Jackson Peter
The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion

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Peter Jackson is well known to students and scholars in the field of Mongol history in the Persian-speaking world. His books on the Delhi Sultanate(1), the Mongols' relations with Europe(2), as well as numerous articles on the political, diplomatic, and religious history of the Ilkhans are fundamental for our understanding of the period. Jackson's 1978 article "The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire" remains the best detailed explanation of the period of civil war that broke the Mongol Empire apart in the mid-13th century(3). Jackson's latest book, *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion*, is a monumental achievement that pulls together aspects of the Mongols' conquest, rule, and interaction with Muslims across Eurasia, down to the period in the fourteenth century when many Mongols converted to Islam. In the Introduction, Jackson writes that the book explores two broad themes, namely the impact on the Islamic world of the Mongol conquests, and the character of Mongol rule over their Muslim subjects.

The first chapter provides a thorough discussion of the main sources for Mongol history, and is followed by a chapter examining the long history of interaction between the nomadic people of Inner Asia and the Islamic world going back to the ninth century when Turks from the steppe were imported as slave-soldiers to the Abbasid Caliphate, down to the rule of the Qara-Khitay in the early 13th century. The steppe nomads, often generally categorized as "Turks" by Muslim authors, were commonly described in terms of generic stereotypes: living in tents, surviving on a diet of meat and milk, and excelling at warfare.

The next two chapters deal with the initial waves of Mongol conquest and rule, before the campaigns of Hülegü Khan to Iran in the 1250s. Chapter 3 begins with Chinggis Khan's campaign to the Empire of Khwarazm in 1219. Although these first conquests were devastating and shocking to the population, Jackson points out that the more extensive expansion into the western steppe and the Islamic Middle East during Ögödey's reign entitle this successor of Chinggis Khan to be considered the true founder of the Mongol Empire. Jackson also shines a light on the important role played by the commanders Chormaghun and Bayju in governing the sedentary urban portions of the Islamic Middle East, regions that would later become part of the Ilkhanate. In assessing the reasons for the Mongols' early military success, Jackson identifies the strength of the Mongols' capacity to muster vital resources, their communications, their skill in reconnoitering the terrain, their discipline, and their military planning. In other words, the Chinggisid Empire was very well organized, enabling the Mongols to subjugate populations and armies larger than their own.

Chapter 4 on "Apportioning and Governing the Empire" focuses on the ways the spoils of conquest, whether territorial, material, or human, were divided up. Significant in sedentary regions were the offices of the *darughachi* and *basqaq*, responsible for collecting taxes, provisioning local security forces, and supervising corvée duties. The *darughachi* tended to be drawn from the *qaghan*'s guard (*keshig*), which Jackson identifies as the core institution of Mongol government.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the conquests of Hülegü, and the beginning of the Ilkhanid period. Jackson makes a case that there is little evidence that Möngke established his brother Hülegü as the head of a new *ulus* in Iran. He also argues that the title "il-khan" does not mean "subordinate khan," as other scholars such as Thomas Allsen have argued,(4) but instead derives from the Turkic "ilig," meaning "sovereign." In comparing the impact of Hülegü's conquests with those of Chinggis Khan, Jackson maintains that what distinguished them was not that Hülegü's campaigns were less destructive, but that reconstruction after the conquests progressed much faster than they did following the initial conquests under Chinggis Khan.

(1) Peter A. Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
(2) Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005).
(3) Peter Jackson, "The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire," *Central Asiatic Journal* 22 (1978), p. 186-244.
(4) See Thomas T. Allsen, "Mongol Imperialism: The Politics of the Great Qan Möngke" in *China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251-1259* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 48; *idem*, "Changing Forms of Legitimation in Mongol Iran," in *Rulers from the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery*, eds. Gary Seaman and Daniel Marks (Los Angeles: Ethnographics Press, University of Southern California, 1991), p. 227.

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Chapter 7 examines the transitional period after about 1260, which was characterized by conflict between various Chinggisid lines and factions. Amid the civil wars, however, a subtler change to the organization of the Mongol Empire and its successor states was taking place, through a process Jackson has elsewhere referred to as a transformation "from *ulus* to khanate."(5) That is, after 1260, there were fewer examples of rights, property, and personnel controlled by a prince of one *ulus* present in the territory of another. The khanates that emerged tended to be defined by the self-contained territory under a single khan's rule, with fewer claims to resources within the territory by outsiders.

In Chapter 8, Jackson takes up trade and the question of the creation of a trans-Eurasian pax mongolica as a result of the Mongol conquests and rule. Here he emphasizes that any talk of *pax mongolica* needs to reckon with the fact that after ca. 1260 there was no single Mongol Empire, nor was there much peace between Mongol uluses. Although characterizations of *pax mongolica* tend to emphasize the security of overland travel provided by a single (or a few) Mongol states, more consequential to commerce in this period was the "injection of unprecedented quantities of plundered goods and capital into the Eurasian commercial networks" (p. 222), as well as a reduction in customs duties, the existence of large nomadic courts and caravanserails, support for cities, and the boost in demand for luxury items and slaves.

Jackson devotes Chapter 9 to the "client Muslim kingdoms," providing details on the ways in which the Mongols ruled through local dynasties, and the benefits to local elites of submission to the conquerors. Jackson looks further at the Muslim servants of Mongol administration in Chapter 10, particularly examining prominent families such as the Juwaynīs, and demonstrating how at different times, the lines between the bureaucratic and military elites could overlap.

Chapters 11-13 deal with questions of religion and relations between the "infidel" Mongols with their Muslim subjects, as well as the process of conversion of the Mongols to Islam. Jackson takes on the often repeated description of the Mongols as religiously tolerant, pointing out that while the Mongols were quite even-handed in privileging members of different religions, they also clearly issued edicts or laws (*yasa*-s) that were incompatible with Islamic religious practice. From the Muslims' point of view, Mongol even-handedness was experienced as a reduction in their status relative to other religious communities, notably Jews and Christians, and contributed to a sense of dissatisfaction and insecurity among the Mongols' Muslim subjects. On the issue of Islamization, the ruler's conversion was less important as an inward, spiritual reorientation than a public decision to align himself more closely with his subjects in order to harness their loyalty. Alongside this political issue, Islamization was also part of a larger process of acculturation of the Mongols, who, particularly in societies like Iran, found it more difficult to hold onto their ancestral traditions. Islamization was "fitful and halting," made difficult in so far as Islam was seen as requiring the Mongols to "live within a polity governed by Islamic principles" (p. 380), and to abandon what many saw as a *yasa* of Chinggis Khan, forbidding discrimination between the religions of the Mongols' subjects.

The Epilogue considers some longer-term elements of the Mongols' legacy in the Islamic world, including the persistence of Chinggisid concepts of legitimacy, administrative practices (such as the *suyūrghāl*), and a somewhat nebulous allegiance to Mongol customary law (*yasa*). Jackson also examines the Mongols' role in the expansion of Islam and the strengthening of non-Muslim states, such as the Mamluk Sultanate, and the Delhi Sultanate, by the migration of Muslims out of Mongol-conquered territory, and the emergence of new Muslim political formations, including the Uzbeks and Ottomans.

The Mongols and the Islamic World is highly detailed and thoroughly researched, while at the same time quite readable. Although readers familiar with Peter Jackson's scholarship will recognize some arguments and topics from earlier publications, the book is far from being a rehashing of old work in a new form. On the contrary, Jackson deftly guides the reader through many of the debates and questions current in the field of Mongol history by virtue of his extensive reading of recent scholarship, and a mastery of the Persian and Arabic source material. There is little available in the field that offers so extensive an overview of the ways Mongol military campaigns, administrative practices, and cultural preferences shaped the history of the Islamic world. And while the bulk of available sources deal with the Ilkhanate, Jackson is deliberate in incorporating comparative analysis of developments in the Jochid and Chaghatayid lands as well.

In 2000, Peter Jackson surveyed the state of research in Mongol studies after a particularly

(5) "From Ulus to Khanate: The Making of the Mongol States c. 1220-ca. 1290," in *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy*, eds. Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1999), p. 12-38.

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fruitful decade and a half of growth in the field.(6) In *The Mongols and the Islamic World*, Jackson has recalibrated the field once again, this time in a vastly more extensive form, as a testament not only to the ways Mongol and Islamic studies have changed in the past twenty years, but also to Jackson's own skill as a researcher and interpreter of the Mongol and Muslim past.

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(6) Peter Jackson, "The State of Research: The Mongol Empire, 1986-1999," *Journal of Medieval History* 26 (2000), p. 189-210.

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