

“Mongol Iranzamin” or Mongols’ Taste of Iran

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For centuries, history has been utilized as a tool for political propaganda. However, in the twentieth century, it transformed from a tool of political propaganda into a potent weapon for political manipulation. The authorities have used and manipulated history to achieve their political goals and personal ambitions. Falsified historical accounts have allowed political power to control the collective memory of the people and rally them around their cause when necessary. Contemporary political power in Iran continues to use historical narratives to achieve similar objectives. In an article entitled *Long Live Mongol Iranzamin*, published on the website of the Baku Research Institute, [Munkhnaran Bayarlkhagva](#) attempts to criticize the falsification of history by modern Iranian historiography. [1] [Bayarlkhagva](#) discusses how Iranian history has been heavily Persianized, which leads to the exclusion of all non-Persian groups from the historical narrative. The focus is on the Mongol era of Iran, and the author argues that comparing Genghis Khan to Hitler and the Mongol invasion to genocide is a distortion of history. [Bayarlkhagva](#) points to changes in political and social life during Mongol rule to support this argument. However, it’s unfortunate that the same author who accuses Iranian historians of falsifying history also resorts to falsification to support his claims.

In analyzing the political processes, [Bayarlkhagva](#) makes two main arguments. Firstly, he argues that it is unscientific to attribute the destruction of cities and massacres of people only to the Mongol conquests as Iran was politically fragmented and destroyed by internal strife on the eve of the Mongol invasions. Secondly, after centuries of political turmoil the Mongolian rulers that conquered Iran brought political stability to the territory and united the country

under a single empire. At the start of the 13th century, Iran lacked political stability and unified authority, making it defenseless against the Mongol raids led by Genghis Khan. However, the invasions did not bring stability to the region. The first invasion was particularly devastating for Iran.[\[2\]](#)

The second invasion of Iran was led by Hulagu Khan, 30 years after the devastating attacks. Following the destruction of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258, Hulagu Khan stayed in Iran and established his capital in Tabriz. It is believed that Hulagu Khan chose Tabriz as his capital and stayed in the area due to his defeat by Baybars at the battle of Ain Jalut (1260), which prevented him from realizing his personal ambitions.[\[3\]](#)

Hulagu Khan was engaged in multiple conflicts during his reign. He fought against the Mamluks of Egypt, as well as against his relative Berke in a long-lasting civil war. Political ambitions and religious conflicts fueled the enmity between the two. Berke Khan, the leader of the Golden Horde, had converted to Islam, while Hulagu Khan was ardent enemy of Islam. In the state established by Hulagu Khan, power struggles and civil wars persisted for several years. The demise of rulers was often attributed to their political opponents, resulting in their assassination. Therefore, the Mongol invasions did not bring about political stability in Iranian territory. Every war and military conflict during that time required large financial resources, which led to the plundering of the population in various ways. This means that the rule of the Mongols intensified social and political upheaval. In fact, three-quarters of Iran's population was killed during the period of the Mongol invasions, and vast cultivated areas were transformed into pastures.[\[4\]](#) Unfortunately, the sources presented by [Bayarlkhagva](#) as confirming his position were taken out of context.

In the territories under Mongol rule, the population faced double legislation with the law of Genghis Khan and the laws of Islam both being enforced. This resulted in significant pressure on the people. Additionally, internal conflicts

within the Mongol community, along with invasions and civil wars, severely impacted the Iranian economy and led to a financial crisis. The steps taken to resolve this crisis even led at one point to a massacre of Jews. In 1291 Arghun Khan's favorite vizier, Jewish physician Sa'ad al-Dawla, his relatives, and proteges were executed and persecution of Jews started in the Ilkhanid Empire. Local nobles were the closest advisers to Mongol judges and state governors, as was the case during the reigns of Arghun Khan Sa'ad al-Dawla and Ghazan Khan Rashid al-Din supervised all state affairs and the treasury during their reigns.

Hulagu Khan's successors gradually moved away from Buddhism as the ruling class began to adopt the behavior and sensibilities of the local nobility and mixed marriages accelerated the assimilation of the Mongols with the Persians and Turks in the northern provinces of Iran. This process further expanded during the rule of Ghazan Khan (1295-1304). After the ruling class converted to Islam, persecution of representatives of other religions resumed. Religious and ethnic tolerance during the early period of the Ilkhanid state did not apply to the whole period of the Mongol era as [Bayarlkhagva](#) claims. Ethnic and religious liberality of the Mongol Khans continued until they embraced Islam. [\[5\]](#)

After consolidating his power, Ghazan Khan refused to submit to Beijing. He also stopped mentioning the name of the Great Khan in official documents and coins. Instead, he started calling himself Khan instead of Il-khan. These actions suggest that the Ilkhanid state became independent and did not submit to the authority of the Great Khan. These facts contradict the author's assertion that Ghazan Khan shared the moral and cultural values of his predecessors. Hulagu Khan was a Buddhist who invaded Iran, while Ghazan Khan, the ruler of the Ilkhanid state, grew up a Christian but converted to Islam to advance his political ambitions. Although they both belonged to the same dynasty, their social and cultural relationship with the leaders of the Great Mongol Empire was limited

because it was solely based on their common ancestry.[\[6\]](#)

Bayarlkhagva makes two other erroneous statements about the social processes that occurred during the Mongol invasions. Firstly, unlike the first invasion, the second invasion was less destructive and more merciful towards scientists, traders, representatives of the bureaucracy, and religious minorities. Secondly, after the second invasion, the Mongol rulers provided strong support for the development of science and culture, allocating funds for the restoration and construction of historical monuments and mosques. I won't delve into the number of casualties, or the extent of damage caused during the first and second Mongol invasions of Iran as that is not the focus of the article. Contrary to Bayarlkhagya's argument, historical sources indicate that both invasions were equally aggressive and there was no significant difference between them in terms of their impact.[\[7\]](#)

During the second invasion of the Mongols, those who were spared paid a hefty ransom. At the early stage of the invasion, the Mongols exhibited tolerance towards ethnic and religious minorities, such as Christians, Jews, and Armenians, who had faced severe discrimination under the Caliphate. The Mongols applied these minorities' knowledge and expertise in their administrative system. Among these minorities were the Persian Nasir ad-Din al-Tusi from Tus, a city destroyed by the Mongols during their first campaign, as well as the Persian Dhia ul-Din al-Juwayni from Nishapur, which was also destroyed by the Mongols. Additionally, there were Jews in the group, such as Said ad-Dawla and Rashid ad-Din Hamadani. After conquering a vast territory, the Mongols required a competent bureaucracy and nomenklatura to govern these territories. Although skilled in warfare, they lacked experience in administration. To overcome this, the Mongols employed Chinese and Uyghur specialists to train their officials since they didn't have their own schools for this purpose.[\[8\]](#)

During their rule, the Mongols gathered skilled and educated

individuals of various ethnicities within the territories they occupied and brought them to the central cities of their empire. However, this was not enough to govern such a vast empire. To manage the territories they conquered, the Mongols relied on local bureaucrats who were familiar with the language and culture of the people they governed. In Iran, there were several well-known bureaucratic families, including the Al-Juwayni family, who held their positions through hereditary means. Under the Mongols individuals appointed to high government positions attempted to allocate key positions in the regions to their relatives and fellow tribesmen. As a result, Iran was effectively governed by the local nobility of Iran.

[Bayarlkhagva](#) correctly observes that the Mongols offered support for the advancement of science and culture in Iran after their second conquest. However, it took over a century for science and culture in Iran to gain support from Mongol rulers. However, Ghazan Khan who finally provided this support, had already distanced himself from Mongol traditions and culture.^[9] Ghazan Khan, during his nine-year reign, declared that Mongols could not practice Buddhism, changed their nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary one, and required them to adapt to the lifestyle of the occupied territories.^[10]

The Ilkhanid state was the period of Mongol rule in Iran that lasted for a little over 70 years. This era was characterized by frequent invasions and civil wars, which resulted in social upheavals in Iranian society. Out of all the rulers of Ilkhanid, only the reign of Ghazan Khan can be viewed as a success for Iran. The prevailing notion in modern Iranian historiography that regards the Mongolian period as a dark period can be explained by the Mongols' prioritization of their own nomadic needs over those of sedentary people, an act which was deeply destructive of Iranians' traditional way of life. However, the Mongols eventually abandoned these attempts due to various socio-political reasons and assimilated instead. They adopted the language, religion, and spiritual

values of the local population. In the process, the local bureaucracy governing Iran showcased remarkable merits that cannot be denied.

It is unfortunate that [Bayarlkhagva](#)'s article on the Mongol era of Iran has only highlighted the positive aspects and ignored its darker sides. To support his claims, it would be more appropriate to examine the inaccuracies in the studies of modern Iranian historiography that focus on the Mongol period. However, instead of doing so, [Bayarlkhagva](#) took historical detours, selectively used sources, and attributed many achievements to the Mongols that were not theirs, leading to incorrect conclusions.

[Long Live Mongol Iranzamin](#)

Notes and references:

[1] Munkhnaran Bayarlkhagva, "Long Live Mongol Iranzamin," *Baku Research Institute*, 2023, <https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/en/long-live-mongol-iranzamin/>

[2] Saunders J.J. *The History of the Mongol Conquests*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001; Morgan, D. O. "The Mongol Armies in Persia". *Der Islam*. 1979, 56 (1): 81–96; David O. Morgan. *The Mongols*. Oxford and Walden: Backwell, 2007; Timothy May. *The Mongol Conquests in World History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2011.

[3] Halperin, Charles J. "The Kipchak Connection: The Ilkhans, the Mamluks and Ayn Jalut". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*. 2000, 63 (2): 229–245; May, Timothy. *The Mongols outside Mongolia. The Mongol Empire*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018; Reuven Amitai-Preiss. *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-İlkhānīd*

War. 1260-1281. Cambridge University Press, 1995; Reuven Amitai-Preiss. In the Aftermath of 'Ayn Jâlût: The Beginnings of the Malmûk-Îlkhânid Cold War". Al-Masaq (10): 1-21. 1990.

[4] Steven R. Ward. *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces*. Georgetown University Press, 2009.

[5] Hope M. Power, *Politics, and Tradition in the Mongol Empire and the Îlkhânate of Iran*. Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2016

[6] Foltz R. *Religions of the Silk Road*, Palgrave Macmillan: 2010.

[7] May T. *The Mongol Art of War: Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Military System*. Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2007.

[8] Thomas T. Allsen, "The Yüan Dynasty and the Uighurs of Turfan in the 13th Century," in *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983.

[9] *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353*. Edited by Linda Komaroff, Stefano Carboni and the METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002.

[10] Hope M. Power, *politics, and tradition in the Mongol Empire and the Ilkhanate of Iran*. Oxford University Press, 2016; Charles Melville, "Padshah-i Islam: the conversion of Sultan Mahmud Ghazan Khan. Cambridge: Middle East Center, 1990.