Amitai, Reuven
Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260-1335).

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During the year 1260 CE two armies faced each other in Palestine at a place known as ʿAyn Jalūt. The battle has become famous for marking a decisive moment in the development of Middle Eastern politics in the 13th century. The outcome of the battle, on the one hand, limited the Mongol expansion into the Levant and, on the other, helped to consolidate the establishment in Egypt of a slave dynasty of Turkish origin known as the Mamluks. It is in the context of the conflictive relationship between the Mongol Ilkhans of Iran (1260–1335) and the Mamluk sultans of Egypt that this book explores different topics in the history of the region. Reuven Amitai has, without doubt, become the leading expert in this particular field since the publication of his previous book on the subject, *Mongols and Mamluks: the Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). This new work is partially based on the previous research and ideas exposed by Amitai, but also incorporates new research and re-evaluates some aspects of Mamluk–Ilkhanid relations based on the "explosion of publication related to both the Mongols and the Mamluks in recent decades" (p. 11). Further, the book is the result of a series of lectures given by the author in January–February 2007 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) in Paris.

The book begins in chapter one by offering some reflections on the "Dynamics of Conflict" between the Mamluks and the Mongols. This chapter looks mostly at the military aspects and makes an emphasis on Mamluk warfare. One of the main ideas that Amitai stresses is that the conflict between these two groups was based on an initial Mongol aggression, which triggered a military reform in Mamluk domains that included an increase in the size of the Mamluk army. However, after the Battle of ʿAyn Jalūt, the war adopted the characteristics of "frontier warfare", especially in the 1260s and 1270s. This meant espionage, razzias and agents in charge of burning grasslands on the border were operating on the Mamluk side to prevent any Mongol advance into the Levant. Similarly, fortresses were repaired and built anew across the border by the Mamluks to not only provide protection, but also facilitate communication and support to spies and other agents in the area. The defensive attitude of the Mamluks changed in the mid 1270s, when they felt strong enough to launch some offensive expeditions into Mongol-dominated regions, such as Anatolia in 1276 and later in 1292. However, Amitai highlights the fact that these expeditions never really changed the balance of the forces in the conflict, but rather they contributed to keeping the conflict alive in the second half of the 13th century. Finally, Amitai makes an interesting point: despite this style of warfare, the borders remained permeable and people, ideas and goods kept moving from one side to the other of the two realms in conflict.

If the first chapter is centred on the military aspects of the conflict, the second is dedicated to exploring the ideological and religious milieu in which the conflict developed in the second half of the 13th century. This is achieved by explaining in a comparative perspective the idea of "holy war" developed by the Mamluks vis-à-vis the Mongol idea of a "mandate of Heaven" that was fundamental in justifying the Mongol conquest of Asia and Eastern Europe in this period. Both ideas have received extensive attention by scholars in the past, but Amitai, apart from including many of them in his argumentation, adds an interesting suggestion. He points out that the Mongol mandate of Heaven could also be considered a form of "holy war" if we take into account the religious tone adopted by the letters sent by the Mongols to their enemies, aiming to produce an anti-Mamluk policy. Expressing the traditional idea of Mongol imperialism in a more religious framework would have developed slowly during the early conquest of the Mongols in Eurasia, but, in the second half of the 13th century, they can already be found in both Christian and Muslim chronicles. This adapted Mongol imperial ideology to a Muslim audience would not have changed but rather been reinforced once the Mongols had converted to Islam at the turn of the 14th century. The Mamluks, for their part, would portray themselves as the protectors of Islam from the very beginning to gain support against the pagan Mongol enemy. Amitai explains how decisions such as the proclamation of a new caliph in 1261 by the Mamluk sultan were used to catapult the sultan into being the major defender of Islam and how this was used to confront the Ilkhanid imperial ideology. Nonetheless, he stresses that, although this Mamluk ideology might have served as an ideological opposition to the Mongols, it was meant mostly for internal consumption in Egypt and the Levant. In these areas, this idea of the sultan as the sole protector of the Muslims would be used to unite especially the Mamluk military class but also the religious establishment and even the masses around the newly established Mamluk dynasty.

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The third chapter deals with the conversion of the Mongols to Islam and the ideological challenge that it posed to the Mamluk ideology. This section firstly enumerates some of the main reasons suggested by scholars in explaining the reasons for the definitive conversion of Mongol rulers to Islam and why this happened under the reign of Ghazan Khan in 1295. From the variety of reasons offered, Amitai highlights the fact that peace with the Mamluks was not one of them. In fact, under two Muslim Ilkhans like Ghazan and Oljeitü, the aggressiveness of the Mongols towards the Mamluks increased and military campaigns were launched into Mamluk Syria. Further, now the Mamluk ideology of the Sultans of Egypt was challenged by Ghazan Khan, who was presented in Ilkhanid sources as a model of Muslim rule. From the Mamluk state, there was a reaction to this new legitimacy claim of the Mongols, now based on Islamic principles. Religious leaders such as Ibn Taymiyya advocated that the conversion of the Mongols to Islam was false, trying to maintain the Mamluk sultan as the only depositary of Islamic legitimacy. Amitai makes a good summary of some of his views and includes appropriate citations from Ibn Taymiyya extracted from primary sources. It is important to highlight that the author of this book suggests that there is no reason to believe that the conversion of Mongol rulers was not sincere despite the fact that they did not abandon some of their traditional customs and beliefs.

The final chapter is an attempt to compare the Mamluk and Mongol ruling classes, as both were part of a military elite with a similar Turco-Mongol cultural background in need of legitimacy from their subjects. Amitai points out that, despite the common background, the comparison could not be taken too far. While the Mamluks were "plucked out" of their nomadic background and were made members of an urban military society, the Mongols were, at least until they converted to Islam, the typical nomadic steppe conquerors interested in obtaining revenues from the conquered peoples but having little cultural contact with the subjects. This situation changed with their adoption of Islam, when they developed a model more similar to that of other Muslim nomadic rulers of Iran, such as the Seljuqs (pp. 86–7). Having made these distinctions clear, Amitai explores how Mamluks and Mongols tried legitimise their rule in the eyes of the local elites they controlled. On the one hand, the Mamluks did this by patronising religious leaders and institutions, reviving the caliphate destroyed by the Mongols and upholding sharia. On the other hand, the Mongols would have adopted Islam as the result of a process of cultural assimilation and it was only after they became Muslims that they adopted "Muslim political culture" to portray themselves as rightful Muslims in the eyes of not only their own Muslim subjects, but also the Mamluk elite (and their subjects).

Overall, this is a well-written book with a balanced use of direct quotes from a variety original sources and it is fully referenced. The fact that it is based on lectures delivered orally makes the arguments flow nicely and makes for easy reading. For that reason, this would be a good book for students being initiated into the field of medieval Middle Eastern history, who will find it useful in the amount of information it provides and in the comprehensiveness of its explanations. The fact that it is published in paperback is also a good asset for students, as it makes it more affordable. As for its academic contribution, a new book on the subject is always welcome. Although the book relies on his previous work, Amitai makes an important update to research in this field and adds new insights into some of the ideas about Mongol–Mamluk relations as a crucial defining point in the history of the Middle East from the 13th century onwards.

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