the patronage and support of the Buddhists, specifically the Tantric Tibetan schools.[42]

With the Hülegüid family's financial and political support, Buddhism established its reach far into the Islamic world. Clusters of Buddhist monastic complexes and shrines appeared between the region south of the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, along the trade routes that lead from Iran to Azerbaijan and eastern Anatolia.[43] Generous Ilkhanid support provided incentives for learned Buddhist practitioners—Tibetans, Kashmiris, Indians, and

[40] Moin, 'Sovereign Violence', p. 475.

[41] See also Gommans and Huseini's article in this special issue.

[42] Tibet was divided into several fiefs among the descendants of Tolui, Chinggis Khan's youngest son, and each son developed patronage relationships with different Tibetan Buddhist schools. Further, the patronage of Buddhist schools in 'Western Tibet, including Ladakh, became a battleground for inter-*ulus* Mongol competition' after the dissolution of the united empire. Roxann Prazniak, *Sudden Appearances: the Mongol Turn in Commerce, Belief, and Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), pp. 136–7; Klaus Sagaster, 'The History of Buddhism among the Mongols', in *The Spread of Buddhism*, (eds) Ann Hierman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 387; Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 149.

[43] Roxann Prazniak, 'Ilkhanid Buddhism: traces of a passage in Eurasian history', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 56/3 (2014), pp. 655, 661–6; Arezou Azad, 'Three Rock-cut Cave Sites in Iran and their Ilkhanid Buddhist Aspects Reconsidered', in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, (eds) Anna Akasoy et al. (Surrey: Routledge, 2011), pp. 209–30; Samuel

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Uyghurs—to travel to the court in Iran, thereby creating an eclectic Ilkhanid Buddhist community.[44] Like other members of the Mongol elite across Eurasia, the Ilkhans were attracted to Buddhist expertise in Indian or Tibetan medicine and tantric magic.[45]

Hülegü's grandson, the Ilkhan Arghun (r. 1284–1291), was particularly noteworthy for his interest in hosting erudite Buddhist medical practitioners, one of whom is alleged to have treated the weakened Ilkhan with life-prolonging concoctions that instead hastened the ruler's demise.[46] The interfaith court debates, mainly between Buddhists and Muslims, formed another of the Ilkhan's interests.[47]

Aside from the short-lived reign of the Muslim convert, the Ilkhan Aḥmad Tegüder (r. 1282–84), the royal patronage of Buddhism in the eastern Islamic world continued almost uninterrupted until the reign of Arghun's son, the Ilkhan Ghazan, who converted to Islam on the eve of his seizure of the throne in 1295.[48] Ghazan was also known to have initially kept the company of Buddhist monks, established Buddhist shrines, and participated in Buddhist rites.[49] This changed following his implementation of a series of Islamization policies throughout the realm and his hostile turn towards the Buddhists, destroying and ransacking Buddhist sanctuaries, even the one in which portraits of his father Arghun hung.[50] Buddhism only existed in Iran through the auspices of the Hülegüid house,[51] and once the court's support shifted from Buddhism towards Islam, the Buddhist presence in Iran declined as well. Thus, Buddhist monks were strikingly absent from the thriving

M. Grupper, 'The Buddhist Sanctuary—Vihara of Labnasagut and the Il-Qan Hülegü: An Overview of Il-Qanid Buddhism and Related Matters', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 13 (2004).

[44] Although initially it seems to have been mostly comprised of Uyghur and Central Asian Turkic Buddhists. Prazniak, 'Ilkhanid Buddhism', pp. 655, 663–4; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, p. 149.

[45] Sagaster, 'The History of Buddhism', p. 386.

[46] Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*, (eds) Muḥammad Rawshan and Muṣṭafā Mūsavī (Tehran, 1373/ 1994), Vol. 2, p. 1179; *Rashīd uddin Fazlullah's Jamiʿu't-Tawarikh: A History of the Mongols*, (trans.) W. M. Thackston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998–1999), Vol. 3, p. 57; Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, 'Rashīd al-Dīn's *Life of the Buddha*. Some Tibetan Perspectives', in *Rashīd al-Dīn: Agent and Mediator of Cultural Exchange in Ilkhanid Iran*, (eds) Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (London: Warburg Institute, 2013), p. 200.

[47] Devin DeWeese, 'ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī's Religious Encounters at the Mongol Court near Tabriz', in *Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th–15th Century Tabriz*, (ed.) Judith Pfeiffer (Leiden: Brill, 2014); J. Brack, 'Rashīd al-Dīn: Buddhism in Iran and the Mongol Silk Roads', in *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, Intellectuals*, (eds) Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack and Francesca Fiaschetti (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

[48] Charles Melville, 'Pādshāh-i Islām: The Conversion of Sultan Maḥmūd Ghazan Khān', in *History and Literature in Iran*, (ed.) Ch. Melville (London: Bloomsbury, 1990), pp. 159–77; Reuven Amitai-Preiss, 'Ghazan, Islam and the Mongol Tradition: A View from the Mamluk Sultanate', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 59/1 (1996), pp. 1–10.

[49] Rashīd al-Dīn, (eds) Rawshan and Mūsavī, Vol. 2, p. 1335; *Rashīd uddin*, (trans.) Thackston, Vol. 3, p. 664.

[50] According to Rashīd al-Dīn, most of the monks chose to convert to Islam; however, since their conversion was insincere, Ghazan sent them back to their homelands. Rashīd al-Dīn, (eds) Rawshan and Mūsavī, Vol. 2, p. 1357; *Rashīd uddin*, (trans.) Thackston, Vol. 3, p. 676.

[51] Prazniak, 'Ilkhanid Buddhism', p. 680.

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intellectual and interreligious disputations that took place under Ghazan's brother and successor, the Ilkhan Öljeitü (r. 1304–16), a Muslim convert like his brother. Yet, even if the Buddhist monks themselves were absent from the court or lacked access to the ruler's milieu, Buddhism appears to have retained its influence through its earlier education and inculcation of the Muslim convert kings, Ghazan and Öljeitü.[52]

Buddhist strategies

The Armenian historian Kirakos Ganjakec'i (1203–71) assigns the Ilkhan Hülegü's 'misinformed' devotion to the yellow-cloaked, shaven-headed Buddhist priests (the *toyins*) to their sorcery, magic, and promises of immortality.[53] Indeed, the Tibetan Sa-skaya priests were reported to have gained Qubilai Qa'an's loyalty and support in Yuan China through their claim to magic powers channelled in particular through the cult of the Tibetan deity of Mahakala.[54] From the Chinggisid perspective, one of the main appeals of the Tibetan Tantra was that it united 'otherworldly transcendence and this-worldly power, in such an intimate and potent way'.[55]

Yet, the strategies deployed by the Buddhist monks to gain patronage and convert (or achieve the ritualized affiliation of) the Chinggisids went beyond the empirical display of their mastery of medicine or tantric magic. The Buddhists also drew on parallels and affinities between Buddhist and Mongol conceptions and patterns to advocate for the khans' embrace of the Buddhist 'translation' and accommodation of Chinggisid notions, from religious pluralism to the Chinggisids' divinized mode of kingship; their goal, however, was the transcendentalist conversion and the radical *ethicization* of the Chinggisids' immanentist patterns.[56]

Scholars have noted how the Mongols' pluralistic attitude, and their immanentist advocacy of inter-cultic transparency, lent themselves, quite naturally, to a conceptual affinity with Buddhism's 'inclusivist principle'[57] or its 'cosmological toleration',[58] that is, the Buddhist capacity to coexist with and

[52] Brack, 'Rashīd al-Dīn', p. 227.

[53] The *toyins* 'by magical means, make horses, camels, the dead and felt pictures speak … They deceived [Hülegü] and said that they would make him immortal; and he lived, moved, and mounted [his horse] according to their words …'. Kirakos Gandzakets'i, 'History of the Armenians', (trans.) Robert Bedrosian (New York, 1986; unpublished translation); Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, pp. 139–40.

[54] Prazniak, *Sudden Appearances*, pp. 176, 185.

[55] Hugh B. Urban, 'The Path of Power: Impurity, Kingship, and Sacrifice in Assamese Tantra', *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 69/4 (2001), p. 805.

[56] On this 'transcendentalist' process, see Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, p. 198.

[57] Richard Young, '*Deus unus* or *Dei plures sunt?*: The Function of Inclusivism in the Buddhist Defense of Mongol Folk Religion against William of Rubruck (1254)', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 26/1 (1989), pp. 130–3. Strathern too observes that 'the way Buddhism sought to incorporate existing spirits and deities within its cosmological vision is broadly comparable to immanentist strategies of translation': Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, p. 136.

[58] Benjamin Schonthal, 'The Tolerations of Theravada Buddhism', in *Toleration in Comparative Perspective*, (ed.) Vicki A. Spencer (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018).

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assimilate local traditions, practices, shrines, and metapersons into its own ritual and cosmic domains.[59] The Buddhist subsumption of other metapersons sets its Indic model of transcendentalism apart from the more 'offensive' monotheist traditions. Whereas Abrahamic religions are 'set up to destroy other religious forms' by monopolizing the divine, refuting their truth claims, and negating their metapersons, 'Buddhism was not founded upon a covenant with a jealous metaperson demanding "faith".' The Buddhists employed a strategy of 'hierarchical inclusion', relegating and demoting the religious Others—their rituals and their deities—into an inferior position within the Buddhist pantheon and its ritual universe.[60] Chinggis Khan and his ritualized cult were subsumed into, superseded, and marginalized by the Buddhist pantheon,[61] and the Mongols' *tenggeri*, 'empirical heaven', was incorporated and subordinated by a transcendent ethical reality.[62]

The Buddhists also employed their own model of righteous-karmic universal kingship, the *cakravartin*, the wheel-turning emperor, to assimilate and convert the Chinggisids' divinized mode of kingship. The *cakravartin* prevailed in Mahayana Buddhism but especially in the tantric (Vajrayan) schools of Tibet. There the institution of divine kingship played an important role before the advent of Buddhism. Along with the fashioning of kings into 'bodhisattvas emanating as emperors' and the doctrine reincarnation, the presentation of a local or foreign ruler as the consecrated *cakravartin*, who wielded political-religious authority, was part of the semeiotic resources employed by Buddhist monks in their interactions with the ruling strata, with the aim of gaining patronage and expanding Buddhist influence.[63]

Assigning Chinggis Khan, his grandson Qubilai Qa'an, and later Yuan (and Ming) emperors the qualities and the designation of the *cakravartin* facilitated the Mongols' integration into local and universal Buddhist genealogies of

[59] Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World*, p. 314.

[60] This was the case of Mahayana Buddhists. In Theravada Buddhism, however, 'the sphere of metapersons' is sidelined altogether by making 'neither their [the metapersons'] eradication nor their assistance … vital for enlightenment' and redemption. Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 71, 75–6; Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 125, 148, 222 (where he discusses this in terms of a 'hierarchical encompassment' of Asian forms of 'dialogical transcendence'); Jason Ananda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), p. 27.

[61] Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*, pp. 115–16; Isabelle Charleux, 'From Ongon to Icon: Legitimization, Glorification and Divinization of Power in Some Examples of Mongol Portraits', in *Presenting Power in Ancient Inner Asia*, (eds) Charleux, Delaplace and Hamayon.

[62] Brian Baumann, 'By the Power of Eternal Heaven: The Meaning of *Tenggeri* to the Government of the Pre-Buddhist Mongols', *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident*, 35 (2013). *Tenggeri's* 'otherworldliness' was not transcendental, since it did not prevent it 'from being immanent in nature'. Jan Assmann, 'Cultural Memory and the Myth of the Axial Age', in *The Axial Age and its Consequences*, (eds) Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 371.

[63] Micael L. Walter, *Buddhism and Empire: The Political and Religious Culture of Early Tibet* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 241; Georgios T. Halkias, 'The Enlightened Sovereign: Buddhism and Kingship in India and Tibet', in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, (ed.) Steven M. Emmanuel (Chichester: Wiley, 2013), pp. 502–5.

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righteous rulership.[64] In one of the letters of the prominent Buddhist monk Togdugpa (Gyelwa Rinpoche Dragpa Tsondrü, d. 1267) to his patron Hülegü Khan,[65] the monk explains that Chinggis Khan's grandson had reached his rank due to the merit he had accumulated in past lives, and that if the khan were to keep to ethical virtues and support of the dharma, and adhere to Buddhist rites, he would certainly be reborn as '*wheel-turning kings* (*cakravartin* kings) and it will serve as cause of one day becoming a completely awakened Buddha'.[66]

The *cakravartin* was conceived as the reverse of the 'Buddha coin'. According to the prophecy made before Siddhartha's birth, he was destined to become an enlightened Buddha or the *cakravartin*. As Reynolds notes, in this prophetic birth narrative, the

> *Wheel* … connotes both the wheel weapon of the warrior king and the wheel of the dharma, which the Buddha set in motion. The same vast amount of merit must accumulate in the previous lives of both beings, and identical miracles attend the birth of each … The path taken was essentially a career choice … a persisting strain in myth and iconography that sees the Buddha as a world emperor *in potentia*, a sort of photonegative emperor.[67]

The *cakravartin* thus 'captured', mirrored, and reinforced the Mongols' universalist aspirations. Yet, with its long history as a means of assimilating, accommodating, and replacing pre-Buddhist modes of divinized kingship, in particular in the Tibetan context,[68] utilizing the title for the Chinggisids furthermore entailed a radical 'shift of focus from the ontological status of the king and his ability to capture supernatural power to the question of his moral authority'.[69] As *cakravartin*, the Chinggisid ruler's fate and rank no longer hinged on his ancestor Chinggis's special connection with Heaven and his inheritance of the Chinggisid *suu* (the family's special good fortune and charisma), but on the ruler's adherence to Buddhist moral codes and his

[64] David Robinson, *Empire's Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), pp. 65–6; Herbert Franke, *From Tribal Chieftain to Universal Emperor and God: The Legitimation of the Yuan Dynasty* (Munich: Verlag der Baerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978), pp. 54–9; Constance Hoog (trans.), 'Phags-pa, *Prince Jiṅ-Gim's Textbook of Tibetan Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), pp. 39–43.

[65] Togdugpa's order, the Phagmo Drupa, was located in Hülegü's appanage in Tibet. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, p. 149.

[66] Jampa Samten and Dan Martin, 'Letters to the Khans: Six Tibetan Epistles of Togdugpa Addressed to the Mongol Rulers Huleu and Khubilai, as well as to the Tibetan Lama Pagpa', in *Trails of the Tibetan Tradition. Papers for Elliot Sperling*, (ed.) Roberto Vitali (Dharamshala: Amnye Machen Institute, 2014; republished in *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, 31 [2015]), p. 310.

[67] Craig J. Reynolds, 'Power', in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, (ed.) Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), pp. 220–1; Halkias, 'The Enlightened Sovereign', p. 501.

[68] Halkias, 'The Enlightened Sovereign', p. 505; Zeff Bjerken, 'On Mandalas, Monarchs, and Mortuary Magic: Siting the Sarvadurgatiparisodhana Tantra in Tibet', *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 73/3 (2005), p. 814.

[69] Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, p. 196.

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support of the dharma.[70] Vesting a foreign ruler with the trappings of the *cakravartin* was conceived as the path to domestication and acculturation, not only the Buddhicization, of unruly conquerors.[71]

Further, although the *cakravartin* complements, accommodates, and reinforces the Mongols' claim to heavenly mandated universal domination, the adoption of the title also informs a shift to a vision of righteous, non-violent, even pacifying, rulership. The *cakravartin* embodies 'the utopian paradox of nonviolent kingship' in (Pali/Theravada) Buddhist thought. Sovereignty requires the use of military force and legal punishment to enforce justice and law, and preserve order, making any ruler an unavoidable wrongdoer with potentially dire karmic repercussions; the *cakravartin*, however, 'transcends violence by conquering—nonviolently—the whole world'. He miraculously establishes a 'Perfect Moral Commonwealth such that no-one does wrong', and thus, there is no need to forcefully punish its denizens.[72]

How was this aspect of the *cakravartin* myth conveyed to and inculcated in the Chinggisid overlords? The question of whether or not the king can avoid karmic retribution for deploying 'necessary' violence due to his duties as the social regulator-ruler was discussed, for example, in the Buddhist monk Togdugpa's letters to Hülegü. Togdugpa explained there that due to the large volume and wide repercussions of the deeds of the kings, these might be the cause of suffering for others, which would lead to negative karmic results for the righteous king; yet, 'there is no sinful deed and no virtue that cannot be purified if confessed in accordance with the sermons of the Teacher', the Buddha. To overcome the negative karma accumulated by these unavoidable wrongdoings, the righteous prince must financially support the dharma, follow Buddhist precepts, be a moral disciple, make generous offerings to the monastic centres, and participate in tantric rituals and empowerments which could result in the prince becoming 'Buddha in full Awakening in one body and one lifetime'.[73]

[70] Samten and Martin, 'Letters to the Khans', p. 313.

[71] S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 39–53, 96–97; Liang Yongjia, 'Stranger-Kingship and Cosmocracy; or, Sahlins in Southwest China', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 12/3 (2011), p. 247.

[72] Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 422; Steven Collins, 'The Lion's Roar on the Wheel-Turning King: A Response to Andrew Huxley's "The Buddha and the Social Contract"', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 24/4 (1996), pp. 441–3. Tibetan authors, however, also took the stance that the support of kings for the dharma should be carried out by both peaceful and (equally justified) violent means 'including the use of wrathful tantric rituals'. William K. Dewey, 'Patrons and Barbarians: The Righteous Dharma King and Ritual Warfare According to Tāranātha', *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, 56 (2020), pp. 125–60.

[73] Samten and Martin, 'Letters to the Khans', pp. 311–3. 'Phags-pa Lama (1235–1280), the Imperial Preceptor of Tibet, likewise advised Qubilai Qa'an to govern according to Buddhist moral codes and avoid violence since peace will be obtained by peace alone ('fire must be put out by water, not by fire itself'). Sh. Bira, 'Qubilai Qa'an and 'Phags-pa Bla-ma', in *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy*, (eds) Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 246.

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Did the Ilkhans in Iran follow this Buddhist advice as well? According to one Ilkhanid Muslim author, the Ilkhan Arghun, who was known to keep the company and follow the instructions of Buddhist authorities frequenting his court, developed a strong aversion to killing at the start of his reign, so much so that once, during a court celebration, he became extremely distraught when he saw the great number of innocent lambs butchered for the feast.[74] The Ilkhan was also ill-disposed towards deploying violence and punishing his enemies, including his Hülegüid cousins and some Mongol commanders who were contesting his seizure of the throne.[75] Buddhist efforts to inculcate the Chinggisids with non-violent governance and raise their awareness of the karmic results of their actions seemed to have gained an audience at Arghun's court and possibly, therefore, with his offspring as well (see below).

Another author, the Sufi master ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 1336), whose account will be discussed below, reports Arghun's condemnation of Muslims and the Muslim law—the Prophet 'Muḥammad's *yasāq*', his command that incentivized, if not obliged, Muslims to shed blood—in a personal exchange between the two following Simnānī's alleged humiliation of the Buddhist monk (*bakhshī*), with whom the Ilkhan had ordered Simnānī to debate. According to Simnānī, Arghun contrasted Islam's (the 'false religion') violent disposition towards *jihad* with the Buddha's precepts regarding the safeguarding of all forms of life from harm, even the 'blades of the grass'.[76] This anecdote points towards another strategy employed by the Buddhists to protect their influence at the court from Muslim 'incursions': they presented the Prophet Muḥammad's path and Islam as inimical to Mongol pluralism and Chinggisid principles. This tactic cultivated anti-Muslim sentiment and strengthened Buddhism's stance as the religion best aligned with Mongol patterns. The promotion of such a discourse vilifying Islam as a violent religion might be added to the Buddhists' discursive arsenal against their Muslims contenders in the Eurasian Mongol court. In post-1294 China, for example, Tibetan Buddhists presented themselves as 'native' to China and as established clergies, while arguing that their Muslim peers were 'commercially minded interlopers' impersonating clergy for the sake of tax evasion.[77]

Muslim responses to Buddhist strategies

In contrast to the Buddhists, Muslims struggled to come to terms with the Ilkhans' even-handed treatment of the religions. Muslims under infidel Mongol rule seem to have been threatened less by the occasional

[74] Arghun also seems to have followed the instructions of his Buddhist advisers in practising periodic dietary restrictions and fasting. Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-fikra fī taʾrīkh al-hijra* (Beirut: Orient Institut, 1998), pp. 284–5.

[75] His attitude changed following Saʿd al-Dawla's rise to power and appointment as vizier during the second half of Arghun's reign (below). ʿAbd Allāh ibn Faḍl Allāh Vaṣṣāf, *Tajziyat al-amṣār wa-tazjiyat al-aʿṣār* (rpt., Tehran 1338/1959–60 of the Bombay edition, 1269/1852–3), pp. 242–3.

[76] DeWeese, 'ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī', pp. 48–53; ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī, *ʿAlāʾuddawla Simnānī: Opera Minora*, (ed.) W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 185–8.

[77] Atwood, 'Buddhists and Natives'.

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implementation of *yasa*-mandated restrictions, such as the prohibition on the Muslim slaughter-ritual or ablutions in running water, than by finding 'themselves reduced to parity with Christians and Jews, who had hitherto enjoyed the status of second-class citizens'. These new, equal privileges were especially conspicuous in matters of religious buildings and taxation (that is, the suspension of the *jizya*, the poll tax). Sunnī Muslims lost their preferential treatment in the bureaucratic ranks, having to share power with *dhimmīs* and the Shīʿīs.[78] During the first two decades after the Ilkhanid court's official embrace of Islam (1295), the Ilkhanate wavered between periodic reinforcement of discriminatory policies against *dhimmīs* and the suspension of those policies in favour of the *yasa*-rooted principle of avoidance of religious partisanship. These measures were often suspended following the visit of esteemed clergymen to the court (who reassured the Ilkhan of the clergy's commitment to prayer for his longevity, a reaffirmation, in other words, that the Mongol ruler remained the sole beneficiary of their ritual power) or after the intercession of one or more of the high-ranking Mongol commanders arguing for the return to 'the pluralism demanded by Chinggis Khan's edict'.[79]

Yet, whereas Buddhists stressed the affinities between the immanentist Chinggisids' religious impartiality and inter-cultic transparency, on one side, and Buddhism's own 'inclusivism', on the other, Muslims might have drawn on a different analogy between Islam's claim to religious dominance over other religions, by violent means if deemed necessary, and Chinggisid supremacy in order to explain the potential applicability and efficacy of Islamic discourses for the Mongol rulers.[80] Muslims sought to favourably present Islam by demonstrating the religion's ability to compliment, accommodate, and even reaffirm other aspects of the Mongols' religio-political worldview: their claim to an uncontested, exclusive, Heaven-ordained mandate of universal domination.

We might return to the example of the aspiring Sufi master Simnānī noted earlier. Detained in the Ilkhan Arghun's camp at Qonqur Öläng during the summer of 1288, Simnānī was made, by his own account, to partake in disputations with Buddhist priests who had travelled from across Mongol-dominated Eurasia especially to confront him.[81] As noted above, according to Simnānī in his conversation with Arghun, the latter took issue with Simnānī's adherence to Islam and its prophet's seemingly violent disposition. The Ilkhan further explained that Muḥammad commanded his army to combat the infidels on the premise that 'if you kill them, you will go to heaven and if they kill you, you will go to heaven as well', which, Arghun observed, increased the death toll on both sides.

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[78] Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World*, pp. 310, 315.

[79] Ibid., pp. 351, 370; J. Brack, 'A Mongol Mahdi in Medieval Anatolia: Rebellion, Reform, and Divine Right in the Post-Mongol Islamic World', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 139/3 (2019), pp. 618–9.

[80] While the immanentist divinization of kings might enable rulers to position themselves as equal, if not superior, to ritual experts (and religious hierarchies) under certain circumstances, the adoption of transcendentalist traditions appealed to rulers for it was perceived to yield certain advantages in state-building projects leading to consolidation of political power and advancing centralization and social disciplining. Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 213, 296–317.

[81] DeWeese, 'ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī'.

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Inspired by the garden setting of his intimate audience with the Mongol monarch, Simnānī replied to the Ilkhan's chastising remarks by comparing Muḥammad to a gardener trimming a tree. The Muslims are the good branches and the infidels are the bad, trimmed, branches. The Muslims, he explains, remove bad branches to avoid the waste of valuable resources: the 'blessings (*niʿmathā*) that they [the infidel branches] consume and then act rebelliously (*maʿṣiyat*), the Muslims would consume and show obedience'.[82] Simnānī not only used metaphors from his immediate environment to advance his message, but he also framed his response in terms compatible with the Mongols' own imperial division of the world into obedient subjects and illegitimate rebels, implying that the infidels were both enemies of Allāh and the Ilkhan or the Chinggisids. Simnānī's account, written down some 40 years after his detention at the court, is naturally to be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, his version of the conversation suggests how Muslims could respond to Buddhist claims by establishing conceptual affinities between Islam's claim to religious supremacy and the Mongol aspiration to universal domination as well as their 'intolerance' towards resistance to their divine mandate. Essentially, Simnānī's response (real or imaginary) to the ruler's Buddhist-tinged offensive explicates to the Ilkhan the societal potency and benefits of Islam's exclusionary message.

A different approach to warding off, or at least restricting, the Buddhist 'hold' on Arghun and his policies was taken by Saʿd al-Dawla, a Baghdadi Jewish physician who was appointed as Arghun's vizier during the final two years of his reign (1289–1291).[83] I include Saʿd al-Dawla within this 'pool' of Muslim specialists since he employed Islamic discourses to accommodate and influence the Ilkhan's decisions, even though he himself clearly lacked the same 'conversion' drive of his Muslim peers and his aim was solely political. Saʿd al-Dawla has not been associated in modern scholarship with the Buddhist presence in Arghun's court; indeed, the evidence for his interactions with the Buddhists is scarce and biased, derived from Muslim accounts that generally indicate hostility towards the Buddhists as well as the Jewish minister and his short-lived domination of the Ilkhanid administration.[84] Yet, there are indications that the vizier was cooperating with monks at the court to advance his political intrigue. According to one account, Saʿd al-Dawla convinced a *bakhshī* to present to the Ilkhan a fabricated accusation against his adviser the amir Toghan. Toghan was subsequently punished with 17 lashes.[85] Saʿd al-Dawla was active at Arghun's court during the height of Buddhist

[82] Ibid., pp. 48–53; Simnānī, *ʿAlāʾuddawla Simnānī*, pp. 185–8.

[83] On the Jewish vizier, see Walter J. Fischel, *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Medieval Islam* (New York: Ktav Publishing Inc., 1969), pp. 90–117; Reuven Amitai, 'Jews at the Mongol Court in Iran: Cultural Brokers or Minor Actors in a Cultural Bloom?', in *Cultural Brokers at Mediterranean Courts in the Middle Ages*, (eds) Marc von der Nöh et al. (Paderborn: Brill, 2013), pp. 39–41.

[84] J. Brack, 'A Jewish Vizier and his Shīʿī Manifesto: Jews, Shīʿīs, and the Politicization of Confessional Identities in Mongol-ruled Iraq and Iran (13th to 14th centuries)', *Der Islam*, 96/2 (2019).

[85] The *bakhshī's* name is written G/K-R-B-N-D. There is a slight possibility that he is the same 'Paranda Bakhshī' who exerted great influence over Arghun. Vaṣṣāf, *Tajziyat*, p. 239. For 'Paranda Bakhshī', see DeWeese, 'ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī', pp. 63–4.

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influence and, based on Ilkhanid histories, we can situate the Jewish physician (prior to his appointment as vizier) at the Ilkhan's camp during the same summer of 1288 in which Simnānī was 'detained' and made to debate the Buddhist monks.[86]

As we noted above, the issue of karmic retribution for the king's deployment of violence troubled the Buddhist-leaning Ilkhan Arghun. Several anecdotes in the historical sources suggest that Saᶜd al-Dawla manipulated these debates, seeking to convince the Ilkhan to adopt a more forceful stance towards his (and Saᶜd al-Dawla's) 'enemies' from within and outside the court. Saᶜd al-Dawla used the language of the political theorist Nasir al-Din Ṭūsī's ethics in a manifesto (*maḥḍar*) he had planned to issue, which demanded full submission and obedience to the Ilkhan *al-ᶜādil* (the just) Arghun and designated the Ilkhan as the divinely supported law-maker monarch. Saᶜd al-Dawla's appropriation of Ṭūsī's political theory fits in with three key tenets of the Chinggisid legitimating assertions: Chinggis Khan and his heirs' law-making roles, exemplified in the *yasa*; the claim to a continuous divine selection of the Chinggisids; and the personal, direct validation of this appointment for each Chinggisid successor.[87]

Saᶜd al-Dawla seems to have been concerned likewise with the Ilkhan's lacklustre response to those who opposed him, possibly linked to the influence of his Buddhist advisers (above). According to the Ilkhanid historian Vaṣṣāf, seeking to counter the Ilkhan's 'pacifism', the Jewish minister explained to Arghun the necessity of using royal violence and ferocity to maintain order and the state with a metaphor that suspiciously resonates with Simnānī's didactic 'gardener' story. Assigned with embellishing 'the dynasty's (*davlat*) rose garden', the gardener, according to the Jewish vizier, must trim the thorns of denial (*khār-i inkār*), that is, the transgressors and evildoers who wish to harm the kingdom's (*salṭanat*) splendour. The same author credited Saᶜd al-Dawla's 'sleek speech' and overall growing influence at the court with Arghun's transition from his earlier 'pacificist stance' to a more violent approach to defusing his opposition during the final two years of his reign.[88]

Another story reported by Vaṣṣāf demonstrates how Saᶜd al-Dawla may have inserted himself into the same Muslim-Buddhist debate over nonviolent rulership and the Muslims' *jihad* against the infidels, which Simnānī's account indicates. It further shows that metaphors and fables were a regular recourse for Saᶜd al-Dawla in his attempts to persuade the Ilkhan. Vaṣṣāf writes that, 'deluded by his high rank and power and displaying the arrogance and haughtiness of Pharaoh, Saᶜd al-Dawla raised before the Ilkhan [Arghun] on several occasions, in the form of fables of the ancestors, the idea that he had inherited prophethood from Chinggis Khan'. This reference to Arghun's prophetic

[86] When he was appointed supervisor of Baghdad's finances after he returned from Baghdad to the Ilkhan's camp. Brack, 'A Jewish Vizier', pp. 379–80.

[87] Ibid., pp. 387–9.

[88] Vaṣṣāf, *Tajziyat*, pp. 242–3. On Arghun's controversial, covert execution of his cousins, see Jonathan Brack, 'Mediating Sacred Kingship: Conversion and Sovereignty in Mongol Iran', PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2016, pp. 38–81; Vaṣṣāf, *Tajziyat*, p. 244; Rashīd al-Dīn, (eds) Rawshan and Mūsavī, Vol. 2, pp. 1179–80; *Rashīd uddin*, (trans.) Thackston, Vol. 3, p. 575.

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inheritance suggests that Saʿd al-Dawla was using 'prophethood' to reinforce Arghun's dynastic claim to his succession to Chinggis Khan's unique affinity with Heaven, further confirming his rightful inheritance to Chinggis's sacral kingship.[89] According to the author, however, Saʿd al-Dawla then urged the Ilkhan to follow the example, not of Chinggis Khan as one might expect, but that of the 'Arab prophet' (*payghambar-i ʿarabī*), who understood that the road to government and religion (*mulk va-milal, dīn va-duval*) is tainted in blood and *jihad*, and who exhorted his companions (*ṣahāba*) to fight and execute raids (*ghazavāt*) on his behalf. Demonstrating his message through the example of the 'Battle of the Trench' (*al-khandaq*, 627/5), the Jewish adviser noted that in a single day Muḥammad ordered the beheading of a great many of his enemies, a display of unwavering ferocity, tenacity, and political astuteness.[90] Saʿd al-Dawla beseeched Arghun to appoint him as his chief financial supervisor ('debt collector'). The Ilkhan should show favour to his supporters and followers, but unmercifully punish his opponents, in order to guarantee the longevity, prosperity, and good fortune of Arghun's dynastic house.[91]

Saʿd al-Dawla appears to present the '*yasa*' of Muḥammad (as opposed to Mongol pluralism) as a response to Buddhist efforts at the court to cultivate anti-Muslim sentiments in Arghun. He, however, appeals to his patron's empirical sense of religiosity. He explores the Prophet Muḥammad's policies not through the (transcendentalist) perspective of 'religion', but through the prism of political theory and statecraft—effectivity and power, in other words. The longevity of the Muslim empire was retained only through a calculated measure of violent retribution. Such a framing strikes a chord with Mongol conceptions regarding norms of statecraft and justified political violence and retribution.[92]

The reference to Saʿd al-Dawla's deployment of the 'fables of the ancestors' might refer to the vizier's use of stories about pre-Islamic monarchs, especially the heroic Persian kings—embedded, embellished, and retained in advice (*akhlāq*) literature—in which the rulers deployed justice and force to maintain social harmony and ward off chaos and decline.[93] Whereas Simnānī defused the

[89] J. Brack, 'Theologies of Auspicious Kingship: The Islamization of Chinggisid Sacral Kingship in the Islamic World', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 60/4 (2018), p. 1165.

[90] Further, Saʿd al-Dawla appears to refer in his 'speech' to the slaughter of the Jewish Banū Qurayẓa tribe following Muḥammad's victory in the Battle of the Trench (April 627/Dhū al-Qaʿda 5). M. Kister, 'The Massacre of the Banū Qurayẓa: A Re-examination of a Tradition', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 8 (1986), pp. 61–74.

[91] Vaṣṣāf, *Tajziyat*, p. 241. The account relates to the summer prior to Saʿd al-Dawla's appointment as vizier, when the Ilkhan appointed him to supervisor of finances (*mushrif*) in Baghdad to examine the financial 'irregularities' of Iraq's governor and collect overdue taxes. Brack, 'A Jewish Vizier', p. 380.

[92] Munkh-Erdene, 'The Rise'.

[93] The Quranic term 'fables of the ancestors' (*asāṭīr al-awwalīn*) was understood to relate to embellished tales or fancy lies. It was associated with Muḥammad's Meccan opponent, the merchant al-Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith, who criticized Muḥammad's revelation as fables and challenged the Prophet to offer his audience a better, more entertaining tale. Rosenthal, '*Asāṭīr al-awwalīn*', *EI*^{2}. Brill Online, 2016, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/asatir-al-awwalin-SIM_8355, [accessed 6 June 2016]. Early traditions also link al-Naḍr, along

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Ilkhan's resistance to Islam by establishing an affinity between Islam's claim to religious supremacy and the Mongol claim to universal domination—in other words, between exclusionary religious and exclusionary political worldviews—Saᶜd al-Dawla established the same violence as politically motivated. Thus, he sought to envision royal violence, even towards members of the Chinggisid family, as politically astute, necessary, and legitimate by taking advantage of the Ilkhan's precarious dynastic condition and the inter-religious competition at the court.

Nonviolent sacral kingship: From *cakravartin* and 'Lord of Auspicious Conjunction'

Our third example of Muslim responses derives from the writings of the Ilkhanid vizier Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318). Rashīd al-Dīn, a Jewish convert to Islam, was engaged in debates with the Buddhists at the court and composed three refutations of the Buddhist dogma of reincarnation.[94] According to one of his accounts, he participated in a debate in Arghun's court during which a Buddhist monk presented him with the riddle of whether the chicken or the egg came first.[95] The vizier's response to the Buddhists, however, was wider and more instrumental to Rashīd al-Dīn's project of securing and reinforcing his Ilkhanid patrons' adherence to their newly adopted Muslim creed. As we saw, the Buddhists assimilated Chinggisid kingship into a merit-based model of Buddhist universal monarchy, the *cakravartin*. The Persian vizier experimented in his writings with his own parallel, Islamic model of sacralized righteous kingship that could accommodate and transpose the divinized-immanentist claims of his Chinggisid patrons into an Islamic framework, thus providing them with a transcendentalist 'twist'.[96] He sought to counter the appeal that some Buddhist concepts still had for members of the royal household, even after the decline of Buddhist presence in the Ilkhanate at the turn of the fourteenth century. Rashīd al-Dīn was inspired by his Buddhist peers-cum-adversaries to appropriate and experiment with a Perso-Islamic title—the *ṣāḥibqirān*, Lord of Auspicious Conjunction—remoulding it to parallel and compete with the appeal of the Buddhist model of sacral kingship. In this scheme, the Buddhist ideal of righteous nonviolent kingship figures as well.

Rooted in the pre-Islamic Iranian conjunction astrology, the *ṣāḥibqirān* indicated a ruler whose rise in fortune was decreed by celestial motions. His birth or appearance on the political or military stage coincided with, and therefore was also predetermined by, a major planetary conjunction (*qirān*), most notably between Saturn and Jupiter. The title became particularly prevalent in imperial court circles from the fifteenth-century onwards, as it was further

with his 'fables', to the knowledge of Persian epic or 'the stories of the Persian kings and the stories of Rustum and Isfandiyār'. Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 171–5.

[94] Brack, 'Rashīd al-Dīn'.

[95] Rashīd al-Dīn, *Laṭāʾif al-ḥaqāʾiq*, (ed.) Ghulām Riḍā Ṭāhir (Tehran, 1976–7), pp. 36–7; Brack, 'Rashīd al-Dīn', pp. 225–6.

[96] Brack, 'Theologies', pp. 1162–8.

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entwined with the figure of Temür (r. 1370–1405) and his patrimony of world conquest.[97] Yet, the title's potency and, moreover, malleability—its ability to accommodate and transform claims to a divinized mode of kingship—seems to have appealed to courtiers and literati already during the Ilkhanid period.[98]

In the introduction to his world history, the *Compendium of Chronicles* (*Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*), Rashīd al-Dīn wrote that Öljeitü was a *ṣāḥibqirān*, 'the like of which had never been seen before in any prior age (*qarnī*)', since his reign (*davr-i salṭanat*) was auspiciously attained without the shedding of 'a single drop of blood' or the fierce inter-dynastic opposition that his predecessors had dealt with. In Öljeitü's reign, the kingdom came under full control and perfect order.[99] The vizier's fashioning of Öljeitü as an auspicious 'non-violent' *ṣāḥibqirān* stands in stark contrast with the way the title would be largely understood from the fifteenth century onwards as representing world conquerors like Iskandar and Chinggis Khan.[100] Indeed, in the *Compendium*, we also find another kind of 'Lord of Auspicious Conjunction': Chinggis Khan is identified as a *ṣāḥibqirān* for his invincibility as a heavenly assisted world conqueror on his divinely commissioned mission of removing corruption from the Muslim world.[101]

There are a number of parallels between the way the *cakravartin* title was employed by the Buddhists—assimilating the Chinggisid claim to an exceptional, heavenly designated, and uniquely auspicious sovereignty into the Buddhist model of universal righteous kingship—and the Persian vizier Rashīd al-Dīn's experimentation with the *ṣāḥibqirān* as a representation of a uniquely fortunate and ethical Muslim ruler. In other words, both titles are employed to radically ethicize the Mongols' divinized kingship and their special good fortune by imbuing Chinggisid sovereignty with Buddhist and Muslim ethical-salvific ideals.[102] Rashīd al-Dīn's 'peculiar' presentation of Öljeitü as befitting the potent title of *ṣāḥibqirān*, due not to his extraordinary performance on the battlefield but to his fortunate, nonviolent, and uncontested transition to the throne, is likewise reminiscent of (Pali) Buddhist traditions of the 'utopian paradox of nonviolent kingship' imbuing the figure of the *cakravartin* (above). Was this too part of the Buddhist 'heritage' at court with which the vizier had to engage and compete? That the Chinggisid auspicious *ṣāḥibqirān* in the vizier's work represented both 'types' of kingship—the violent, ferocious world-conqueror and the nonviolent righteous, miracle-doer (*ṣāḥib karāmāt*) ruler—further speaks to the complementary nature of the Mongols' religious

[97] Moin, *Millennial Sovereign;* Lisa Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire: Memory and Dynastic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 47–8.

[98] Brack, 'Theologies', p. 1168.

[99] Rashīd al-Dīn, (eds) Rawshan and Mūsavī, Vol. 1, pp. 5–6; *Rashīd uddin*, (trans.) Thackston, Vol. 1, p. 5.

[100] Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*; Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 166–71.

[101] Rashīd al-Dīn, (eds) Rawshan and Mūsavī, Vol. 1, pp. 287–90; *Rashīd uddin*, (trans.) Thackston, Vol. 1, pp. 141–2.

[102] Brack, 'Theologies', p. 1151.

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pluralistic approach, on the one hand, and their legitimating claim to world domination, on the other. Both were aspects of the same immanentist religio-political logic.

The vizier was not only responding to Buddhist discourses on kingship and discussions on karmic retribution that were probably still current at the Ilkhanid court. He also had in mind his patrons' tumultuous succession history and the Ilkhanid inter-dynastic strife. Öljeitü's reign, his rise to the throne with meagre opposition,[103] and his *ṣāḥibqirān* auspiciousness mark the resolution of a two decades-long period in Ilkhanid history of inter-dynastic insecurity and conflict from which Arghun's offspring emerged victorious.

In addition to offering a parallel model to the Buddhists, we also find that Rashīd al-Dīn employed in his theological treatises the same strategy as Simnānī: stressing equivalences and cognates between the Chinggisids' totalizing vision of heavenly determined universal rule and Islam's totalizing vision of the universal cult.[104] In one of his theological treatises, the vizier illustrates the infidel's submission to Allāh by comparing it to a rebel's surrender to the legitimate king, explicitly using the Mongolian-Turkish term *īl* (*il/el*), meaning peace, harmony, and submission. In the Mongol ultimatums to European courts, Chinggis is described as the sole lord on earth (*super terram Cingischam solus dominus*), and polities and rulers are divided into wilful submitters (*el*) and those in a 'state of rebellion' (*bulgha/bulaq*) against Heaven's wish. This latter group awaited their brutal fate at the hands of the Mongol armies.[105] Rashīd al-Dīn explains that the infidel rebels' surrender to the king is registered in the ruler's books to be rewarded by the same 'king' in a favourable fate in the afterlife; infidelity, on the other hand, is analogous with mutiny against the rightful ruler.[106] Such articulations appealed, on the one hand, to the Mongols' own tendency to make similar equivalences between obedience to Heaven's will and the heavenly designated Chinggisids, and the religious submission to God, or morality and righteousness.[107] On the other hand, these were also part of Rashīd al-Dīn's broader campaign of using Mongol translatability to reinforce his patron's embrace of Islam and dismantle and subvert the very same Mongol, immanentist logic of translatability. He attempted to carry this out by inculcating the rulers with the monotheistic outlook of religious non-translatability and the transcendentalist intransigence to conversion to a new religion or 'relapse' to the old ways.[108]

The vizier's efforts to represent Islam's key tenets and Chinggisid universal domination as equivalent and complementary, rather than inimical, corresponded with other experiments during the period following the Ilkhanate's

[103] With the exception of the execution of the Ilkhan Geikhatu's son, Ala Fireng, who seems to have aspired to the throne. Vaṣṣāf, *Tajziyat*, pp. 461–2.

[104] To paraphrase the observation in Moin's framework article in this special issue.

[105] Jackson, 'World Conquest'.

[106] Rashīd al-Dīn, *Bayān al-ḥaqā'iq*, (ed.) Hāshim Rajabzāda (Tehran, 1386/2008), p. 127. Jackson similarly notes the potential Islamic 'edge' due to this conceptual correspondence (Muslim submission to God and the Mongol demands). Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World*, pp. 336–7.

[107] For example, Atwood's discussion of Arghun's letter in his article in this special issue.

[108] Brack, 'Disenchanting Heaven'.

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embrace of Islam. According to Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328), during the brief Ilkhanid occupation of Damascus in 1299–1300, he was told by the Mongol commander Qutlughshāh (d. 1307) that 'God sealed prophecy [the line of prophets, *khatama al-risāla*] with Muḥammad' and that 'Chinggis Khan was the king of the earth (*malik al-basīṭa*), and whoever turned his back on his command and the command of his descendants is a dissident (*khārijī*).'[109] Although Islam did not present the same level of religious 'inclusivism' and assimilative quality as Buddhism, Muslims had other tools at their disposal to establish and promote conceptual affinities between Islam and Chinggisid principles.

Conclusions

In their article in this special issue Gommans and Huseini demonstrate that Mughal intellectuals appropriated the Chinggisid model of religious pluralism, aligning and merging it with Persianate traditions of political theory or wisdom literature (*akhlāq*). In doing so, they refashioned an idealized version of Chinggis Khan and his heirs as just, wise, compassionate, moral, and self-disciplined kings commissioned with keeping social harmony. The Mongols and their 're-consecrated' religious impartiality became the 'practical and historical' Perso-Mongol precedent for emperor Akbar's own policy of religious pacification, *ṣulḥ-i kull*. There is a certain validity to the Mughal intellectuals' claim: not only were Persian traditions and concepts of kingship and political theory employed as an intermediary, a means of reconciling between Mongol and Muslim traditions already under the Ilkhans,[110] but we can easily identify parallels and continuity between the Mongol and Mughal sultans' modes of sacralizing kingship and their wavering between contrasting tendencies towards transcendentalism and immanentism following the Chinggisid conversion to Islam.

Gommans and Huseini further demonstrate the importance of the heritage of Mongol immanentism for Akbar's own self-fashioning into a sacralized emperor and for the provincialization or 'demotion' of Islam in the Mughal new *sulḥ-i kull* 'order'. The Mughal experimentation with *sulḥ-i kull* might be seen not only as an institutionalized, more advanced iteration of the Chinggisids' policies of religious pluralism but also as part of an ongoing Islamic engagement with Mongol patterns of immanentist-sacral kingship and inter-religious transparency and non-exclusivity. These motifs were expressed both in religious pluralism and in instances of sovereign violence directed towards 'passive intolerance'.[111] The debates on religious 'tolerance' versus violence and sovereignty in the Ilkhan Arghun's court during the late

[109] Quṭb al-Dīn Mūsā al-Yūnīnī, *Early Mamluk Syrian Historiography: Al-Yūnīnī's Dhayl Mirʾāt al-Zamān*, (ed. and trans.) Li Guo (Leiden: Brill, 1998), Vol. 1, pp. 157–8 (English), Vol. 2, p. 119 (Arabic); K. V. Zettersteen, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mamlukensultanane in den Jahren 690–741 der higra nach arabischen Handschriften* (Leiden: Brill, 1919), p. 76 (where Qutlughshāh further claims that Chinggis Khan was a Muslim convert).

[110] Charles Melville, 'The Mongol and Timurid Periods, 1250–1500', in *A History of Persian Literature. Vol. 10: Persian Historiography*, (ed.) C. Melville (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 191–2.

[111] Moin, 'Sovereign Violence'.

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1280s indicate, furthermore, that Muslims were far from the only religious agents taking part in the process of negotiating Mongol religiosity. Muslims seem to have not only competed in this process with other religious representatives but also adopted some of their rivals' methods.

While the Mongols in Iran ultimately embraced Islam, they showed a certain resistance to the monotheist ideal of religious exclusion and to the uprooting of their patterns of religious interchangeability. The Mughals too favoured universalizing translatability, transparency, and commensurability over distinction, exclusion, and boundary policing. *Sulḥ-i kull* might also be viewed then as Akbar's attempt to resolve this irreconcilable conflict by offering a non-exclusionary, and thus pluralistic, version of Islamic monotheism.

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