

Theologies of Auspicious Kingship: The Islamization of Chinggisid Sacral Kingship in the Islamic World

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In 1412, after nearly five years of exchanging gifts and embassies across Asia, a letter from the Ming emperor Yongle (r. 1402–1424) arrived from Beijing at the Herat court of the Timurid ruler Shāhrukh (r. 1409–1447). Composed in Chinese, with Persian and Mongolian translations, the letter declared emperor Yongle’s heavenly mandated, just, and impartial universal suzerainty. The Yongle letter praised in a condescending tone Shāhrukh’s good government, and identified the Timurids as subordinate Ming vassals. It plainly stated that after Mongol rule (*davr-i mughūl*) had come to an end, Shāhrukh’s father Temūr (r. 1370–1405) had submitted to the Ming emperor. The letter commended Shāhrukh for following the example of his father and maintaining the steady flow of tribute to the Ming, and urged him to protect Ming interests in the thriving of trans-Eurasian trade.¹ Finally, to add insult to injury, the letter firmly “advised” Shāhrukh to resolve his discord with his nephew.

Unsurprisingly, Yongle’s message was received poorly at the Timurid court. In his two response letters, one in Persian and the other in Arabic, Shāhrukh decisively rejected the Ming emperor’s description of their relationship. He instead defined the relationship between Yongle’s father, Hongwu

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¹ ‘Abd al-Razzāq Samarqandī, *Maṭla’-i sa’dāyn va majma’-i bahrayn*, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Navā’ī, ed. (Tehran: Mu’assasah-yi muṭāla’āt va taḥqīqāt-i farhangī, 1372 [1993–1994]), v. 3, 159–61; E. Blochet, *Introduction a l’histoire des mongols de Fadl Allāh Rashid ed-Din* (Leiden: Brill, 1910), 242–71; Joseph Fletcher, “China and Central Asia, 1368–1884,” in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 209–11.

(r. 1368–1398), and his own father, Temür, as having been one of “love and friendship,” not subordination, and he recommended that they follow that example. Shāhrukh’s letters matched Yongle’s condescending tone, and patronizingly “invited” him to convert to Islam and implement the Sharī’a, Muslim law throughout Ming lands.²

The greatest blow to the Ming demand for Timurid submission was dealt by the historical vision of Shāhrukh’s letters. The Timurid ruler’s Persian letter offers a concise Islamic salvific narrative. It begins by discussing the successive line of Abrahamic prophets sent by God in each generation to guide mankind, culminating in Muḥammad’s prophethood, but then skips the next seven centuries to directly arrive at the thirteenth-century rise (*khurūj*) of Chinggis Khan, his appointment of his offspring as rulers throughout Asia, and their subsequent conversion to Islam. The letter then shifts focus to the Ilkhans (r. 1258–1335), the Mongol dynasty that ruled Iran, Azerbaijan, and Iraq, and to whose territories and imperial apparatus the Timurids (1370–1507) now laid claim, and emphasizes the conversion of the Mongol Ilkhans Ghāzān (r. 1295–1304), his brother Öljeitü (r. 1304–1316), and Öljeitü’s son Abū Sa’īd (r. 1317–1335). Their righteous, just, and Sharī’a-abiding rule was restored by Temür, who rose to power some decades after the Ilkhanid collapse. Shāhrukh surpasses his father by zealously enforcing justice and the Sharī’a, and furthermore abrogating the Mongol court law (*yarghu*) and Chinggisid customary laws. The account ends with Shāhrukh urging Yongle to accept Islam. The second, Arabic letter complements this depiction of Shāhrukh. It identifies Temür’s heir as the sultan who is assigned by God each age to use his supreme military might to enforce justice, order, and the command of the Sharī’a universally, or, as the letter pointedly notes, as far as China. This was an implicit threat to the Ming.

The Timurids and the Ming, two successor polities that rose in the aftermath of the mid-fourteenth-century collapse of the Mongol khanates in Iran (the Ilkhanate) and China (the Yuan, 1271–1368), deployed a variety of strategies to support and enhance their claims to succeed to the Chinggisid regional and Eurasian rule. They creatively, skillfully, and often successfully crafted and propagated their narratives of the rise, decline, and aftermath of the Mongol Empire, aiming to convince multiple constituencies—both within the territories they now claimed as their own and in rival neighboring polities—of their uncontested, exclusive inheritance of the Mongols’ legacy of Eurasian domination.³ Yet the correspondence between Shāhrukh and Yongle revealed the

² Samarqandī, *Maṭla’-i sa’dayn*, v. 3, 162–65. Shāhrukh’s patronizing tone can be detected in the title, *naṣīhat nāmāh* (letters of counsel), given to his reply to the Ming.

³ For the Ming, see David M. Robinson, “Controlling Memory and Movement: The Early Ming Court and the Changing Chinggisid World,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* (forthcoming, March 2019). For the Timurids and the Jalayirids, see Beatrice Manz, “Mongol History Rewritten and Relived,” *Revue des mondes musulmans de la Méditerranée* 89–90

tangible, practical limits of Ming and Timurid expansive aspirations toward Eurasia. Not only was the revival of the Chinggisid model of universal empire unattainable solely at the one end of Asia, but also, despite it being a shared experience, the Chinggisid heritage was interpreted very differently in the Sinitic and the Persianate spheres. The Mongols' imperial claims and political rhetoric underwent extensive local processes of intercultural translation, adaptation, and elaboration, under both the Yuan and Ilkhanid rule, which yielded different results. This set limits on post-Mongol Eurasian inter-imperial commensurability.

Yongle's letter to Shāhrukh claimed that the Ming had succeed to the Mandate of Heaven, which granted him the right to rule over a territory essentially tantamount to the Chinggisid imperial domains, and that Ming superiority, modeled on the Mongol Yuan's earlier vision of universal rulership and expansive boundaries, mandated that the distant Timurids now concede to the position of Ming subordinates.⁴ Shāhrukh's letters in response laid down the argument for his own succession to Chinggisid authority, through the Mongol Ilkhans to his father Temür, but did so by framing the Timurid inheritance within the Islamic salvific schema. The letters fashioned Shāhrukh into a divinely designated Muslim reformer king who followed a successive line of righteous Sharī'a-adhering Muslim Mongol rulers who assumed their place after the line of Abrahamic prophets ended with Muḥammad. Although the letters do not explicitly state so, their account of Shāhrukh as a Sharī'a-upholding reformer king closely resonates with Shāhrukh's identification by Timurid authors as the *mujaddid*, the centennial religious renewer sent by God each century, according to a tradition from the Prophet Muḥammad.

Recent scholarship argues that the rise of the Timurid Empire at the turn of the fifteenth century was a point of departure for an early modern age marked by new imperial, absolutist, and universalist Muslim ideologies. These ideologies offered an alternative, first, to the earlier restrictive, genealogical, and juridical Sunnī definitions of religious and political authority; and second, to the principle of lineage-based Chinggisid universal rule. The latter remained dominant in the eastern Islamic world in the decades after the Ilkhanate's disintegration, but began losing ground to new dynastic formulations with

(2000): 129–49; Anne Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Mamluk and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 174–87; Patrick Wing, *Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 129–46, 185–201. For a comparative approach, see Michal Biran, *Chinggis Khan* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007).

⁴ Yongle's expansive geographical aspirations and Ming rhetoric of inclusive rulership were shaped by Yuan and Chinggisid precedents. See Robinson, "Controlling Memory"; and his "Delimiting the Realm under the Ming Dynasty," in Michal Biran et al., eds., "Universality and Its Limits: Spatial Dimensions of Eurasian Empires" (forthcoming from Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Temür's death in 1405.⁵ This new vision of cosmic and imperial rulership came to the fore in extensive appropriations and elaborations of religious, messianic, and sacral-cultic titles and their wide circulation across early modern Muslim courts.⁶ The adoption of the title of *mujaddid*, the centennial religious renewer, and the model of the religious reformer for Shāhrukh, alongside other Timurid experiments with Islamic titles to express new models of absolutist rulership, are accordingly interpreted as marking the beginning of a gradual yet decisive desertion of the Chinggisid legacy and its replacement with potent theories of Muslim emperorship and a new Timurid pedigree.⁷ While Shāhrukh's letters to the Ming do indeed take note of Shāhrukh's abrogation of the Chinggisid court law, what is more significant is that they invoke his *mujaddid*-like kingship to make the opposite argument, in support of the Timurid inheritance of Mongol rule in Iran and Central Asia. By committing to the role of Sharī'a-adhering Muslim rulers, Temür and Shāhrukh are envisioned in the letters not as turning their back on Chinggisid tradition but rather as succeeding to the illustrious Muslim Mongol Ilkhans, and through them, to Chinggis Khan's universal rulership.⁸

This argument for Timurid-Ilkhanid continuity was not without basis, nor was it a fifteenth-century fiction. Shāhrukh's claim to the position of a universal reformer king was rooted in an earlier Ilkhanid Muslim-Chinggisid synthesis. That synthesis had been unfolding through many instances of experimentation and exchange since the Mongols' conversion to Islam during the final decade of the thirteenth-century, if not the beginning of the Mongol invasions into the Islamic heartland decades earlier. In what follows, I argue that the process of translating and adapting Chinggisid sacral kingship had profound implications for the Perso-Islamic world. It set the course for the fashioning of new models of sacral and cosmic Muslim kingship that were expressed in the formulation of a new political vocabulary of imperial rule.

⁵ Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); İlker Evrim Binbaş, "Timurid Experimentation with Eschatological Absolutism: Mīrzā Iskandar, Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī, and Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī in 815/1412," in Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, ed., *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 277–303; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Legitimacy," in Armando Salvatore, Roberto Tottoli, and Babak Rahimi, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Islam* (Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 353–75.

⁶ Christopher A. Markiewicz, "The Crisis of Rule in Late Medieval Islam: A Study of Idrīs Bidlīsī (861–926/1457–1520) and Kingship at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2015), 311, 330–41. For the ritual and performative aspects of Timurid, Safavid, and Mughal sacral kingship, see Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*; and "Sovereign Violence: Temple Destruction in India and Shrine Desecration in Iran and Central Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, 2 (2015): 467–96.

⁷ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 251–86; Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 35–37.

⁸ For Timurid claims to their succession to the Ilkhans, see Manz, "Mongol History."

My focus here is the early stages of this process at the Ilkhanid court in Iran during the thirteenth and fourteenth-centuries. Anne Broadbridge has surveyed and analyzed the manifestation of Ilkhanid ideological claims in the diplomatic exchanges between the Ilkhans and their rivals, the neighboring Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria (r. 1250–1517), mainly through the rich Mamluk corpus of Arabic historical writing. She has charted the Ilkhanid transition from emphasizing the Chinggisid descent-based, divine right to elaborating their own claim to supreme Muslim sovereignty, combined with Mongol imperial traditions.⁹ Here I will highlight instead Ilkhanid discourses on kingship as they evolved in a diverse array of texts, produced mainly in Persian and in a range of genres including history, poetry, and theology. These texts were largely intended for internal Ilkhanid court readership or circulation within the Ilkhanate.

CHINGGISID SACRAL KINGSHIP

Before examining how Mongol imperial claims came to be negotiated, reinterpreted, and elaborated in the Perso-Islamic sphere, we must address a historiographical challenge that they pose, namely that the Mongols' vision of their mission of world conquest and universal rule was largely articulated by authors who were not themselves Mongol. Such messages were composed in an assortment of languages, of regions that Mongols either ruled directly or threatened to conquer. We therefore often end up grappling with observations about the Mongols based on claims the Mongols reportedly made to conquered or "yet to be conquered" peoples. We need to consider whether these add up to a clearly structured steppe ideology or are instead *ad hoc* responses—a gradually developing set of propositions—that were expressed and shaped by various agents of the Mongols or representatives of the populations they threatened.¹⁰ That said, the Mongols' reliance on intermediaries should not lead us to assume that the Mongols lacked agency.¹¹ We must consider the Mongol ideological apparatus in relation to the broader pattern they exhibited in their approach to the conquered.¹²

⁹ Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*.

¹⁰ See, for instance, the gradual formation of a Mongol religious policy from "a series of separate decisions taken by Chinggis Khan during his conquest[s]..."; Christopher P. Atwood, "Validation by Holiness or Sovereignty: Religious Toleration as Political Theology in the Mongol World Empire of the Thirteenth Century," *International History Review* 26, 2 (2004): 237–56.

¹¹ Brian Baumann, "By the Power of Eternal Heaven: The Meaning of *Tenggeri* to the Government of the Pre-Buddhist Mongols," *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 35 (2013): 233–84, 270–72.

¹² Devin DeWeese similarly argues that the Inner Asian political-imperial tradition did not constitute so much "recurrent *ideals*, but recurrent *patterns* of evoking the intimately linked assimilative mythic complex reflecting cosmic and domestic order"; *Islamization and Native Religion: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1994), 525.

The Mongols considered the religious traditions and spiritual resources of conquered peoples in the same way they viewed their cultural wares, human talents, and technological innovations.¹³ They selectively appropriated and adapted those religious and political institutions to which they ascribed prestige and power or which they deemed useful for securing cooperation.¹⁴ They also absorbed traditions that were compatible with their own conception of their heaven-granted rule and that therefore could enhance their claims to continuity with the imperial founder and inheritance of his sacral authority.¹⁵ Put differently, the Mongols welcomed “innovation through assuming continuity.”¹⁶ The subsequent process of reinterpretation, elaboration, and assimilation of the Mongols’ political rhetoric and assertions into local, sedentary traditions had its most extensive manifestation under the Yuan and later the Ming in China, and under the Ilkhans and then the Timurids in Iran and Central Asia. It would be a mistake to understand this as a departure from Mongolian norms due to the nomadic conquerors’ acculturation or submission to some superiority of the conquered sedentary cultures, since in fact it continued earlier Mongolian practice.

Research indicates that, either by the end of Chinggis Khan’s life or under his son Ögödei’s reign (1229–1241), a relatively coherent and clearly articulated message about the Mongols’ legitimacy as world-rulers, based on Chinggis Khan’s affinity with heaven, had been forged and was being widely propagated.¹⁷ The Chinggisid affinity with heaven was commonly expressed

¹³ Judith Pfeiffer, “Reflections on a ‘Double Rapprochement’: Conversion to Islam among the Mongol Elite during the Early Ilkhanate,” in Linda Komaroff, ed., *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 371–72; Michal Biran, “Introduction: Nomadic Culture,” in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, eds., *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015), 1–9.

¹⁴ Peter Jackson, “The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered,” in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, eds., *Mongols, Turks and Others* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 277–78.

¹⁵ In Weberian terms, the Mongols assumed and deployed sedentary tools that they found useful for further routinizing the charisma of the imperial founder. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 246, 251.

¹⁶ Alan Strathern, “Transcendental Intransigence: Why Rulers Rejected Monotheism in Early Modern Southeast Asia and Beyond,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, 2 (2007): 358–83, 365. Reversion, therefore, became a significant avenue for converting the Mongols. Compare, for example, the depiction of Chinggis Khan as a proto-Confucian with his presentation as a proto-monotheist: Christopher P. Atwood, “Explaining Rituals and Writing History: Tactics against the Intermediate Class,” in Isabelle Charleux et al., eds., *Presenting Power in Ancient Inner Asia: Legitimacy, Transmission and the Sacred* (Bellingham: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 2010), 95–129; and R. Amitai, “Did Chinggis Khan Have a Jewish Teacher? An Examination of an Early Fourteenth-Century Arabic Text,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, 4 (2004): 691–705.

¹⁷ Peter Jackson, “World Conquest and Local Accommodation: Threat and Blandishment in Mongol Diplomacy,” in Judith Pfeiffer and S. A. Quinn, eds., *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 3–22.

in the following two-part Mongolian formula: *möngke tengri-yin küchün-dür; qa'an-u suu-dur* (“By the might of Eternal Heaven; by the good fortune of the Qa’an”).¹⁸ Variations of such succinct formulaic statements are found in the Mongols’ ultimatums and revolved around two main legitimizing assertions, which had their roots in steppe imperial legacies.¹⁹ The first was that heaven (*tenggeri* in Mongolian) selected Chinggis Khan and conferred upon him its blessing and protection, as well as an exclusive mandate to universal conquest and domination. The second was that Chinggis Khan possessed a special good fortune (*suu* in Mongolian), which further confirmed his identity as heaven’s chosen one and guaranteed his predestined success as the fortunate, universal emperor.²⁰ Johan Elverskog suggests that these statements amounted to a “political theology of divine right” that sanctified Mongol rule through a tripartite relationship between heaven, Chinggis Khan, and a ruling offspring. Chinggis Khan, who had initially received heaven’s favor and the divine right to rule, confers them upon his next chosen descendant.²¹

In this immanentist vision of Mongol kingship,²² the connection to Chinggis Khan and his heaven-derived lineage becomes the locus of sacred power, the main effective channel for claiming divine support and legitimizing one’s rule. This relationship with Chinggis Khan was cultivated and enhanced through a shifting range of practical avenues that included maintaining the cultic reverence for and ritualized connection to the imperial founder;²³ claiming privileged descent within the Chinggisid line;²⁴ demonstrating adherence to Chinggis’ real or fictive policies and assertions as expressed in his *yasa* (the Mongol code of law attributed to him) and to his mission of world conquest;²⁵

¹⁸ Denise Aigle, “The Letters of Eljigidei, Hülegü and Abaqa: Mongol Overtures or Christian Ventriloquism?” *Inner Asia* 7, 2 (2005): 143–62, 147–48.

¹⁹ Peter B. Golden, “Imperial Ideology and the Sources of Political Unity amongst the Pre-Chinggisid Nomads of Western Eurasia,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 2 (1982): 37–77.

²⁰ Igor de Rachewiltz, “Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundation of Chinggis Khan’s Empire,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 7 (1973): 21–36, 29–33; Baumann, “By the Power.”

²¹ Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism, and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 48–62.

²² On immanentist (divinized) and transcendentalist models of kingship, see Alan Strathern, “Global Patterns of Ruler Conversion to Islam and the Logic of Empirical Religiosity,” in A.C. S. Peacock, ed., *Islamisation: Comparative Perspectives from History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 21–55.

²³ Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*, 48–52; DeWeese, *Islamization*, 524. It remains to be examined to what extent this connection was established through a cohesive ritual program based on earlier steppe precedent or was instead an evolving, contingent amalgamation of ritual aspects assumed from other traditions.

²⁴ Genealogical seniority was determined by a hierarchical system of “chief wives” and degrees of descent from Chinggis Khan. See Peter Jackson, “The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 22, 3 (1978): 186–244, 193–95; Shai Shir, “‘The Chief Wife’ at the Courts of the Mongol Khans during the Mongol World Empire (1206–1260)” (MA thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006 [in Hebrew]).

²⁵ For knowledge of Chinggis Khan’s edicts as a criterion for electing the khan, and the continuity of the Chinggisid mission, see George Lane, “Intellectual Jousting and the Chinggisid

and finally, imitating and embodying the divinely inspired traits attributed to the imperial founder. These traits, themselves subject to change and reinterpretation, might include Chinggis Khan's supra-mundane intelligence and his intuitive, divine knowledge—a "sense of right" and premonition—that were attained through an unmediated, personal communion with heaven.²⁶ In addition to their inheritance of heaven's blessing through the link to Chinggis Khan, the Mongols claimed that heaven's favor could not be secured or assumed solely through ritual, confessional, or genealogical means; heaven's appointment of the ruler had to be proven by empirical demonstrations such as the candidate's military and political success.²⁷ The intricate and often combustible relationship between these two elements—inheritable authority and personally demonstrated charisma—yielded contradictory and overlapping structures for deciding succession and inflicted intense succession struggles on the empire and its successor khanates.²⁸

Religious interlocutors and cultural mediators from conquered peoples strove to demonstrate to their Mongol overlords the efficacy of their sedentary traditions in order to translate and reinforce their patrons' claims to succeed to this mode of heaven-derived kingship.²⁹ These same cultural brokers sought to gain access to and influence with the Mongol rulers, in addition to wealth and

Wisdom Bazaars," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26, 1–2 (2016): 235–47, 246; Reuven Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260–1335)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

²⁶ Christopher Atwood, "Partners in Profit: Empires, Merchants, and Local Governments in the Mongol Empire and Qing Mongolia," workshop presentation in "Asian Early Modernities: Empires, Bureaucrats, Confessions, Borders, Merchants," Istanbul, 2013. For instance, see Alā' al-Dīn 'Aṭā-malik Juvaynī, *Ta'rikh-i jahān gushā* (Leiden: Brill, 1912–1937), v. 1, 16–17; Juvaynī, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, J. A. Boyle, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), v. 1, 23–24.

²⁷ Atwood, "Validation," 253.

²⁸ Joseph Fletcher discusses the latter as the principle of *tanistry*, according to which the successor is the most qualified member of the clan; "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46, 1 (1986): 11–50, 16–19. A tension also existed between the ideal of corporate, shared sovereignty among the Chinggisid family and claims to patrilineal-based authority. Judith Pfeiffer, *Conversion to Islam among the Ilkhans in Muslim Narrative Traditions: The Case of Ahmad Tegüder* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2003), 172–75.

²⁹ Compare, for example, how Shī'ī agents appealed to the Mongols at the Ilkhanid court by suggesting the affinity between Chinggisid descent-based authority and the Shī'ī principle of descent from the Prophet, and how Tibetan Buddhists used the merit-based model of *cakravartin* kingship (the wheel-turning sage kings and universal emperors) to argue for the continuity of Qubilai (r. 1260–1294) and his heirs with Chinggis Khan through their adoption of and support for the Dharma. Furthermore, the Ilkhanid ruler Öljeitü, himself a Shī'ī convert, used a comparison with Shī'ism/Sayyidism to support the claim that non-Chinggisid commanders could not hold the Ilkhanid throne. Judith Pfeiffer, "Confessional Ambiguity vs. Confessional Polarization: Politics and the Negotiation of Religious Boundaries in the Ilkhanate," in Judith Pfeiffer, ed., *Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th–15th Century Tabriz* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 129–70; Herbert Franke, *From Tribal Chieftain to Universal Emperor and God: The Legitimation of the Yuan Dynasty* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978), 54–59.

stature. Further, they saw the Mongols' appreciation of ritual expertise and intercultural translation and their interest in appropriating local traditions as opportunities to persuade them to convert or to strengthen their earlier conversion and commitment. Yet the Mongols understood their conversion differently: they did not consider religious affiliation exclusive, as limiting potential affiliations with or borrowing from other religious systems.³⁰ And even when they did take up other religions, those religions remained subservient to the divinely favored Chinggisid rule.

Under the Yuan, the Mongols' claim to heaven's selection of Chinggis Khan and his offspring was subsumed into the Confucian structure of the Mandate of Heaven. That allowed the Ming dynasty to assert that they had restored Yuan rule in China, and for a short while under emperor Yongle, to claim for themselves the Chinggisid model of universal domination of Eurasia. The Ming argued that the Yuan dynasty had lost heaven's favor through poor government and depravity, but now it was the turn of their own just and impartial rule.³¹ Tibetan Buddhists, too, incorporated the Mongols into a karmic model of universal emperorship (the *cakravartin*, the wheel-turning sage king) that through the Dharma reaffirmed Chinggisid exceptionalism, and moreover reinforced and sanctified the Yuan family's relationship with their forefather Chinggis Khan.³²

In Ilkhanid Iran, the special good fortune that was bestowed upon, and employed and redistributed by the Chinggisids found compatible political structures, mainly in the Iranian "royal glory" (*farr*) and the Muslim "good fortune" (*davlat*).³³ Still, unlike Buddhism or Confucianism, Muslim (Sunnī) culture by the thirteenth century had yet to develop a parallel, dominant, and readily available structure of Muslim sacred kingship that was not bound to, or restricted by, the Sunnī genealogical and juridical definitions for the transmission of divine authority. This is striking considering that Muslim courts

³⁰ The Mongol understanding of conversion and religion, therefore, fits also that of non-transcendentalist (or cosmothiestic) societies, in which religious traditions were "mutually transparent and compatible" (Assmann) and rulers were ready "to accept new gods and rites in an endless cycle of invention" (Strathern). Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3; Strathern, "Transcendental Intransigence," 364. The Mongols, indeed, viewed their affinity to heaven, and heaven itself (*tenggeri*, the supreme sky-god of the steppe), to be translatable and compatible with other religious systems. Thus, Allāh, Khudā, Tian, and Deus were all fit as "transparent translation[s]" for *tenggeri*, and religious experts were all praying to the same deity. Atwood, "Validation," 252–53.

³¹ Robinson, "Controlling Memory."

³² Phags-pa, *Prince Jii-Gim's Textbook of Tibetan Buddhism*, Constance Hoog, trans. (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 39–43; Robinson, *Empire's Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 65–66.

³³ Thomas Allsen, "A Note on Mongol Imperial Ideology," in Volker Rybatzki et al., eds., *The Early Mongols: Language, Culture and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University, Denis Sinor Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2009), 1–8. For the Chinese rendering of the Chinggisid fortune (*yum*), see Francesca Fiaschetti, "Tradition, Innovation and the Construction of Qubilai's Diplomatic Rhetoric," *Ming Qing Yanjiu* 18 (2014–2015): 65–96, 81–83.

and sultans had ample resources for adapting a Muslim model of sacred kingship long before the Mongol period, given the Islamic assimilation of the Persianate political tradition (and its resonant strands of divine kingship and absolutism), the spread of Sufism (with its direct channels to the divine), and the institution of the caliphate (which drew on the Hellenistic mold of sacral monarchy).³⁴ Yet in the post-Mongol period we witness experimentations and elaborations on claims to sacral emperorship that, in their expansiveness, ingenuity, audacity, and diffusion, surpassed those of any other period of Islamic history.³⁵

Scholars suggest that the Mongol conquests and rule contributed to the emergence of a new mode of sacral Muslim kingship in the early modern period by creating a vacuum of Islamic authority through the Mongols' annihilation of the 'Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad in 1258. In this view, by ending the caliphate the Mongols shattered "the political and religious framework of the majority Sunnī Islam,"³⁶ and inaugurated an unprecedented era of constitutional crisis that later Muslim thinkers toiled to resolve.³⁷ Others have observed that the Mongol invasions created social and political conditions that made people more receptive to alternative—messianic, Sufi, and Shīʿī—structures of authority that were more adaptable than the Sunnī caliphal model.³⁸

Here I seek to refine this "crisis thesis" by showing that the fashioning of the early modern model of sacral kingship was equally, if not primarily, shaped by the earlier experimentation with a new Chinggisid-Islamic synthesis in Mongol-ruled Iran. This Ilkhanid-sponsored project of translating, adapting, and re-conceptualizing the Chinggisid claim to divine privilege set the path for fashioning a new discursive realm of Islamic kingship. It was marked by,

³⁴ A transition toward a new conception of royal Muslim authority can be detected earlier, especially in influential Persian works of political ethics ("advice literature") and Sufi manuals, yet this did not coalesce into a full-fledged and widely promulgated model of sacral Muslim kingship as we find it in the post-Mongol period. Saïd Amir Arjomand, "Legitimacy and Political Organization: Caliphs, Kings and Regimes," in Robert Irwin, ed., *The New Cambridge History of Islam 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 240–54. On the other hand, we can also observe in the post-Mongol model of sacral kingship certain continuities with caliphal monarchy. On the Late Antique notions of sacral kingship as the background for the caliphate, see Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and Pagan Polities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001).

³⁵ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Turning the Stones Over: Sixteenth-Century Millenarianism from the Tagus to the Ganges," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 40, 2 (2003): 129–61. Only after the Mongol period do we notice the appearance of imperial Muslim shrines, which Moin argues were interlinked with a new style of sovereignty that drew on the symbols and rituals of Muslim sainthood; "Sovereign Violence," 467–96.

³⁶ Mir-Kasimov, "Introduction," in Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, ed., *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 11.

³⁷ Binbaş, "Timurid Experimentation," 300.

³⁸ Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 29–41.

among other aspects, the unprecedented royal appropriation of religious and messianic titles such as the *mujaddid*, the centennial renewer of Islam.

MONGOL MUJADDIDS

The *mujaddid* tradition emerged from within specific scholarly circles to legitimize the teachings of ninth-century jurist al-Shāfi'ī' (d. 820). It was not a central concept in medieval Islamic religious thought, and functioned mainly as an honorific title bestowed unsystematically on religious scholars.³⁹ Starting in the fifteenth century, when its significance grew among religious and intellectual scholars and it was ascribed additional, eschatological connotations, it gained enthusiastic audiences within court circles.⁴⁰ The tradition offered rulers an established legitimizing discourse of religious renewal and reform (*tajdīd*).⁴¹ Jalāl al-Dīn Qāyīnī (d. 1434–1435), Herat's market inspector, was the first to apply the tradition to Shāhrukh, and he linked the latter's status as the centennial renewer of the ninth Hijri century to his campaign to restore Sharī'a order.⁴² Like later Timurid authors, Qāyīnī also related Shāhrukh's *mujaddid* position to his rejection of Chinggīsid law in favor of Islamic law and his adoption of an anti-Chinggīsid stance.⁴³

Shāhrukh's embracing of the *mujaddid* tradition had precedence in the Mongol court in the early fourteenth-century Ilkhanate. The Ilkhanid vizier Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318) is mainly known for his world history, the first of its kind in the Islamic world, but he was also a prolific author in other fields, especially theology. The vizier was the first to experiment with the religious tradition, in the introduction to his *Book of the Sultan*,⁴⁴ a lengthy treatise that answers the Muslim Mongol ruler Öljeitü's questions about prophethood and revelation. In the introduction, Rashīd al-Dīn lists the main proofs (*barāhīn*) for the Ilkhan Öljeitü's exceptional rank of sacral kingship. The first is the

³⁹ The eschatological classification of the *tajdīd* tradition was a later innovation, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Ella Landau-Tasseron, "The 'Cyclical Reform': A Study of the Mujaddid Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 79–117; Yohanan Freidman, *Prophecy Continues: Aspects of Aḥmadī Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 97.

⁴⁰ Melvin-Koushki, "Islamicate Empire."

⁴¹ Hayrettin Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 116ff.

⁴² Maria Eva Subtelny, "The Sunni Revival under Shāh-Rukh and Its Promoters: A Study of the Connection between Ideology and Higher Learning in Timurid Iran," *Proceedings of the 27th Meeting of Haneda Memorial Hall. Symposium on Central Asia and Iran, August 30, 1993* (Kyoto: Institute of Inner Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1994), 14–23.

⁴³ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 261–65.

⁴⁴ The work has several titles. The fullest appears to be "The Epistle of the Sultan on the Debates on Prophethood" (*al-Risāla al-sultāniyya fī al-mabāḥith al-nabawiyya*) or "on the Prophetic Ranks" (*fī al-marātib al-nabawiyya*), but it is also known as *The Debates of the Sultan (Mabāḥith al-sultāniyya)*. On this interesting work and its manuscripts, see Josef Van Ess, *Der Wesir und seine Gelehrten* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1981), 17–19. I have used the Persian manuscript of *Kitāb-i sultāniyya*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, MS Nuruosmaniye 3415.

tradition transmitted from the Prophet Muḥammad, “God will send to this community at the turn of every century a person who will strengthen its religion.”⁴⁵ He cites here the *mujaddid* tradition nearly verbatim, but replaces “renew” (*yujaddid*) with “strengthen” (*yuqawwī*). The vizier describes the ruler Öljeitü, not as a centennial renewer, but instead as a centennial “strengtheners of religion.”

The *mujaddid* tradition seems to have been well-known in Ilkhanid intellectual circles. Another contemporaneous Ilkhanid court historian designated Rashīd al-Dīn—vizier, historian, and Shāfi‘ī theologian—as the centennial renewer (*mujaddid*) of the eighth Hijri century.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the vizier’s choice to change the tradition from the “renewer” to the “strengtheners” seems to have been due less to his “own claim” to the rank than to his wish to adapt and repurpose for a new, royal purpose a tradition that at this stage was still most familiar as an honorific scholarly title.⁴⁷ This appears to have changed later in the fourteenth century as court circles quickly became more familiar with the tradition.⁴⁸

Like later authors, Rashīd al-Dīn provided his rationalization for identifying Öljeitü as a “*mujaddid* king.” He understood the tradition to allot a measure of cyclical salvific time, as did the aforementioned Timurid market inspector Qāyini, who argued that Shāhrukh was the centennial renewer because his righteous reign began in 1408–1409 (811 Hijri), exactly nine centuries after the Prophet’s *hijra*.⁴⁹ Rashīd al-Dīn argued that Öljeitü deserved the title since his auspicious reign was preceded by a century during which “not even a single strengthener (*muqawwī*) of the religion of Islam” had appeared, and the Muslim world had succumbed to moral decay and the resurgence of the idol worshippers and non-believers. The “light-emitting” Öljeitü effaced “the traces of these unbelievers” and his enthronement was greeted by a surge in Mongol conversion to Islam.⁵⁰ In addition to the idea of Öljeitü’s divine appointment, the vizier’s revised *mujaddid* tradition was also compatible with the Mongol understanding of Chinggisid rule as predestined. As reported by the Mongol *Secret History* and repeated in the Mongol ultimatums to

⁴⁵ *Inna Allāh yab’ath li-hadhihi al-ummah ‘alā ra’s kull mī‘at sana man yuqawwī lahā amr dīnihā. Kitāb-i sulṭāniyya*, f. 118r.

⁴⁶ ‘Abd Allāh ibn Faḍl Allāh Vaṣṣāf, *Tajziyat al-amṣār wa-tajziyat al-a’sār* (repr. Tehran 1338/1959–1960, of the Bombay edition, 1269/1852–1853), 539.

⁴⁷ The vizier’s example predated the earliest usage of the title for political leaders, for which see Jo Van Steenberg, “Qalāwūmid Discourse, Elite Communication, and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix: Interpreting a 14th-Century Panegyric,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 1–28.

⁴⁸ The vizier’s “innovation” had no lasting influence with later authors, who used the unaltered version. See, for example, Ūzūn Ḥasan’s “Sunni *tajdīd*” claims. John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu* (Salt Lake City, 1999, rev. and expanded), 100–6, 140.

⁴⁹ Subtelny, “Sunni Revival.” Samarqandī (d. 1482), though, claimed that Shāhrukh was the *mujaddid* since he was appointed ruler (*salṭanat*) of Khurasan in the Hijri year of 800. Samarqandī, *Maṭlā’-i sa’dāyān*, v. 3, 494–96.

⁵⁰ *Kitāb-i sulṭāniyya*, ff. 118r–19r.

European leaders, Chinggis Khan's rise and rule were predicted by a prophecy delivered from heaven to the shaman Teb Tenggeri.⁵¹ Rashīd al-Dīn's identification of Öljeitü as a preordained reviver king justified Ilkhanid rule based on a Muslim prophetic tradition instead of a Mongol prophecy. Muḥammad, in other words, assumed Teb Tenggeri's role. The vizier assimilated the Mongols into the Islamic salvific schema by reinterpreting and reinforcing their claims to predestined and divinely supported government.⁵²

A similar portrayal of Ilkhanid rule as preordained stands at the center of the earliest conversion narrative of Öljeitü's brother and predecessor, the Ilkhan Ghāzān. This account appears in an early iteration of Rashīd al-Dīn's *Blessed History of Ghāzān*, but was probably authored by another fourteenth-century Ilkhanid court historian named 'Abd Allāh al-Qāshānī.⁵³ According to this providential conversion narrative, the Mongol *amir* and Muslim convert Nawrūz (d. 1297) persuaded Ghāzān to convert to Islam on the eve of his battle with his senior cousin over the throne. He proclaimed that Ghāzān was the great king expected by religious scholars and predicted by astrologers (*aṣḥāb-i nujūm va arbāb-i taqvim*) to appear around the year 1291 (690 Hijri).⁵⁴ The king's guidance would strengthen Islam and revive (*tāzah va tarī shavad*) the weakened (*mundaris gashtah*) Muslim community, and his prolonged rule would restore utopian justice. Nawrūz reported that he became convinced that prince Ghāzān was this predestinated king by "the impressions of the shining forehead (*jabīn-i mubīn*) of the prince," and argued that "were the prince to convert to Islam and adhere to the tenets and tracts of the faith, he would certainly be the ruler of the age (*ūlī al-amr-i 'ahd*)."⁵⁵

⁵¹ *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, Igor de Rachewiltz, trans. and annotated (Leiden: Brill, 2004), v. 1, 168; v. 2, 869–73; Franke, *From Tribal Chieftain*, 21.

⁵² Compare with Hūlegū's letter to King Louis IX of France (1262), in which Teb Tenggeri's prophecy is embedded into a Christian-biblical framework, and thus depicted as the final link in a chain of prophetic communications to mankind; Aigle, "Letters of Eljigidei," 152–53.

⁵³ 'Abd Allāh al-Qāshānī is mainly known for his history of Ghāzān's brother, Öljeitü. His narrative can be found in an iteration of the *Ta'rikh-i mubārak-i Ghāzānī*, found in the Paris manuscript (Bibliothèque Nationale, Supplément persan, 1113), which Karl Jahn used for his edition (*Geschichte Gāzān-Hān's aus dem Tarīh-i mubārak-i-gāzānī* [London: Luzac & Co., 1940]), and in the St. Petersburg manuscript (dated to 1576), which 'Alī Zādah used for his 1957 edition (Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-tawārikh*, 'Abd al-Karīm 'Alī Zādah, ed. [Baku, 1957], v. 3, 579–619). As Kamola recently noted, while Ghāzān's "alternative" conversion narrative is missing in the Paris manuscript, it is found in full in 'Alī Zādah's edition (the St. Petersburg manuscript). Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, 89–93.

⁵⁴ Rashīd al-Dīn/'Alī Zādah, *Jāmi' al-tawārikh*, 604–7.

⁵⁵ Qāshānī's reference to the regal signs on Ghāzān's "forehead" is echoed in the account of Sorghan's prediction of Chinggis's rise in the *Jāmi' al-tawārikh*. According to the prophecy, Chinggis Khan's success was predestined since "heavenly assistance and regal splendor (*farr-i shāhī*) patently shine (*lā'ih*) from his forehead." This observation is missing in the second appearance of this prediction in the *Jāmi' al-tawārikh*. Faḍl Allāh Abū al-Khayr Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-tawārikh*, Muḥammad Rawshan and Muṣṭafā Mūsavī, eds. (Tehran, 1373/1994), v. 1, 181, 376; Rashīd

The Mongol commander concluded his speech with the statement, “The religion of Islam, which has been weakened by its subjugation to the infidel (*kuffār*) Tatars and the domination of the tyrants and hypocrites (*zālimān va fāsiqān*), will be revived through the prince’s [Ghāzān’s] support.”⁵⁶ This reveals the way in which the author shaped Ghāzān’s conversion account to respond to, and moreover correct, earlier apocalyptic impressions arising after the Mongol invasions. The phrasing evokes an important paragraph in an early thirteenth-century celebrated Sufi manual, *The Path of God’s Bondsmen*. In that work, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī Dāya (d. 1256) referred to the well-known comparison of the king to the shepherd who protects his flock of sheep, his subjects, from the evil wolves.⁵⁷ The wolves, he explained, are the accursed polytheists (*kuffār-i malā’īn*), “who have become powerful (*mustavlī*) during these hard times.”⁵⁸

Rāzī further contextualizes this parable in the prelude to his Sufi manual, where he describes in similar terms the Mongols’ (*kuffār-i tatār*) attacks in 1220 and their subjection (*istilā*) of the eastern Islamic world. Arguing that the Mongol invasions were God’s punishment for the ingratitude and corruption of the Muslims, Rāzī claims that the chaos and massacres “resemble only the catastrophes that shall ensue at the End of Time (*fitnahā-yi ākhīr al-zamān*) as foretold by the Prophet.”⁵⁹ As proof of the Mongols’ role as the prophesized doomsday villains, he points to the horrific fate of his hometown of Rayy. He urges the political leaders of his age to join in union and protect the Muslims from the developing catastrophe (*fitna*), and warns that if they disregard their fundamental obligation as Muslim kings and shepherds, “Islam will be completely eradicated” and capitulate to infidelity. Ghāzān’s conversion narrative echoes Rāzī’s work, but it swaps out the penitential, apocalyptic interpretation of the Mongol conquests for a new providential narrative.⁶⁰ Thus, the convert-to-be Ghāzān himself “answers” Rāzī’s plea from

al-Dīn, *Rashīd uddīn Fazlullah’s Jamī’u’l-Tawarikh: A History of the Mongols*, W. M. Thackston, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1998–1999), v. 1, 97, 181.

⁵⁶ “The tyrants and offenders” may be the Mamluks (see the Ilkhanid letter below), the Ilkhans’ rivals in Egypt and Syria.

⁵⁷ Completed in 1223, *The Path of God’s Bondsmen* (*Miršād al-‘Ibād*) gained considerable popularity after Rāzī’s death. The resemblance between the Sufi manual and Qāshānī’s narrative has also been noted by Kāmola (*Rashīd al-Dīn*, 183).

⁵⁸ Najm al-Dīn Rāzī Dāya, *Miršād al-‘ibād min al-mabdā ilā al-mā’ād*, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad, ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i kitābkhānah-i sanā’ī, 1383 [1984]), 248–49; Rāzī, *The Path of God’s Bondsmen from Origin to Return*, Hamid Algar, trans. (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1982), 415–16.

⁵⁹ Rāzī, *Miršād al-‘ibād*, 8–9; *God’s Bondsmen*, 39–41.

⁶⁰ On the transition from penitential to providential responses to the Mongols, see Devin DeWeese, “‘Stuck in the throat of Chingiz Khan’: Envisioning the Mongol Conquests in some Sufi Accounts from the 14th to 17th Centuries,” in J. Pfeiffer and S. A. Quinn, eds., *History and*

half a century earlier and reverses the decline of Islam at the hands of his Mongol ancestors. Ghāzān's conversion-enthronement, therefore, restarts Islamic time that had been suspended half a century earlier with the Mongol conquest of Baghdad (1258).⁶¹

The author of Ghāzān's conversion narrative might also have been playing with messianic resonances in his description of the anticipated utopian justice. His statement that "from the inclusiveness of the justice of this king, the sheep will be protected from the harm of the wolf" was reminiscent of statements made in Persianate works of advice literature by pre-Islamic Iranian monarchs who epitomized the Iranian ideal of just kingship,⁶² as well as descriptions of the utopian justice the eschatological redeemer would enforce.⁶³ Whereas Rashīd al-Dīn cast Öljeitü as a centennial "converter king," Qāshānī continued the project of earlier Ilkhanid authors who justified Ilkhanid rule by fashioning their Mongol overlords into another cycle of Iranian monarchy⁶⁴ and by further aligning Ilkhanid rule with Perso-Islamic governmental norms.⁶⁵

In addition to its possible reliance on *The Path of God's Bondsmen*, Ghāzān's conversion narrative appears to be linked with the second letter Ghāzān's chancery issued to the commanders of Syria during his short-lived occupation of Damascus (1299–1300).⁶⁶ This letter also foreshadows Shāh-rukh's response to the Ming emperor with which I began this article. It begins with a succinct Islamic salvation history that positions the Ilkhan and his Syrian campaign as continuing the successive missions of Abrahamic

Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 23–60; Pfeiffer, "Confessional Ambiguity," 133–38.

⁶¹ The Mongol conversion under Ghāzān "unleashed an unprecedented amount of historiography" after nearly half a century of historiographical silence. Judith Pfeiffer, "The Canonization of Cultural Memory: Ghāzān Khān, Rashīd Al-Dīn, and the Construction of the Mongol Past," in Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, eds., *Rashīd al-Dīn: Agent and Mediator of Cultural Exchanges in Ilkhanid Iran* (London: Warburg Institute, 2013), 57–70.

⁶² Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyāsatnāmah*, Murtaḍā Mudarrīsī and Muḥammad Qazvīnī, eds. (Tehran, 1334 [1955]), 40.

⁶³ 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaf* (Johannesburg: al-Majlis al-'ilmī, 1983), v. 11, 400–1; Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs*, 46.

⁶⁴ Consider, for instance, how the author mentions the prediction of the astrologers alongside that of the religious scholars, thus aligning the providential appearance and revival of Islam of the anticipated king with Iranian astrological cyclical rhythms of salvific kingship. On Perso-Islamic astrological determinism, see Saīd Amir Arjomand, "The Conception of Revolution in Persianate Political Thought," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 5 (2012): 1–16.

⁶⁵ Ghāzān is the first ruler to take on the title of the *Pādshāh-i Islām*, a fitting Perso-Islamic synthesis, and was described as the initiator of a new era of Iranian history. Charles Melville, "History and Myth: The Persianisation of Ghāzān Khan," in Eva M. Jeremias, ed., *Irano-Turkic Cultural Contacts in the 11th–17th Centuries* (Pilsen: Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2002/2003), 133–60.

⁶⁶ For the five texts related to Ghāzān's occupation, see Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 73–80.

prophets: “In every age (*zamān*), the turn of time (*al-dawr*) requires that God, may He be exalted, send a prophet to guide the world and direct man toward the right path....” Yet, it says, after prophethood ceased with Muḥammad, whenever decay and oppression spread and the Muslims turned their backs on the Sharīʿa, “God brought forth an individual from amongst those in authority (*ūlī al-amr*) who would strengthen the religious matters, reproach all the beings, and forbid them from wrong....”⁶⁷ The letter then describes the Mongols’ sincere and miraculous conversion to Islam as God’s response to the Mamluks’ corrupt rule, tyranny, and hypocrisy.

A striking feature of Ghāzān’s conversion narrative and this letter is that both employ the title of *ūlī al-amr* (ruler) to describe the figure of the periodically sent Muslim reviver king.⁶⁸ The title is derived from the Qur’anic “authority verse” (Qur’ān 4:59)⁶⁹ that was mostly referenced to testify to the requirement of full, unconditional obedience to the appointed political leaders of the community.⁷⁰ Indeed, both the conversion account and the letter link the verse to the Mongol demand for full submission.⁷¹

The title *ūlī al-amr* is also used in each of the texts to integrate the convert Ghāzān and the Mongols into the Islamic “rhythm of salvation.”⁷² Thus, the letter envisions Ghāzān as continuing a successive line of rulers who are periodically and continuously sent by God to chastise the believers and undo the recurring corruption of the faith, as the successive chain of Abrahamic prophets had done before. Like Shāhrukh’s message to the Mīng emperor, the salvific narrative in Ghāzān’s letter ignores the caliphate and its historical claim to succeed the Prophet Muḥammad, and presents political leaders or kings, rather than the caliphs or the religious scholars (*ulamāʿ*), as the true upholders of the Sharīʿa in the post-Muḥammad age. The apparent audacity of such a claim should not distract us from the letter’s underlying message that the Mongol invasions, rule, and conversion to Islam had all unfolded *within*

⁶⁷ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-fikra fī taʾrīkh al-hijra*, Donald S. Richards, ed. (Beirut: Dār al-nashr “al-kitāb al-ʿarabī” Barlīn, 1998), 333–34.

⁶⁸ In addition, like Qāshānī’s narrative, the letters issued by Ghāzān’s chancery possibly drew also on Rāzī’s *Mirṣād al-ʿibād* to argue, for example, for the Mamluks’ ignorance of true kingly conduct. Jonathan Brack, “Mediating Sacred Kingship: Conversion and Sovereignty in Mongol Iran” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2016), 169–71.

⁶⁹ “O those who believe, obey God and the Messenger and those in authority among you.”

⁷⁰ Asma Afsaruddin, “Obedience to Political Authority as Evolutionary Concept,” in M. A. Muqtedar Khan, ed., *Islamic Democratic Discourse* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 46–47.

⁷¹ For the conversion narrative, see Rashīd al-Dīn/Alī Zādah, *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*, 604–5. The letter, which references the “authority verse” no less than three times, links the verse to the demand for unwavering Mamluk submission, and moreover accuses the Mamluks of transgressing God’s command by repeatedly disobeying and killing “those in authority” among them. Al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-fikra*, 333–34.

⁷² I borrow this term from Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and Pagan Politics* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 41.

Islamic salvific history, and were part of a recurring providential design to restore Islam and the Muslims to pristine glory.

ILKHANID *MAHDĪS* AND LORDS OF AUSPICIOUS CONJUNCTION

In addition to theological works, histories, and letters, the Ilkhanid experimentation with a mixture of messianic allusions, Iranian ideals of just kingship, and prophecy was also carried out in court poetry. The Shīʿī court poet Abū Sulaymān al-Banākātī (d. 1329–1330) preserved in his history specimens of his own poetry.⁷³ A *qaṣīda* in praise of Ghāzān, for which the poet was awarded the title “king of poets” at the Ilkhan’s celebration (Ūjān, 1302), reads:

Oh Heaven, fortune of the path of kingship, it has been determined
By the words of the Prophet, that you are the Khusrav, the master of the age (*ṣāhib-zamān*)
You are the *mahdī* of the End of Time as is evident, oh king, from the palm of your hand
For you have endless fortune (*naṣīb*) from ‘Alī, lion of God⁷⁴

The poem identifies the Mongol ruler Ghāzān as the *mahdī* whose arrival is predicted by the Prophet. The poet does not elaborate Ghāzān’s messianic role. Rather than the eschatological redeemer, the *mahdī* title signifies Ghāzān’s personification of the ideal Islamic sovereign, just as the poet’s praise for the magnanimity, justice, and benevolence of the “Pādshāh Ghāzān” reveals the Mongol ruler’s embodiment of ideal Iranian monarchy.⁷⁵ These verses also entwine the themes of heaven, good fortune, and prophecy. The Ilkhan’s rise and rule are foretold by the Prophet Muḥammad, and materialized through Ghāzān’s share of good fortune from ‘Alī, echoing both Teb Tenggeri’s prophecy and Chinggis Khan’s unique good fortune.⁷⁶

The court poet was not alone in associating Ghāzān’s heavenly supported and predestined rule with the salvific arrival of a *mahdī*. Nearly three decades after his victory over his cousin and his enthronement, the Ilkhanid-Anatolian historian Karīm al-Dīn Aqṣarāʾī in his history, *Night Time Narratives and Keeping up with the Good*, depicted the final clash between Ghāzān and his rival cousin Baidu as an apocalyptic battle scene from the “Hour of Calamity.”⁷⁷ He described Ghāzān as the Lord of Auspicious Conjunction

⁷³ Peter Jackson, “Banākātī, Abū Solaymān,” *Elr*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/banakati-abu-solayman-dawud-b> (accessed 4 Dec. 2015).

⁷⁴ Abū Sulaymān Dāwūd Banākātī, *Rawḍat ūli ’-albāb fī ma’rifat al-tawārīkh wa’l-ansāb* (Tehran: Silsila-yi intishārāt-i anjuman-i āthār-i millī, 1348 [1969]), 465–66.

⁷⁵ Another line in the poem reads: “You have cultivated the world with your justice and generosity and the justice, of a hundred like Kīsrās serving at your court.” For Ghāzān as *mahdī*, see also Banākātī’s poem from August 1303; *ibid.*, 468.

⁷⁶ The poet might have received his inspiration from Ilkhanid decrees that expanded the duo of heaven’s blessing and the Chinggisid fortune to incorporate also the Prophet Muḥammad. See Francis Woodman Cleaves, “The Mongolian Documents in the Musée de Téhéran,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 16/1–2 (1953): 1–107, 23, 26.

⁷⁷ Karīm al-Dīn Aqṣarāʾī, *Musāmarat al-akhbār va musāyarat al-akhyār*, Osman Turan, ed. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1944), 183–89.

(*ṣāhibqirān*), the like of which had never been seen before. Although he refrained from explicitly identifying Ghāzān with the *mahdī* title, he portrayed his victory as overturning the *fitna*, the distortion of the natural order that had resulted from Baidu's satanic and tyrannical emergence (*khurūj*), which signaled "the darkness of the day of resurrection (*qiyāma*)."⁷⁸ The *mahdī*-like Ghāzān is a reformer king who restores Islam to its previous glory, vanquishes the idol worshippers and Buddhists, and reinstates utopian justice.⁷⁸

It is significant that a narrative that alludes to the Ilkhan's role as a *mahdī*-reformer king assigns Ghāzān the auspicious title *ṣāhibqirān*, Lord of Auspicious Conjunction. This title, which had pre-Islamic Iranian roots, indicated the fortune of a ruler whose birth or rise coincided with, and was therefore also predetermined by, a major planetary conjunction (*qirān*), most notably that of Saturn and Jupiter. Prior to the Ilkhanid period, the title appears intermittently in poetry and panegyrics, mainly from the Ghaznavid and Saljūq courts.⁷⁹ The *ṣāhibqirān* became especially prevalent in court circles from the fifteenth century onward as the title became further entwined with the figure of Temūr and his patrimony of world conquest. This astrologically derived title was charged with additional messianic and millenarian significance in the early modern period due to the impending great conjunction of 1583 (991 Hijri) that marked the end of a 960-year-long cycle that started around the time of the Prophet Muḥammad's birth, in 571, and therefore coincided with the turn of the Hijri millennium.⁸⁰

The pairing of the two titles, the Lord of Auspicious Conjunction and the eschatological redeemer (*mahdī*),⁸¹ is also found in a contemporaneous Anatolian account: according to *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, a hagiography of Rūmī (d. 1273) and his descendants, when the Mongol governor of Anatolia, Temürtash (d. 1327), reconquered the city of Konya in 1323, he proclaimed:

⁷⁸ The Sunnī *mahdī* designated an eschatological figure, an apocalyptic world-ruler, and a cyclical reformer, or "a *mujaddid*-like *mahdī*" who appears periodically to set the community aright after its corruption and restore morality and order. Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform: Mahdīs in the Muslim West*, Martin Beagles, trans. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 20; Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs*, 133, 139–40.

⁷⁹ Markiewicz, "Crisis of Rule," 311–18. *Ṣāhibqirān* did gain some currency in thirteenth-century Ilkhanid historiography. The Ilkhanid historian Juvaynī describes Ögedei (r. 1229–1241) as *ṣāhibqirān*, who follows the examples of Ḥātim al-Ṭāī (the famous pre-Islamic Arab warrior-poet) and Anūshirvān, connecting Ögedei to two pre-Islamic figures known for their generosity and justice. Juvaynī, *Ta'rikh-i jahān gushā*, v. 3, 190; Juvaynī, *Genghis Khan*, v. 2, 234. During the Ilkhanid period, the title does not appear to be restricted to the ruler rank. Thus, Rashīd al-Dīn referred to himself as *ṣāhibqirān* (Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, 102, 248).

⁸⁰ Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*; Derek Mancini-Lander, *Memory on the Boundaries of Empire: Narrating Place in the Early Modern Local Historiography of Yazd* (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2012), 244–67.

⁸¹ Another early fourteenth-century author, Jamāl Qarshī, writing in Kashgar under Mongol rule, describes Chinggis Khan both as "*ṣāhib al-qirān* and the conqueror of the End of Time (*qahramān-i akhir al-zamān*)"; *Mulḥaqāt al-ṣurāḥ*, in *Istoriya Kazakhstana v persidskikh istochnikakh*, Ashirbek Kurbanovich Muminov, ed. (Almaty, 2005), v. 1, 246.

“I am the *ṣāhibqirān*; why indeed, I am the *mahdī* of [the end of] Time.”⁸² Temürtaṣh’s statement in this eyewitness account relates to the Mongol governor’s short-lived revolt against the Ilkhan Abū Saʿīd, during which the Mongol governor reportedly proclaimed himself *mahdī* (1322–1323).⁸³ That governor was the aforementioned Aqṣarāʾī’s patron, to whom the Anatolian historian dedicated his *Night Time Narratives*. Behind Aqṣarāʾī’s “messianic” depiction of the Ilkhan Ghāzān as the ideal Perso-Islamic ruler and Muslim reviver king was the author’s wish to encourage his current patron, the rebellious Mongol governor, to follow the historian’s model of the ideal Muslim sovereign, on which he imprints the figure of Ghāzān.⁸⁴

The coupling of the titles of *mahdī* and *ṣāhibqirān* in these accounts from the 1320s onward indicates the progressing assimilation of the Mongols’ claim to divine mandate into Islamic salvific temporality and historicity. From the astrologically ascribed *ṣāhibqirān* to the prophetically preordained “*mujaddid*” (“strengtheners of religion”), to the Qurʾanically assigned “ruler of the age” (*ūlī al-amr*), and finally, the ultimate reformer, the *mahdī*, Ilkhanid cultural brokers appropriated religious and messianic titles that espoused a similar vision of Islamic political authority. This new type of Muslim kingship was assigned through direct divine intervention in human history (or through cosmic determinism) and bypassed the earlier, restrictive definitions for the transmission of divine authority and legitimacy: hereditary succession to the Prophet (the caliph or the Shīʿī Imam) or the juridical reasoning and authority of religious scholars and jurists.⁸⁵ As Christopher Atwood explains, the Mongols rejected the idea of a “binding address of divine favor.” Heaven’s favor was not limited to one cult or individual, nor could it be assured through adherence to a specific ritual practice or dogma. Divine favor was revealed only through empirical

⁸² Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad-i Aflākī, *Manāqib al-ʿarīfīn*, Tahsin Yazıcı, ed. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1961), v. 2, 977–78; *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, John O’Kane, trans. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 684–85. Aflākī gives 720 (1320) for the retaking of Konya, but this appears to be a mistake since *Tārīkh-i al-i Saljūq* and other accounts give the year 723 (1323). Anonymous (ca. 765/1363), *Tārīkh-i al-i Saljūq dar anāʾilī* (Tehran: Ayināh-yi mīrāth, 1999), 132.

⁸³ Temürtaṣh proclaimed himself *shāh-i islām* or *ṣāhibqirān* and *mahdī*. Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī, *Zafarnāma von Hamdallāh Mustawfī und Šāhnāma von Abu’l-Qāsim Firdausī* (from the facsimile of the British Library, Or. 2833, Tehran: Markaz-i naṣr-i dānishgāhī Irān, 1377 [1999]), v. 2, 1460–61. On the revolt and the rebel, see Charles Melville, “Anatolia under the Mongols,” in Kate Fleet, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 1: *Byzantine to Turkey, 1071–1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 89–90; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 117–22.

⁸⁴ Aqṣarāʾī, *Musāmarat al-akhbār*, 3–6; Charles Melville, “The Early Persian Historiography of Anatolia,” in J. Pfeiffer and S. A. Quinn, eds., *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 45–46. Aqṣarāʾī’s history ends just prior to Temürtaṣh’s revolt and although the author does not explicitly refer to the revolt or to Temürtaṣh’s *mahdī*-claim, he does mention that Temürtaṣh was campaigning to reinforce public morality and was implementing anti-Christian policies, and adds that these exhibited “the signs of the manifestation of the *mahdī*”; *Musāmarat al-akhbār*, 310–27.

⁸⁵ Woods, *Aqquyunlu*, 4–8.

proof in the form of political and military success.⁸⁶ It was their reaffirmation of the ruler's personal and unmediated, cosmic or divine selection that made the *mujaddid*, *ṣāhibqirān*, and *mahdī* compelling choices for reconstructing, in Islamic terms, the Chinggisids' assertions about sacred kingship. The result was an entirely new Perso-Islamic-Mongol synthesis.

THEOLOGIES OF AUSPICIOUS KINGSHIP

The vizier Rashīd al-Dīn's theological and historical writings present the most extensive and ingenious Ilkhanid effort to forge a cohesive theory of Islamic sacral kingship to mediate the Chinggisids' unique affinity with heaven. The key work for his experimentation with a theologically and scripturally grounded model of sacral kingship is his treatise on "prophetology," *Book of the Sultan*. He begins it by situating the exceptional class of kings within a hierarchical system: "Although the rank of kings does not reach the rank of prophethood, nonetheless, in accordance with His order 'Obey Allāh, and obey the Messenger, and those in authority from among you (*ūlī al-amr minkum*)' [Qur'ān 4:59], He [God] gave the absolute kings (*muṭlaq pādishāhān*) a relation (*nisbat*) to the prophets and even to Himself." Yet, not all kings are made equal. Some rulers are Lords of Auspicious Conjunction (*ṣāhibqirān*), kings who are not only "just, perfect, and wise," but also "have a further, intimate relationship (*khuṣūsiyyat*) and affinity with God," and are, therefore, predestined to achieve greatness.⁸⁷

The vizier was the first to systemically employ *ṣāhibqirān* to label a new rank of sacral kingship. He uses the title to translate and redefine the Chinggisids' special good fortune (*suu*) and the idea of the fortunate (*suutu*) Chinggisid line.⁸⁸ For example, in his third polemical anti-Buddhist treatise, the vizier says he explained to the Sultan Öljeitü that there are individuals who have "perfect sacred souls (*nufūs-i kāmila muqaddasa*), like the souls of the prophets, the saints (*avliyā*) and the *ṣāhibqirān* kings, and such kings are like your [Öljeitü's] excellent ancestor Chinggis Khan and his descendants such as the King of Islam [Öljeitü], that the stars have no influence over their perfect souls."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Atwood, "Validation," 253.

⁸⁷ *Kitāb-i sultāniyya*, ff. 119v–20r.

⁸⁸ For examples of the term *suutu Chinggis Khan* or *suutu ijayurtan* ("those who have a fortunate ancestry"), see de Rachewiltz, "Some Remarks," 167, 171; Elizabetta Chiodo, *The Mongolian Manuscripts on Birch Bark from Xarboxyn Balgas in the Collection of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 252–54; Antoine Mostaert and Francis W. Cleaves, *Les Lettres de 1289 et 1305 des Ilkhanid Aryun et Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 22. In another treatise, the vizier theorizes the Chinggisid good fortune by establishing a hierarchical system of Neoplatonist, Persian, Muslim, and astrological terms for fortune. *Miftāh al-tafāsīr*, ed. Hāshim Rajabzāda (Tehran, 1391 [2013]), 239–49.

⁸⁹ The vizier further develops the idea that the good fortune of such *ṣāhibqirān* kings also protects their auspicious horoscopes (*tālī*) and their reigns from the influence of ominous stars (*nahs*). Rashīd al-Dīn, *As'ila va ajviba-yi rashīdī*, R. Sha'bānī, ed. (Islamabad: Markaz-i taḥqīqāt-i fārsī-yi Irān va Pākistān, 1993), v. 2, 23–25.

The vizier identifies here the Chinggisids as a dynasty of auspicious *ṣāhibqirāns* whose good fortune protects them from ominous celestial patterns. In another instance, from his historical masterpiece *The Compendium of Chronicles* (*Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*), the vizier claims that Öljeitü was a *ṣāhibqirān*, “the like of which had never been seen before, in no prior age (*qarnī*),” since his reign (*davr-i salṭanat*) was auspiciously attained without the shedding of blood or fierce opposition as had been the case with his predecessors.⁹⁰ As the vizier points out, the meaning of the *ṣāhibqirān* Öljeitü’s Mongolian name—“auspicious, blessed”—indicates his possession of this special good fortune.⁹¹ Öljeitü is not awarded the title of *ṣāhibqirān* for his unprecedented success in the battlefield or repute as world conqueror, as the title would be interpreted from the fifteenth century onward,⁹² but instead for his unopposed rise to the Ilkhanid throne due to his auspicious inheritance.

In fashioning Öljeitü’s sacred image, the vizier also draws on the title’s roots in pre-Islamic Iranian traditions. He writes that, as *ṣāhibqirān* kings, the Ilkhan Öljeitü and his ancestor Chinggis Khan join the glorious line of divinely aided (*mu’ayyad min ‘ind Allāh*) Iranian monarchs, such as Iskandar (Alexander the Great, 356–323 BC) and Anūshirvān (r. 531–579).⁹³ The association of Öljeitü with the figure of the famous, just Sasanian philosopher king Anūshirvān is, moreover, germane to Rashīd al-Dīn’s self-portrayal as the exemplary vizier. In several instances, the vizier-physician Rashīd al-Dīn compares himself to Anūshirvān’s mythic, wise, minister-physician Buzurgmīhr, who is presented as having been the only person able to answer Anūshirvān’s difficult questions and wise riddles, a claim that Rashīd al-Dīn often repeats regarding his own relationship with his Mongol patron.⁹⁴

The vizier’s most pressing concern in his introduction to *Book of the Sultan* is to define the relationship between Öljeitü’s rank of exceptional *ṣāhibqirān* kingship and the prophets. Rashīd al-Dīn enumerates in detail Öljeitü’s extraordinary feats (*karāmāt*), from his miraculous birth and his protection of the realm from drought and ominous celestial signs to his ability to read the minds of his men and predict their future actions. He compares the ruler’s early manifestations to the early childhood feats of the prophets. He argues

⁹⁰ Rashīd al-Dīn/Rawshan, v. 1, 5–6; Rashīd al-Dīn/Thackston, v. 1, 5. For Chinggis Khan, Ilkhan Hülegü, and Ghāzān as fortunate *ṣāhibqirāns*, see Rashīd al-Dīn/Rawshan, v. 1, 222, 287–90; v. 2, 1348, 1489; Rashīd al-Dīn/Thackston, v. 1, 116, 141–42, v. 3, 672, 736.

⁹¹ *Kitāb-i sulṭāniyya*, ff. 121r–23r. Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkisch und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1963), v. 1, 174.

⁹² Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 279–81.

⁹³ *Kitāb-i sulṭāniyya*, ff. 122r–23r.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 27v. For the claim that the vizier alone could answer the ruler’s questions, see Rashīd al-Dīn, *Kitāb al-as’ila wa’l-ajwiba al-rashīdiyya b’il-fārisiyya* (MS Ayasofya, no. 2180), f. 35r. Rashīd al-Dīn is also associated with Buzurgmīhr in Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī’s *Zafarnāma*; Kamola, 276–78.

that just as prophets and saints only gradually (*bi-tadrīj*) receive full revelation (*vaḥy*) and inspiration (*ilhām*), respectively, so too, Öljeitü's rank gradually and progressively grows, so that "insight (*firāsāt*) and inspiration reach his [the Ilkhan's] blessed mind." He defines the Ilkhan as a saintly king possessing both "the rank of sainthood (*vilāyat*, *ṣāḥib karāmāt*) and the rank of rulership (*ūlū al-amrī*)." ⁹⁵ In another treatise, in which Rashīd al-Dīn answers his patron's question about the unique properties of kings in comparison to those of the prophets, he explains that there exists a hierarchy of ranks within the category of absolute kings and sultans (*muṭlaq mulūk va-salāṭīn*). Some of these *ṣāḥibqirān* kings are held in such high regard that they receive "different kinds of inspirations (*ilhām*)," each according to his specific capacity and aptitude. ⁹⁶

The concept of divine inspiration (*ilhām*) plays a significant role in the vizier's fashioning of Öljeitü's special relationship with God as related to, but also distinct from, that of the prophets, who receive divine revelation (*vaḥy*). Among the divinely inspired traits that came to be attributed to the imperial founder Chinggis Khan were supra-mundane intelligence and an intuitive, divine knowledge attained through a personal communion with heaven that required no intermediacy of established clerics or scriptural experts. The transfer of heaven's favor from Chinggis Khan to his chosen successor hinged on the latter displaying the personification of those same attributes. Since in the Mongol worldview sedentary religious traditions were all "mutually transparent and compatible," ⁹⁷ they were also all subservient to the Chinggisids' heavenly supported rule and subject to their superior intellect. Chinggis Khan's heirs were, therefore, presented as untutored prodigies who, with no previous learning or training in the great scriptural traditions, could intuitively replicate them and also intervene and correct them. ⁹⁸

Rashīd al-Dīn was neither the first nor the last to struggle to address this aspect of Chinggisid authority. The idea that Chinggis Khan possessed a divinely inspired intellect and a direct communion with heaven, as well as his position as a law-maker ruler, naturally lent themselves to comparisons between Chinggis Khan and prophetic figures. ⁹⁹ Aside from the Damascene scholar Ibn Taymiya's (d. 1328) notorious lamentation that the Mongols

⁹⁵ *Kitāb-i sulṭāniyya*, ff. 135r–36v. Rashīd al-Dīn makes similar statements about Ghāzān in the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, though they are not nearly as elaborate as what he says about Öljeitü. Rashīd al-Dīn/Rawshan, v. 2, 1335–41; Rashīd al-Dīn/Thackston, v. 3, 664–69.

⁹⁶ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Kitāb al-as'ila wa'l-ajwiba* (MS Ayasofya, No. 2180), ff. 37r–37v.

⁹⁷ Assmann, *Moses*, 3.

⁹⁸ Atwood, "Explaining Rituals," 101.

⁹⁹ For instance, the Armenian priest Grigor Aknerc'i writes that Chinggis received from a gold-feathered, eagle-like angel "all the commandments of God in his own language." Zaroui Pogossian, "An 'Un-known and Unbridled People': Vardan Arewelc'i's Colophon on the Mongols," *Journal of the Society of Armenian Studies* 23 (2014): 7–48, 36–37.

venerated Chinggis Khan as a prophet despite his dubious origins,¹⁰⁰ several, mainly Arabic Mamluk accounts indicate the popularity of the notion that Chinggis Khan had an affinity with prophethood or was aspiring to become a prophet.¹⁰¹ In the Ilkhanate, the Jewish vizier Sa'd al-Dawla (d. 1291) allegedly claimed that the Öljeitü's father, the Buddhist Ilkhan Arghūn (r. 1284–1291), “had inherited prophethood from Chinggis Khan.” His intention seems to have been to use the notion of prophetic inheritance to support his patron's claim to his succession to Chinggis Khan's special connection to heaven, and thereby reaffirm his rightful succession to the throne of the Ilkhanate.¹⁰²

Another example is found in a history written by Muḥammad Shabānkāraī (d. 1337) in which he attributes Chinggis Khan's remarkable success as world conqueror to God's favor, arguing that had he been Muslim, “one could have said that he had a share in prophethood (*az nubuvvat bā bahra būdah ast*).” However, a few lines later the author adds, “One can say that government and kingship (*salṭanat va-mamlakat*) culminated (*khatm shud*, literally “sealed”) in [the Chinggisids], just as prophethood was sealed with Muḥammad.”¹⁰³ This implies that Chinggis Khan's near-prophetic status was due to the conqueror's close, unmediated relationship with God. However, like Rashīd al-Dīn, Shabānkāraī also distinguishes Muḥammad's prophethood from Chinggisid kingship. The Chinggisids held a distinct position of kingship that was parallel to, though not identical with, Muḥammad's special rank as the “Seal of Prophethood.” The idea that Chinggis Khan embodied the ultimate model of kingship and surpassed all other mythic kings with his intelligence, cunningness, justice, and natural disposition toward kingship was established early on by the Ilkhanid historian Juvaynī (d. 1283), whose history became the model that later Ilkhanid authors such as Rashīd al-Dīn strove to emulate.¹⁰⁴

Rashīd al-Dīn's theological writings tread a fine line between attributing to Öljeitü miraculous feats and divine gifts such as divine intuition, and clearly and decisively differentiating his patron's sacral position from that of the prophets. Thus, he argues that through his divine intellect and natural

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Taymīya, *Majmū' fatāwā shaykh al-islām Ahmad Ibn Taymīya*, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim, ed. (Riyadh/Mecca, 1381–86/1961–1967; repr. 1417/1995), v. 28, 521–22.

¹⁰¹ Thus, the Ayyubid historian Ibn Wāsil (d. 1298) linked Chinggis Khan's near-prophetic status amongst the Mongols to the conqueror's role as law-maker, and the Mamluk official al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333) relates a story about Chinggis Khan's attempt to achieve prophetic status like Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad through ascetic practices. Ibn Wāsil, *Mufarrij al-kurūb fi akhbār banī ayyūb* (Maṭba'at jāmi'at fu'ād al-awwal, 1953–1977), v. 1, 36–37; Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fi funūn al-adab* (Cairo: Maṭba'at dār al-kutub al-miṣriyya, 1985), v. 27, 207–8; Amitai, “Did Chinggis Khan Have a Jewish Teacher?” 691–705; Biran, *Chinggis Khan*, 114–21.

¹⁰² Vaṣṣāf, *Tajziyat al-amṣār*, 241.

¹⁰³ Muḥammad Shabānkāraī, *Majma' al-ansāb* (Tehran: Amīr kabīr, 1363 [1984]), 223–24.

¹⁰⁴ Juvaynī, *Ta'rīkh-i jahān gushā*, v. 1, 16–18; Juvaynī, *Genghis Khan*, v. 1, 23–25.

disposition the Mongol ruler was able, with no previous study or knowledge, to arrive at brilliant theological speculations unattainable by others. To further explain his patron's unique intellectual aptitude, he introduces the notion of "natural knowledge" (*ilm-i fitrī*), which he illustrates with the illiterate (*ummī*) Prophet Muḥammad, whose "gift" of illiteracy was a mark of his attainment of full human perfection (*muḥlaqan kamāl-i insānī*). He presents this as supporting evidence for the unlearned Öljeitü's remarkable, divinely inspired intellect and absolute kingship.¹⁰⁵

In his political theology, Rashīd al-Dīn builds on the influential twelfth-century Ash'arite theologian and exegetist Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī's (d. 1210) theory of the human perfection of the Prophet Muḥammad. Fakhr al-Dīn "reconciled ancient and Islamic philosophical ideas about the soul's perfection with Sunni ideas about prophetic guidance" to imagine a hierarchy of human souls, at the highest level of which are the perfect souls of the prophets.¹⁰⁶ Due to their intellectual and moral perfection, the prophets are endowed with a distinct aptitude to guide and perfect the souls of the imperfect, the rest of mankind.¹⁰⁷ Rashīd al-Dīn presents the Ilkhan Öljeitü as possessing a luminous and sacred soul (*nafs-i qudsī*), through which divine wisdom reaches his subjects and the masses. He notes, too, that the Ilkhan has the ability to perfect and guide others, the vizier Rashīd al-Dīn included, toward deeper understandings of theological and philosophical issues.¹⁰⁸

Rashīd al-Dīn reconstructs Öljeitü's exceptional kingship as a reflection of Muḥammad's extraordinary prophethood. He situates Öljeitü's supreme position within a hierarchical system of kingship that parallels Muḥammad's position in Fakhr al-Dīn's hierarchy of human intellectual and moral perfection. Bolstering Öljeitü's sacral kingship in theology, Rashīd al-Dīn promotes the image of his patron as the champion of reason, "the king of *kalām*,"¹⁰⁹ and as further proof that Öljeitü's insights are of divine origin he repeatedly states the proverb, "The words of kings are the kings of words" (*kalām al-mulūk mulūk al-kalām*).¹¹⁰

Rashīd al-Dīn expands Fakhr al-Dīn's hierarchal system of sacred souls by introducing a new rank of "philosopher-kings"—the auspicious *ṣāhibqirāns*—as a separate conduit of divine inspiration running parallel to prophethood and

¹⁰⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Bayān al-ḥaqā'iq*, Hāshim Rajabzādah, ed. (Tehran: Mīrāth maktūb, 1386 [2008]), 83–85; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Kitāb al-as'ila wa 'l-ajwiba* (MS Ayasofya, No. 2180), f. 35v.

¹⁰⁶ Tariq Jaffer, *Rāzī: Master of Qur'ānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 212; Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 109–53.

¹⁰⁷ Jaffer, *Rāzī*, 205ff.

¹⁰⁸ *Kitāb-i sulṭāniyya*, f. 134r.

¹⁰⁹ Rashīd al-Dīn accordingly conceives of Öljeitü's intellect as a source of human reason, and presents the Ilkhan as campaigning for reason in his court audiences and debates. *Bayān al-ḥaqā'iq*, 87.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83; Pfeiffer, "Confessional Ambiguity," 155.

sainthood. He thereby resolves in his political theology the incongruity between the Islamic dogma of the finality of prophethood with Muḥammad and the Mongols' understanding of the Chinggisids as blessed with a direct and continuous link to God. Muḥammad's prophethood, however, sets limits on the Chinggisid claim to divine access: Öljeitü's *unmediated* divine inspiration can only come second to Muḥammad's *mediated* divine revelation.¹¹¹ Öljeitü's new rank of Muslim kingship therefore comes at a hefty price for the Mongol ruler: it is premised on his recognition of the exceptionality and finality of Muḥammad's prophethood—a core tenet of the Muslim faith—and therefore his conceding to limits on his own divine sovereignty. Expanding the sacred hierarchies of Islam, Rashīd al-Dīn constrains and contains his Mongol patrons' immanentist impulses and claims to near-divinity, and in the process safeguards his own position, and more generally that of his fellow scriptural experts, as intermediaries between the Mongol rulers and the divine.

There are several striking affinities between the way Rashīd al-Dīn uses the title of *ṣāhibqirān*, Lord of Auspicious Conjunction, in his theological reworking of Mongol sacred kingship and how Buddhist monks employed the *cakravartin*, the model of the Buddhist universal emperor, to mediate and reinforce Chinggisid kingship.¹¹² Both titles denote a category of supra-moral universal cosmocrats, Buddha-like or Muḥammad-like kings, a status attained through the ruler's moral and intellectual self-perfection.¹¹³ Both the *cakravartin* and the *ṣāhibqirān* were also used to reinforce claims of continuity with the empire's founder Chinggis Khan.¹¹⁴ Moreover, just as the Buddhists anchored Chinggisid sacral kingship in a new moral order grounded in a transcendent heaven instead of the Mongols' fearsome and amoral *tenggeri*,¹¹⁵ so too does the Muslim vizier transpose Chinggisid sacral authority into an Islamic soteriological framework.¹¹⁶ These two similar assimilative approaches to the displacement of the Mongols' heaven—with Muḥammad or with the Dharma—reflect a wider, common, and recurring pattern at the Mongol courts. The Mongols were keen on religious traditions, institutions, and

¹¹¹ *Book of the Sultan* originates with Öljeitü's question to the religious scholars assembled in Gävbārī in March 1307 (Ramaḍān 706) of why revelation received through the mediation of angels, as in the case with the Prophet Muḥammad, is considered superior to unmediated revelation; that is, revelation received without intermediaries (e.g., in dreams). *Kitāb-i sulṭāniyya*, ff. 147v–50r.

¹¹² Franke, *From Tribal Chieftain*, 54–59. Elverskog also shows how under the sixteenth-century Mongols in Inner Asia “political authority came to be ritualized through parallel systems of legitimacy: God's blessing and the Dharma” (*Our Great Qing*, 54–62).

¹¹³ Liang Yongjia, “Stranger-Kingship and Cosmocracy; or, Sahllins in Southwest China,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 12, 3 (2011): 236–54.

¹¹⁴ For the *cakravartin*, see Phags-pa, *Prince Jiñ-Gim's Textbook*, 39–43.

¹¹⁵ Baumann, “By the Power,” 273–78.

¹¹⁶ This is best exhibited by the vizier's three refutations of reincarnation. I am currently working on a separate study of these treatises that also examines the extent to which Rashīd al-Dīn's political theology was influenced by his exposure to and competition with Buddhism.

symbolic forms that would not only award them prestige and spiritual power, but also support and enhance their own claims to legitimacy—their sacral kingship and its link to the dynastic founder. Buddhist and Muslim cultural brokers took full advantage of their patrons' expectations and needs. Rashīd al-Dīn's crafting of a new Islamic political theology, therefore, was part of a broader, cross-Eurasian process in which Chinggis Khan's heaven-sanctioned rule was being replaced with alternative, "local" forms of cosmocracy. The success of Buddhists and Muslims in converting the Mongol rulers, especially when compared to the failed proselytizing efforts of Christians, who were far less inclined or equipped to accommodate the supernatural pretensions of potential royal converts,¹¹⁷ can be attributed to the ability of Buddhism and Islam to harness, or fashion and fit, their own models of sacral kingship.¹¹⁸

CHINGGISID-MUSLIM SACRAL KINGSHIP AFTER THE MONGOLS

Thirteenth- through fourteenth-century Ilkhanid experiments with Mongol notions of sacral kingship provided later, early modern imperial courts and authors ample resources, including a formidable yet flexible repertoire of religio-political constructs, symbols, and titles. These structures were reinterpreted to fit with new philosophical, mystical, and occultist formulations of Islamic sovereignty, and express and reinforce the claims of new Turkic-Mongol patrons to sacral stature and spiritual and cosmic roles as Muslim emperors.

Fifteenth-century Timurid historians eagerly adopted the title of *ṣāhibqirān* to describe Temür's auspicious kingship and success as world conqueror. Elaborating the vision of a *ṣāhibqirān* kingship still further, Timurid secretaries, literati, intellectuals, and occult specialists used detailed horoscopes to attribute Temür's rise to specific heavenly conjunctions. They imbued the Timurid model of sacral kingship, which the figure of Temür posthumously came to personify, with additional messianic and millenarian significance.¹¹⁹ The title of *ṣāhibqirān* became so closely associated with Temür's sacral persona that, from the fifteenth century on, nearly any designation of a ruler as *ṣāhibqirān* would signify a claim to Temür's legacy of imperial rule in its various iterations.¹²⁰ This model of kingship would be further expanded and disseminated through a "dual astrological-lettrist ideological platform" that intermingled

¹¹⁷ Strathern, "Ruler Conversion," 38.

¹¹⁸ The commonalities between Buddhist and (early modern) Muslim models of sacral kingship have also been noted by Anne M. Blackburn, in "Buddhist Technologies of Statecraft and Millennial Moments," *History and Theory* 56, 1 (2017): 71–79.

¹¹⁹ Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 31–37; Mancini-Lander, *Memory*, 252–53; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 254–55. Only from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries do we find astrologically supported arguments for designating the ruler as *ṣāhibqirān*, which suggests that the title lacked a fixed meaning and was subject to ongoing experimentation.

¹²⁰ Melvin-Koushki, "Islamicate Empire."

occult sciences, astrological machinations, and Sufi paradigms to support claims that later Perso-Muslim courts and Turkic-Mongol rulers emulated and elaborated.¹²¹ The notion that the Chinggisids possessed divine intellect was also adopted and altered to support the claims of Timurid princes that they were spiritually perfected philosopher kings who possessed the capacity, like Rashīd al-Dīn's representation of Öljeitü, to directly contribute to the most pressing intellectual and scientific debates of their time.¹²²

The *mujaddid* tradition was also expanded, and ascribed new elaborate and creative explanations that legitimized the ruler's identification as the centennial religious renewer. A ruler's birth or ascension to the throne were made to accord with patterns of cyclical decline and renewal or with the career and life of the Prophet. Like the *ṣāhibqirān*, the *mujaddid* came to denote the king's predestined and direct divine appointment.¹²³ This repurposing of religious epithets and traditions and their transformation into potent vessels of royal and imperial power anchored the early modern fashioning of new royal selves in Islamic epistemological and hermeneutic frameworks. It firmly rooted an emergent "discursive realm" of Islamic kingship within Muḥammad's divine revelation and Islam's salvific program.¹²⁴

Scholars view the proliferation of *ṣāhibqirān*, *mujaddid*, and other religious titles such as the *mahdī*, the Sufi *qutb* (pole), and the caliph¹²⁵ among Timurid and subsequently Mughal, Safavid, and Ottoman court authors, as going hand in hand with the fifteenth-century disengagement from the lineage-based Chinggisid model of authority, if not as signifying the near-full desertion of the Mongol legacy and its replacement with an alternative, potent Muslim theory of sacral kingship.¹²⁶ However, the Timurid model of sovereignty

¹²¹ Melvin-Koushki, "Astrology, Lettrism, Geomancy: The Occult-Scientific Methods of Post-Mongol Islamicate Imperialism," *Medieval History Journal* 19, 1 (2016): 142–50.

¹²² Melvin-Koushki, "Islamicate Empire"; Binbaş, "Timurid Experimentation," 277–303. The idea that the Chinggisid khan had a direct conduit to God finds parallel in stories about Temür's communications with an angel (Manz, "Tamerlane," 118).

¹²³ For a sixteenth-century Ottoman example, see Luṭfi Pasha, *Tawārīkh-i āl-i 'Uthmān* (Istanbul: Maṭba'a-yi āmirah, 1341 [1925]), 6–12.

¹²⁴ On the self-fashioning of early modern kings, see Kathryn Babayan's discussion of Shah Thamasb's *Memoir* and his self-portrayal as "mystic-king," in *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 295–348. For the new "discursive realm" of Muslim kingship more generally, see Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*. I think that we need to reassess Moin's arguments that this new discursive realm was rooted less in a "scriptural Islam" and more in popular imaginations and devotional practice, and that, moreover, a clear-cut distinction between the two spheres should be drawn.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Yazdī's attempt to redefine the "caliphate" according to his new "theological absolutism." Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 251–86.

¹²⁶ See John Woods, "The Rise of Tīmūrid Historiography," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46, 2 (1987), 81–108, 104–5; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 253. Then again, in early modern Central Asia we find "a much closer, and often self-conscious, articulation of the mutual reinforcement, rather than opposition, of Islamic frameworks and Chinggisid prerogatives." Devin DeWeese, "Telling Women's Stories in 16th-Century Central Asia: A Book of Guidance in Chaghatay Turkic for a Royal Lady of the Bukharan Court," *Oriens* 43, 1–2 (2015): 154–222, 215.

was in large part a reiteration, a successful “rebranding” and elaboration, of the earlier Ilkhanid project of incorporating and adapting the Mongol claim to govern through heaven’s favor and Chinggis Khan’s supreme auspiciousness.¹²⁷ Like Shāhrukh’s portrayal as a Sharī’a-upholding king in his letter to the Ming emperor, the fifteenth-century sanctification of Temür expressed Timurid continuity with, not its break from, the Chinggisid legacy, even if Temür’s fame might overshadow Chinggis Khan’s reputation as the invincible world conqueror.

CONCLUSIONS

In *The Millennial Sovereign*, Azfar Moin argues that Timurid and subsequent Mughal and Safavid claims to a sacral mode of kingship were based, not on the imposition of a specific “ideology on the masses,” but rather on a ruler successfully “pouring himself” into preexisting “mythic molds ... shaped by collective imagination and social memory”: “the hero, the saint, and the messiah.”¹²⁸ Yet, in Ilkhanid Iran this was a reciprocal process: Mongol rulers were not simply poured into received Islamic and Iranian molds; instead, symbols and titles were selectively appropriated and transformed into potent vessels that could accommodate a vision of kingship that matched the Chinggisid version of a universal, heaven-derived rulership. The result of this Ilkhanid experimentation with Chinggisid sacral kingship was a subtle and intricate interplay between thaumaturgic and salvific claims, between accommodation of Mongol rulers’ immanentist impulses and their monotheistic containment and constraint. Even when they did not fully come to fruition, Ilkhanid experiments with Mongol-Muslim kingship, and especially Rashīd al-Dīn’s unique political theology, suggest that the overall trajectory of this court-based project was not so much divine kingship under an “Islamic guise” as it was a sacral mode of kingship fully set into Islamic scriptural, salvific, and transcendentalist frameworks. The Mongols desired to collect, annex, and assume local religious and political traditions and institutions that could express and enhance their own legitimizing claims. In pursuing this goal, they set in motion a process of assimilation that inevitably led to their own integration into the Perso-Islamic world. It also facilitated the formation of new political discourses that enabled divinized forms of kingship to inhabit the Islamic monotheistic world.

¹²⁷ This was plainly stated by Beatrice Manz nearly three decades ago, in “Tamerlane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty,” *Iranian Studies* 21, 1–2 (1988): 105–22, 117.

¹²⁸ Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 54.

Abstract: This article explores the fashioning of a new discursive realm of Islamic kingship in thirteenth–fourteenth-century Mongol-ruled Iran (the Ilkhanate). It examines how literati, historians, and theologians ingeniously experimented at the Ilkhanid court with Persian and Islamic concepts and titles to translate and elaborate their Mongol patrons' claims to govern through a unique affinity with heaven. The fusion of Mongol and Islamic elements formulated a new political vocabulary of auspicious, sacred, cosmic, and messianic rulership that Turco-Mongol Muslim courts, starting in the fifteenth century, extensively appropriated and expanded to construct new models of imperial authority. A comparison with Buddhist and Confucian assimilative approaches to the Mongol heaven-derived kingship points to a reciprocal process. Mongol rulers were not simply poured into preset Muslim and Persian molds; symbols and titles were selectively appropriated and refashioned into potent vessels that could convey a vision of Islamic kingship that addressed Chinggisid expectations. From their desire to collect and assume local religious and political traditions that could support and enhance their own legitimizing claims, the Mongols set in motion a process that led to their own integration into the Perso-Islamic world, and also facilitated the emergence of new political theologies that enabled models of divine kingship to inhabit the Islamic monotheistic world.

Key words: sacral kingship, Islam, messianism, Buddhism, Iran, Eurasia, Mongol Empire, Ilkhanate, China, Timurids, Ming, cultural brokerage