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Ilkhanid Buddhism: Traces of a Passage in Eurasian History

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INTRODUCTION: MAPPING SOCIAL SPACES

Ilkhanid Buddhism, a political and cultural phenomenon of the Ilkhanate, had a sudden visible presence within the Eurasian world and then dissolved into more diffuse traces. The Ilkhans ruled Iran and neighboring territories from 1256–1335 as the grandsons and heirs of Chinggis Khan (1162–1227) and as subordinate regional rulers to the dominant Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). Few scholars today would deny the pivotal and creative role played by the Mongol conquests despite their destructive and by some measures relatively short span of governance. Ilkhanid Buddhism also had a paradoxical existence, burning bright for a short time, seemingly disappearing under subsequent layers of Islamic and Eurocentric histories, and yet continuing to spin its traces through currents of intellectual life. What follows explores a political and cultural mapping of Ilkhanid Buddhism and the Eurasian discourse on Buddhism of which it was a part during a critical historical period.

Given the fragmented and incomplete record of Ilkhanid Buddhism, it is essential to have a conceptual framework that recognizes the potency of dispersed elements through an integrated but not necessarily coherent field of cultural relations. Antonio Gramsci's work has been helpful here. Historical processes can "deposit traces" without leaving clear lists or "inventories" of things and documents.[1] Gramsci's notion of "traces" is indispensable to grasping Ilkhanid Buddhism's significance. To begin with, we have no Ilkhanid Buddhist theological texts to examine. Rashid al-Din's *Life of the Buddha* and relevant passages from the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* (Compendium of world history) are the only extended contemporary discussions of Ilkhanid Buddhism,

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[1] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, trans. and eds. (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 324–25. Also see, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1978), 25. I thank Arif Dirlik for this reference.

which was more a cultural and political phenomenon than a particular school of thought. Rather than debating fine points of the Dharma, Kashmiri, Tibetan, Chinese, and Uighur Buddhists offered the Ilkhanid court expert advice on governance, medical treatments, agriculture, and other matters.

Perceptions of Buddhism evolved as individuals in the Frankish kingdoms or the Mamluk Sultanate recognized different aspects of Ilkhanid Buddhism and the questions these might raise for their own domestic and foreign concerns. A comparative approach with Buddhism under the Yuan Dynasty can also leverage details particular to features of Buddhism under the Ilkhanate. Bertold Spuler has noted the importance as well as the difficulties of tracing this history when he suggests that although, "The land must have been littered with Buddhist temples," the subsequent loss of Buddhist sources and Muslim authors intent on denying the impact of Buddhism in their heartland left our understanding of Buddhism in Iran "one of the darkest portions" of the Ilkhanid period.[2] Recent scholarship has begun to grapple with the darkness.[3] In what follows, I attempt to integrate what we know of Ilkhanid Buddhism into an *inventory of traces* from the archaeological, literary, diplomatic, and artistic sources of the period. I use this to construct *political and cultural mappings* of the *social spaces* in which Ilkhanid Buddhism reveals itself to have been a Eurasian-wide cultural phenomenon of historical consequence that, in the end, had more to do with perceptions than texts.

POLITICAL AND PHYSICAL MAPPINGS: THE REALITY OF ILKHANID BUDDHISM

The fabric of Ilkhanid Buddhism was a complex weave of many threads. Politically embedded, Buddhism easily entered into court discourse, as Vassaf, early fourteenth-century Persian historian of the Ilkhanate, suggests in the following vignette. According to Vassaf, Ilkhan Arghun (r. 1284–1291) listened one day to his physician and minister Sa'd al-Daula, a man of Jewish upbringing and a staunch enemy of Islam.[4] Seeking the favor of the Ilkhan, who was

[2] Bertold Spuler, *Die Mongolen in Iran: Politik, Verwaltung und Kultur der Ilchanzeit 1220–1350* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 150–51.

[3] Samuel M. Grupper presents an exhaustive survey of evidence regarding Ilkhanid Buddhism that has greatly benefited this article's attempt to read Ilkhanid Buddhism in its Eurasian historical perspective; "The Buddhist Sanctuary-Vihara of Labnasagut and the Il-Qan Hulegu: An Overview of Il-Qanid Buddhism and Related Matters," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 13 (2004): 5–77. More recent but briefer treatments of Ilkhanid Buddhism can be found in Johan Elverskog's *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); and Richard Foltz's *Religions of the Silk Roads: Premodern Patterns of Globalization*, 2d ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010 [2000]).

[4] Summarized by A. Bausani, "Religion under the Mongols," in J. A. Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), vol. 5, 538–49, here 541; and Michal Biran, *Chinggis Khan: Makers of the Muslim World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2007), 121. By the 1260s, Chinggis Khan's status as a prophet was already well established in contemporary political circles. See Minhāj Sirāj Jūzjānī, *Ṭabakāt-i-Nāṣirī: A General History of the*

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known for his Buddhist beliefs and practices, the minister spun the following tale and offered a proposal: Chinggis Khan, the minister proclaimed, was a great man and prophet in the tradition of Muhammad. Since prophecy was known to be a hereditary gift, it followed that Arghun, of the same lineage, must also possess this ability; he should, therefore, fulfill his destiny and follow in the steps of the great prophet Muhammad. That is, the minister continued, Arghun should found a new universal religion. To symbolize this momentous development Sa'd al-Daula suggested Arghun turn the Ka'ba in Mecca into a pagoda!

This story begins to sound like a riddle: Why would a Jewish minister encourage a Buddhist ruler to follow Muhammad and replace Islam with a new Buddhism? Evidently, the proposal seemed reasonable to Sa'd al-Daula, who was an intelligent man, and also to Arghun, who although he did not act upon the suggestion did make Sa'd al-Daula his personal physician and vizier. Ilkhanid court political culture spun a variegated web of religious options. Personal preference played a major role in each of Ilkhan's choices among varieties of Islam, Buddhism, and Nestorianism. Political considerations were never far behind. The need for an effective ideology that might balance competing theological interest groups was paramount. Formally educated into Buddhist teachings, Arghun and other Ilkhans significantly drew from the Dharma for general governing principles and were perceived as so doing. A mapping of the physical presence of Ilkhanid Buddhism reveals Buddhist communities as far west as Anatolia [see map 1], where they coexisted with Christian and Muslim communities. Within this era of Buddhist revival, the story of Ilkhanid Buddhism begins in east Turkestan and north China as prelude to its distinctive development in the social environment of thirteenth-century Iran.

Confronted with early Mongol expansion, northern Buddhist leaders initially proceeded with caution and adept political strategies. Turkic Uighur families who practiced Buddhism were early supporters of the Chinggisid claims to world leadership and continued to serve as valued military and political advisors to the Khans throughout their rule. Within the Han Chinese domains, one eminent Buddhist monk, Master Xingxiu (Hsing-hsiu, 1166–1246), responded to the political uncertainties of early Mongol rule by retiring to write. He produced a two-volume work titled "Record of (the Lodge of) Leisureliness" (Congrong (an) lu), which recounted the lives of one hundred Chan masters who had achieved enlightenment and served to promote Chan

Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia, Including Hindustan, from A.H. 194 (810 A.D.) to A.H. 658 (1260 A.D.) and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islam, by Minhāj-ud-dīn, Abū-ʾUmar-i-ʾUṣmān, H. G. Raverty, trans. from Persian (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1970), vol. II, 1077–78.

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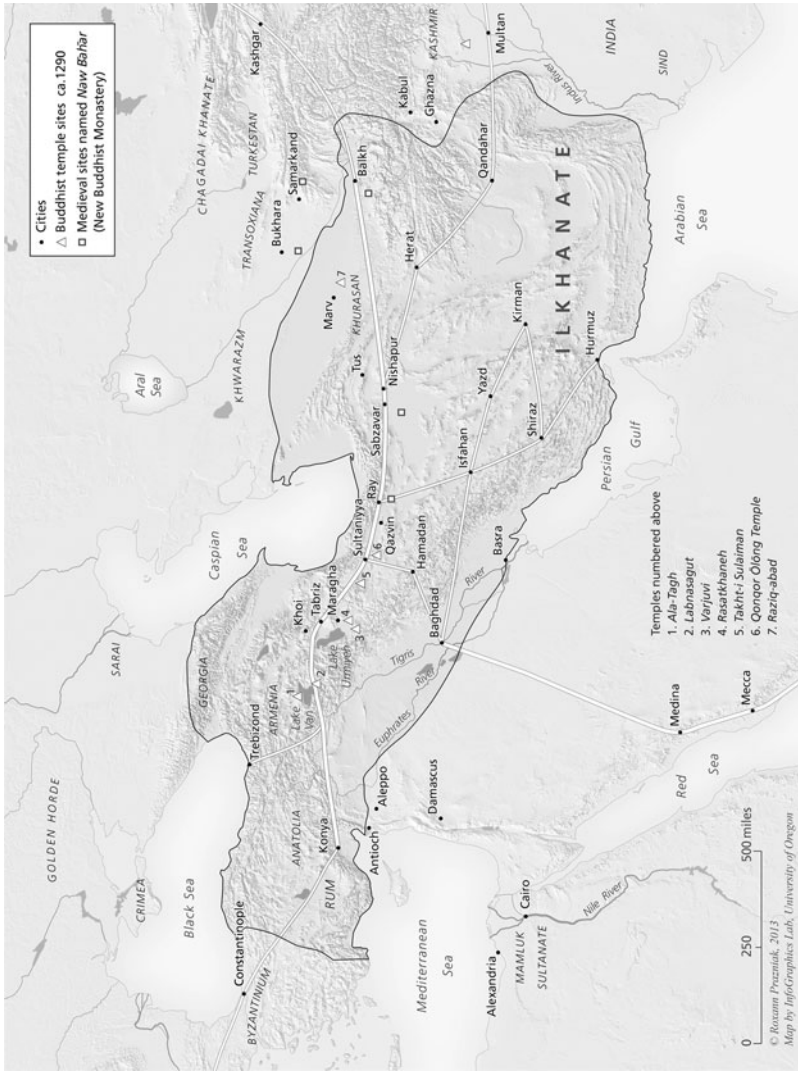

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teachings. Hülegü (r. 1256–1265), the founder of the Ilkhanate, attended Chan religious ceremonies at Da Qingshou under the direction of Grand Mediation Preceptor Haiyun. For a decade before his departure for the western regions in 1251, Hülegü financially supported the renovation of Da Qingshou Temple and regularly attended temple study sessions. When he departed the region, he sought Haiyun's blessing for his work.[5]

For all schools of Buddhism, the sudden reality of Mongol dominance offered competitive opportunities. As waves of Tibetan and Kashmiri priests found audience with the Khan at Karakorum, Chan Buddhist groups experienced a gradual eclipse of their authority. Court-issued invitations to Dharmasvamin and other Tibetan monks familiar with Nepalese Buddhist teachings popular in this period increased in frequency.[6] With Haiyun's death, the shift gained momentum and ties to Tibetan Buddhism, through Tangut Buddhism, grew. In 1247, Mongol rulers in Karakorum sponsored a major project to reprint and circulate the highly prized Tangut text of the *Golden Light Sutra*. Adepts carefully prepared new printing blocks to replace those previously destroyed during Mongol conquest. The text itself detailed the duties and rewards for rulers who governed in accordance with the Dharma. Once reprinted, the text was widely circulated and promoted as a guide to leadership and a statement of Mongol political ideology. The writer of the preface made clear that the text was to be "spread abroad as medicine, to heal and restore the faith."[7] By invoking a political use of the Buddhist concept of reincarnation, Mongol rulers also inserted themselves into the sacred histories of past Tangut and Tibetan lineages, locating their origins among the royal house of the Buddha himself and claiming this as the ultimate source of their legitimacy.

Hülegü's contacts with Kashmiri Buddhist communities began early in his career and would continue to feed currents of Ilkhanid Buddhism.[8] Kashmiri masters were well known for preserving a highly refined form of Buddhism that incorporated "both the speculative and logical tradition and the practice of Tantra and ritual."[9] Although Buddhism had ceased to be a dominant presence in the region of Kashmir by the thirteenth century, a long and rich tradition of scholarship

[5] Jan Yün-hua, "Chinese Buddhism in Ta-tu: The New Situation and New Problems," in Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary, eds., *Yüan Thought: Chinese Thought and Religion Under the Mongols* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 386, 388–89.

[6] Chag Lo-tsa-ba, *Biography of Dharmasvamin (Chag Lo-ts-ba Chos-rje-dpal), A Tibetan Monk Pilgrim*, deciphered and trans. by George Roerich (Delhi: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna; Shri Jainendra Press, 1959), iv–v, 56.

[7] Ruth Dunnell, "The Hsia Origins of the Yuan Institution of Imperial Preceptor," *Asia Minor* 51 (1992): 85–111, here 106, 109–10.

[8] Ronald M. Davidson, "Hidden Realms and Pure Abodes: Central Asian Buddhism as Frontier Religion in the Literature of India, Nepal, and Tibet," *Pacific World Journal*, 3d series, 4 (2002): 153–81, esp. 161, 164, 167.

[9] Grupper, "Buddhist Sanctuary, 20 n. 47.

was a distinctive feature of this area.[10] In the late 1250s, distinguished scholar and Tibetan monk Orgyan pa made a pilgrimage to Orgyan in the region of Kashmir where he purportedly drank from the turquoise waters of Lake Maru and visited the five springs of Garnatama mountain. At the prosperous town of Malot, Orgyan pa visited a temple he described as having been built by King Hülegü (the future Ilkhan Hülegü).[11] After the second Mongol invasion of Kashmir in 1253, Hülegü received booty and laborers from the region.[12] Contact also came in the form of military and political intelligence. Kashmiri monks Otoci and Na-mo supplied Hülegü with information vital to his defeat of Quli Sultan (Hu-li Suan-T'an) and the advent of Mongol political control of Kashmir.[13]

When Khubilai became Khan in 1260 he retained the lion's share of authority over Tibetan regional leaders, but Hülegü continued to post his own representatives to areas of Kashmir and western Tibet. With the establishment of the Yuan court at Khanbalïq (Dadu) in 1271, Kashmir territories that were home to various Buddhist sects were divided between Hülegü and Möngke. Mongol authorities invested Lakshamadeva (r. 1273–1285) as raja of Kashmir and Mongol vassal. Hülegü's territories spanned fifteen specific locations in the area of Western Tibet including the kingdom of Ladakh that was home to the Phag-mo gru-pa sect, to which the Ilkhans became patrons.[14] Although the number of Buddhist households and scholarly communities in this region was not large, the allure of Kashmiri/Western Tibetan Buddhist culture remained.[15] The pasturelands and market towns in Hülegü's possession also marked land routes between Tibet and Iran.[16]

Earlier Iranian encounters with Buddhism left two historical layers beneath thirteenth-century developments. Khurasan, with a center at Balkh in

[10] Mohibbul Hasan, "Historical Writing in Medieval Kashmir," in Mohibbul Hasan, ed., *Historians of Medieval India* (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1968), 53–58, here 53. For an historical geography of this period, see, V. C. Bhutani, "Historical Geography of Kashmir from the Earliest Times," *Indian Historical Review* 27, 2 (2000): 4–16.

[11] Giuseppe Tucci, "Translation of the Itinerary of Orgyan Pa," in *Travels of Tibetan Pilgrims in the Swat Valley* (Calcutta: The Greater India Society, 1940), 41–64, here 46–47. See also Elliot Sperling, "Hülegü and Tibet," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung Tomus* 44, 1–2 (1990): 145–57, here 152 n. 26.

[12] Karl Jahn, "A Note on Kashmir and the Mongols," *Central Asiatic Journal* 2 (1956): 176–80, here 179.

[13] Yün-hua, "Chinese Buddhism," 393–94.

[14] Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, "Rashid al-Din's *Life of the Buddha*, Some Tibetan Perspectives," in Annna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, eds., *Rashid al-Din, Agent and Mediator of Cultural Exchanges in Ilkhanid Iran* (London: The Warburg Institute, 2013), 197–211, here 198–99. See also Sperling, "Hülegü and Tibet," 145, 147, 156. Hülegü's name appears in Tibetan sources as "Hu-la-hu" and "Hu-la," and he is referred to as the patron of the Phag-mo gru-pa sub-sect, or as the "Stod-Hor king."

[15] Aziz Ahmad, "Conversion to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir," *Central Asiatic Journal* 23 (1979): 3–18, here 8.

[16] Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, "The Qarlugh Kingdom in the North-Western India during the Thirteenth Century," *Islamic Culture* 54, 2 (1980): 75–91, here 77, 80, 82.

eastern Iran, had been a stronghold of Iranian Buddhism from the second to the third centuries. Nothing explicit is known of the doctrinal features that defined the Iranian "New Buddhism" of these and later centuries. Richard Bulliet has written that it is possible to see in "the Naw Bahar at Balkh the last functioning segment of what was once a string of monasteries stretching from Bactria to Kurdistan and devoted to a form of Buddhism that was uniquely identified with Iranian speakers."[17] Archaeological evidence from Bactria and Merv reveals an abundance of Buddhist artifacts including a third century CE wall painting at Kara-tepe in southern Uzbekistan [ancient Bactria] that bears the inscription "Buddha Mazda" and depicts an image of the Buddha surrounded by a halo of flames, a signifier of the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda.[18] Mkrtychev Tigran notes evidence of twenty different Buddhist sites from the first to the eighth centuries in the area of Bactria-Tokharistan as well as indications of Kashmiri Buddhist artistry into the eleventh century.[19] Melikian-Chirvani points out, "It is for its royal significance that the Buddha was clad in *parniyan/parand* attire as the Lord of the Universe, a concept which almost entirely entered Buddhism when it was refashioned to a considerable extent in Iranian lands."[20] Ibn al-Nadim (d. 995 CE), speaking from within Islam, wrote that the Buddhists of Khurasan descended from among the most exalted people of the earth; they were faithful, charitable, and selfless. He counted the Buddha as a prophet.[21]

A second pattern of encounter that left cultural traces occurred during the eight and ninth centuries in Islamic western Iran. Versed in Buddhist studies, Umayyad Islamic scholar Wasil ibn Ata (700–748) fused Greek and Buddhist ideas into his school of Islam. Arab author Umar ibn al-Azraq al-Kirmani, also of the Umayyad period, sought to explain Buddhism in terms that drew analogies with Islam. He wrote an account of the Nava Vihara (Naw Bahar) center of Buddhist learning in Balkh that appeared in the tenth-century work the *Book of Lands*, by Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadhani. During the early Abbasid period (750–1258), Buddhist scholars were invited to Baghdad to participate in translation projects at the Bayt al-Hikma, or House of Wisdom. Yahya Ibn Barmak, chief minister to the caliph and possessing family ties to the Nava Vihara Monastery

[17] Richard W. Bulliet, "Naw Bahar and the Survival of Iranian Buddhism," *Iran: The Journal of Persian Studies* 14 (1976): 140–45, here 144, 145.

[18] Boris J. Stavisky, "Buddha-Mazda" from Kara-tepe in Old Termez (Uzbekistan): A Preliminary Communication," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 3, 2 (1980): 89–94, here 89–91. For mention of Russian scholarship on Buddhism, see Richard Foltz, "Buddhism in the Iranian World," *Muslim World* 100 (Apr./July 2010): 204–14, here 206.

[19] Mkrtychev Tigran, "Buddhism and Features of the Buddhist Art of Bactria-Tokharistan," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 133 (2007): 475–85, here 475, 482–83. I thank an anonymous *CSSH* reader for this reference.

[20] Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, "Iran to Tibet," in Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, eds., *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 108 n. 84.

[21] Muhammad Ibn Ishaq Ibn al-Nadim, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, Bayard Dodge, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 824–25.

in Balkh, utilized his connections to bring Buddhist scholars from Kashmir to translate Buddhist medical texts from Sanskrit into Arabic.[22] The powerful Barmakid family of Balkh, some of whose members served as vizier to the early Abbasid Caliphate, were descended from a hereditary line of Buddhist priests, possibly of Kashmiri ethnicity.[23]

The question legitimately arises as to what relevance, if any, these earlier Iranian pre- and post-Islamic encounters with Buddhism might have had for the era of Ilkhanid Buddhism. To answer this, a point of comparison might be helpful. In the Yuan territories, the basic tenets of Buddhist belief, concepts of reincarnation, bodhisattvas, and symbols of the Buddha were familiar entities easily associated with Tibetan variations. Buddhism in thirteenth-century Iran constituted a more dramatic intervention into local society. When Rashid al-Din argued for the legitimacy of Ilkhan Ghazan over that of the Mamluks of Egypt, based on the Mongol's purported Buddhist lineage, he appealed to sensibilities that recognized Buddhist concepts long after they had been divested of direct Buddhist association. Previous absorption of Buddhism into Sufism in eastern Iran and continuing ties with Kashmiri Buddhists created a potential for cultural resonance. Similarly, eighth-century translations of Buddhist texts undertaken by Central Asian Muslim scholars had produced an Arabic literature on Buddhism, including such works as *Bilawhar wa Budhasaf* and *Kitab al-Budd*.[24] In the thirteenth century, Christian Arabs in northern Syria, inspired by contemporary Tabriz manuscript workshop styles, produced illustrated manuscripts contributing to the renewed popularity of these stories from the Buddha's life.[25] Although largely eclipsed by Islam at the time of the Mongol conquests, a legacy of Buddhism from an earlier Iranian encounter remained available for revival.

Tabriz as a Commercial and Cultural Center

Before looking at specific construction projects sponsored by the Ilkhans, it is valuable to identify some of the infrastructure that made Ilkhanid Buddhism possible. Situated in the eastern corner of an alluvial plain with the Caspian Sea to the east, and the Sahand massif with peaks of 11,000 feet to the

[22] Alexander Berzin, "Historical Survey of the Buddhist and Muslim Worlds' Knowledge of Each Other's Customs and Teachings," *Muslim World* 100 (Apr./July 2010): 187–203, here 188–89.

[23] Kevin van Bladel, "The Bactrian Background of the Barmakids," in Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, eds., *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 43–88, here 69.

[24] Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts of Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majihima-Patipada (The Middle Way)," *Islamic Studies* 48, 3 (2009): 367–94, here 370.

[25] Rima E. Smine, "The Miniatures of a Christian Arabic Barlaam and Joasaph: Balamand 147," *Parole de l'Orient* 43 (1993): 171–229, here 205, 207. Smine identifies the stylistic elements as Persian from Anatolia or northern Mesopotamia. See also John A. Boyle, "Literary Cross-Fertilization between East and West," *Bulletin* (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies) 4, 1 (1977): 32–36, here 34.

south, Tabriz had long been the only suitable pass in the area for east/north and south/north trade routes. It took the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 1258, however, to accent and augment Tabriz's place in the string of urban cultural centers that dotted central Eurasia. Ilkhanid geographers placed the new city of Sultaniyya, begun under the reign of Ilkhan Arghun and originally known as Arghunia, at the pivotal point between the *shah-rah-i gharbi* [western imperial highway] connecting Sultaniyya to Konya in Anatolia via Tabriz and the *shah-rah-i sharqi* [eastern imperial highway] linking Sultaniyya with Balkh through Rayy and Sabzavar, cites with Naw Bahar place names. A southern imperial highway connected Tabriz through Sultaniyya to Isfahan and Kirman, with an alternate route through Shiraz to Hurmuz.[26] Rashid al-Din wrote, "…Tabriz was so populace that it became an Egypt with Arghunia as the capital like Cairo."[27] Tabriz, in this case, refers to both the city and its regional domain within Azerbaijan.[28] Sources agree that Tabriz was the finest and largest city in all of Iran and an intellectual center of high repute. An individual referred to as "the great Frank physician" declared in 1311, "Since I have been received in the service of that great man [Rashid al-Din], I have, through his munificence, learned scientific truths which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no man ever dreamt or imagined of them."[29] Reflecting the diversity of the intellectual community, Rashid al-Din, in a treatise on *Reason and Science*, recorded not only his own answers to questions but those of Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist scholars as well.[30]

Commercial activity flourished under Ilkhanid patronage. Resources from this wealth committed to constructing and maintaining Buddhist sites were an essential part of early Ilkhanid political vision. Even territories on the periphery of the empire were drawn to the wealth and power of Tabriz. The papal inventory of 1295 included silks manufactured in Tabriz, and Emperor Rudolf IV of Habsburg was buried in 1365 in silk woven in Tabriz between 1319 and 1335.[31] Economic historian A. P. Martinez notes that the trade between India and

[26] Hamd-Allah Mustawfi of Qazwin, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulub* (1340), G. Le Strange, trans. (Leyden: E. J. Brill and E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1919), 56, 162–79.

[27] Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles*, W. M. Thackston, trans. and annotation (Cambridge: Harvard University Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1999), 577.

[28] Hamd-Allah Mustawfi of Qazwin, *Geographical Part*, 78, 82.

[29] Zeki Velidi Togan, "A Document Concerning Cultural Relations between the Ilkhanide and Byzantines," in *Ilhanli Bizans Kültür Münasebetlerine Dair Vesikalar* (Istanbul: Islam Tetkikleri Enstitüsü Dergisi IV. cildine ektir, 14, 1965), 9–15, here 11. Togan suggests "the Frank physician" was George Chioniades from Trebizond. I express my appreciation to Professor Osman Gazi Özgüdenli for this reference as well as helpful conversation and references in Rohrborn, note 58, and Satoko Shimo, note 74.

[30] Togan, "Document Concerning Cultural Relations," 9, 15.

[31] David Jacoby, "Oriental Silks Go West: A Declining Trade in the Later Middle Ages," in Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli and Gerhard Wolf, eds., *Islamic Artifacts in the Mediterranean World: Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2010), 72, 73.

European lands was the Ilkhanate's main source of revenue, going so far as to state, "The India trade of the Latin West was responsible for the prosperity of the Il-Khanate."[32] Virgil Ciociltan refers to Tabriz as "the veritable goose that laid the golden eggs," noting that in addition to east-west routes through the city, "products from the Caucasus and the Eurasian steppes and forests arrived from the North, while from the south goods came from the Indian Ocean via the Persian Gulf and Ormuz."[33] Musk from Tibet and superior grades of rock crystal from the mountains of Kashmir were some of the high-end specialty items that traveled overland and by sea to markets in Tabriz. Rashid al-Din himself, during his time as vizier to the Ilkhans, invested the vast majority of his own wealth in trade, primarily textiles, as did most of his associates among the nobility.[34] Large portions of this prosperity directly supported the construction of Buddhist temples and complexes in the Ilkhanid territories. It is estimated that over the first three decades of Mongol rule in Iran, the Ilkhans collectively advanced half of their treasury for elaborate gold and silver Buddhist images at multiple sites across Azerbaijan and Khurasan.[35] The same pattern held for the Yuan court's sponsorship of Tibetan Buddhism. Tons of gold and silver amounting to half or more of the Yuan government's expenditures, plus tens of thousands of bolts of silk, made possible an era of extraordinary artistic creativity and technical expertise devoted to Buddhist activity.[36]

Buddhist communities historically sustained extensive fiscal and commercial networks, and there is no reason this pattern would not have continued into the Mongol era. Mobile, flexible, and loosely federated, communities (*sangha*)

[32] A. P. Martinez, "The Eurasian Overland and Pontic Trades in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries with Special Reference to Their Impact on the Golden Horde, the West, and Russia and to the Evidence in Archival Material and Mint Outputs," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 16 (2008/2009): 128–221, here 152–53.

[33] Vilgil Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Samuel Willcocks, trans. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 49.

[34] I. P. Petrushevshy, "The Socio-Economic Conditions of Iran under the Il-Khans," in J. A. Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), vol. 5, 483–537, here 510. He also may have held farmland in Kabul, Ghazna, Lahore, and the province of Sind, as well as capital in trade with India and Transoxiana. See Zeki Velidi Togan, "References to Economic and Cultural Life in Anatolia in the Letters of Rashid al-Din," Gary Leiser, trans., in Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn, with Ernest Tucker, eds., *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asian and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods* (Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 2006), 84–111, here 93, 101. Leiser discusses the controversy surrounding these letters and concludes, "They must at least be accepted, like certain information in legends or epics, as broadly reflecting various realities from the time in which they were written. It is the task of the historian to tease out these realities" (85–87).

[35] J. A. Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the Il-Khans," in J. A. Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), vol. 5, 303–421, here 380.

[36] Anning Jing, "Financial and Material Aspects of Tibetan Art under the Yuan Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae Supplementum* 64, 2 (2004): 213–41, here 116–17.

generated an infrastructure that worked hand in hand with commercial activity to maximize regional and long-distance investment in pastoral goods, hemp oil, timber products, bamboo materials, and lacquer items, and often banking institutions. We know that in Yuan territories where Muslim merchants formed strong trade networks, Yuan imperial support for Buddhist monasteries rendered Muslim financiers a vulnerable minority, often at odds with Confucian factions. The latter under the circumstances were more likely to find common political ground with Buddhist associates. When El Temür established his new reign at Dadu in 1328, he revoked the commercial privileges of Muslim merchants in favor of their competitors, the Buddhist monasteries.[37]

A similar pattern of financial and political jockeying can be detected under the Ilkhanate. A study by I. P. Petrushevsky suggests that at the Ilkhanid court Buddhists and Nestorians frequently allied, while a Muslim elite supported by factions of the Turkish military aristocracy and Iranian bureaucrats constituted an opposition. At times Jews sided with Buddhists.[38] His reading rings true to the scenario between Ilkhan Arghun and Sa'd al-Daula recounted by Vassaf. Fiscal tensions in Iran tended to reflect an inadequate revenue base,[39] which was less of an issue for the Yuan rulers who inherited a bureaucratic tax collection system, a strong agrarian base, and a well-establish paper currency.[40] In Iran, Muslim traders and financiers still commanded the dominant networks on the ground, and the Ilkhanid rulers had to negotiate equitable relations while supporting the considerable prosperity of Buddhist establishments.[41] Prominent merchant Malik al-Islam Jamal al-Din, for example, retained privileges to negotiate on behalf of Iranian Persian Gulf merchants for clients in

[37] John W. Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians: Aspects of Political Change in Late Yuan China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 51.

[38] I. P. Petrushevsky, "Rashid al-Din's Conceptions of the State," *Central Asiatic Journal* 14 (1970): 148–62, here 149–50.

[39] Despite its overall success in trade, Ilkhanid fiscal policies ranged from weak to disastrous in the rural sector. There was less of an agricultural base to begin with, greater destruction during the period of conquest, and slow reconstruction. See A.K.S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 77–104. See also Eliyahu Ashtor, "The Economic Decline of the Middle East during the Later Middle Ages," *Asian and African Studies* 15 (1981): 253–86, here 258.

[40] J. A. Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the Il-Khans," in J. A. Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), vol. 5, 303–421, here 403. Also see, Ji Kaiyun, "Lüelun Zhongguo yu Yilang lishi wenhua de gongxing" On general characteristics of the history and culture between China and Iran), in Yao Jide, ed., *Zhongguo Yilang xuelunji* (Iranian studies in China) (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 2008), 50–66, here 59.

[41] D. C. Twitchett, "The Monasteries and China's Economy in Medieval Times," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 19, 3 (1957): 526–49, here 533, 536, 540; Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians*, 39; Lien-sheng Yang, "Buddhist Monasteries and Four Money-Raising Institutions in Chinese History," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 13, 1/2 (1950):174–91, here 187, 191; Kogi Kudara, "The Buddhist Culture of the Old Uigur Peoples," *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, 3d series, 4 (Fall 2002):183–95, here 185–86; Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press, 2003), 214, 216–17.

India who mostly likely were also Muslim.[42] However, newly constructed, strong Buddhist communities in Iran made up of craftsmen, artisans, and practitioners, at sites such as Khoi and Khurasan, would naturally have attracted and supported merchants connected specifically to Buddhist communities. Given their rivalry as well as interdependence with Muslim merchants, it is reasonable to suppose that there were networks of Buddhist merchants and financiers that linked Iran-based Buddhist communities with Uighur or Kashmiri Buddhist communities. Commercial wealth gained through both Muslim and Buddhist trade networks gave Buddhism a visibility as far west as Anatolia.

Iranian Buddhist Temple Construction: Khurasan to Azerbaijan

During the Ilkhanate, Mongol rulers built a corridor of Buddhist temples between the Black Sea and the area south of the Caspian Sea, along routes that linked Anatolia to the Indus River Valley and Uighurstan. Archeological evidence to date is limited but suggestive of Buddhist temple building activity at Ala-Tagh, Khoi, Tabriz, Maragha, Takht-i Sulaiman, and Sultaniyya. Rock-cut cave structures bearing strong similarities to Buddhist architecture have been identified, but Nestorian claims to the same sites are also plausible, as is the possibility of multiple usages over time.[43] Literary references to a period of extensive Buddhist temple construction in Ilkhanid Iran are more abundant. Such sources indicate, among other locations, a Buddhist temple at Raziq-abad near Merv, built by Arghun in 1250, and one in Tabriz that purportedly included a mural with Arghun's portrait.[44] Because the Ilkhans followed a nomadic lifestyle, Buddhist religious sites were often moveable in the form of elaborate camp tents, but they could also be of a fixed-construction style in the case of urban structures. Historian Rashid al-Din wrote, "Temples were built in every place, and vast sums were spent on them. This sect [idolatrous *bakhshis*] had risen to the apex of power, as was apparent to all."[45] Some of the craftsmen employed for these projects held slave status (*asiran*) and were assigned to large workshops (*kar-khanas*).[46] The higher one's skill level the more favorable the working and living conditions. Motivated by the desire for immortality and a legitimizing political cosmology, Hülegü too

[42] Mohammad Rafluddin Makhdumi, "Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah: A Link between the Indians and the Mongols," *Journal of Pakistan Historical Society* 56, 1 (2008): 33–43, here 35, 42 n. 24.

[43] Warwick Ball, "Some Rock-Cut Monuments in Southern Iran," *Iran* 24 (1986): 95–115.

[44] Emel Esin, "Four Turkish Bakhshi Active in Iranian Lands," in M. Y. Kiani and A. Tajvidi, eds., *The Memorial Volume of the 5th International Congress of Iranian Art & Archaeology: Tehran-Isfahan-Shiraz, 11th–18th April 1968* (Tehran, 1972), vol, 2, 53–73, here. Esin also tells, less convincingly, of a gilded bronze Buddha found in Afyon in Anatolia, and Mongol idols reportedly burnt in Anatolia (see n. 2).

[45] Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tawarikh*, pt. 3, 664.

[46] Tomoko Masuya, The Ilkhanid Phase of Takht-i Sulaiman, PhD diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1997, 34; and Petrushevsky, "Rashid al-Din's Conceptions of the State," 512–13.

had spared no expense in the creation of monastic complexes, and the results were visually magnificent. They embodied the highest of contemporary craftsmanship, often drawn from the Himalayan regions, which were home to highly skilled artisan lineages who constituted a cosmopolitan itinerant class highly sought after by political elites from Dadu to Tabriz.

The ethnic identities of Ilkhanid temple builders varied. Archeological evidence shows that Ilkhanid temple structures shared design elements with Buddhist sites in Central Asia and Afghanistan, both of which derived their original inspiration from Tibetan, including western Tibetan, examples in the sixth and seventh centuries. Literary sources are revealing when they use different terms at different times and in different ways to identify the groups active in Ilkhanid Buddhist centers. *Toyin* appears in an early account and is superseded by the use of the term *bakhshi* in later records. Kirakos, a contemporary traveler, described the Buddhist temple complex of Labnasagut on the northeast of Lake Van in Armenian territories, constructed in 1260–1261: "Hülegü built a temple for huge idols, collecting there all kinds of craftsmen-stone masons, carpenters and artists. And there is one group [among them] that are called *toyins*. These [latter]—magicians and sorcerers—they, with magical arts induced horses and camels and the dead and felt images to speak. All of them are priests; they shave the hair of the head and the beard [and] they wear on the breast yellow cloaks and they worship all, but most of all Sakyamuni and Maitreya."[47]

Toyin was a Turkic ecclesiastical term used to designate monks of noble descent.[48] Traveling through Anatolia, immediately to the west of Labnasagut, at a slightly later date in 1289–1291, Dominican Friar Ricoldo da Montecroce noticed Buddhist priests known by the Turco-Mongolian term *bakhshi*.[49] While both terms have Turkic associations, the predominant use of *bakhshi* in the later period suggests the selection of a term to cover the more eclectic nature of Ilkhanid Buddhism and the shift toward greater inclusion of Kashmiri personnel. Victor Mair demonstrates that the term *bakhshi* entered Persian in the fourteenth century from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.[50] It was absorbed into Turkish among the Uighurs in the seventh century when it was associated with Buddhist teachings, but came to have the more limited connotations of "scribe" in the fourteenth century, by which time Islam had made major

[47] Thomas T. Allsen, *Technician Transfers in the Mongolian Empire* (Bloomington: Central Eurasian Studies Lectures, Department of Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University, 2002), 14, 15.
[48] Grupper, "Buddhist Sanctuary," 43–44.
[49] Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Il Libro della Peregrinazione nelle Parti d'Oriente di Frate Ricoldo da Montecroce* (Roma: Istituto Storico Domenicano, 1948), 50–51. See also a recent critical edition of the Latin text and a French translation: Riccold de Monte Croce, *Pérégrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche Orient: Texte latin et traduction. Lettres sur la chute de Saint-Jean d'Acre. Traduction*, R. Kappler, ed. (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1997).
[50] Victor H. Mair, "Perso-Turkic Bakshi = Mandarin Po-Shih: Learned Doctor," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 16 (1992): 117–27.

inroads among the Uighur communities. In the Kashmiri setting, *bakhshi* was the term of choice for high standing, learned men from among the Buddhist clergy. *Bakhshi* did eventually morph in Mongol usage into a general term for men of learning with or without ties to Buddhism. At court in Tabriz, however, Kashmiri monks in Arghun's retinue were clearly identified as *bakhshi*; Rashid al-Din recorded that it was *bakhshi* who tested him with their riddles about the chicken and the egg, and other philosophical puzzles.[51] The *bakhshi*, demonstrating expertise with texts, martial skills, formulae, writing, dance, song, and alchemy, were a fluid elite group perceived to possess potent knowledge of how to affect reality.[52]

Buddhist priests in Anatolia and Armenia initially hailed from Uighur communities, and the shift toward reliance on Kashmiri resources came later and more gradually as the Uighur presence remained but faded. While they overlapped, there was also some differentiation in the skill sets of these two groupings. As early supporters of Chinggis Khan, the Uighurs had Mongol support before the inception of the Ilkhanate. When Hülegü began his attack on Baghdad in 1258, and later during his capture of Aleppo, he relied on *bakhshi* commanders of Uighur Turkic origin, some of whom were monks temporarily released from their vows so they could join in battle.[53] There seems to be no evidence of Kashmiri monks serving as military commanders for the Ilkhanate. The Kashmiri *bakhshi* were perhaps less combative in general, though they were politically savvy.

Juvanyi, historian to the early Ilkhanid court, mentions the ongoing tension between Uighur Buddhists and Muslims in the eastern empire. He tells the story of Bala Bitikchi, Uighur and idolater [Buddhist], who attempted in 1252–1253 to persuade the local Uighur nobles to slay all the Muslims in Besh-Baligh so as to secure Uighur favor with the Mongols.[54] Beyond martial skills, the Uighurs carried literary skills that were valuable in the Mongols' early empire-building enterprises; they employed a script developed by Uighur scribes from the Sogdian script to transcribe spoken Mongolian for court documents.[55] At Labnasagut, terms used to identify Maitreya and Sakyamuni were derived from Old Turkic Uighur script. Although Ilkhan Ghazan's education included Uighur script and sciences, his court included Kashmiri

[51] Abolala Soudavar, "The Saga of Abu-Sa'id Bahador Khan: The Abu-Sa' idname," in Julian Raby and Teresa Fitzherbert, eds., *The Court of the Ilkhans, 1290–1340* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 117.

[52] Thomas Allsen suggests *bakhshi* be translated as "ritualist" (personal communication, May 2012).

[53] Grupper, "Buddhist Sanctuary," 42.

[54] 'Ala-ad-Din 'Ata-Malik Juvaini, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. by John Andrew Boyle from text of Mirza Muhammad Qazvini (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), vol. 1, 48–53.

[55] I thank Pier Giorgio Borbone for this note and for reading an early draft of this paper.

in its linguistic mix, mostly likely reflecting an influx of Kashmiri personnel.[56] Conflict between the Yuan rulers and their Chagadai rivals in Central Asia disrupted pathways across Central Asia from Uighur territories in the 1270s and 1280s, and this diminished Uighur immigration into Azerbaijan while enhancing India and Kashmir as resources of Buddhist expertise.[57] Klaus Rohrborn observes that terms used by Rashid al-Din in his discussion of Buddhism reflect the revival of Sanskrit learning, which suggests Kashmiri origins.[58] Ilkhanid Buddhism, from Hülegü's signature monastery to Rashid al-Din's history, relied heavily on communities from the border states of China and Tibet proper, namely Uighurstan and Kashmir.

After the construction of Labnasagut, Hülegü sponsored a second Buddhist complex of comparable quality in southern Azerbaijan at Khoi.[59] Khoi was a medium-sized town with many gardens and eighty villages among its dependencies. The region was known for its especially sweet grapes and pears. Locals referred to it as the "Turk country" because its Khitay (Chinese) population was descended from Uighurstan.[60] Here we have evidence of a population that by choice and/or design constituted an identifiable immigrant Buddhist population. They were connected to the early period of Buddhist temple construction in the region, and provided both craftsmen and practitioners for the project.

The Rasatkhaneh Hill Caves (the Observatory Hill Caves) near Maragha, west of Tabriz, were possibly another elaborate example of Buddhist cave structures, as were the Varjuvi caves just 6 kilometers to the south. Observers of the sanctuary layouts of the caves at Maragha have suggested architectural similarities to Buddhist temples in the areas of both Turfan and Afghanistan. MacDonald Kinnier, who visited the site in 1812, compared the structures to cave temples in India, with their elevated altars, but said they lacked the latter's beauty and magnitude.[61] Warwick Ball was there in 1975 and examined the structural features with a focus on Uighur Buddhist connections, and he too noted temple design elements in common with sites at Bamiyan in Afghanistan.

[56] Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tawarikh*, pt. 3, 667. Rashid al-Din lists Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Kashmiri, Tibetan, Cathaian, and Frankish, among the language spoken by Ghazan and his court.

[57] Thomas T. Allsen, "The Yuan Dynasty and the Uighurs of Turfan in the 13th Century," in Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 253–58.

[58] Klaus Rohrborn, "Die Islamische Weltgeschichte des Rasiduddin als Quelle fur den Zentralasiastischen Buddhismus?" (The Islamic history of the world by Rashid al-Din as a source for Central Asian Buddhism?), *Journal of Turkish Studies* 13 (1989): 129–33, here 132.

[59] Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tawarikh,* pt. 3, 513.

[60] Hamd-Allah Mustawfi of Qazwin Qazwin, *Geographical Part*, 86–87.

[61] John MacDonald Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* (London: n.p., 1813), 156–57.

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Most recently, Arezou Azad carried out a detailed field investigation of the possible Buddhist sites at Maragha and Sultaniyya.[62]

None of the observed evidence contradicted contemporary features of known Buddhist sites, but there was also no remaining definitive evidence to firmly establish a Buddhist association, such as frescoes, statuary, or decorative designs. There is some suspicion that the numerous temples referenced in literary sources may have been structures near but not at the Maragha caves. The archeological evidence at Varjuvi suggests that this could have been part of a Buddhist temple that had been converted to a mosque during the time of Ghazan. Koranic inscriptions were carved into the walls and frescoes were removed.[63] The general plan of the Varjuvi site was more consistent with Buddhist rock-cut sites than with Islamic architecture. Given the tendency to convert structures rather than demolish them, there could conceivably be other Buddhist structures in this guise. We must also remember that elaborate church and temple structures of the Ilkhanate were frequently tent complexes that would no longer remain.

Sultaniyya, founded by Arghun and completed by his son Öljeitü, had a castle built of cut-stone and known for its beauty. Arghun located his mausoleum there, and the Buddhist community was large. Mustawfi of Qazwin wrote in 1340, "There are at the present time so many great buildings in Sultaniyyah, that, except for Tabriz, the like thereof is seen in no other city. People also have migrated hither from many other provinces, to settle in the (new) capital, being of all nations and sects, whereby the language spoken at present here is not uniform, though it is mainly a mixed dialect of Persian."[64] Rashid al-Din recorded Arghun's preoccupation with several Kashmiri *bakhshi*, including the one who offered him an elixir of longevity that eventually killed him.[65]

Arghun and other Ilkhans regularly used the site of Qonqor Ölöng near Sultaniyya for religious ceremonies supervised by Kashmiri *bakhshi*,[66] and there the archeological evidence is richer. The village that sits on the plain of extensive palatial ruins is today named Viyar, a possible cognate of *vihara*, Sanskrit for Buddhist monastery.[67] Tiles excavated at Qonqor Ölöng were made in Kashan and carry Chinese/Buddhist motifs similar to those found at Takht-i Sulaiman, being dragon motifs associate the site with the royal

[62] Arezou Azad, "Three Rock-Cut Cave Sites in Iran and Their Ilkhanid Buddhist Aspects Reconsidered," in Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, eds., *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 209–30.

[63] Warwick Ball, "How Far Did Buddhism Spread West? Buddhism in the Middle East in Ancient and Medieval Times," *al-Rāfidān* 10 (1989): 1–14, here 8.

[64] Hamd-Allah Mustawfi of Qazwin, *Geographical Part*, 61.

[65] Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tawarikh*, pt. 3, 574, 577, 664.

[66] Arezou Azad, "Three Rock-Cut Cave Sites," 212.

[67] Ibid.: 223.

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authority of Buddhist Ilkhanid sponsors. The Kashan tiles of Takht-i Sulaiman are decorated with specifically Buddhist motifs, such as an array of lotus flower designs.

The complex built at Takht-i Sulaiman by Ilkhan Abaqa (r. 1265–1281) was a summer palace of the Ilkhans with residences, a treasury, and halls for imperial audiences. Because rulers held religious ceremonies at their seasonal locations, Takht-i Sulaiman would have had such buildings and they would have been Buddhist, in keeping with Abaqa's preferences, and possibly also Nestorian to accommodate his wife's beliefs. A specific large, four-columned structure at Takht-i Sulaiman has been identified as a likely location of a Buddhist temple.[68]

Archeologists have also identified the remains of a Buddhist temple near Merv that incorporated local architectural features into a Buddhist design. Other examples of Buddhist cave construction existed near Sultaniyya and Lars.[69] Merv, Khoi, and Tabriz all had sizeable Buddhist populations, and Buddhist priests arrived from India, Kashmir, and Uighuristan as well as Khitay [north China]. Rashid al-Din gives the impression of extensive Buddhist influence:

> Arghun Khan was highly devoted to the *bakhshi* and followed their path. He constantly patronized and favored them. One *bakhshi* came from India and claimed to have lived a long time.[70]
>
> In order to show his fervor, he [Arghun] built lofty idol temples at Khabushan in Khurasan, and he performed his duties in such a way that all the *bakhshis* and monks were astonished by his degree of asceticism and rigor.[71]
>
> The practice of idolatry, which had been completely eliminated throughout the region from the beginning of Islam, reappeared during their time, and that group had become powerful…. In Khurasan as governor and commander of the army, he [Arghun] built major idol temples in Khabushan, and he spent most of his time conversing, eating, and drinking with the *bakhshis* in those temples. The belief he had for that sect and the worship he performed of the idols were beyond description.[72]

The full extent of Buddhist temple building in Iran under the Mongols is lost to us. Historical records, however, document a contemporary perception of a culturally prosperous, politically active Iranian Buddhism. For churchmen, merchants, and others traveling from regions surrounding the Ilkhanate, Buddhist monks and temples were clearly identifiable parts of the social landscape.

[68] Tomoko Masuya, Ilkhanid Phase of Takht-I Sulaiman, 220.

[69] Warwick Ball, "Two Aspects of Iranian Buddhism," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 1, 1–4 (Shiraz, 1976): 103–63, here 136–37, 141, 143. See also, Gianroberto Scarcia, "The 'Vihar' of Qonqor-Ölöng Preliminary Report," *East and West* 25, 1–2 (1975): 99–104.

[70] Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tawarikh*, pt. 3, 574.

[71] Ibid.: 620.

[72] Ibid.: 664.

CULTURAL MAPPING; BUDDHISM IN THE *JAMI' AL-TAVARIKH* OF RASHID AL-DIN

The *Jami' al-Tavarikh* (Compendium of world), compiled by Rashid al-Din, was a unique product from the period of Ilkhanid Buddhism. Its first part, known as the "History of the Mongols," was commissioned by Ilkhan Ghazan after his conversion to Islam in 1295. Ghazan himself was raised in Mongol Buddhist traditions shaped by teachers who hailed from western Tibetan regions. It was Ghazan's successor Ilkhan Öljeitü (r. 1304–1316) who commissioned the next volumes of the *Jami' al-Tavarikh*, which were produced in the Tabriz workshops first in 1304 and extended the work to a world history.

When Rashid al-Din came to write his world history, he faced several problems: How could multiple historical temporalities be woven into one contemporary social space? What framework could hold this multiplicity of groups that inhabited the Mongol world as well as inconsistencies in their representations? How could the facts of Mongol rule, with its cultivation of Buddhist teachings, a diverse Iranian Muslim elite, diplomatic opportunities in Christian Western Europe, and military challenges from Mamluk Egypt be woven into a coherent worldview under Ikhanid rule? Although the Yuan territories were home to many, diverse groups, no work comparable to the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* was produced under Yuan auspices. This work developed as an organic part of Ilkhanid court culture, as well as from Rashid al-Din's own desire to create a viable ideology for the contemporary Iranian polity.[73] In this pursuit, he sought to represent history as a moment in the present.[74]

It is fair to surmise that Rashid al-Din, as vizier and party to all levels of court activities, had ample opportunity to encounter Buddhist practitioners and become familiar with their ideas. Öljeitü, sponsor of the project, became a Buddhist, then a Sunni Muslim who eventually moved toward Shi'ism. Buddhist priests attempted to win him back throughout his lifetime suggesting the continued influence of Buddhists at court.[75] Buddhist beliefs were at play among factions of the Mongol elite who were a significant part of the audience Rashid al-Din hoped to address. This is not to say that he believed in Buddhist precepts of faith, but he arguably did take Buddhism seriously. When he contended that Ilkhan Ghazan's Islam was superior to that of the Mamluks, he pointed to the Mongol's assumed Buddhist genealogy as evidence of a pedigree higher than

[73] I. P. Petrushevsky, "Rashi al-Din's Conception of the State," *Central Asiatic Journal* 14 (1970): 148–62, here 152–53.

[74] The Mongol History of the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* derived from the *Tarikh-i Ghazani* (Ghazan's history), which scholars believe was the spoken word of Ilkhan Ghazan as dictated to Rashid al-Din. See Satoko Shimo, "Ghazan Khan and the *Ta'rikh-i Ghazani*—Concerning Its Relationship to the 'Mongol History' of the *Jami' al- Tawarikh*," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko (The Oriental Library)* 54 (1996): 93–110, here 109.

[75] Ball, "Two Aspects," 142.

that of the slave rulers of Egypt.[76] Learned Buddhist monks of Chinese and Kashmiri origin served as his consultants on scholarly, agricultural, and medical projects. Buddhist monks employed as historians at the Imperial Library in Dadu maintained the "Archives of the Court" known as the *Dafartir-I divan* to Rashid al-Din through the assistance of Bolad, emissary from the court of Qubilai Khan. We also know that Buddhist scholars worked on the "Chinese" dynastic histories in the *Jami' al-Tavarikh*.[77] Rashid al-Din and Kashmiri Buddhist monk Kamalashri co-created sections on Buddhism and the history of India. That there was a relationship between the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* and Buddhism at the Ilkhanid court seems clear, but it was a conceptually and politically complex one.

Ilkhanid Buddhist concepts of kingship and karma (merit) offered a potent framework for organizing disparate histories. This would not be the first time that Buddhist-inspired concepts were put into secular political service without direct acknowledgement. Song Dynasty (960–1279) historians Lu Tsu-chien (1137–1181) and Cheng Chiao (1108–1166) both contributed to an expansive period in the dynastic historiography of East Asia under a neo-Confucian movement that incorporated Buddhist principles through both cultural osmosis and intentional borrowing.[78] Buddhist philosophy held that history was more than the sum total of its events and that meditative study of history might serve as a basis for action. The *Golden Light Sutra*, widely circulated throughout the Mongol Empire, spoke clearly to issues of governance and historical framing. In chapter 12, "The Inviolable Commitments of Divine Kings," we read:

> Protecting his realm according to the Dharma
> Teaching well the laws of the Dharma too,
> Those engaged in virtue should be encouraged
> And he himself must refrain from evil deeds.
>
> When those who do evil deeds
> Are accordingly tamed,
> A year of abundance will ensue.
> Magnanimous will be the king
> Possessed of renown and fame
> Who reigns his subjects in peace.[79]

[76] Karl Jahn, "An Indian Legend on the Descent of the Mongols," in *Rashid al-Din's History of India: Collected Essays with Facsimiles and Indices* (London: Mouton & Co., 1965), lxxviii–xvi, here lxxxiii.

[77] Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 83–102, here 84, 95. See also Herbert Franke "Some Sinological Remarks on Rasid ad-Din's History of China," *Oriens* 4, 1 (1951): 21–26.

[78] Lu Tsu-chien, "A Discussion of History," and Cheng Ch'iao, "General Preface to the T'ung Chih," both in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, compiled by William Theodore de Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), vol. 1, 441–44.

[79] *Golden Light Sutra*, Losang Dawa, trans. (Portland: Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, 2006), 64.

Historical vision in the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* was consonant with the philosophical and conceptual outlook of these teachings. All place-based histories were integrated into one historical framework that preserved their separate narratives while reflecting a larger historical dynamic.

The *Jami' al-Tavarikh* challenged past historiography by embodying two distinctive features: a global relational foundation for historical understanding, and an incarnation of historical time into the present moment. In his effort to represent contemporary thirteenth-century world history, Rashid al-Din possessed no regional or imperial histories that were sufficient as models. He was aware of the Islamic traditions in historiography that recorded the chronologies of individual rulers and selected geographies. These included the *Tarikh al-Tabari* (History of the prophets and kings) by al-Tabari (838–923), and *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* (The complete history) by Ibn al-Athir (1160–1233). Rashid al-Din and his team of scholars also drew selected materials from the *Ta'rikh al-Hind* (History of India) by al-Biruni (973–1048) and the *Tarikh-i Jahangushay-i Juvaini* (History of the world conqueror) by Ilkhanid court historian Juvanyi (1226–1283).

Creating a global historical space with all temporalities subject to the political present, the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* re-imagined time and place into an historical geography of diverse peoples with varied levels of achievement in material culture and spiritual understanding. The histories of Arabs, Greeks, Franks, Chinese, Turks, and others were all integrated into a Mongol-Islamic historical framework. Visually, everyone more or less shared Mongol-Persian facial features and dress. The historical Buddha himself was depicted as a great prophet. In a rhetorical move that provided Buddhism with an Arabian historical pedigree, the narrative posited: "Before the acceptance of Islam, the inhabitants of Mecca and Medina were Buddhists."[80] At the same time, Chenggis Khan was presented as a descendent of the tribes of Noah, through his son Japheth.[81] Historical truth was in the integration of these narratives and was made possible by concepts of reincarnation and multiple temporalities. Inclusiveness did not imply impartiality.

Rashid al-Din's message regarding Buddhism in the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* was complex, and his efforts to create a universal history were fraught with

[80] Karl Jahn, "Kamalashri—Rashid al-Din's 'Life and Teaching of Buddha,'" in *Rashid al-Din's History of India: Collected Essays with Facsilmiles and Indices* (London: Mouton & Co., 1965), xxxi–lxxvii, here xl; discussed as well in Sheila R. Canby, "Depictions of Buddha Sakyamuni in the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* and the *Majma al-Tavarikh*," *Muqarnas* 10, special issue, "Essays in Honor of Oleg Grabar" (Brill, 1993): 299–310, here 301. Also, Robert Hillenbrand, "Non-Islamic Faiths in the Edinburgh Biruni Manuscript," in R. Hillenbrand, A.C.S. Peacock, and Firuza Abdullaeva, eds., *Ferdowsi, the Mongols and the History of Iran: Art, Literature and Culture from Early Islam to Qajar Persia* (London: I. B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2013), 306–15, here 308. Hillenbrand notes that the Sabian idols in al-Buiruni's illustrated work resemble Buddhist figures. These may have contributed to Rashid al-Din's thoughts about Buddhist inhabitants of Mecca.

[81] Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tawarikh*, pt. 1, 27.

contradictions. This could be a consequence of many scholars having worked with different sources under Rashid al-Din's supervision with little time for ferreting out inconsistencies. It could also be that recognized ambiguities and paradoxes were presumed to create a larger truth among many smaller truths. On one hand, Rashid al-Din hoped to convey the importance of Buddhism in keeping with recent achievements of Mongol leaders devoted to this faith; on the other, he wanted to subordinate Buddhism to Islam. On one level, Rashid al-Din was recording the history of Buddhism to make note of an errant view that belonged to the past and not the future. On another, he was employing some of its basic rhetorical strategies. This required philosophical dexterity, interesting examples of which can be found in the *Jami' al-Tavarikh*'s claim that the interior of Abyssinia was home to Buddhist communities and that the Amazon women of Herodotus fame were all Buddhists.[82] In the social environment of thirteenth-century Iran, Buddhism was perceived as a faith that simultaneously preceded and might supersede Islam, one that had been destroyed by Islam but had now returned as potential rival with supporters in high places, perhaps to be assimilated into Islamic culture. As one historian has written, Muslim scholars during the era of Mongol rule were stunned by the "overwhelming presence of Buddhists in the Muslim heartland."[83]

Rashid al-Din described his method in his discussion of "the nature of history." He stated his understanding of the contradictory features of historical narratives and the need to faithfully record all stories, even those of rejected or disputed occurrences. Nothing can be verified absolutely, he contends, so even rejected notions may carry some truthful knowledge. "Therefore," he wrote, "it is the duty of historians to take the stories and narratives of every nation and group, however those people have recorded and reported them in their own books, and to relate and rewrite them from the well-known and current books of those nations based on accounts of the most reliable people."[84] The uniqueness of his historical vision is its conscious effort to carry contradictions, potential truths, and past truths within a "big picture" framing. Along these lines, Timothy Barrett observes that Buddhism carries its own sense of "cultural time" that in particular historical periods has lent itself to an "imaginative use of the transregional breadth of the Buddhist tradition," and that Buddhism "usually opened up the possibility of quite remarkable vistas beyond the local that most of the other religious traditions with which it first competed in Asia significantly lacked."[85] The Ilkhanid period was an historical

[82] Karl Jahn, Kamalashri-Rashid al-Din's *Life and Teaching of Buddha*, n. 25, xl.
[83] Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 173.
[84] Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tawarikh,* pt. 1, 8, also 7–9.
[85] Timothy Barrett, "History," in Donald S. LopezJr., ed., *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 124–42, here 125, 134. I thank an anonymous *CSSH* reader for this reference.

moment particularly conducive to the cultivation of this aspect of Buddhist tradition.

Given that the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* was written after the formal exclusion of Buddhism from court sponsorship, it is remarkable that Buddhism was not simply airbrushed from this state-sponsored project. Instead, Rashid al-Din and Kamalashri took great care to convey a comprehensive and sympathetic rendering of the Buddha's life for a predominantly Islamic audience, translating Buddhist terms and concepts into language and narratives familiar to Muslim readers.

The text and images of the "History of Hind and Sind [India]" in Rashid al-Din's Compendium had dual political purposes: to integrate Buddhism into the story of a Mongol Islamic present, and to consign Buddhism to the past, rendering it politically less potent in the present. Toward these ends, Buddhist artistic elements entered the visual field of Rashid al-Din's manuscript. Leo Jungeon Oh has noted numerous detailed examples of Buddhist iconography in Ilkhanid pictorial language found in "The Great Mongol shahnama," the Diez Albums, and the *Jami' al-Tavarikh*. Many motifs such as stylized cloud formations typically attributed to "Chinese art" are in fact specifically Buddhist elements from cave art of the Tarim Basin and do not appear in generic landscape art of the Tang or Song.[86] Buddhist elements also entered into the representation of political figures. While Yuan dynasty-based Tibetan Lamas reinvented Chinggis Khan as a Charkravartin, universal Buddhist emperor, pictorial conventions for conveying such authority also appeared in Ilkhanid illustrations of monarchial figures.[87] Situated in the *Jami' al-Tavarikh*, where, as Robert Hillenbrand has pointed out, the majority of the images represent the Mongol war machine, the permanence of Mongol authority, and Mongol commitment to acculturation, three illustrations of the life of the Buddha address each of these points.[88] They are: (1) The Temptation of Mara, in which the Buddha offers fruit to Mara, a demonic tempter; (2) The Grove of Jetavana or the Garden of Ketumati, in which the mother of the Buddha gave birth; and (3) Kushinagara, in which the Buddha achieved Nirvana.[89]

Taken together, the three images display a rhythm of point and counterpoint composed of Buddhist and Islamic motifs. In The Temptation of Mara,

[86] Leo Jungeon Oh, "Islamicised Pseudo-Buddhist Iconography in Ilkhanid Royal Manuscripts," *Persica* 20 (2005): 91–154, here 107.

[87] Emel Esin, "Turkic and Ilkhanid Universal Monarch Representations and the Cakravartin,"-Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth International Congress of Orientalists, 4–10 Jan. 1964 (New Delhi: n.p.), 86–132.

[88] Robert Hillenbrand, "Propaganda in the Mongol 'World History,'" *British Academy Review* 17 (Mar. 2011): 29–38, here 38.

[89] Sheila S. Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid al-Din's Illustrated History of the World*, in Julian Raby, general ed., *The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art*, vol. 27 (New York: The Nour Foundation, Oxford University Press, 1995), folios 274a, 276b, 277b.

the Buddha's clothing not only covers more of his body than is typical but also suggests a Muslim style of dress with caped robe and head covering. The Grove of Jetavana has no human figures, a unique artistic choice that through an especially animated yet naturalistic rendering of trees expresses a cosmic vitality. A profound event in human history is suggested through a stand of trees and draws attention to the cosmic interdependence of human and natural phenomenon. A master of political and visual ambiguity, Rashid al-Din knew that in popular lore trees once spoke and moved about and were related to early ancestors. Finally, in Kushinagara, the setting is unexpectedly Muslim. A dome-shaped building made of brick, resembling a contemporary Persian mausoleum of Sufi celebrity Barak Baba, replaces the crystal structure described in the text.[90] Barak Baba himself was reputed to have supernatural powers and considerable influence over Ilkhans Ghazan and Öljeitü.[91]

Discrepancies between text and image, as well as between Indian texts and the *Jami' al-Tavarikh*, create artistic spaces in which ambiguity renders the illustrations readable from multiple social perspectives. A successful visual impact would effectively address contemporary political perceptions among both Muslim and Buddhist audiences. In the Sanskrit texts, Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, dies in a grove of sal trees rather than a crystal, domed building; a specific garden, with the Buddha's mother in birthing position, was replaced with a stand of trees and no birthing scene; and finally Mara as Satan with his daughters as described in the text is replaced by Mara alone, emphasizing a dualism of evil and good that resonates with monotheism in the Islamic tradition. It is most interesting that the stand of trees visually recalls old growth juniper trees in the region of Sindh. The story of the Buddha's life was not new in Persian literature. It was first translated into Arabic from Persian in the early ninth century and gained immediate and widespread popularity. Many stories from both the written and oral traditions gained familiarity through translation into Sufi and other Islamic traditions. The Mongol period, however, reversed the power relations that surrounded such cultural exchanges.[92] Buddhist traces became encoded in ways of perceiving the history of the world as a consequence of Mongol hegemony. Soon after, Buddhist authority at the Ilkhanid court would begin to wane.

[90] Sheila S. Blair, "Patterns of Patronage and Production in Ilkhanid Iran: The Case of Rashid al-Din," in Julian Raby and Teresa Fitzherbert, eds., *The Court of the Ilkhans, 1290–1340* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 39–62, here 43–44.

[91] Bernard Lewis, "Bārak Bābā," *Encyclopædia Iranica* 2, I, 1031; H. Algar, "Barâq Bâbâ," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, III, 754–55.

[92] Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 115. See also Wang Yidan, *Bosi Lashite "Liji—Zhongguo li" yanjiu yu wenben fanyi* (A study and collated translation of Rashid al-Din's history of China in Jami al-Tavarikh) (Beijing: Kunlun Press, 2006), 123–24.

NEW INTELLECTUAL SPACES: PERCEPTIONS OF ILKHANID BUDDHISM

Just as the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* mapped the world of Ilkhanid authority, intellectuals and statesmen beyond the Ilkhanate mapped their own relationships to the political and intellectual realities of Mongol dominance. The frame of reference for this exchange was more holistic than the east/west divide that would later mark European Orientalism. Edward Said has characterized the "strategic location" of writers in the Orientalist mode as one of "exteriority," viewing "the Orient" from an outside perspective as "the other."[93] Cultural exchange during the Ilkhanid period took place in an era of expanding geographic and historical awareness with new perceptions of shared social spaces. Although conflict and anxiety were parts of the experience, in these "contact zones"[94] European representations of the Mongol world tended toward inquiry and wonder more than assumed superiority. As Mary B. Campbell has written, Marco Polo's representation of the Mongol Empire caught the attention of his peers not because he posited a dichotomous "other" but rather because, with miracles and fabulous tales included, he created an enlarged world that was recognizable within Europe's own geopolitical imaginary.[95] European perception of the Mongol world was as much a search for sameness as it was a desire for the new and different.

Ilkhanid politics and society were on the minds of many. In a remarkable show of personal regard for the Mongol rulers, Italian-speaking families in noticeable numbers named their sons after the rulers of the Ilkhanate, of whom they were evidently more aware than they were of the Yuan emperors. Children named after Ilkhan Hülegü were known as Alaone, those who chose Ilkhan Arghun called their sons Argone, Ilkhan Ghazan became Cassano, and for the Great Khan there was Can Grande.[96] One can only imagine what the exact associations may have been, given the confusion, wishful thinking, and misinformation that circulated, but the pattern suggests a positive outlook regarding developments in Tabriz and a desire for increased contact. Franciscan scholars and monks shared this curiosity about news from the Ilkhanate. By 1287, Franciscans and Dominicans had convents at Sivas, Tabriz, and Salmas in the Ilkhanate. The Ilkhanid cities of Maragha and Sultanyyia played host to Roman Catholic bishoprics by the early 1300s. With its continental reach and proximity to the eastern Mediterranean world, Tabriz became the destination for groups looking to connect with products and people of the whole empire and beyond.

[93] Said, *Orientalism*, 20–21.
[94] Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* 91 (1991): 33–40.
[95] Mary B. Campbell, "The Utter East: Merchant and Missionary Travels during the 'Mongol Peace,'" in *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 87–121, here 112.
[96] Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (London: Pearson Longman Press, 2005), 315.

Ilkhanid court politics entered into intellectual discourse in Mamluk Egypt during this period. Writing from a vantage point of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517), legal scholar Ibn Taymiyah (d. 1328) strongly critiqued Ilkhan Ghazan's religious policies and secular approach to legal matters. In Ibn Taymiyah's view, Ghazan's conversion to Islam was a thin veneer over a Buddhist worldview. A scholar of the Hanbali school of Islam, Ibn Taymiyah viewed the rationalism he detected in Mongol governance as a negative feature bordering on secularism. His knowledge of Ilkhanid Buddhism came through extensive contact with the Ilkhanid court and a brief meeting with Ghazan himself. When Ilkhan Ghazan issued an *aman* after his capture of Damascus in which he invoked the Mongol tradition of placing all religions on the same plain in order to assuage the Christian population of the city, Ibn Taymiya offered this as evidence of Ghazan's continuing deference to Mongol policies inspired by Buddhist principles. He thought Ilkhanid Buddhists were polytheists (*al-mushrikun*) who followed the Mongol concept of law, the *yasa* given by Chinggis Khan, which unlike the law of *shari'a* was of human rather than divine origin.[97] Rashid al-Din, as we have seen, argued that the Mongols were in fact of more divine lineage than the slave rulers of Egypt because of the Mongols' Buddhist lineage. Although Ibn Taymiya was persecuted for his views during his lifetime, he wrote extensively during the period of Mongol rule. His experience and that of his audience was rooted in the trauma of Mongol rule that itself claimed the mantel of Islam. Ibn Taymiya essentially defined an Islamic fundamentalist perspective that would find renewed relevance in later centuries when Islam responded to European industrializing society.[98]

The same inclusivism, or general failure to discriminate among religious preferences, which troubled Ibn Taymiya resonated in the positive with Sufi-based notions of universal peace. Sufism gained a new strength during this period that would continue long after the Mongol era. Writing from Konya in central Anatolia under Ilkhanid management, Jalâl al-Din Rumi (1207–1273) offered this thought:

> On truth's path, wise is mad, insane is wise.
> In love's way, self and other are the same.
> Having drunk the wine, my love, of being one with you,
> I find the way to Mecca and Bodhgaya are the same.[99]

[97] Denise Aigle, "The Mongol Invasions of Bilad al-Sham by Ghazan Khan and Ibn Taymiyah's Three 'Anti-Mongol' Fatwas," *Mamluk Studies Review* 11, 2 (2007): 89–120, here 99, 115–16.

[98] James Pavlin, "Sunni Kalam and Theological Controversies," in S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge), 105–18; W. B. Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). See also Tamim Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 161–64.

[99] Rumi, *Kulliyat-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, Badiozzaman Forouzanfar, ed., Zara Houshmand, trans. (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1988), Poem, 302.

Moderate Sufi masters were welcomed at the Ilkhan's court including some circles of the Muslim elite. This created a comfort zone in which both could interact with the result that moderate Sufis played a pivotal role in the movement of the Buddhist-educated Ilkhans toward Islam.[100] Through Sufism, members of the Mongol elite could associate aspects of their Buddhist knowledge with Islam while not abandoning their early Buddhist orientations. Reuven Amitai-Preiss has made the case that Ghazan's Islam was a syncretistic faith that remained loyal to many of the basic beliefs and customs of the Mongols and their Buddhist education even when these principles ran contrary to the faith of Islam.[101] Legal matters, rituals, marriage customs, and other practices continued to be governed by Mongol law, the *yasa*. It is interesting that after Ghazan's conversion, when he gave orders to build or refurbish mosques in every village in his domain, he also ordered the endowment of funds at each location for the maintenance of bird shelters, a practice that at the time was associated primarily with Hindu and Buddhist attitudes toward animals.[102] Only later would this practice become a standard feature of Muslim charity, previously devoted exclusively to human religious needs.

Latin Europe's awareness of Ilkhanid beliefs grew out of practical interests in conversion and diplomatic opportunities as well as intellectual curiosity and economic motives. Given their flexible use of religious policy, the Ilkhans cared less about winning converts but very much about diplomatic initiatives. Ilkhan Arghun baptized one of his own sons and named him Nicholas, after Franciscan Pope Nicholas IV, in hope for an Ilkhanid/Papal alliance against the Mamluks. The Ilkhans modeled a clear message that religious difference was not a barrier to political dialogue and cooperation. Beginning in the 1260s and continuing to the late 1280s, the Ilkhans sent numerous missions to European capitals to negotiate military and diplomatic alliances with the Christians against the Muslim Mamluks of Egypt. These included a letter to the king of France from Ilkhan Öljeitü, the embassy of Rabban Sauma in 1288 to the Papacy and the English and French monarchs, and another diplomatic mission lead by Buscarello Ghisolfi in 1289. All failed because the Latin leaders faltered.

Franciscan theologians of prominence Roger Bacon (1214–1294) and Ramon Llull (1232–1315) were among those who explored the views of the Idolaters [Buddhists]. Much of Bacon's understanding of Mongol society and customs came from the writings of William of Rubruck (1220–1293), a

[100] Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "Sufis and Shamans: Some Remarks on the Islamization of the Mongols in the Ilkhanate," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42, 1 (1999): 27–46, here 28.

[101] Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "Ghazan, Islam and Mongol Tradition: A View from the Mamluk Sultanate," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 59, 1 (1996): 1–10, here 9.

[102] A. Bausani, "Religion under the Mongols," in J. A. Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), vol. 5, 538–49, here 543.

Flemish Franciscan who traveled to the Khan's court at Karakorum in 1255, five years before the construction of the Ilkhanid Buddhist complex at Labnasagut. Rubruck's observations were of Buddhism in eastern Turkestan and Mongolia. By 1270, however, when Bacon wrote his *Opus Majus*, Tabriz dominated the European imaginary of the Mongol world, and the Ilkhans' Buddhist temple-building extravaganza was in full swing. Azerbaijan was a showcase for Buddhist practice and material culture. Latin merchants and mendicants working the Black Sea ventured through Trebizond and around Lake Van, the vicinity of the dazzling Buddhist complex at Labnasagut, to Tabriz where Latin Churchmen founded monasteries and offices.

What Bacon learned from Rubruck he transferred to contemporary awareness of Tabriz. Rubruck was the first European of the Mongol era to bring back detailed information about Buddhism. His basic impression was that the Buddhists were foolish in their beliefs but nonetheless intellectually challenging. His curiosity engaged him in question and answer sessions with monks limited only by the vocabulary and patience of Rubruck's interpreter. He found the Buddhist monks he met less objectionable than the Nestorians he encountered. Rubruck made note that the Uighur Buddhists formed a distinct sect of their own. "Wherever they go," he commented, "they have in their hands a string of one or two hundred beads, like our rosaries, and they always repeat these words, *on mani baccam*, which is, 'God, thou knowest,' as one of them interpreted it to me, and they expect as many rewards from God as they remember God in saying this."[103] Bacon read Rubruck's reports with great enthusiasm and made reference to Rubruck's findings in his *Opus Majus*. He declared, "I have examined this book [Rubruck's reports] with care, and I have conferred with its author, and likewise with many others who have explored the places of the East and South."[104] Bacon's discussion abounds with references to the Mongols.[105] His goal is to integrate earlier reports by Rubruck and Carpini into a new vision of the world knowledge. Bacon's knowledge of Buddhism led him to include it among the six great intellectual traditions of the world. He contended that the ultimate source of Mongol strength was not their military power but their science, philosophy, and astronomy.[106] In his view, command of multiple languages, a component

[103] William of Rubruck, *Journey to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253–55* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1900), 146. For a more recent edition, see: *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253–1255*, P. Jackson and D. Morgan, eds., P. Jackson, trans. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1990).

[104] Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus*, Robert Belle Burke, trans. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928), vol. I, 324.

[105] Bacon, *Opus Majus*, vol. 1: 287, 323, 385, 388, vol. 2: 789, 806.

[106] Devin DeWeese. "The Influence of the Mongols on the Religious Consciousness of Thirteenth-Century Europe," *Mongolian Studies* 5 (1978/1979): 41–78, here 59. See also A. Ruotsala, "The Encountering of Mongols and Mendicants in the 13th Century," *Mongolica: An International Annual of Mongol Studies* 13, 34 (2003): 278–282.

of inclusivity, gave the Ilkhanid court a competitive edge in religious and other matters, as did their knowledge of the magical arts including alchemy, which was a rational discourse in Bacon's view.[107]

Fellow Franciscan and missionary Ramon Llull was also trying to get a grip on the Mongols, and his eye was on Tabriz. With news of Ilkhanid victories over Mamluk forces in Syria at the end of 1299, Llull immediately set sail for Cyprus hoping to continue on to Mongol-liberated Jerusalem to study, meet Ilkhan Ghazan, and do missionary work, only to find that the Mongol victory did not include Jerusalem and would prove to be short-lived with regard to Aleppo and Damascus.[108] Like Bacon, Llull perceived the Ilkhanid practice of promoting dialogue as a powerful dynamic that Europeans themselves might emulate to their own advantage. While this courtly practice had long been a feature of rulership in Central Asia under the influence of Buddhist styles of religious debate, the idea of inviting Buddhists or Muslims to a Christian court for intellectual exchange was all but unthinkable. Both Bacon and Llull argued that the Papacy and the universities of Europe should encourage the study of Arabic and Mongolian for more effective and peaceful religious dialogue.

Although Latin scholars had begun to discover the riches of Arabic learning as early as the twelfth century, not until the thirteenth century did the Central Asian Buddhist recursive argument method enter into natural sciences discourse among Latin intellectuals.[109] Ilkhanid Buddhist culture and political practice stimulated new imaginative spaces. In his *Book of the Gentile*, a dialogue among a Christian, a Jew, and a Muslim with the Gentile, an idol worshipper, Llull left open the question of a preferred faith, stating instead, "War, turmoil, ill will, injury, and shame prevent man from agreeing on one belief."[110] Within Christendom this was a unique perspective. The ideal of "universal peace" grounded in diplomacy and intellectual dialogue began to emerge.[111] In a work titled the *Blanquerna* (1283), Llull strongly suggested cultural exchange between the Mongols and the Franciscan friars to promote

[107] E. Westacott, *Roger Bacon in Life and Legend* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 80.

[108] Ramon Llull, *A Contemporary Life*, Anthony Bonner, ed. and trans. (Barcelona: Tamesis Barcino, 2010), 67.

[109] Christopher I. Beckwith, *Warriors of the Cloisters: The Central Asian Origins of Science in the Medieval World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 25.

[110] Ramon Llull, *Book of the Gentile*, in Anthony Bonner, ed., *Selected Works of Ramon Llull (1232–1316)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), vol. 1, 303.

[111] The ideal of inclusiveness associated with Mongol rule was still in vogue when Edward Gibbon wrote his celebrated *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909), vol. 7, 4, n. 8, in which he referred with admiration to the religious tolerance of the Mongols: "But it is the religion of Zingis that best deserves our wonder and applause. The Catholic inquisitors of Europe, who defended nonesense by cruelty, might have been confounded by the example of a barbarian, who anticitpated the lessons of philosophy and established by his laws a system of pure theism and perfect toleration." Accurate or not, this was a long-lived perception from the Mongol era.

peaceful learning and rational discourse. In his *Libre de meravelles* (1287), he expressed the hope that, "there should be established in Paris monasteries, wherein should be learned the languages of those that are unbelievers; …and that there should be Tartars [Mongols] at Paris who should learn our writing and language before returning with this knowledge to their own country."[112] Aware that the Ilkhanid court largely functioned on this model of discourse among diverse religions, Llull remained frustrated by French King Philipp IV's resistance to his plan. Meanwhile, out in the field, John of Monte Corvino took it upon himself in 1305 to have illustrations of Old and New Testament scenes with Latin, Turkish, and Persian inscriptions produced for missionary work.[113] In this effort to communicate other problems arose. Around 1313, Franciscan Andrew of Perugia expressed annoyance that Buddhist openness to other religions resulted in many baptisms among idolators but few strict Christians.[114]

Marco Polo himself passed through Tabriz around 1290, traveling sea and land routes from India during a time when Ilkhanid Buddhism was at its height under Ilkhan Arghun (1284–1291). The inventory of Polo's and his uncle's possessions at the time of their deaths lists four "large golden tablets of authority" (*paizi*) received at the Ilkhanid court.[115] In his discussion of Buddhism, Polo used the Mongol term *Burkhan*, meaning "divine" when referring to the Buddha as Sakyamuni Burkhan. Dictated from memory after over two decades, Polo's account of Buddhism fused his experiences into a composite narrative that he located on the Indian peninsula, the Buddha's homeland. His perspective was comparative and accommodating. He commented that Indian yogis "anoint various parts of their body with great reverence, no less than Christians display in the use of holy water," and went on to suggest, "For assuredly, had he [the Buddha] been a Christian, he would have been a great saint with our Lord Jesus Christ."[116] Polo's open-mindedness even extended to the concept of reincarnation: "And they said that he had died eighty-four times. For they say that when he died the first time he became an ox; then he died a second time and became a horse. And in this manner they say that he died eighty-four times and that every time he became an animal—a dog or some other creature. But the eighty-fourth time he did and became a god. And he is deemed by the idolaters to be the best and the greatest god

[112] J. N. Hillgarth, *Ramon Lull and Lullism in Fourteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1971), 49.

[113] "The Third Letter of John of Monte Corvino," in Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mongol Mission* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 228–31, here 228.

[114] "The Letter of Andrew of Perugia," in Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mongol Mission* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 235–37, here 237.

[115] David Jacoby, "Marco Polo, His Close Relatives, and His Travel Accounts: Some New Insights," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 21, 2 (2006): 193–218, here 203.

[116] Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Ronald Latham, trans. (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), 279, 283.

they have."[117] For contemporary Christian audiences familiar with the story of *Barlaam and Joasaph*, a Christianized version of the life of the historical Buddha, Marco Polo's rendering of the Buddha's biography from prince to sage rang a note of familiarity. *Barlaam and Joasaph* itself suddenly enjoyed a new round of popularity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Although the practice of non-violence toward animals had been absorbed into the Buddhist tradition in earlier centuries from Indian folktales, Jain, and Hindu stories, in the thirteenth-century this concept was identified primarily with Buddhist narratives, namely the *Jataka* stories that recount Buddha's various reincarnations and encounters with animals. Christianized Buddhist tales, many of which were initially translated into Syriac, possibly from Manichaean materials that blended Buddhist and Christian elements, had circulated in earlier centuries but again enjoyed a new peak of interest in the context of thirteenth-century developments. Joseph Wilson notes that the legends of Saint Christopher, Saint Eustace, and Saint Hubert all shared textual and iconographic commonalties with the Buddhist *Jataka* stories. The popular thirteenth-century hagiography *The Golden Legend*, by Jacobus de Voragine, included these biographies of the saints along with that of Saint Francis.[118] Nonviolence toward animal life as a test for sainthood, a theme adapted from the *Jataka* and prevalent among heterodox Christian groups in the practice of vegetarianism, was incorporated into stories of Saint Eustace and then edited in the thirteenth century by purveyors of Latin Church orthodoxy at a time of rigorous Church persecution of suspected heretics. Both in the popularity of these tales and their censorship by the Roman Church we see traces of engagement with elements of the thirteenth-century Buddhist revival.

CONCLUSIONS: AN INTERVENTION IN EARLY MODERN EURASIAN HISTORY

Buddhist ideology was essential to Ilkhanid political and cultural reach. Occupying fertile cultural terrain for imaginative and practical possibilities, Ilkhanid Buddhism both shaped and was shaped by its social environment. The mix of Ilkhanid Buddhism was itself a unique blend of diasporic Buddhist communities not dominated, as was Yuan Buddhism, by high profile representatives of the Tibetan schools. The integrative tone of Ilkhanid Buddhist ideology legitimized the Mongol presence in Iran while at the same time dispersing intellectual traces that provoked a variety of strong responses. However imperfectly the match between Ilkhanid ideology and political realities, Mongol claims to

[117] Polo, *Travels*, 283. Kamalashri also conveyed that the Buddha died and was reborn eighty-four thousand times. There are also numerous references to animals and non-killing. Karl Jahn, "Kamalashri-Rashid al-Din's *Life and Teaching of Buddha*," 96, 103,105,111.

[118] See Joseph A. P. Wilson, "The Life of the Saint and the Animal: Asian Religious Influence in the Medieval Christian West," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 3, 2 (2009): 169–94, here 179, 181, 183.

ecumenical rule were perceived to be credible and noteworthy. Ibn Taymiya's tracts condemning the Ilkhans for their corruption of Islam were a response to Ilkhanid military campaigns, but they were also an intellectual assessment of Buddhist principles, intermixed with Sufi and Shi'a beliefs, which he deemed excessively inclusive. For the Franks, the Ilkhans were more potential ally than military threat; the religious life of the Ilkhanid court gave them plausible grounds for imaging at the very least a place among the diverse panoply of groups and the hope of winning through dialogue a more dominant position.

The Buddha in the land of thirteenth-century central Eurasia was a Mongol phenomenon of the Ilkhanid court; intercultural engagement with this historical occurrence made it an event of global significance. For almost forty years, Ilkhanid Buddhism had noteworthy levels of support through political and scholarly connections and functioned as the primary ideology of an empire of exchange with transcontinental reach. Intellectual and political engagement with the Ilkhanid court represented a Eurasian Buddhist international. The retreat of Ilkhanid Buddhism during a subsequent resurgence of Islam has largely eclipsed our historical understanding of this significant presence at a critical time in world developments. Under the Mongol Ilkhans, Buddhism in Iran constituted a unique passage in both the history of Buddhism and Buddhism in the making of an emergent modern world.

Abstract: Buddhism contributed to the culture and politics of thirteenth-century Eurasian intellectual exchange, depositing literary, artistic, and architectural traces subsequently eclipsed by layers of Islamic and Eurocentric history. Within extensive cross-continental networks of diplomatic and commercial activity, Ilkhanid Buddhism and the Buddhist revival of which it was a part drew serious attention among contemporary travelers, scholars, and statesmen including Ibn Taymiyah, Roger Bacon, and Rashid al-Din. This article argues that awareness of a Buddhist scholarly and political elite in the Muslim heartland, with its center at Tabriz, generated a historically significant Eurasian Buddhist discourse during a critical passage in the turn to modernity.