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Topic- 1.The Mongol Period

**Online Class Materials**

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# The Mongol Period

The Khwarazmian dynasty only lasted for a few decades, until the arrival of the Mongols. Genghis Khan had unified the Mongols, and under him the Mongol Empire quickly expanded in several directions. In 1218, it bordered Khwarezm. At that time, the Khwarazmian Empire was ruled by Ala ad-Din Muhammad (1200–1220). Muhammad, like Genghis, was intent on expanding his lands and had gained the submission of most of Iran. He declared himself shah and demanded formal recognition from the Abbasid caliph Al-Nasir. When the caliph rejected his claim, Ala ad-Din Muhammad proclaimed one of his nobles caliph and unsuccessfully tried to depose an-Nasir.

The Mongol invasion of Iran began in 1219, after two diplomatic missions to Khwarezm sent by Genghis Khan had been massacred. During 1220–21 Bukhara, Samarkand, Herat, Tus and Nishapur were razed, and the whole populations were slaughtered. The Khwarezm-Shah fled, to die on an island off the Caspian coast. During the invasion of Transoxiana in 1219, along with the main Mongol force, Genghis Khan used a Chinese specialist catapult unit in battle, they were used again in 1220 in Transoxania. The Chinese may have used the catapults to hurl gunpowder bombs, since they already had them by this time.

While Genghis Khan was conquering Transoxania and Persia, several Chinese who were familiar with gunpowder were serving in Genghis's army. "Whole regiments" entirely made out of Chinese were used by the Mongols to command bomb hurling trebuchets during the invasion of Iran. Historians have suggested that the Mongol invasion had brought Chinese gunpowder weapons to Central Asia. One of these was the huochong, a Chinese mortar. Books written around the area afterward depicted gunpowder weapons which resembled those of China.

## **Destruction under the Mongols**

Before his death in 1227, Genghis had reached western Azerbaijan, pillaging and burning cities along the way.

The Mongol invasion was disastrous to the Iranians. Although the Mongol invaders were eventually converted to Islam and accepted the culture of Iran, the Mongol destruction of the Islamic heartland marked a major change of direction for the region. Much of the six centuries of Islamic scholarship, culture, and infrastructure was destroyed as the invaders leveled cities, burned libraries, and replaced mosques with Buddhist temples.

The Mongols killed many Iranian civilians. Destruction of qanat irrigation systems destroyed the pattern of relatively continuous

settlement, producing numerous isolated oasis cities in a land where they had previously been rare. A large number of people, particularly males, were killed; between 1220 and 1258, 90% of the total population of Iran may have been killed as a result of mass extermination and famine.

### **Ilkhanate, 1256-1335**

After Genghis's death, Iran was ruled by several Mongol commanders. Genghis' grandson, Hulagu Khan, was tasked with the westward expansion of Mongol dominion. However, by time he ascended to power, the Mongol Empire had already dissolved, dividing into different factions. Arriving with an army, he established himself in the region and founded the Ilkhanate, a breakaway state of the Mongol Empire, which would rule Iran for the next eighty years and become Persianate in the process.

Hulagu Khan seized Baghdad in 1258 and put the last Abbasid caliph to death. The westward advance of his forces was stopped by the Mamelukes, however, at the Battle of Ain Jalut in Palestine in 1260. Hulagu's campaigns against the Muslims also enraged Berke, khan of the Golden Horde and a convert to Islam. Hulagu and Berke fought against each other, demonstrating the weakening unity of the Mongol empire.

The rule of Hulagu's great-grandson, Ghazan (1295–1304) saw the establishment of Islam as the state religion of the Ilkhanate. Ghazan and his famous Iranian vizier, Rashid al-Din, brought Iran a partial and brief economic revival. The Mongols lowered taxes for artisans, encouraged agriculture, rebuilt and extended irrigation works, and improved the safety of the trade routes. As a result, commerce increased dramatically.

Items from India, China, and Iran passed easily across the Asian steppes, and these contacts culturally enriched Iran. For example, Iranians developed a new style of painting based on a unique fusion of solid, two-dimensional Mesopotamian painting with the feathery, light brush strokes and other motifs characteristic of China. After Ghazan's nephew Abu Said died in 1335, however, the Ilkhanate lapsed into civil war and was divided between several petty dynasties – most prominently the Jalayirids, Muzaffarids, Sarbadars and Kartids.

The mid-14th-century Black Death killed about 30% of the country's population.

## **Sunnism and Shiism in Pre-Safavid Iran**

Prior to the rise of the Safavid Empire, Sunni Islam was the dominant religion, accounting for around 90% of the population at the time. According to Mortaza Motahhari the majority of Iranian scholars and masses remained Sunni until the time of the Safavids.<sup>[11]</sup> The domination of Sunnis did not mean Shia were rootless in Iran. The writers of The Four Books of Shia were Iranian, as well as many other great Shia scholars.

The domination of the Sunni creed during the first nine Islamic centuries characterized the religious history of Iran during this period. There were however some exceptions to this general domination which emerged in the form of the Zaydīs of Tabaristan (see Alid dynasties of northern Iran), the Buyids, the Kakuyids, the rule of Sultan Muhammad Khudabandah (r. Shawwal 703-Shawwal 716/1304-1316) and the Sarbedaran.

Apart from this domination there existed, firstly, throughout these nine centuries, Shia inclinations among many Sunnis of this land and, secondly, original Imami Shiism as well as Zaydī Shiism had prevalence in some parts of Iran. During this period, Shia in Iran were nourished from Kufah, Baghdad and later from Najaf and Hillah. Shiism was the dominant sect in Tabaristan, Qom, Kashan, Avaj and Sabzevar. In many other areas merged population of Shia and Sunni lived together.

During the 10th and 11th centuries, Fatimids sent Ismailis Da'i (missioners) to Iran as well as other Muslim lands. When Ismailis divided into two sects, Nizaris established their base in Iran. Hassan-i Sabbah conquered fortresses and captured Alamut in 1090 AD. Nizaris used this fortress until a Mongol raid in 1256.

After the Mongol raid and fall of the Abbasids, Sunni hierarchies faltered. Not only did they lose the caliphate but also the status of official madhhab. Their loss was the gain of Shia, whose center wasn't in Iran at that time. Several local Shia dynasties like Sarbadars were established during this time.

The main change occurred in the beginning of the 16th century, when Ismail I founded the Safavid dynasty and initiated a religious policy to recognize Shi'a Islam as the official religion of the Safavid Empire, and the fact that modern Iran remains an officially Shi'ite state is a direct result of Ismail's actions.