

# THE STUDY OF CONSEQUENCES OF MONGOLIANS' INVASION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ILKHANATE DYNASTY ON IRANIAN CULTURE, ART, AND ARCHITECTURE

Solmaz TABE AFSHAR  

*PhD student, Department of Architecture, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran*

## Research Article

PII: S238315532100004-10

*Received: 20 August 2021*

*Revised: 19 October 2021*

*Published: 15 December 2021*

 Corresponding author:  
E-mail: [s.tabefshar@gmail.com](mailto:s.tabefshar@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT:** The invasion of Mongolians was one of Iran's most important events in the history of Iran that was accompanied by full-scale consequences, especially political, social, and artistic aspects that have never left Iranian societies and are still current and ongoing. During these destructive wars that eventually led to the establishment of the Ilkhanate dynasty, countless cultural and artistic changes happened both among the Mongolians and also in Iranian society. With help of researches and library studies, and by taking an analytical look into art and architecture of this era, this study aimed to analyze the important political, religious, cultural, and social elements that affected the shaping of new concepts in architecture and art of the Ilkhanate period. Through these investigations, it was concluded that although various artistic and architectural elements were witnessed in the Ilkhanate period, following the presence of the Mongolians in this period, new artistic genres and schools were shaped alongside a spiritual and different atmosphere that was ruling art and architecture which was different from previous periods in Iran.

**KEYWORDS:** Ilkhan Architecture, Religion, The Mongolian Culture, Art and Sufism.

## INTRODUCTION

### The victory of the Mongolians in Iran and its consequences

Mongol is a tribe of the yellow race that their motherland is Mongolia. Because of their warfare, their traces have been drawn towards different areas in Asia and even Eastern Europe. Most Mongolians are followers of Buddhist and Tibetan creeds, and Shamanism; and they speak in Mongolian. Due to their nomadic lifestyle, Mongolian people did not have a fixed place to live and their reservation was monopolized in nomadic tents and special entries [1, 2]. Temujin (known as Genghis Khan 614-736) was the king of Mongolia at the beginning of the 7th century. He started conquering countries and dominated lands of Qarakhtai and thus became neighbors with the Kharazmshah of Iran.

The Mongolians' invasion of Iran happened when this country was a pioneer in the fields of science, culture, and art. Schools, the presence of scientists, famous artists, and also valuable works of art, architecture, and literature in this period, pictures a growing and developing society. The invasion of Mongolians in Iran and the Ilkhanate dynasty had an eye-catching effect in changing this process. Destruction and demolition of this war changed the social, scientific, and cultural course of Iran forever.

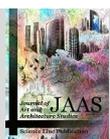
Hulagu Khan was the founder of the Mongolian Ilkhanate dynasty in Iran (1256-1335 AC). The Ilkhans took control of parts of present Anatolia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as Iran. The first Mongolian rulers were dependent on the great Mongolian ruler in China, but the Mongolian Ilkhans in Iran gradually turned into an independent government. On the other hand, the Mongolian rulers were affected by Iranian culture and civilization. Therefore these changes led to complicated cultural reformations that can be seen in both conquerors and conquered countries [3, 4].

The invasion of Mongolians in Iran was the beginning of a new era in the history of the art and architecture of Iran and the Muslim world. Coming up, we are going to look into the way art and architecture of this period in Iran were shaped by studying political, religious, cultural, and social elements.

### A) Role of political changes in art and architecture

Considering some political changes of attitude during the invasion of Mongolians in Iran, alongside the period of the Ilkhanate dominion, the presence of Iranian bureaucrats was one of the most important influential factors. Also, to better understand these contributing political factors in artistic changes in this historical juncture of Iran,

**Citation:** Tabe Afshar S (2021). The study of consequences of Mongolians' invasion and establishment of the Ilkhanate dynasty on Iranian culture, art, and architecture. *J. Art Arch. Stud.*, 10 (2): 24-30.  
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.54203/jaas.2021.4>



2021 SCIENCELINE

**JAAS**

**Journal of Art and Architecture Studies**

ISSN 2383-1553

*J. Art Arch. Stud.* 10(2): 24-30, Dec 15, 2021

we're going to look into the role of dominating political factors in two periods of the invasion of Mongolians and the Ilkhanate dominion [5].

### **1) The period of war and the invasion of Mongolians:**

- Most people that were under the ruling of Genghis Khan, did not have a cultural background and were used nomadic life. They did not pay attention to the city and urban life; and during this period, they destroyed most cities and artistic and architectural works.

- Before the invasion of Mongolians in Iran, various scientists and artists were trained; that unfortunately most of them were killed during the invasion of Mongolians, and scientific researches massively lessened. Besides, despite the Mongolians' interest in art that we see in upcoming periods, because of the dead of artists in this period, there was no chance for building and innovation and the emergence of new artistic genres [3].

### **2) The period of the Ilkhanate dominion:**

Following the establishment of the Ilkhanate dynasty in Iran by the Mongolian Hulagu Khan; and their allegiance of Genghis Khan, the ruler of China, more relations with China were foregrounded; and therefore, these political reformations changed some artistic and architectural works including:

- 1) Constructions of this period are not comparable to the previous period regarding quality and solidity. This is visible after a considerable decrease in the quality of architectural works due to haste and impetuosity to reconstruct the destructions after the war.

- 2) Following the increased interactions with China, the Chinese taught Iranian artists miniature and printing industry [6].

- 3) During the Ilkhanate era, the art of book designing was flourished more than any other era. With the establishment of the Ilkhans in Tabriz, this city turned into one of the most important bases of cultural and artistic activities; and following the interaction and integration of two painting styles of Chinese and Baghdadi, arts such as calligraphy and polishing in Tabriz was consistently and dynamically reformed [7].

### **B) The role of cultural reformations in art and architecture**

Considering the social changes caused by the establishment of the Ilkhanate dominion and the presence of non-Iranian population more than ever,

like the Mongolians and the Chinese in Iran with a culture different from Iranian culture, we can see the formation of two types of influential cultural ways of thinking:

### **1) Preservation of Iranian culture: Previous styles and patterns**

Iran, with an ancient civilization and rich culture, has always been a source of valuable works of art and science alongside capable artists. During the period after the invasion of the Mongolians and the Ilkhanate dominion, despite the destructions, artists and architects still had access to this valuable treasure of art and architecture in the past; and they started modeling the works remained. In this period, with the support and backing of some Mongolian rulers who were interested in Persian art and architecture, we can see the flourishing of Persian art and architecture. In this regard, Sheila Beller and Jonathan Bloom believe that the conquest of the Mongolians in Iran has been beneficial to Iran; because architecture and its other arts turned into a cultural and artistic innovation center in the world of Islam. Iranian motifs in this period turned into a standard for assessing works of art in most Muslim regions. For example, the strong pattern of four porches became prevalent in Egypt, Morocco, and India [8]. After the establishment of the Ilkhanate dominion, the tendency of the Ilkhans towards Iranian principles following Hulagu's use of bureaucrats and Iranian educated people in court increased and through their efforts we witness:

- 1) Since Mahmud Ghazan that followed cutting interactions with the great Khan in China, urban culture replaced the traditional life of Mongolians. In this period, the first prominent signs of the effect of Iranian culture on Mongolian rulers can be seen. Ghazan khan converted to Islam and ordered the building of mosques and baths in Iranian cities; and city and urban life gradually improved [8].

- 2) Building a series of graves can be known as chief yielding of Ghazan khan from Iranian culture after choosing urban life [8].

- 3) Gradually it was possible for Persian culture to rebirth through the preservation of the previous culture with gathering books and reposing the condition of scholars; and ultimately leading to the emergence of huge cultural and art centers in different cities, especially cities such as Maragheh, Tabriz, Shiraz, Harat and Samarkand [7].

- 4) During this time, a new era of astronomy and mathematics formed due to their improvements; and consequently, a new style in architecture and art was

founded. For instance, we can refer to the observatory of Maragheh which was the first scientific and research center in the Ilkhanate period that was built, which was Khajeh al-Din al-Tusi's will and Hulagu's order in year 656. The dome of the observatory was built using astronomy, mathematics, and physics. This dome was a source of inspiration for other buildings of this period including the dome of Soltanieh [9].

5) The interest of the Mongolians in decorative arts and architecture of the period before Islam in Iran led to their support of the painting, book design, and calligraphy, along with a tendency to Sassanid architecture; therefore we can see an upswing of certain styles of these arts among artists. Also, Abaqa Khan renovated and utilized Takht-e Soleyman which was a complex remained from the Sassanid period (224-651 A.C) [10].

## 2) Being affected by Mongolian and Chinese culture

Beside various effects of Persian civilization and art on Mongolian rulers, not so civilized Mongolian thoughts and culture are also exhibited in this period:

1) Mongolian rulers were very greedy; and because of their great tendency to show off pomp and power, high and tall buildings turned into the prominent feature of architecture in this period.

2) In this period, despite the prohibition of some decorative arts, especially painting and sculpture, in periods after Islam we can see an increase of utilizing decorative arts due to the great interest of Mongolian Ilkhans in decoration; and religious clergies prohibited decorations to some extent [11].

3) The fascination of Mongolian rulers in decoration and coloring buildings is a visible change in architectural ornaments of this period in Iran. The use of colorful decorations was limited after the emergence of Islam, and architectural decorations were often done as one-color (natural color of bricks or plaster) along with tiles or turquoise or azure bricks; but in this period, considering the great fascination of Ilkhans in colorful ornaments, tiling, especially mosaic started circulating; and ornaments of previous periods replaced colorful and lively ones [11].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Effect of Chinese art on Persian art and architecture

With the establishment of the Yuan dynasty in China by Kublai Khagan; and the Persian Ilkhans'

declaration of allegiance to him, political, cultural and business relations between Iran and China extended and peaked. This caused:

1) The miniature painting which was influenced by Chinese art became prevalent; and resulted in preparing new copies of books and ancient Persian inscriptions; and a lot of old stories were portrayed and illustrated. These books include *Manafe-ol-Heyvan* by Abdollah ibn Bukhtushu and three small books of *Shahnameh* that were illustrated [3].

2) Arthur Pop: Persian architectural ornaments that were worn out and died after the arrival of Islam have been revived by vibrant herbaceous motifs inspired by Chinese art [1].

3) The prevalence of Chinese motifs is more visible in this period. Three kinds of impressions of Chinese art in Persian works can be recognized:

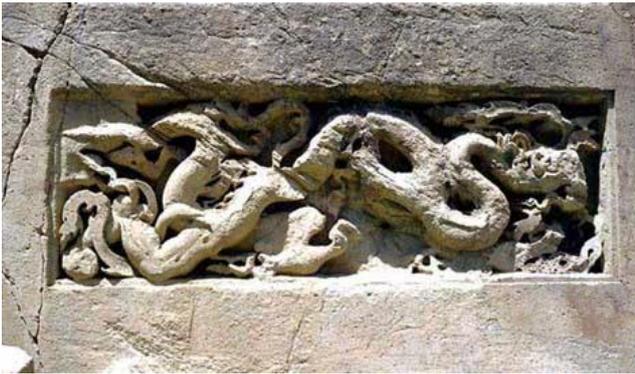
- First: Among the borrowed ornaments of Chinese art, we can refer to the motif of the Chinese dragon and some other mythical images from the Ilkhanate era on pieces of tile collected from Takht-e-Soleyman area. [11].

- Second: The influence of Chinese motifs that considering the previous limitations, seems like it affects Persian artists. After this period, Persian paintings that are known as miniatures eminently progressed and obtained their Persian identity [11].

- Third: The third effect of Chinese arts is changing the Persian abstract floral motifs which were under the influence of Chinese patterns; while the Persian identity of the motifs is preserved. Persian floral motifs (going back to the Sassanid era) became more delicate and their background became more visible. This change continued well in the next period [11].



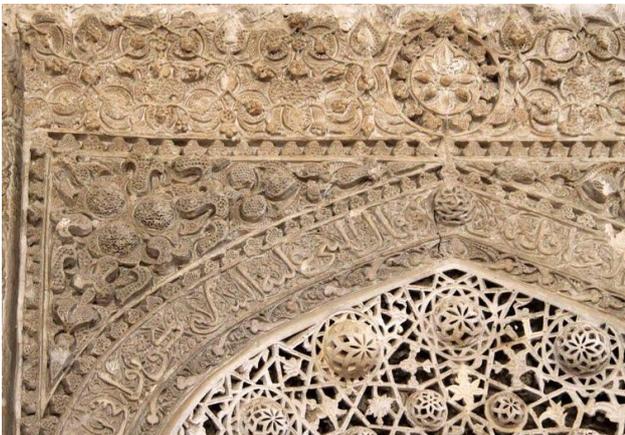
**Figure 1.** Golden tile with dragon motif; source: David, Denmark



**Figure 2.** Dragon motif on Dashkasan Temple, Zanjan



**Figure 3.** Miniature in Mongolian style, Source: Manafe-ol-Heyvan



**Figure 4.** Floral motifs in plasterwork in the altar of the grand mosque of Urmia

### Effect of religion and beliefs on art and architecture

#### *Shamanism of Mongolians*

Mongolians were at first followers of a simple creed named Shamanism; which was a kind of defective monotheism in which various gods with lower ranks partake in maintenance and order of the

universe with God. This creed has magical aspects that center around Shaman's character. He is not only a wizard and a sage, but also a healer, a learned person, and a poet [1]. The great eternal God of Mongolians is in the skies. From their view, "the blue eternal sky" has a hidden power, creating and running the universe. Mountains and trees had a special place for Mongolians. Holy mountains were the gods' place and a bridge between the sky and the earth. Flying and connecting to the sky was one of their dreams that only Shamans would find the power to do so in trance-like and spiritual trips. Ascending the mountains always refers to the trip to the center of the world in the skies [1].

#### *Flourishing of Sufism in Iran*

With chaos caused by the fall of the Khwarazmian dynasty, the presence of Ismailia's in Iran, and religious assortments along with the invasion of Mongolians, the tendency to Sufism increased. Sufi sheiks infiltrated so much till Khan himself also respected them and they gradually intervened with politics too. On the other hand, considering similarities between Shamanism and Sufism, we can conclude that once the Mongolians entered Iran and accepted Islam, slowly left behind their Shaman creed and converted to Islam that had fundamental aspects of similarities with their creed.

#### *Conversion of Mongolians to Islam*

Mongolian tribes were not dogmatic in religious matters and had a gentle attitude toward followers of other religions. This compromise of beliefs caused followers of different religions to promote their religion. Persian grandees made benefits well from this situation to convert Ikhans and Mongolian princes to Islam [12].

#### **Effect of Sufism and the Mongolian Shaman creed:**

Following the spread of Sufism in art and architecture, we can see the emergence of new styles including:

1) Constructing big buildings like Arg Alishah with homogenous and consistent brickwork is a symbol of the cosmic mountain and Mongolian Shaman creed.

2) Tall minarets for the first time emerged in Soltanieh dome (the grave of Oljietu) and then in Persian architecture.

3) In domes, porches, and transoms of mosques and buildings of this period, like Arg Alishah in Tabriz or the grand mosque of Yazd, an increase of height and scale which is the main feature of Ilkhanate architecture is completely visible.

4) Building broad architectural alleys, with a big scale and magnitude and glory of buildings like Sheikh Ahmad-e Jami complex, Bastam, Sheikh Safi Al-Din Ardabili, and Soltanieh city center complex can indicate Shamanic and spiritual creed of Mongolians as a symbol of the cosmic mountain [13].

5) Despite the prevalence of painting and decorative arts before Islam, we still can see the use of perspective and realism in paintings, unlike Western art. However, support of Ilkhans in the development of decorative arts including lifting restrictions was one of the reasons for further improvement of these arts which was mentioned earlier [10].



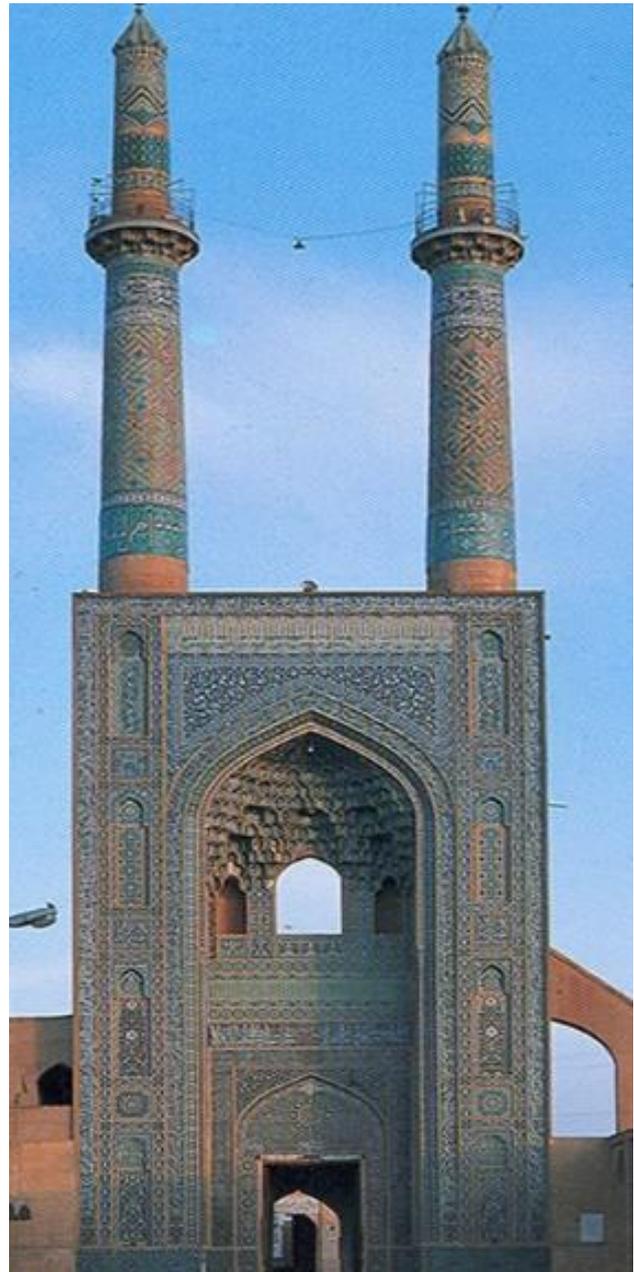
**Figure 5.** Castle (Arg)



**Figure 6.** Tomb



**Figure 7.** Alley



**Figure 8.** façade of the mosque

### **Effect of Islam**

Tekuder (681-683) Hulagu khan's son, is regarded as the first Muslim Ilkhan. Iranian politicians had a big role in his empowerment. Also, Iranian sages finally succeeded in converting Ghazan khan to Islam (694). Ghazan, (Mahmud) declared Islam as the official religion. Oljaitu and Abu Saeed were two other Ilkhan rulers that converted to Islam [12]. Conversion of these rulers to Islam and their effort to apply Islamic principles in society resulted in changes in art and architecture.

1) We witnessed building tombs for Mongolian rulers unlike the past; because according to the

ancient custom of Shaman, they would build their tombs in unknown places away from others' reach; while Ghazan khan after converting to Islam, built a tomb for himself and cultivated its surroundings and called it Shanb Ghazan; or Oljaitu to make a new capital and a tomb for himself, built the city of Soltanieh [12].

2) Prevalence of building education centers to teach theology and science, like Rabe-e Rashidi educational complex in the Ilkhanate period. The founder of this complex was Rashid-al-Din Hamadani, minister of Ghazan khan and Oljaitu [13].



**Figure 9.** Rabe-e Rashidi

## CONCLUSION

The Ilkhan architecture used Seljuq techniques and motifs and created works with a different spiritual quality that found a new meaning in the special spiritual atmosphere of that time. In this article, by identifying important political, cultural, artistic, and religious elements in the interval of the Mongolians' invasion till the end of the Ilkhan dominion, Persian artistic and architectural reformations were analyzed. Finally, to sum up, this conclusion was made that: A) Regarding politics, although we witnessed various destructions in architecture at the beginning of the Mongolians' reign, later due to interactions with China and a combination of two painting styles of Chinese and Baghdadi, we saw a reformation in Tabriz style and prevalence of portraitist and miniature. B) Regarding culture, considering the Ilkhans' tendency to Persian principles and employment of scientists in the head of government; and the rulers' tendency to display greatness, we saw the prevalence of previous urbanization motifs and the emergence of large cultural and artistic centers and building libraries and observatories and prevalence of tall buildings.

C) Regarding religion, due to the Mongolian rulers' tendency to Shamanic creed and then converting to Islam, and finally Sufism, we saw the prevalence of domes and tall minarets and building of broad graveyards and theology educational centers.

## Competing interests

The author declares that there is no competing interest.

## REFERENCES

1. Van Renterghem V (2009). The Mongols in the Islamic Lands—Studies in the History of the Ilkhanate. *Journal of Early Modern History*. 13(1):86-8. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006509X436950>
2. Mirinezhad, S (2014). The effect of Mongolian Shamanism in Ilkhan architecture in Iran. *City Identity*, No.20.
3. Aghili A (2016). Studying cultural occasions of Iran and China in the Ilkhanate period, a historical periodical of foreign relations, No. 68.
4. Aigle D (2008). Iran under Mongol domination: The effectiveness and failings of a dual administrative system. *Bulletin d'études orientales*. Mar 1(Supplément LVII):65-78. PDF; [Google Scholar](#)
5. Razavi A (2018). Military control station in Ilkhan and other rulers' occasions. *History of Islamic Civilization Bulletin*, No. 51.
6. Samaghi F (2013). Analysis of circumstances of the Ilkhans' relations with rulers of minor Asia, humanism and cultural studies research center, No. 3.
7. Moghtadaee A (2008). The peak of calligraphy, the Ilkhan style, gathering of Tabriz art school.
8. Torkamani Azar P (2007). Persian scientific centers in the Ilkhanate period, *History of Islam magazine*, No. 29
9. Mollahasani, M (2018). Scientific and educational centers of the Ilkhanate period and the role of Persian bureaucrats in its establishment, *Growth periodical of historical education*.
10. Azand, Y (2013). Painting style of Baghdad (Al-e Jalayer), *fine arts*, No. 14.
11. Mamani H, Sharifi N, Utaberta N (2012). Investigating Cultural, Artistic and Architectural Consequences of Mongolian Invasion of Iran and Establishment of Ilkhanate Dynasty. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 6(7): 1906-11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1329937>
12. Barani M (2002). The criticism and analysis of the Ilkhans' tendency to Islam and Shiite, history in the mirror of research. No. 1.
13. Sarafrazi A (2010). The religious and political attitudes of Ilkhans towards the Ilkhanid's coins (1253-1355). *Journal of Historical Researches (University Of Isfahan)*, 46(1-5): 47-65. <https://www.sid.ir/paper/148706/en> ; [Google Scholar](#)

14. Farahani M (2008). An association of architectural complexes in the Ilkhanate period, the first large geometrical criterion urban places in Iran. Gathering of Tabriz artistic style.