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SUFIS AND SHAMANS: SOME REMARKS ON THE ISLAMIZATION OF THE MONGOLS IN THE ILKHANATE*

BY

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Abstract

Some scholars have argued that sufis, Muslim mystics, played a decisive role in converting the Mongols in Iran to Islam in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, mainly because of the similarity between the extreme sufis (the dervishes) and the shamans of the traditional Mongol religion. This paper maintains that it was primarily some moderate, "institutional" sufis who were close to Mongol ruling circles and thus played a part in their conversion. This, however, had little to do with any resemblance between shamans and sufis, since it is suggested that Muslim mystics, even of the dervish variety, are basically dissimilar to the Inner Asian shamans. If, indeed, both kinds of sufis were successful in influencing the Mongols, it would appear that this is due to other reasons suggested at the end of the paper.

It has long been a commonplace among historians of the late medieval Islamic world that sufis played an instrumental role in the conversion of the Turco-Mongolian populations which entered the Muslim lands from Central Asia from the early eleventh century onward. One of the first proponents of this idea, and certainly the most influential, was the great Turkish historian Mehmed Fuad Köprülü. According to his view, shared by many other scholars, the similarity between the traditional Inner Asian shaman and the popular Muslim mystic made the latter the logical agent of the conversion of the Eurasian nomads, both before and after their migration into the Islamic world. The syncretic and non-orthodox nature of the sufis added to their appeal among the tribesmen, whose entrance into the new religion was thus eased.¹⁾

* Earlier versions of this paper were given at a seminar on the Ilkhanate held on 24 May 1997 at St. Antony's College, Oxford, and at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 15 July 1997. I am grateful to several participants in these two meetings who made important comments.

In this paper, the term "Iran" is used to describe the territory ruled by the Ilkhans from the mid-1250s until around 1335, comprising the modern states of Iran, Turkmenistan, Iraq (plus trans-Euphrates Syria) and Azerbaijan, as well as much of the Caucasus, Turkey and Afghanistan.

1) Köprülü 1929; Köprülü 1993, pp. 5, 11; Vryonis 1971, pp. 271-2, 366, 371; Ménage

In the following paper, I am not disputing this explanation in its broad lines, and certainly not with regard to the Seljuqs and their Turcoman followers in Iran and later in Anatolia, a subject which must be dealt with elsewhere.²⁾ I will, however, attempt to begin the reexamination of this approach for the period of Mongol domination in large swaths of the Middle East.³⁾ My tentative conclusion is that we do not necessarily have to abandon this idea of sufi mediation between Islam and the Mongol tribesmen of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. We do, however, have to refine this thesis with regard to the Mongol ruling elite, i.e. the Ilkhans themselves, the royal family and the senior officers. This elite seems on the whole to have adopted a reserved and at times antagonistic view towards the more popular, “extreme” sufis, the so-called dervishes. On the whole, the sufis who were welcomed into elite circles, and in fact played a vital role in the eventual conversion of the Ilkhans and their entourage, were those of a more moderate ilk, certainly acceptable to and part of the orthodox urban milieu, in which *inter alia* the majority of the senior civilian bureaucrats would have felt at home. The prominence of the moderate sufis might in itself lead to a questioning of the assumption that it was the similarity of sufis to shamans which propelled the Mongol elite towards the former, since if anything, it was the extreme sufis, the dervishes, who most resemble, so it would seem, the traditional Mongolian shaman. Even this last assumption, however, may be doubted, as will be seen in the following discussion.

At this point, it would be useful to clarify the distinction between the two groups referred to above, the extreme, anti-nomian sufis, often known as dervishes or *faqirs*, and the more moderate, “establishment” mystics. The former have recently been subjected to an excellent study by Ahmet Karamustafa,⁴⁾ who has outlined their main characteristics: renunciation of the normal world; deviance from social norms, including bizarre dress, general appearance (the so-called “four blows”) and behavior; and, extreme poverty. These mendicant dervishes were frequently accused, not without justification, of acting counter to the Shari‘a and harboring extreme theological and philosophical views. The

1979, pp. 59-67; Roux 1984, p. 44; Fletcher 1986, p. 44. Some scholars have given a more restricted version of this view, or expressed it with reservations: Cahen 1969, p. 139; Inalcik 1973, p. 186; Morgan 1988, p. 73.

2) This reexamination for the Turks in Anatolia, both in the Seljuq and Mongol period, has been initiated by Karamustafa 1994a, pp. 175-98; see also the comment by DeWeese 1996, p. 184, n. 11.

3) The matter has already been broached for the Chaghatayid Khanate by Paul 1990, pp. 313-9.

4) Karamustafa 1994b.

second class of mystics—what Karamustafa calls “institutional sufis”—is perhaps more difficult to typify, but it would not be amiss to suggest that their characteristics included obedience to the Shari‘a, a milder asceticism, and more interaction and intermingling with both the ‘*ulamā*’ and the political elite.⁵⁾ The distinction between these two groupings is not absolute; certainly there was no organized movement of all the dervishes or moderate sufis, and there were vast differences between the different groupings and shaykhs within both streams. Also the border between the two groups was not impermeable, and there was interaction between individuals from both camps.⁶⁾ Finally, there is perhaps also a tendency by later pious scholarship over time to sanitize some extreme figures, portraying them in a more “respectable way.”⁷⁾ Be that as it may, a rough distinction between these two forms of mystical Islam is a useful one, and on the whole is borne out by historical reality. It should be pointed out that two frequently encountered aspects of sufi life, the *samā’* (singing sessions)⁸⁾ and the perceived ability of holy men to perform miracles (*karāmāt*) are not unique to either stream of sufism.

*

Hülegü, so it would appear, entered the Muslim world without much knowledge or a clear attitude towards the mendicant dervishes. As late as 658/1260,⁹⁾ in the aftermath of campaigning in the Middle East and some four decades after the first Mongol invasion in the region, this prince—known already as *ilkhān*—was perplexed after meeting a group of Qalandars (*jam’ min al-fuqarā’ al-qalandariyya*), the famous dervish group, at the plain of Ḥarrān to the east of the Euphrates in what is today southeastern Turkey. According to the chronicle attributed to Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, the Ilkhan asked the Shī‘ī scholar Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, a trusted advisor, the identity of these people. Ṭūsī reportedly answered, “[They are] the surplus of this world,” which led to Hülegü having them executed. Only then did the Ilkhan ask the scholar the meaning of this comment. The latter replied: “People are divided into four classes, [those]

5) See the comments in Karamustafa 1994b, pp. 88-9.

6) Karamustafa 1994b, pp. 85-100; Karamustafa 1994a, pp. 196-7; see the comment by H. Algar in *Elr*, vol. 3, p. 755.

7) Ménage 1979, p. 61.

8) On the practice of *samā’*, *raqs* (dance) and *wajd* (ecstatic trance) by the Kubrawiyya, who are mentioned below, see DeWeese 1992, pp. 144-6.

9) From the context it would appear that this incident occurred after Hülegü left Syria in the late winter of 1260, and not earlier in the year (or late 1259), when he made his way from the Jazīra into the country.

involved in rulership, commerce, craftsmanship and agriculture, and those who are not [in these categories], they were a burden on [the people].”¹⁰) For a mainstream, albeit Shi‘ī, scholar, these dervishes were clearly beyond the pale. Hülegü, perhaps not knowing any better, took him at his word.

Less than a generation later, however, another Ilkhan had adopted a different outlook towards the dervishes. Tegüder Aḥmad (r. 1282-84), son of Hülegü and the first Mongol ruler in Iran to convert to Islam, seems to have been associated with such sufis from an early age. The Mamluk historian al-Dhahabī (d. 1348) reports in his *Ta’rikh al-islām* that Tegüder was exposed as a young child to members of the Aḥmadiyya-Rifā‘iyya, the so-called “howling dervishes,” which led to his conversion while still a boy.¹¹) There are several reasons to discount the veracity of this story, but it does hint at Tegüder’s contact with sufis of the more extreme nature and their influence over him.¹²) We can be more certain of the Ilkhan’s connection with another sufi personality, Kamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, a rather dubious figure clearly outside the sufi establishment and the *‘ulamā* at large. Mamluk sources report that Tegüder had fallen under his influence as a young man, some time before he had acceded the throne, and was converted to Islam by him.¹³) Some of these sources portray ‘Abd al-Raḥmān as an out and out charlatan and purveyor of legerdemain,¹⁴) while others are somewhat more charitable.¹⁵) The latter mention that he had studied with the *shaykh al-islām* Shaykh Muwaffiq al-Dīn al-Kayāshī, a famous mystic of Mosul who died in 680/1281-2, known for his Quranic commentaries and his ascetism, as well as the distance he maintained from the government of Badr al-Dīn Lu’lu’, ruler of Mosul.¹⁶) But while Muwaffiq al-Dīn’s credentials as a scholar and moderate sufi — albeit on the austere side — were impeccable, those of his former student left much to be desired from the point of view of institutional sufism. During the reign of Abagha, he had succeeded in ingratiating himself with part of the Mongol elite in Iran, particularly with the noble ladies (*khawātīn*), most important of these being the mother of young Tegüder. This was not achieved through displays of spiritual powers or devotional intensity, let alone learning in the Islamic sciences, but rather in his success in performing tricks. The sources describe at some length how these

10) Ibn al-Fuwaṭī 1932-3, p. 432 (on the matter of authorship see the comment in art. “Ibn al-Fuwaṭī,” *EF*²). This passage is cited and discussed in Mazzaoui 1972, p. 42 n. 3.

11) Al-Dhahabī MS., fol. 23b-24a.

12) Amitai-Preiss forthcoming.

13) Ibn al-Dawādārī 1971, p. 263; Ibn al-Furāt 1942, p. 278.

14) Al-Dhahabī MS., fol. 25b; Yūnīnī, 1954-61, vol. 4, p. 215.

15) Ibn al-Dawādārī 1971, pp. 262-3; Ibn al-Furāt 1942, p. 278.

16) Mustawfī 1961, p. 702; al-Ṣafadī 1931-, vol. 8, pp. 291-2.

deceptions were engineered. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s rise in influence may also have been due to his powerful personality. His being a sufi, however, seems to have little to do with his success.

‘Abd al-Raḥmān does not really seem to fit into either of the categories of sufis expounded above. He was surely neither a member of the sufi establishment nor a typical mendicant, anti-nomian dervish. However, an associate of his clearly fits into the latter class. This was Īshān or Ḥasan Mengli, who according to Rashīd al-Dīn, had been a disciple of one Bābī Ya‘qūb from Arrān. The historian reports that Tegüder would spend his time in Īshān Mengli’s tent, which was pitched near that of the Ilkhan, taking part in *samā‘* sessions, to the detriment of state affairs. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was called *bābā* (Turkish: father) by the Ilkhan, while Īshān Mengli was referred to as *qarindāsh* (Turkish: Brother).¹⁷⁾ The latter’s teacher, Bābī Ya‘qūb (or perhaps Ya‘qūbiyyān) appears to have been associated with the Qalandariyya. So, at least, he was accused by the mid-fourteenth century writer Tawakkuli ibn al-Bazzāz.¹⁸⁾ In any event, in the spring of 683/1284, Tegüder, on the eve of a confrontation with Arghun, paid a visit to this Bābī Ya‘qūb and his followers.¹⁹⁾ With regard to Īshān Mengli, Ibn al-Bazzāz claims that he used hashish together with the Ilkhan. While this last statement may be taken with some reservation, it is clear that Tegüder had associated himself with a decidedly “low” sufi milieu, to which ‘Abd al-Raḥmān did little to improve. The disdainful attitude of his father, Hūlegü, to such devotees, had thus been shunted aside.

Whether this was a wise political move is another matter. It probably played a part, as Jean Aubin has recently suggested, in helping to turn many of the Muslim bureaucrats against Tegüder, in spite of his being a Muslim.²⁰⁾ Īshān Mengli’s attempts to discredit the moderate sufi Shaykh Zāhid also appear not to have endeared him to the religious establishment.²¹⁾ One wonders, although it must be admitted that this is highly speculative, whether the Ilkhan’s close association with sufis of a decidedly non-institutional mien also contributed in some way to the growing alienation between him and much of the Mongol elite, who may have remained more faithful to Hūlegü’s view on the matter. In any event, the idyll of the dervishes was to be of short order. The two personalities just now discussed did not long survive the fall of their devotee and

17) Rashīd al-Dīn 1941, p. 47.

18) Ibn al-Bazzāz 1994, p. 217; Karamustafa 1994b, p. 57; Sohrweide 1965, pp. 103-4; Aubin 1995, pp. 41-2.

19) Rashīd al-Dīn 1941, p. 53.

20) Aubin 1995, p. 32.

21) Ibn al-Bazzāz 1994, pp. 217-9; Aubin 1991, pp. 39-53; Sohrweide 1965, pp. 103-104.

patron. ‘Abd al-Rahmān, having been sent on a diplomatic mission to the Mamluk Sultan Qalawun, died—more-or-less under house arrest—soon after being informed of the news of Tegüder’s death.²²⁾ Īshān Mengli, who remained at home, was executed after Arghun’s accession to the throne by being cooked in boiling water.²³⁾ This was one trial by fire that a dervish did not survive.

During his struggle against Tegüder, there are reports in sources of various provenance that Arghun had criticized the Ilkhan’s adherence to Islam and the policies inspired by this attachment. This, so it would seem, provided an effective rallying cry to those elements in the Mongol elite dissatisfied with Tegüder’s personality and actions.²⁴⁾ Once in power, however, Arghun returned to the earlier practice of even-handed treatment to the different religious communities found in the Ilkhanate. Arghun may have gained power on an “anti-Islamic” platform, and he dis-established it as a state religion, but he had nothing against Islam *per se* and certainly did not persecute Muslims as a group. In fact, during his struggle with his uncle, he took advantage of his passing through Bisām, to visit the tomb of the famous ninth century mystic Abū Yazīd,²⁵⁾ and there ask for divine assistance for victory.²⁶⁾ This was, it would seem, an attempt by Arghun to take out a little “celestial insurance,” to use David Morgan’s apt term.²⁷⁾ It should come as no surprise then, that the sufis, at least of moderate leaning, appear to have been welcome at the court during Arghun’s reign (1284-91). The Kubrawī shaykh ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1336), scion to a family of high officials in the Ilkhanate and himself in official service early in the reign of Arghun before embarking on the sufi path, was an involuntary guest at his court. It was during this forced stay, some eighty days long, that he engaged in the famous debate in which, so it is reported, he readily defeated the Buddhist monks.²⁸⁾

It was from the ranks of the Kubrawiyya that came the personality who properly initiated Ghazan, Arghun’s son and eventual successor (r. 1295-1304) into the Muslim faith. This was Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Ḥammūya, the son of Sa’d al-Dīn Muḥammad, one of disciples of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā. The exact course

22) Holt 1986, pp. 130-1.

23) Ibn al-Bazzāz 1994, p. 219.

24) Amitai-Preiss forthcoming.

25) On him, see *EP*², vol. 1, pp. 162-163.

26) Rashīd al-Dīn 1941, p. 53.

27) Morgan 1986, p. 44.

28) Mustawfi 1961, pp. 675-676; F. Meier, “‘Alā’ al-Dawla al-Simnānī,” *EP*², vol. 1, pp. 162-163; J. van Ess, “‘Alā’ al-Dawla Semnānī,” *Elr*, vol. 1, p. 775; DeWeese 1994, p. 173; cf. Bausani 1968, p. 545. Simnānī, it should be noted, had grown up at the *ordu* (royal camp) and thus had known Arghun since adolescence; Aubin 1995, p. 82.

of this conversion has been analyzed in detail by Charles Melville, and need not detain us now. Mention should be made, however, that while Ṣadr al-Dīn gave the future Ilkhan instruction and performed the actual conversion, the latter was convinced to adopt Islam by his lieutenant Nawrūz, and his motivation appears to have been an amalgam of conviction and political reasons.²⁹⁾ It is interesting to note that there is no record of any significant spiritual contact before hand between Ghazan and sufis of any kind.

Once becoming a Muslim, however, the situation is seen to change. Another sufi personality was found in the entourage of this Ilkhan: Sa'd al-Dīn Quṭluq/Quṭluḡ Khwājah Khālidi Qazwīnī, who according to Mustawfī was responsible for converting Ghazan "and most of the Mongols."³⁰⁾ Charles Melville,³¹⁾ as well as the translators of the facsimile edition of Mustawfī's work, were surely correct to cast doubt on this claim.³²⁾ But such an avowal could only be made if this Quṭluq Khwājah was indeed part of Ghazan's entourage. As Melville writes: "... it is not impossible that Sa'd al-Dīn [Quṭluq Khwājah] did indeed at some later stage attend and instruct Ghāzān."³³⁾ The above mentioned Shaykh Zāhid Gilānī, who is portrayed as an opponent of the Qalandars, was also the recipient of a visit by this Ilkhan.³⁴⁾ Another possible sufi, Nizām al-Dīn Maḥmūd, seemingly of the moderate variety, is called *shaykh al-shuyūkh* and was found among the group of scholars and high bureaucrats who accompanied Ghazan to Syria in 1300, what one Mamluk historian called *a'yān dawlat al-malik ghāzān*.³⁵⁾ This personality may be identified with the Maḥmūd Dinawarī, who Rashid al-Dīn refers to as *shaykh al-mashāyikh*, and was active in the events leading up to Ghazan's successful challenge of Baidu's rule, and afterwards.³⁶⁾

This is not to say that Ghazan's relations with sufis were trouble-free. In

29) Melville 1990, pp. 159-177.

30) Mustawfī 1961, p. 675.

31) Melville 1990, p. 161.

32) Mustawfī 1913, vol. 2, p. 217, n. 1.

33) See also the comments in Aubin 1995, p. 60.

34) Rashid al-Dīn 1940, p. 100; Aubin 1991, pp. 41-48. A fantastic account of Ghazan's relations with Shaykh Zāhid, as told in the mid-fourteenth century *Ghāzān-nāmah*, is the subject of a paper given by Charles Melville, at the Ilkhanate conference given mentioned in the initial note of this paper.

35) Ibn al-Dawādārī 1960, p. 32. This list of personalities, without the description given above, is found in the anonymous Mamluk chronicle edited by Zetterstéen 1919, p. 76, who also mentions this Nizām al-Dīn several times during the Mongol occupation of Damascus; at least once he was requested to intercede with the Mongols on behalf of the local population (pp. 69-70). Zetterstéen, in the index (p. 307), gives him the entry: Nizām al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. 'Alī al-Shibānī, but it is unclear what the basis for this identification was.

36) Rashid al-Dīn 1940, *passim*; Aubin 1995, pp. 47-48.

703/1303, word came to him of a conspiracy of sufi shaykhs and others to depose and replace him with his cousin, Ala Fireng, son of the Ilkhan Geikhatu (r. 1291-5). The conspirators, led by one Pīr Ya'qūb Bāghbānī, were quickly rounded up, and conveniently branded as Mazdikites before they were executed.³⁷⁾ Whether they really held such extreme views may be doubted. Likewise it may be questioned whether these followers of Pīr Ya'qūb were actually dervishes, as suggested by K. Jahn.³⁸⁾ On the contrary, the relationship of at least two of this group with the former wazīr Ṣadr al-Dīn Khālīdī Zanjānī hints at the sufis among them as being of the moderate type. In any event, it is clear that mystics may have been respected by the recently converted Ilkhan, but not if they meddled in politics, particularly if they plotted against him.

Ghazan himself appears to have dabbled in sufism. According to the testimony of Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Ḥammūya, recorded in several Mamluk sources, Ghazan was given a woolen coat by him, indicating that perhaps the Ilkhan was initiated as a sufi.³⁹⁾ Whether Ghazan understood the full implications of this particular act remains an open question. In any event, in 1303, towards the end of his life, Ghazan isolated himself, ostensibly for forty days, from his court and usual comforts, and attended by only a few individuals.⁴⁰⁾ The use of the term *chihilla* (> the more common *chilla*)⁴¹⁾ seems to indicate that a sufi-like retreat of devotion was planned. J.A. Boyle, however, has commented that "motives may well have been medical rather than spiritual for it is clear that the Il-khan's infirmity—whatever its nature—was no longer a mere inflammation of the eyes."⁴²⁾ All this being said, the enthusiasm that some modern scholars have expressed regarding Ghazan's devotion to sufism may be overstated,⁴³⁾ reading more into the sources than is warranted, and ignoring the Ilkhan's other intellectual pursuits, let alone his interest in Mongol tradition and institutions.⁴⁴⁾

Dervishes of a more popular ilk were also found in the vicinity of the Ilkhan. Rashid al-Din mentions Ghazan's solicitude for a group of unknown dervishes in 703/1303 in Iraq.⁴⁵⁾ Of more significance is a shaykh of Turkish origin, Baraq

37) Rashid al-Din 1940, pp. 152-154; Bausani 1968, pp. 548-549.

38) In the summary of Rashid al-Din 1940, p. xliii.

39) Melville 1990, pp. 163, 168.

40) Rashid al-Din 1940, p. 152. There is no basis for the passage in Howorth, 1876-1927, vol. 3, p. 480, for the following rendition of this passage: "[Ghazan] was waited upon by dervishes. His residence was enclosed by a palisade."

41) On this retreat, known as *khalwa* in Arabic, see *EI*², vol. 2, p. 55; vol. 4, pp. 990-991.

42) Boyle 1968, vol. 5, p. 395.

43) Cf. Murtaḍawī 1991, pp. 322-346; Lewisohn 1995, pp. 81-84.

44) See Amitai-Preiss 1996b, pp. 25-34; Amitai-Preiss 1996a, pp. 1-10.

45) Rashid al-Din 1940, pp. 151-2. On p. 209, mention is made of Ghazan's building of

Bābā, born near Tokat in eastern Anatolia, and a follower of Sari Saltūq, the “semi-legendary warrior saint who propagated Islam in the Crimea and Dobruja.”⁴⁶) Baraq arrived at the Ilkhanid court during the reign of Ghazan, obtaining there some prominence, at least according to the Mamluk sources. In 706/1306, during the reign of Öljeitü (1304-16), Baraq and a group of some 100 followers crossed the Euphrates into Syria. They were well received in Damascus, in spite of the scandal that their appearance and behavior caused, and were permitted to visit Jerusalem. By the order of the Mamluk Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalawun (or rather the order issued in his name), however, Baraq’s progress to Egypt was halted, and he and his entourage were sent back across the Euphrates. Not long afterwards, the shaykh met his end in Gilān, while taking part in Mongol efforts to bring that recalcitrant region under control.⁴⁷) Perhaps our estimation of Baraq’s importance during Ghazan’s reign should be tempered by the total lack of any allusion to him in Rashīd al-Dīn’s *Jāmi‘ al-tawārikh*. On the other hand, he does enjoy some mention in Qāshānī’s *Ta’rikh-i ūljāytū*, although only in connection with his ill-fated participation in the campaign to Gilān. His tomb was eventually placed near the mausoleum of Öljeitü, again an indication of his relationship with this later Ilkhan.⁴⁸) There is, however, no getting around his greater prominence in the Mamluk sources, reflecting perhaps the image that Baraq had succeeded in projecting in Syria, and indicating less real authority and influence among the Mongols than he claimed.

It would seem then that the post-conversion Ilkhans adopted a more positive attitude towards mendicant dervishes than the founder of their dynasty. Yet, while Baraq Bābā may have enjoyed some prominence, or was at least tolerated during Ghazan’s reign, it appears that those sufis with real influence, religious and perhaps otherwise, with the Ilkhan were of a more moderate, generally institutional nature. During the early years of Öljeitü’s reign, Baraq’s position may have been more pronounced, although the exact extent of his influence is hard to gauge. In any event, it does not seem to have adversely affected the role of more temperate mystics, such as Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabilī, the disciple of Shaykh Zāhid Ibrāhīm Gilānī, who enjoyed some eminence during the reign of Öljeitü’s son and successor, Abū Sa‘īd (r. 1316-35).⁴⁹) Mustawfī, writing just a

a *khānqāh* sometime during his reign, as part of the many Islamic buildings which he established; the exact character of its inhabitants are not specified.

46) H. Algar, “Barāq Bābā,” *Elr*, vol. 3, p. 754.

47) H. Algar, “Barāq Bābā,” *Elr*, vol. 3, pp. 754-575; B. Lewis, “Barāq Bābā,” *EP*, 1:1031-2; Karamustafa 1994b, pp. 62-63; Karamustafa 1994a, pp. 193-196; Melville forthcoming.

48) Qāshānī 1969, p. 70, cited in Melville forthcoming, n. 49; Blair 1986, p. 142.

49) See the short and general comments in Mazzaoui 1972, pp. 52-54; Minorsky 1954, pp. 515-527.

few years after this Ilkhan's death (and thus probably not out of overtly pious anachronism) states that the Mongols were greatly attached to Ṣafī al-Dīn, who restrained many of them from molesting the people.⁵⁰) Other moderate sufis are also found to have enjoyed some prominence. After some initial tension, Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī was reconciled to Öljeitü (at least until he became a Shī'ī), who built an academy in Sultāniyya in his honor.⁵¹) This Ilkhan also reconstructed the tomb of the above-mentioned ninth century mystic Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī, and supported Nūr al-Dīn Isfarāyīnī, another important mystic.⁵²) Simnānī was also well thought of by the Sunni Abū Sa'īd, who is recorded to have visited him.⁵³) A detailed discussion of the role of both anti-nomian and institutional sufis in the post-Ghazan period, when the matter of conversion to Islam was already settled for the Ilkhans, goes beyond the confines of this present study. We might mention, however, that the sufis were only a portion of the entourage of religious figures who surrounded Öljeitü and Abū Sa'īd, and influenced them. In fact, it appears that it was theologians, such as the Shī'ī al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, who set the tone of the religious life in the former's reign.⁵⁴)

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Michel Mazzaoui has written: "The whole question of Ṣūfism or mysticism during the Mongol period has not been studied in full, and our knowledge about folk Islam during this period and afterwards is very sketchy."⁵⁵) I must admit that the matter is still very murky, but perhaps my short survey, which surely has not touched upon every sufi shaykh with whom the Mongol elite had connections, permits the following tentative conclusions:

The dervishes of an anti-nomian bent began their contacts with the Ilkhans on a decidedly negative note. With the Islamization of the Ilkhans, their position appears to have improved, but on the whole and in the long run, they enjoyed a secondary status compared to more moderate sufis. Not only had the latter a place of some honor among the pagan Ilkhans, they were instrumental in the conversion of the Ilkhans and their continual instruction and guidance in the new faith.

To what can we attribute this hierarchy of sufis? The Ilkhans may well have

50) Mustawfī 1961, p. 675, cited in Lambton 1988, p. 322.

51) J. Van Ess, in *Elr*, vol. 1, p. 775.

52) Lewisohn 1995, pp. 84, 111; cf. J. van Ess, in *Elr*, vol. 1, p. 775.

53) Ṣafādī 1931-, vol. 7, p. 357; J. van Ess, in *Elr*, vol. 1, p. 775.

54) Schmidtke 1991, pp. 23-32.

55) Mazzaoui 1972, p. 42.

been influenced by their various Muslim advisors and officials, drawn mainly from the urban administrative and scholarly milieu. These notables, of whom Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's example was given above, seem to have looked upon the dervishes with distaste. On the other hand, some of the prominent moderate, institutional sufis, even those of a pronounced ascetic taste, were very much a part of the world of the senior '*ulamā*' and bureaucrats, and the border between these two sectors was neither fixed or impermeable. Second, they may well have remembered the role of popular dervish figures in fermenting rebellion against authority. An earlier generation of Mongol leaders had to deal with the movement of a charismatic Muslim ascetic figure claiming magical power, Maḥmūd Tārābī, in the area of Bukhara in 636/1238-9,⁵⁶) and the memory of Bābā Ishāq's rebellion in Anatolia in 1241 against the Seljuqs may have played a role.⁵⁷) It might be suggested that the anti-nomian dervishes themselves shunned patronage and contact with authority. Maybe there were those with such principles, and therefore we do not know about them, but in the examples adduced above, the dervishes in question do not seem to have held such scruples.

All of the above applies to the relationship between Mongol rulers in Iran and the various types of mystics in their realm. The information regarding wider circles of Mongols, let alone the average tribesman, is spotty at best. There is evidence, albeit not much, of the attraction of non-institutional sufis for the Mongols at large. The Mamluk historian al-Nuwayrī (d. 1332) writes that among the reasons that the Mongol elite rose up against Tegüder Aḥmad was that his mentor Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān, had drawn the "sons of the Mongols" (*awlād al-mughul*) towards him.⁵⁸) Whether this inclination was of a spiritual nature is left unsaid in the source. Other Mamluk writers, describing more-or-less the same period, describe an Oirat Mongol who converted to Islam, took the name 'Alī, became a *faqīr* (i.e. dervish), and with a group of followers from among the "sons of the Mongols" (*awlād al-mughul*) made his way across the Euphrates to Syria. There, for reasons which are not completely clear (for unacceptable religious practices or moral turpitude?), he and some of his brothers were eventually arrested.⁵⁹) Both of these pieces of evidence derive from the time of Tegüder Aḥmad, when anti-nomian dervishes were at the apogee of their influence. Whether these *awlād al-mughul* were from the elite

56) Juwaynī 1912-37, vol. 1, pp. 85-90 (= Juwaynī 1958, vol. 1, pp. 109-15). See also Bausani 1968, p. 548.

57) Cahen 1968, pp. 136-137.

58) Al-Nuwayrī 1985, p. 402.

59) Baybars al-Manṣūrī MS. fol. 129b; Ibn al-Furāt 1942, p. 250; al-Maqrizī, 1934-73, vol. 1, pp. 708-709.

or the common tribesmen is unspecified. Regarding other periods, we are still in the dark regarding the success of the sufis in converting the rank-and-file Mongols.

In the above discussion only the role of the sufis in the conversion to Islam of the Ilkhans has been mentioned. Other factors, such as the role of key members of the Mongol elite who had already converted (Nawrūz being the most prominent), political or other practical reasons, let alone the whole question of acculturation and assimilation to a wider culture (perhaps via the Turks) have been ignored and will have to wait analysis elsewhere.⁶⁰) The focus here has been on sufis, and it has been seen that generally those with long-term and lasting influence were of an institutional, moderate variety, heirs to a centuries-long tradition which was still vigorously developing in this period and would continue to do so long after the Mongols had disappeared as a political force or distinctive ethnic group in the Middle East.

There is little reason to connect the sufi personalities which we have encountered here with traditional Mongol shamanism or shamans. The statement that the Mongols, at least their rulers and elites, were attracted to sufism because of the sufis' similarity to shamans is an assumption which has never been proven. In fact, there is nothing in sources of which I am aware that remotely justifies such a position. One might ask, where is the one statement by a source of any provenance which could remotely be construed to support the attraction of the Mongol rulers to sufis, moderate or otherwise, because of their shamanistic past? Even if we were to accept such a postulation, how do we account for the fact that the Mongol elite was attracted mainly to the moderate sufis rather to the anti-nomian variety, who—one might *a priori* suggest—had a greater resemblance to the shamans.

A closer inspection of the matter reveals that perhaps shamans and sufis, certainly of the institutional kind, have less in common than is often thought. The shaman in traditional Mongol religion seeks—according to Walther Heissig—“ecstasy and the ability to combat harmful powers and forces and to look into the future in order to interpret and prophesy, through the help of spirits which have been made subservient.”⁶¹) He or she has little if any interest in what would be considered spiritual or transcendental in both the monotheistic and Indian religions, but rather was basically involved “in preventive and healing

60) I am now working on what will hopefully be a comprehensive study of the whole question of the Mongols' Islamization, of which this present paper will be a part.

61) Heissig 1980, p. 6; see also Boyle 1972, p. 184. A detailed discussion of the Mongolian shaman and traditional Inner Asian religion is beyond the bounds of the present paper.

magic.”⁶²) This is not the place to present a discussion, even a summary one, of sufism, but one might mention gnosis (*maʿrifa*), the “annihilation in God” (*fanāʾ*) and “the unity with Being” (*ittiḥād* or *waḥdat al-wujūd*), sufi concepts which are completely foreign to the inner Asian shamanistic milieu. These and other goals of the sufi are achieved by various means, some of which have a certain resemblance with the technique of the shaman, i.e. communicating with the “otherworld” through ecstasy and trance (the so-called “shaman’s ride”) but these are mainly external aspects and have nothing to do with the essence of either the shaman’s or sufi’s vocation. In addition, the Mongolian shamans of that time (and even of today) practice neither ascetism nor self-abuse, the former found among a broad range of sufis, and the latter common among certain extreme dervish groups.

But what of the anti-nomian dervishes? Does not their bizarre dress and behavior, let alone at least some of their devotional practices, reveal a similarity and even relationship to Mongolian shamans? One piece of evidence, and as far as I can tell the only one, which has been adduced to show the alleged influence of shamanism on sufis is an interesting passage from the *al-ʿIbar fī khabar man ghabar* by al-Dhahabī, who writes that among the latter day followers of Aḥmad al-Rifāʿī (d. 578/1182), “devilish practices had come into use since the Mongols took Iraq, such as entering fire, riding lions and playing with animals. Neither the Shaykh [al-Rifāʿī] nor his righteous [first] followers had known these . . .”⁶³)

There are, however, a number of reasons why this statement cannot serve as a basis for the attribution of a strong shamanistic connection between this particular dervish group (let alone dervishes as a whole) and shamanism. It should first be noted that al-Dhahabī does not explicitly state that the Rifāʿīs took these allegedly new practices from the Mongols, but only that they were introduced sometime after the Mongols conquered Iraq (A.D. 1258). The exact origin of these innovations is not given, although it was perhaps Dhahabī’s intention to imply that it was somehow connected to the Mongols. More importantly, as D.S. Margoliouth has noted, the wild practises to which the Rifāʿiyya were ascribed were no invention of al-Rifāʿī, “since the like are recorded by al-Tanūkhī in the

62) Heissig 1980, p. 12. This is not to suggest that traditional Mongolian (and Inner Asian) religion was without any interest beyond the practical and mundane. It certainly had cosmological concerns and attributed great importance in matters of origins and ancestors (see DeWeese 1994, pp. 27-35). These interests would appear to be somewhat different than those found in sufism.

63) Al-Dhahabī 1985, vol. 3, p. 75, who refers to the Rifāʿiyya as Aḥmadiyya. This passage, cited by the sixteenth century writer Ibn al-ʿImād 1931-32, vol. 4, p. 260, is seen as definite proof of a shaman-sufi connection by Köprülü 1929, p. 12; Vryonis 1971, p. 366.

fourth century A.H. [= ca. tenth century A.D.]”⁶⁴) Margoliouth, unfortunately, did not provide a reference for this information, but it seems in this author’s *al-Faraj ba’d al-shidda*, there is a story of riding a lion.⁶⁵) This information is not connected with sufis *per se*, but it does show that this motif, at least, was found in Islamic society centuries before the Mongols showed up on the scene. There also appears a story about a man seeking refuge in an oven, but this was unlit, and also not tied to sufism.⁶⁶) However, the motif of the trial by fire, and specifically being tossed into an oven, is an ancient one in the Near East, going back at least to the Book of Daniel (ch. 3).⁶⁷)

Some extreme dervish practices, including bizarre dress and self-inflicted pain (although not necessarily the ones just described) apparently precede the Mongol invasion of eastern Iran (1219) and certainly that of Iraq (1258).⁶⁸) So while we cannot rule out the possibility of some Mongol influence, among which might be something specifically shamanistic, on the Rifā’iyya, it seems no less likely that these activities were an independent, “Islamic” development, perhaps derived from the practices of other dervish groups. It might well be that al-Dhahabi’s attribution, albeit by implication, to the Mongols, is nothing more than an attempt to blame outlandish practices among Muslims (in his eyes certainly) on the once infidel Mongols, with their plethora of strange customs. In this connection, we might mention the attempt by the fifteenth century Egypt jurist and historian, al-Maqrīzī, to blame the adoption of the Mongol *yasa* (law code) for the infringement by the Mamluk *ḥujjāb* (chamberlains) on the authority of the qadis in Cairo, an accusation which has been shown to have little basis in fact.⁶⁹)

The Mongol shamans, usually referred to as *qāms* (a Turkish word) in the Arabic and Persian sources, are a fairly non-descript lot in Mongol Iran. In the post-Hülegü period, groups of them appear on occasion, but invariably without names.⁷⁰) In fact, as far as I know, not one individual shaman is ever named

64) Art. “Aḥmad al-Rifā’ī,” *EF*², 8:524 (this is basically the same article which appeared in *EF*¹). C.E. Bosworth, the author of the subsequent entry in *EF*², on the Rifā’iyya order, leaves open the question when these practises, which made the order famous, came about.

65) Tanūkhī 1978, vol. 4, pp. 139-147. I am grateful to Dr. Julia Ashtiany of St. Andrew’s University for her advice on this material.

66) Tanūkhī 1978, vol. 3, pp. 62-63; this passage is translated in Ashtiany 1991, pp. 108-128.

67) See DeWeese 1994, pp. 243-267, for a discussion of the oven motif in pre-Islamic, Islamic and Inner Asian contexts. It is worth mentioning the taming of a lion story is also found in Daniel (ch. 6), a book which reflects a heavy “Eastern,” i.e. Iranian, influence.

68) Karamustafa 1994b, pp. 39-46.

69) See Ayalon 1971-73, *passim*.

70) See, for example, Amitai-Preiss 1991, pp. 355-356; Rashid al-Dīn 1941, p. 46.

in the Ilkhanid state; the term *beki*, often found in the sources for the early Mongol empire as a title of shamans together with a name, is no longer in use.⁷¹⁾ This is in stark contrast to the many prominent sufi shaykhs, moderate and extreme, known in the sources, some of whom have been mentioned above.

There is no evidence that the shamans were expelled from the Ilkhanate after Ghazan's conversion, as were the *bakhshis*, the Buddhist holy men, who were eventually ordered out when it became clear that they were still practicing their religion while having ostensibly become Muslims.⁷²⁾ The shamans, on the other hand, are found voicing their opinions in Öljeitü's reign,⁷³⁾ and may have lingered in Iran for some time, although their eventual fate is unknown. Other post-conversion vestiges of the pre-Islamic shamanism also remained for a period.⁷⁴⁾

Mention has been made of certain similarities between particular aspects of the sufi experience and that of the shamans, such as the use of the trance (although sufis and shamans employed it for different goals). Some sufis were known and venerated for their wonder-working (*karāmāt*), as were shamans. And sufis might have been consulted for mundane matters, and not only those relating to transcendental affairs. It is possible, then, that the partial resemblance between shamans and sufis *may* have contributed to some degree for the success of some of the latter in converting and instructing the Ilkhans and their entourage, and their popularity in wider circles. This, it must be added, is an assumption that has yet to be substantiated. No source known to me offers it as an explanation. Other reasons may also be suggested. Perhaps the success of individual sufis in converting at least some of the Mongols, elite and otherwise, may be due to their attraction which they held for large sections of Islamic society, i.e. a homey, down-to-earth version of Islam, unencumbered with legalistic and theological niceties, and at times willing to turn a blind eye to elements of the traditional, pre-Islamic religion. It is also possible that the sufis, some of whom at least would be found in the country, would come into contact with the Mongol tribesman, and thus could influence them, both in conversion and afterwards.⁷⁵⁾

Thus, from what we have seen above, there is little proof to support the contention of Köprülü and others that the dervishes were an amalgam of shamanism and Islam, if not shamans in sufi clothes. If the shamans put on a Muslim

71) Roux 1984, p 71; Doerfer 1963-75, vol. 1, pp. 235-238; Paul 1990, p. 314.

72) Rashīd al-Dīn 1940, p. 188.

73) Boyle 1968, p. 402; also Boyle 1972, p. 184, who points out that these were surely shamans, although the source refers to them as *bakhshis*.

74) Amitai-Preiss 1996a, pp. 1-10, esp. 9.

75) This last reason was suggested by Prof. A.K.S. Lambton at the Ilkhanate seminar in which this paper was first given.

garb to please the princes, as Köprülü's claims,⁷⁶⁾ there is no evidence of it in the sources which I have examined. Perhaps, then, the time has come to eschew phrases such as "shamanistic" and "crypto-shamanistic"⁷⁷⁾ when discussing the sufis and dervishes of the Mongol period, such as Shaykh Baraq. This dervish may have been un-orthodox and even weird in the eyes of the 'ulamā' and others of the civil and political establishment, but it seems that he reflected a long developing strand of anti-nomian sufism,⁷⁸⁾ and the connection to Inner Asia shamanism is tenuous at best.

This study appears to confirm the measured statement by the anthropologist A.M. Khazanov, with regard to conversion of Inner Asian peoples to a monotheistic religion: "Spiritual middlemen and mediators, very often of sedentary origin, functionally somehow replaced their pagan counterparts. . . ."⁷⁹⁾ In other words, charismatic personalities of one type are replaced by those of another. In the case of the Mongols, it now can be questioned whether this replacement was also a result of some type of inherent similarity between the two groups of charismatic persons. There is no evidence that loyalty and later nostalgia for shamanism influenced the Ilkhans' choice of sufis, even before they converted. As we have seen, the Ilkhans generally preferred moderate sufis, those mystics whose practice least resembled the holy men of the traditional Mongol religion. Elements of traditional Mongol religion, usually known under the rubric of shamanism, continued to be practiced for decades in the environs of the newly converted Ilkhans and their entourage.⁸⁰⁾ But this seems to be separate from the relationship between Ghazan and his successors with their sufi teachers and associates.

Postscript

After this article went to press, I learnt of additional relevant information which was published in an important article by Daniella Talmon-Heller, "Arabic Sources on Muslim Villagers under Frankish Rule," in Alan V. Murray ed., *From Clermont to Jerusalem: The Crusades and Crusader Societies 1095-1500 (International Medieval Researches, 3)* (Brussels: Brepols, 1998), p. 109. There evidence is cited from another work by al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām*

76) Köprülü 1929, p. 13.

77) For the latter, see H. Algar, "Barāq Bābā," *Elr*, vol. 3, p. 754.

78) See Karamustafa 1994a, *passim*.

79) Khazanov 1994, p. 14.

80) On the assimilation of elements from traditional Inner Asian religion during the process of Islamization in the Mongol khanates of Central Asia and their successor groupings and states, see DeWeese 1994, p. 516 and *passim*.

al-nubalā', Sh. al-Arna'ūt and M.N. al-'Arqasūsī eds. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1988), vol. 20, p. 383, of a Syrian sufi shaykh, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Muqaddasī (d. ca. 548/1153-4), who is reported to have ridden a lion; supposedly the Franks said of him: "Lions and Tigers are like tame animals for Abū al-Ḥusayn."

Here, at least, al-Dhahabī believes that the lion-riding shaykhs made their appearance before the arrival of the Mongols in the Islamic world in the early thirteenth century. This weakens al-Dhahabī's own claim, cited above, that only in the aftermath of the Mongol conquest of Iraq did the Aḥmadiyya/Rifā'iyya adopt *inter alia* lion-riding. The topos is found in connection to sufis long before the Mongols made their appearance in the area.

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