

## **The Relationship between Sufis and Inner Asian Ruling Elites**

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Sufism flourished during the thirteenth century in the Middle East and Central Asia. The Mongol conquests have been given much credit, at least for the spread of Sufism, since Sufis immigrated—as did many others—to safer regions to avoid the destruction of war. Afterward, a variety of relationships developed between Sufis and Inner Asian elites during the period of the Mongol Empire, in the successor khanates, and eventually in other Inner Asian kingdoms. Still, Sufism and its relationship with Inner Asia, particularly among the Inner Asian elites, remains a largely neglected area of study. This article examines the historiography of the field and synthesizes what is known of the relationship between Sufis and Inner Asian elites. By examining Sufism and its position and attitudes from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, one can see a metamorphosis of this relationship from one of hostility to one of mutual benefit.

### **The Need to Examine the Early Sociopolitical Role of Sufis**

Sufism, a mystical and emotive form of Islam, spread and flourished during the thirteenth century in the Middle East and Central Asia. The Mongol conquests have been given much credit, at least for the spread of Sufism, since Sufis immigrated—as did members of many other groups others—to safer regions to avoid the destruction of war. Later, as the Mongols of the Il-Khanate of Persia (1260–1335); the Jochid Khanate (1260–1480), known popularly as the Golden Horde; and the Chaghatayid Khanate (1260–1360) converted to Islam, Sufis played a major role in the conversion of the Mongols. Later still, Sufis played a central role in the affairs of the successors of the Mongols, not only in matters of religion but also in politics. Yet, beyond the scope of religion, what exactly was that role? And how have scholars approached it? How did the Sufis fit into the political structure of a nomadic and often alien court, government, and social structure, one that was tolerant of all religions but, at the same time, aggressively punished any religion that threatened its power? Although the issue of conversion of Inner Asian elites cannot be avoided in this discussion, the focus will be on these other important questions.

## The Period of Mongol Invasions

Although initial contact between Inner Asians and Sufis—called thus because they tended to wear coarse woolen robes known as *ṣūfs*—occurred prior to the 1219–60 Mongol invasions of the Middle East and Central Asia, it is more appropriate to begin this study with the 1219–20 Mongol invasion of the Khwārazm Empire. Prior to this invasion, a different milieu existed. The Saljūqs and other Oghuz Turkic groups were Muslim. Islam spread among them fairly quickly; and due to intermittent warfare and trade between Dar al-Islam (the “Abode of Islam,” or Islamic world) and Dar al-Harb (the “Abode of War,” or non-Islamic world) across the Syr Darya River, the Turks who migrated into the Middle East were not unfamiliar with Islam. Furthermore, the Mongol invasions were catastrophic in the sense that, to much of the sedentary world, the Mongols were an enigma. No one knew much about them prior to the invasions; it was difficult to understand their tolerance of all religions; and, in the Islamic and Christian worlds, the Mongols were seen a punishment from heaven. Thus, not only did the Mongol invasions manifest a real political and economic instability but they also created a true spiritual crisis for many Muslims and Christians. For the purpose of this study, however, the discussion will be directed only to the impact upon Muslims.

According to Potter (1994, 77), the Mongol invasions of Iran were crucial for Iran’s religious identity—and perhaps for the identity of the Islamic world in general. Tensions between Sunni and Shī‘a subsided; and the differences in the interpretation of the *Sharī‘a* (Islamic Law) among the four Sunni schools of law, which sometimes led to large-scale riots, became less important. Although Sunnis rejoiced over the destruction of the ‘Ismā’īlīs in Northern Iran, the end of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258 meant that supreme political authority—more importantly, legitimization—came no longer from the caliph but through one’s descent from Chinggis Khan (ca. 1162–1227).

Although Ibn Taymīyya (1263–1328) and perhaps others accused the ‘Ismā’īlīs of encouraging the Mongols to invade, rumors existed that Caliph al-Nāṣir (r. 1180–1225) requested Chinggis Khan’s aid against the Khwārazmshāh, Muḥammad II. Interestingly enough, the ‘Ismā’īlīs informed the Mongols where the last Khwārazmshāh was located (ibn al-Athir 1979, 495). Despite accusations from both sides, many Sufis, particularly the Kubrāvīyya order, saw the Mongol invasions of Khwārazm and, subsequently, the rest of the Middle East to be the result of ninety years of misrule by non-Muslims—and for misconduct to Sufis. According to Sufis, the execution of a prominent Sufi, Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī, by Muḥammad II in 1219 was the true cause of the Mongol invasions (Lewisohn 1992, 30). The result of the invasions, they believed, would cause the meaningless forms of

Islam to disappear. In addition, they thought that the invasions were punishment for insincere believers, like Muḥammad Khwārazmshāh, who, in the eyes of some, were essentially infidels or worse (Lewisohn 1995, 57–58).

What the Sufis did not realize is that the Mongols did not come to correct the injustices toward “the friends of God,” as the Sufis were often called, but to avenge the massacre of a Mongol-sponsored trade caravan. Furthermore, all Muslims in the region witnessed the sheer ferocity and power of the Mongol armies—and that no one was safe from their wrath.

Indeed, the Mongol invasions drained the populations of Mawarannahr, Khurāsān, and much of Iran. Not only were thousands killed through war (as well as during the hardships that followed) but thousands also migrated to safer regions. Many of the refugees were Sufis. The kingdoms of Fars, Azerbaijan, Rūm, and Luristan were all safe havens for the refugees. Even after Mongol armies reached these areas, they submitted rather quickly and thus were spared the wanton devastation that Khurāsān experienced. Most of the Sufis, it should be noted, went to Rūm or Fars, as their respective rulers offered the most patronage and protection (Jamil 1986, 21).

From the beginning of his reign, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Kayqubād (r. 1219–37), Saljūq sultan of Rūm, provided support and shelter for scholars and Sufis. Among the most famous who took refuge in Konya, the Saljūq capital, was Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn (1207–73). Indeed it is from his long stay in Rūm that Jalāl al-Dīn is best remembered today as Rūmī, the famous Sufi poet and mystic. He fled from Balkh in the Khwārazmian Empire to Konya in 1219, the same year that the Mongol invasions began.

Saljūq state officials also patronized Sufi refugees. Not all of the Sufis who arrived in Rūm fled from the Mongols. Indeed, Abū Bakr of Shīrāz, located in present-day Iran, and many Sufis—such as Sufi poet Shaykh Maṣalah al-Dīn Sa’dī (d. 1291), who had been banished by the Salghūrid ruler of Shīrāz, Abū Bakr ibn Sa’d (d. 1260)—took refuge in Rūm. Still, the largest influx occurred in the 1220s when the Mongols arrived in Fars (Jamil 1986, 25). Thus, under such conditions and patronage, Sufism flourished in some regions. One scholar, K. M. Jamil, saw the period of Mongol rule prior to the Il-Khanate (1260–1335) as “a great time for the propagation of Sufi ethics” (1986, 31). Indeed, in these areas Islam transformed from an emphasis on legalism and outward piety to inward contemplation and spiritual growth. This transformation supported the rise of a popular religion often frowned upon by more formal Muslim jurists.

Many Sufis remained in Rūm and Delhi until the 1250s, when a new wave of Mongol conquests brought a stable civilian administration. Thus Shaykh Maṣalah al-Dīn Sa’dī, Shīrāz’s most famous son, finally returned to his hometown in 1256. From the safety of their refuge, the Sufis proclaimed that God punished only nations that deserved it, particularly during the 1220s as the Mongols attacked only the former possessions of the Khwā-

razmshah in Central Asia and Northwestern Iran. Fars submitted in 1231 without a fight to the Mongol general, Chormaqan Noyan (d. 1241). Rūm remained independent from Mongol domination until 1243, when Chormaqan's successor, Baiju (fl. 1230–60), defeated the Saljūqs at Köse Dagħ. Thus, during this period, the Sufis could delight in the misfortunes of the Khwārazmshah and his family, who were relentlessly pursued by the Mongols.

Rumors also existed that the success of Chinggis Khan was due to his “humble supplications before God” (Jamil 1986, 33–34). This rumor should not be misconstrued as praise for the Mongols but, rather, that even an infidel who demonstrated humility before God could work miracles. Overall, the Sufis thought that the Mongols would perish due to hubris. The Mongols' reliance on the merits of their own deeds would lead to their fall, according to Sufi philosophers. Goodness and greatness were granted only through Allah's favor. All of the Mongols' accomplishments were for naught unless they understood this, for Allah could revoke his favor at any moment (Jamil 1986, 33–35).

While the Sufis consoled themselves with this belief, the Mongols coincidentally held a similar view. (K. M. Jamil, who is perhaps the only scholar actually to examine the reaction of the Sufis to the Mongol invasions, overlooked non-Islamic sources in his evaluation of events.) Although it is doubtful if the Sufis knew of the Mongols' belief, the Mongols admitted that their accomplishments were only with the favor of heaven. In a letter to Pope Innocent IV (ca. 1195–1254), Güyük Khan wrote:

These words of thine I have also not understood. The eternal God has slain and annihilated these lands and peoples, because they have neither adhered to Chingis Khan, nor to the Khagan, both of whom have been sent to make known God's command, nor to the command of God. Like thy words, they also were impudent, they were proud and they slew our messenger–emissaries. How could anybody seize or kill by his own power contrary to the command of God? . . . From the rising of the sun to its setting, all the lands have been made subject to me. Who could do this contrary to the command of God? (Dawson 1955, 85–86)

### *The Work of K. M. Jamil*

As mentioned earlier, several scholars believe that the era of the pre-1260 Mongol invasions was a critical time not only for Islam but also for the growth of Sufism. Yet, of all of the periods in which Central Asia and the Middle East were under Inner Asian rule, this period has received the least attention. On its own, K. M. Jamil's *Sufis in the Mongol Era* (1986) is woefully inadequate to address this period, since half of the volume is devoted to Sufi doctrine and not to Sufi political, diplomatic, or social actions. It is fortunate, however, that Jamil's endeavors are in print. He examines how Sufis flourished by obtaining the patronage of the rulers of, for example,

Rūm and Fars. Thus, while Jamil has not pursued Sufi interaction with the Mongols, he has done much to further our understanding of the impact of the Mongols on Sufism on the fringes of the Mongol Empire and in reaction to the Mongols. He also investigates why Islam and Sufism not only survived but also grew during the period of Mongol invasions, a time wherein contemporaries themselves believed that the end of Islam might be drawing near. Jamil's conclusion is that in this time of temporal and spiritual crises, having faith and solace in religion was the only avenue of condolence open to Muslims (1986, 49). The emotive spirituality of Sufism, as found in the Sufi brotherhoods and Sufi-derived popular religion, provided more tangible comfort and expression than the staid Sunni practice.

Although arguing with his assessment of the situation is difficult, Jamil's methodology is somewhat flawed. Because he did not consult non-Islamic sources, he missed insights as to how another religion viewed the Mongols as the harbingers of doom. Of course, Jamil may simply have not wanted to use a comparative approach; yet his bias against the Mongols is nevertheless apparent. Jamil deplored the death of Sufis at the hands of the Mongols. In his writing, it is unclear whether he felt that the Mongols intentionally targeted the Sufis or whether they were just often victims of unfortunate circumstances (1986, 27–29). Although the Mongols' toleration of all religions is well known, during the plundering of cities and in warfare, it is doubtful if the common Mongol soldier cared if an individual was of a particular religion or a holy man.

On the other hand, Jamil examines how the Sufis, when not in flight, preached for total resistance against the Mongols. They essentially espoused a guerilla war against the Mongols. Furthermore, they urged Muslim leaders to unite against the Mongols. Much like the similar efforts of Jalāl al-Dīn Khwārazmshah, they went unheeded (1986, 35). One may wish however, that he had explored this aspect more in his work.

#### *The Work of Leonard Lewisohn*

Another scholar who has ventured into the study of the Sufis during the period of the Mongol invasions, Leonard Lewisohn, has done so by studying the poetry and literary works of the Sufis. Most of his work, however, is centered on the Il-Khanate era (1260–1335). Like Jamil, Lewisohn has noted that the Mongol invasions prompted the flowering of Sufism in Persia. To Lewisohn, "the most significant change which did occur during the Mongol period was the establishment of Islam on a Sufi foundation" (1995, 83). All of the Sufi orders within Central Asia and Persia—such as the Kubrāvīya, Nurbakshīya, Naqshbandīya, and Ni'matu'llāhīya—grew, probably due to economic advantages given to mosques and *khānqāhs* (houses or hospices where Sufis lived and gathered) built during the reign of the Il-Khans, the period during which many of the orders came into ex-

istence. Nonetheless, the same situation may be applied to Sufis prior to the Il-Khanate. This similarity should not be construed as a preference by the Mongols toward Islam during the period of the invasions, but rather as a general policy of toleration. Mongol nobility were well known for their charity toward religious figures and places. Although they were Nestorian Christians, Sorqoqtani (d. 1252), Doquz Khatun (d. 1265), and other princesses often donated money to mosques, madrasas (schools), Buddhist temples, and other shrines.

Lewisohn's work, particularly in his research into Sufi poetry, is very insightful. He observed that Sufis used poetry as a form of social commentary. Much of it was directed against the Shī'a for bringing in the Mongols, perhaps alluding to the 'Ismā'īlīs' alliance with the Mongols against the Khwārazm Shāhs (May 2004). Other poems were directed against the Mongols (Lewisohn 1995, 28–29).

In general, however, Lewisohn's work is rather sedentary centric, as he does not appear to understand the Mongol culture. One example is that he wrote that Buddhism was the state religion of the Mongols. He concluded that this situation forced the Muslims to tolerate the presence of Buddhism and that it was also "leading among the factors to the rise in the popularity of Sufism" (1992, 32). Although the influence of other religions may have led to a more syncretic form of Islam, which often appears to be the guise of Sufism, Buddhism was certainly never the state religion of the Mongols. Certain Khans during the Il-Khanate era may have had a predilection for it; but the Mongols did not establish a state religion—except in the cases of Uzbek Khan in the Golden Horde and Ghazan Khan in the Il-Khanate, which, in both cases, was Islam. Even Kublai Khan (1215–94), who perhaps was the most important proponent of Buddhism, never made it the official religion, although, to Muslims and Daoists, the favor given to Buddhists certainly gave it the appearance of a state religion. Furthermore, shamanistic elements appear to be more common in Sufism than Buddhist elements, particularly among antinomian Sufis.

It is difficult to agree with Lewisohn's opinions concerning the works of Rashīd al-Dīn and Juvainī, two Persians who served in the Mongol administration. Often he compares the Mongols to the Nazis of the twentieth century; and he compares Rashīd al-Dīn, Juvainī, and the non-nomadic officials of the Mongols to the officials in the Vichy government of France: unwilling accomplices, but with little choice but to cooperate (1995, 58–59). He also declared that there was a greater freedom of speech and thought in the Mongol period than during the Saljūq period, which helped accelerate the rise of Sufism (1992, 32). Yet, how can one relate freedom of speech to a totalitarian regime? The Mongols could not be considered a democracy, but neither could they be classified as a totalitarian government.

Certainly, the military adroitness and dominance of the Mongols could be compared with the German Wehrmacht of the Nazi era; but, in spite of the number of casualties inflicted by the Mongols on civilian population, the Mongols neither established an Auschwitz nor committed genocide, with the exception of the Tatars during the rise of Chinggis Khan. (And that was more a matter of practicality and revenge for previous offenses committed by the Tatars. Furthermore, the Mongols tended to eliminate only the elite figures of a group and then simply absorb the rest of the tribal populace.)

Moreover, it is questionable if one may compare Rashīd al-Dīn or Juvainī to Vichy officials. Although both rose to positions of prominence, Rashīd al-Dīn as the *wazīr* of the Il-Khanate and Juvainī as the governor of Baghdad, their writing is neither lavish praise of nor apologia for the Mongols. One cannot deny, though, that they do write favorably of the Khans and certain members of the Mongol court. Yet they also praise many of the enemies of the Mongols. Juvainī, for example, writes in glowing terms about perhaps the most elusive and frustrating of the Mongols' enemies: Jalāl al-Dīn. Furthermore, Juvainī was delighted when the Mongols destroyed the 'Ismā'īlī strongholds in Iran (Juvainī 1998, 722–23). Lewisohn's criticism of Rashīd al-Dīn and Juvainī, while valid on the point that they held a pro-Mongol bias, is misplaced, particularly when he states that freedom of speech and thought existed within the Mongol realm. Nonetheless, Lewisohn's contribution to the study of Sufism in the medieval period cannot be ignored; but scholars must be cautious about his interpretation of Mongol power relationships.

### *The Work of Monika Gronke*

A third scholar who has ventured into the topic of Sufism in the invasion period is Monika Gronke. She acknowledges that Sufism played a political role in that the Sufis worked with the Mongols but also organized rebellions and resistance against them. One example of rebellion was that of Maḥmūd Tarabī, who led the revolt of Bukhara in 1239–40 (Gronke 1997, 207). The relations of the Sufis toward the Mongols, however, are more of a sidebar to her focus, which is popular religion in thirteenth-century Iran.

The central point of Gronke's work is that shaykhs, or Sufi leaders, would and did become rivals. Often their followers actually became engaged in combat. These battles further caused their followings to be somewhat fluid. Often shaykhs on the losing end of these rivalries saw their followings dwindle as the adepts transferred loyalties to other shaykhs or, perhaps disillusioned, even abandoned Sufism altogether and adopted a more orthodox form of Islam (1997, 216).

Gronke also takes a Weberian stance in viewing that Islam, like most religions, has a division between "high" religion and popular religion. She

does, however, recognize that it is difficult and often impossible to determine where Sufism ended and orthodoxy began (1997, 206–7). Her work is well researched and written; one may only hope that she continues to work in this time period and perhaps broaden her research focus.

### **The Il-Khanate Era (ca. 1265–1340)**

The majority of work concerning Sufism and the Mongols, or any other Inner Asian groups, falls in the period of the Il-Khanate of Persia, roughly between 1265 and 1340. The Jochid Khanate (more popularly the “Golden Horde,” 1260–1480) and the Chaghtayid Khanate (1260–1360) must also be included here, although both khanates existed longer than did the Il-Khanate.

During this period, the Mongols began to convert to Islam and see it as the dominant religion. Why and how the Mongols converted is beyond the scope of this study. Still, a brief review of the conversions is necessary to understand the context of the era. The traditional view of the role of Sufis among the Mongols during this period was that they were instrumental in the conversion of both the Mongols and the Turkic tribes associated with them. Mehmed Fuad Köprülü was perhaps the first to espouse the opinion that the similarity between the Inner Asian shaman and the Muslim mystic made the Sufi the natural agent for the Islamization of the Mongols (Köprülü 1993, 11; Amitai-Preiss 1999, 27). The syncretic appeal of the Sufi eased the transition.

Reuven Amitai-Preiss, on the other hand, takes another view. He argues (1999, 28–29) that the conversion of the Il-Khanate was due to moderate or institutional Sufis who were close to the ruling circles and not to the more extreme Sufis or dervishes to which Köprülü alludes. The dervishes and antinomian Sufis were closely tied to the shamans of Inner Asia as they either resembled them or had defeated them in religious and magical feats. And although the term *dervish* has become associated with Sufism in general, in the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, a dervish in the eyes of the establishment was one who combined asceticism with deviant behavior in action and physical appearance.

The first Il-Khan to convert was Tegüder b. Hülegü (r. 1282–84). Some writers believed that he was converted as child after exposure to the influence of Aḥmadiya and Rifā’iya Sufis. Tegüder was actually more involved with Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, who could be classified as somewhere in between the antinomians and the institutional Sufis. Al-Raḥmān, somewhat of a Rasputin, ingratiated himself with the female nobility through legerdemain rather than through Islam. The Mongol elite and the ‘ulamā’ (the collective body of Sunni jurists, scholars, and theologians), on the other hand, had little respect for him and considered al-Raḥmān simply a dervish

(Amitai-Preiss 1999, 30–31). Naturally, after Tegüder fell from power, al-Raḥmān’s influence also declined.

The next ruler was Arghun (r. 1284–91), who maintained a more orthodox form of Islam, although he also visited the tombs of certain Sufi saints—but this, according to Amitai-Preiss, may have been not for devotion but for “celestial insurance” (1999, 32–33). In addition, Sufis, whom Ahmet Karamustafa would classify as “institutional” or more mainstream, frequented the court. These included the Kubrawī shaykh, ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnāni (d. 1336), and Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Hammūya, also a Kubrawīya Sufi, who later converted Ghazan Khan (r. 1295–1304) to Islam. Amitai-Preiss’s rationale that the institutional Sufis rather than the antinomian Sufis and dervishes were the true key to Mongol conversion is largely due to activities during this period.

Although many Mongols still retained shamanic practices, many of these had been suborned through syncretic forms of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. As the Mongol court grew increasingly sophisticated in culture and tastes from the time of Chinggis Khan, so did their religious sensitivities. Throughout the era of the Mongols, debates between religious authorities took place in the Mongol court. The travel accounts of William of Rubruck (ca. 1220–93) and John of Plano Carpini (ca. 1180–1252) provide vivid accounts of these encounters. Prior to the breakup of the Mongol Empire, most of the contestants all returned home thinking that they had won the debate and converted the Khan (May 2006). After the dissolution of the Empire, the various khanates vied for power and influence beyond their own borders. One such conduit was through religion. During the Sufi visits, we see also a new purpose in the religious debates: determining a religion. Whereas conversion from shamanism to another religion appears to have been conducted via a duel between shaman and other contender, in the cosmopolitan court of the Il-Khans, religion was decided through oratory. One such debate involving Simnāni and Buddhist monks lasted eighty days, with Simnāni emerging triumphant.

After Ghazan’s conversion to Islam, Sufis became more prominent. Indeed, several were in Ghazan’s entourage at all times as scholars and administrators. His relations with Sufis, however were not untroubled. When he heard of a conspiracy of Sufis against him, the Sufis were rounded up and executed. Keeping with general Mongol tradition, religion was fine, as long as it did not interfere in politics. Still, Ghazan was inducted into Sufism in 1303. He wore a woolen cloak and was secluded from court for forty days on a retreat. It is not clear, however, if Ghazan truly understood the symbolism of the cloak. Amitai-Preiss believes that many scholars have read too much into his induction into Sufism (1999, 34). Much like the Christian popes and kings who heard rumors that the Mongol khans were Christian, most scholars of Sufism also focus too much on this event and ignore Mongol tradition and custom.

Another example of scholars fixating on unsubstantiated claims is that, although dervishes did exist in the royal circles of the Il-Khanate, the sources clearly reveal that the moderate Sufis exercised more influence and power (Amitai-Preiss 1999, 34–35). Yet why was this? Amitai-Preiss suggests three factors. The first was that the Mongol khans were influenced by the scholars and administrators who were of the ‘ulamā’ or who were institutional Sufis. Second, the Mongols may have also remembered the role of Sufis in rebellions. Third, antinomian Sufis, by definition and nature, rejected patronage by the authorities. Therefore, they could never be a true influence at the court (1999, 36–37).

Amitai-Preiss has not limited himself to examining only the relations between the court and Sufis. Although he acknowledges that the position of the average Mongol toward Sufism is not well known, there is some evidence that younger Mongols were attracted to the dervishes. In many ways, this inclination mirrors the disestablishment attraction of modern youths. Here may be another reason why the Mongol elite did not support Tegüder, because his mentor, ‘Abd al-Rahmān, cultivated a following of younger Mongols (Amitai-Preiss 1999, 37).

Amitai-Preiss’s research does not indicate any evidence that the Il-Khans were attracted to Sufism because of a resemblance to shamanism. And if it did, Amitai-Preiss asks, then why did the Mongols reject the antinomian dervishes who had more in common with the Inner Asian shaman than they did with the institutional Sufis (1999, 38–39)?

Leonard Lewisohn’s work in the Il-Khanate period focuses once again on the poetry and other literature of the Sufis; but he also looks at the patronage of Sufism by the Il-Khan’s court. In this period, the literary works of the Sufis indicate a peaceful and advantageous relation with the Mongols. As for the Mongols, their relationship with the Sufis is best indicated through their patronage of Sufism and Sufis. It was due to their patronage that Sufism perhaps experienced a renaissance (Lewisohn 1995, 72–74). The Mongol Khans, their amirs, and administrators took the lead in providing economic assistance to the Sufis. Mongol leaders and administrators established *waqfs* (religious endowments) to support the *khānqāhs* of various orders, including those of antinomian Sufis (1995, 111). Öljeitü Khan (r. 1304–16) even built a mausoleum for Bayazid al-Bastāmī (d. 874), a Sufi who is best known for his utterances while in an ecstatic state. Although Sufis looked upon these utterances as proof of Bastāmī’s intimacy with the divine, the ‘ulamā’ viewed him as blasphemous. During this time, Tabriz, the Il-Khanate’s capital (in present-day northwestern Iran), was a center of Persian literature and Sufism. Evidence of Sufi support for the Il-Khanate and vice versa is illustrated by the fact that some Sufis composed lengthy poetic eulogies for Khans, mourning their deaths (1995, 76).

*The Sufis & the State during the Il-Khanate Era*

The growing relationship between the Sufis and the state has been noted by several scholars. As Sufis often played an integral part in the conversion of Inner Asian leaders, Sufis often became the primary religious authorities within the court (Potter 1994, 55). As noted previously, they occasionally gained influence by debating rival religions; but, with the adoption of Islam, their only true competition came from members of the ‘ulamā’. Furthermore, the conversion of the Khans often led to the conversion of the army, which in turn led to a quicker assimilation into Iranian or Turkic society. Thus we have seen an expansion in the role of the Sufi in the Il-Khanate from that of just a spiritual leader of Muslims to a diplomat in the service of the state. This new position evolved into a standard role for Sufis throughout the history of Inner Asian ruling elites.

Under Il-Khanid patronage, Sufism flourished and reached new heights. Al-Rūmī, Sa’dī, and Ṣafī al-Dīn (the founder of the Safavid Sufi order) were among the beneficiaries of Il-Khanid support for Sufism. Between the years 1304 and 1365, the number of shrines related to Sufis increased, often because of economic support from a representative of the Il-Khans (Potter 1994, 78–79). Indeed, the munificent patronage of Sufism by the Mongols—and the resulting impact of Sufism on other areas across the Il-Khanate—has gained new appreciation (Lane 2003). The most significant religious event in the Il-Khanate era, however, was the rapid spread of Sufis. No longer were they just individuals and small bands, as they were prior to and during the period of Mongol invasions (Potter 1994, 78). Rather, they became large movements that included lay supporters and often a network of *khānqāhs*. Perhaps it is the spread and growing popularity of Sufism among the population—and among the Mongols—that necessitated the political and diplomatic role of Sufis, often in the form of mediators.

Even in 1246, Shaykh Bahā’ al-Dīn, a Suhrawardī Sufi, negotiated the surrender of Multan (in present-day Pakistan). Not only did the Mongols peacefully capture the city, but the shaykh was also able to ransom the lives and property of the citizenry (Potter 1994, 92–93). Nowruz, the Il-Khan general, used the Sufis Shihāb al-Dīn ‘Ismā’īl and Qotb al-Dīn to mediate the release of a prisoner. This example is only one of many (Potter 1994, 93). Gronke determined that even antinomian Sufis were involved in diplomacy. Ghazan and Öljeitü often used Qalandars, perhaps the most well-known antinomian sufi group, in diplomatic ventures; Baraq Baha was one such example (Gronke 1997, 214–15). As I discuss below, Inner Asian elites continued to use Sufis in their diplomatic endeavors even after the collapse of the Il-Khanate.

*Devin DeWeese on Sufism during the Il-Khanate Era*

Perhaps the most important work on Sufism among Inner Asian-ruled societies is Devin DeWeese’s 1994 monograph, *Islamization and Native Re-*

*ligion in the Golden Horde*, a study that spans from the Mongol period well into the Timurid (1365–1500) and Shaybānid (1500–98) periods of Central Asia. DeWeese's methodology is essential to comprehend: he examines Sufism from an Inner Asian perspective rather than from just a traditional Arab–Persian standpoint. DeWeese investigates how becoming a Muslim affected one's identity among non-Muslim Inner Asian groups. Although his study is related to conversion, it also falls into the domain of relations among Sufis, Muslims, and non-Muslims. In short, DeWeese argues that by becoming a Muslim, one assumed a new identity. The example he uses (1994, 60–66) concerns a Kalmyk prince who converted to Islam but was unable to convince his father or any other Kalmyks to convert. (Kalmyks were Mongols who moved to the Volga River in the seventeenth century.) The Kalmyk prince was ostracized and essentially considered dead by his family. In a setting such as this one, making the decision to convert to Islam had serious consequences. Perhaps this example may be applied to earlier scenarios and to hypotheses why there are no records of common Mongols converting to Islam until after the conversion of Khans. If a Khan converted, then one had protection, a precedent, and could therefore maintain one's identity.

DeWeese also uses sources in a manner from which many scholars could learn. By examining conversion narratives and epics, DeWeese is able to define cultural principles and also the viewpoint of the Inner Asian natives. Previously, scholars had relied primarily on etic sources. In the study of history, one may question the value of ancient oral accounts, many of which were passed down through the centuries before being transcribed. DeWeese's approach may also be applied to the use of hagiographies, which are often the only sources available for studying the lives of Sufis outside the Middle East.

So what, then, is their value in historical research? Oral tradition and hagiographies do indeed have little historical value in terms of sequence and reliability of events, but they do reveal much about the social history, spiritual beliefs, and other information that is not normally included in official histories (Gronke 1997, 208). DeWeese is perfectly aware of the problems of using the emic oral tradition and the etic hagiographies. Yet he asks this question: "Does popular oral tradition borrow tales from written venues, or from Sufi lore transmitted within a narrower community, and distort or 'degrade' them, or do literary hagiographies . . . assemble, and often imperfectly transmit (or purposefully 'domesticate') narratives circulated for decades of centuries in oral venues ranging from the public to the formal?" (1999, 410).

The answer to DeWeese's question varies according to the respective source. Yet it remains a question that scholars must consider anytime they use hagiographies or oral sources. Indeed, much of what we know about the

Mongols prior to their invasion of China or Central Asia is from *The Secret History of the Mongols*, one of the very few authentic sources from a Mongol perspective concerning the rise of Chinggis Khan. First recorded as early as 1229, its final version is thought to have taken form during the reign of Möngke Khan (r. 1251–59). Although it does contain some very important historical data, which can be verified through triangulation with other sources, the true value of *The Secret History of the Mongols* is in understanding the culture, society, and mindset of Chinggis Khan and the Mongols. In doing so, one may then gain greater insight into the motives and the actions of the Mongols once they are outside of Mongolia.

DeWeese carries this idea to his other work. Although his research on the Golden Horde is pioneering, it is not exhaustive. One can hope that DeWeese may return to it one day. Most of his attention, however, has been directed to the successors of the Mongols: the Timurids, the Shaybānid Uzbeks, and the Mughals.

### **The Post-Mongol Period**

The study of Sufism in Central Asia within the Shaybānid Uzbek Empire is still in its infancy. In one of his articles, DeWeese (1999) examines the Yasavīya, a Sufi order that followed the teachings of Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm Yasavī and which eventually died out in Central Asia. His research, however, indicates that the Yasavīya order was also known by two other names: “Jahrīya,” indicating the vocal *dhikr*, which was a spiritual identity; and the “*masha’ikh-i turk*,” or the Turkic shaykhs, which became a distinct ethnic group from at least the thirteenth century (390).

DeWeese’s approach to this group is somewhat different from the methodology he used to study the Golden Horde. Besides the Yasavīya, other *tariqahs* (Sufi orders) within Central Asia also operated in the Persian world. For example, the Kubravīya and the Naqshbandīya came from the Persian world into the Turkic. The Yasavīya, however, originally came from a Turkic environment and then entered the Persian world. It did so during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “precisely during a period that saw the reinvigorated domination of Inner Asian steppe traditions in Central Asia, in political and social terms” (DeWeese 1999, 414). Although this article is not intended to examine specific orders, in order to fully appreciate the historiography of relations between Sufis and the Inner Asian elites, I must briefly focus on the Yasavīya order, as it was initially an Inner Asian *tariqah*.

#### *Central Asian Sufi Orders: Themes in the Emerging Study of the Yasavīya*

Three major Sufi orders existed in Central Asia: the Naqshbandīya, the Kubravīya, and the Yasavīya. The Yasavīya order spread among the pri-

marily nomadic and Turkic population of Central Asia, while the Naqshbandīya and the Kubravīya spread among the urban and Iranian populations. A rivalry emerged between the Naqshbandīya and the Yasavīya—but it was also a bit of a partnership, as they proselytized largely among different population groups (DeWeese 1996, 186). Eventually, the Naqshbandīya assimilated the Yasavīya.

Prior to DeWeese's efforts, the Yasavīya had received little attention from scholars, whereas the Naqshbandīya had received much more, especially in the last twenty years, with Hamid Algar being the foremost scholar of this movement. One of the leading factors for the paucity of scholarship on the Yasavīya was due to the existence of Soviet Union. Not only did the Soviet Union isolate the region but, more importantly, it also impeded the study of any religion even by their own academics. Sufism in particular was frowned upon as a scholarly topic (DeWeese 1996, 181–82). Thus, much of what we know of the Yasavī tradition came from sources produced by the Naqshbandīya. These sources, in return, have received virtually no critical analysis, especially in terms of historical context or motivation. What is even more amazing is that the Yasavīya themselves adopted many of these sources as their own (DeWeese 1996, 185).

Two themes emerge in the study of the Yasavīya tradition. The first is the process of Islamization of the non-Muslim populations in Mawarannahr (between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers in Central Asia) and Khurasan (modern eastern Iran and part of western Afghanistan) after the Mongol invasions. The second theme is the “communal and political implications of the adoption of Islam by members of the Chingisid [*sic*] dynasties and/or the tribal elite,” a familiar theme from DeWeese's work on the subject (1996, 196). Furthermore, the Yasavīya came to reflect and mold the processes of assimilation of Islam and made Islam meaningful to Central Asian society. Also possible is that the Sufi orders competed for converts among the Inner Asian elites.

In DeWeese's study of the Yasavīya, one of his primary sources is the *Lamahāt min nafahāt al-quds* (The shining spot of a holy reputation), written by 'Ālim Shaykh of 'Alīyābād. Compiled in 1626, it is perhaps the most important Persian source produced by Yasavīya members. The work provides an excellent understanding of the rivalry between the Yasavīya and the Naqshbandīya, but it focuses on Mawarannahr and ignores other regions of Yasavīya activity. Still, the *Lamahāt* demonstrates that the Yasavīya was not just a Turkic- or nomadic-oriented *tarīqah*, which is currently the prevailing thought. It demonstrates the Yasavīya ventured into the primarily Persian urban world as well (DeWeese 1999, 413). The *Lamahāt*, however, relies heavily on oral tradition; but DeWeese believes that it was written in direct response to literary sources on the Yasavīya produced by the Naqshbandīya. 'Ālim Shaykh wrote it in Persian, although he knew

and had written tracts in Turkic before. ‘Ālim Shaykh attempted, through the *Lamahāt*, to compete with the Naqshbandīya on their own ground: the Persian world (DeWeese 1999, 413).

### *The Kubravīya Order*

DeWeese does not limit himself to the Yasavīya. In his research on the Kubravīya, DeWeese argues that there are two tendencies in studying the Kubravīya (1992, 122). The first is that scholars usually ignore the order’s efforts in Central Asia. Second, a belief exists that the Kubravīya doctrine was simply a transitional phase to militant Shi‘ism. In order to understand what actually happened to the order in Khurasan and Central Asia, one must examine hagiographies.

Of course, the same problems arise with the hagiographies of the Kubravīya as with any other order. One must question their validity on points of historical accuracy; but, as with all hagiographies and oral traditions, they are still useful for constructing social and cultural histories. Much of what is included in the hagiographies is fanciful, just as the mythical elements in Inner Asia oral traditions, but they are also vehicles to convey information about the relationship between Sufis and the ruling elite. One example is the hagiography of Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī, a fourteenth-century Kubravī Shaykh. Much of his hagiography describes, in somewhat veiled terms, his hostility to the rise of Timur-i Leng (r. 1370–1405), the Central Asian conqueror known in the West as Tamerlane (DeWeese 1992, 121–22). Much like many political polemics, the authors could not directly express their true feelings. Rather, they relied on allusions and metaphors, much like Sufi poetry during the Mongol invasions and the Il-Khanate period. Still, we cannot depend solely on written records for comprehending the relationship between Inner Asian elites and Sufis. After all, Timur-i Leng built a mausoleum in 1389 for Aḥmad Yasavī (1103–60) in the town of Turkistan (in present-day southern Kazakhstan) over two hundred years after the shaykh’s death (DeWeese 1992, 122; today the mausoleum is a UNESCO World Heritage site). Thus, while some Sufis might criticize the Inner Asian elites, many continued to find support from them.

### *Sufis & Inner Asian Elites after 1335*

What, then, was the role of the Sufis in relation to the Inner Asian elites after 1335? Muḥammad Shaybānī (d. 1510), student of Ḥāfiẓ al-Bukhārī and founder of the Uzbek Empire, was heavily influenced by the teachings of Aḥmad Yasavī. The Yasavīya tradition provided an interface for the Sharī‘a and the heritage of the Chinggisid princes. The ‘ulamā’, however, doubted the sincerity of the religious beliefs intermixed with military and imperial aspirations. According to Andras Bodrogligeti (1994, 48), Shaybānī used the social teaching of the Yasavīya Sufis in order to create a supra-tribal

community, essentially an ‘umma (Islamic community) of Turks. Their loyalty was to Islam and not to individual tribes. The stress was laid on popular support through the Sufis and on the loyalty and cohesiveness of the Turkic Muslim community. Furthermore, just as Aḥmad Yasavī emulated the Prophet Muḥammad, so did Shaybāni—especially as the leader of a community, leader of the forces of Islam, and enforcer of the Sharī‘a. Shaybāni was very spiritual and tried to be a model Muslim (Bodrogligeti 1994, 52). In this manner, he attempted to appease the ‘ulamā’ in the cities of Mawarannahr, even though the Sufis within the empire were of greater importance in legitimizing his rule.

The result of Bodrogligeti’s research reveals that when the Yasaviya were proselytizing among the Uzbeks, they used a “low-level” literary idiom. This idiom eased conversion, but equally important was that it became the language of popular literature and was much different from the traditional Arabic–Persian idiom. Furthermore, both commoners and elite used it (Bodrogligeti 1994, 47). Thus the Sufis were also actively involved in creating higher culture for the Uzbeks.

Potter’s research examines the debate among Sufis during that period regarding whether they should cooperate with state officials. Ultimately, for many orders, such as the Naqshbandīya and the Ṣafavīya, this cooperation was critical for their success. Another school of thought was that to cooperate with the state was a form of corruption. The Chistis of India, in particular, espoused this view (Potter 1994, 80).

Timur-i Leng, although he displayed a preference for the Naqshbandīs, demonstrated respect for all Sufis. But, then, Timur was always the ultimate pragmatist. The Timurids were not the only Central Asian royalty to have an affiliation with the Naqshbandīs. Despite the Yasaviya ties of Shaybāni, the Uzbeks grew increasingly closer to the Naqshbandīya order, perhaps because the Yasaviya were incorporated into the Naqshbandīya. Foltz (1996, 230) has noted that “by the end of the fifteenth century in Central Asia it had become imperative for anyone with political aspirations to have Naqshbandī support since . . . it was by patronizing the order that political figures” maintained and strengthened their relationships with commoners.

Under the Naqshbandī shaykh, Khwāja ‘Ubaydullāh, the order adopted a doctrine to actively influence political leaders for the betterment of the lives of the common Muslim. Considering the Uzbek and Timurid respect for the Naqshbandīya order, it was only natural that, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Naqshbandīs often acted as intermediaries between the Uzbeks and the Timurids, both of which were vying for power in the same region (Foltz 1996, 230).

Thus the Naqshbandīs and other Sufis increased their roles as envoys and literati among the Inner Asian courts, and they also made conscious

efforts to become more involved in politics. Eventually, the influence of the Naqshbandīs grew to the point where they gave assistance to Timurid landlords and officials and also legitimized the rule of Uzbeks, the Timurids, and—later—the Mughals. In return, the ruling elite provided them with *waqfs* and mausoleums, among other forms of economic support (Buehler 1996, 210).

### **The Sufi Influence in Inner Asia**

Thus we see an indirect action of Sufis. As the Inner Asian nations converted to Islam, the Chinggisid factor in ruling declined. Although many leaders, such as Timur-i Leng, always sought a Chinggisid to sit on the throne in order to be seen as a legitimate ruler among the other Chinggisids, it was the influence of the Sufis who legitimized the rule of the Inner Asian elite among the sedentary people. As Islamization increased among the nomads, the Chinggisid factor waned. True, the Mughals and the Uzbeks still traced their lineage to Chinggis Khan, but it was less important than during the time of Timur. It should not be thought, though, that the Sufis' actions in politics could ultimately have deposed a Khan. Buehler sums up the stance of the ruling elite best: "Sufis were useful to the Mughals but were not considered invincible; when the boundaries of political acceptability were transgressed, the emperor quickly reminded the Sufis that they were still his subjects: often violently" (1996, 222).

In conclusion, Sufism flourished indirectly because of the Mongol invasions. Over time, roles of Sufis in politics and their relationships with the Inner Asian ruling elite grew, as did their influence in the Islamic world. Ultimately, many Sufi orders became consciously and intimately involved with the court. Yet the Khan could always break their influence. In terms of historiography, much work is yet to be conducted on Sufism in relation to the ruling elites and in Inner Asia in general. The common approach seems to be through the analysis of hagiographies in conjunction with the standard official histories and documents, but more work through emic sources is necessary. Only then will scholars have a better understanding of how Sufis fit in the Inner Asian world.

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