

# Investigating Cultural, Artistic and Architectural Consequences of Mongolian Invasion of Iran and Establishment of Ilkhanate Dynasty

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**Abstract**—Social, culture and artistic status of a society in various historical eras is affected by numerous, and sometimes imposed, factors that better understanding requires analysis of such conditions. Throughout history Iran has been involved with determining and significant events that examining each of these events can improve the understanding of social conditions of this country in the intended time. Mongolian conquest of Iran is one of most significant events in the history of Iran with consequences that never left Iranian societies. During this tragic invasion and subsequent devastating wars, which led to establishment of Ilkhanate dynasty, numerous cultural and artistic changes occurred both in Mongolian conquerors and Iranian society. This study examines these changes with a glimpse towards art and architecture as important part of cultural aspects and social communication.

**Keywords**—Art and Architecture, Exchanging cultures, Ilkhanates, War

## I. INTRODUCTION

**S**TUDYING the process of cultural and social formation, growth and development in a society indicates that what is evident as dominant culture in a society in a given time is the result of a very complex process. Identifying, analysis and criticizing cultural and social conditions require examining effective factors on the trend of a process, which produces social and cultural conditions. These factors can be very different whether in quality or quantity in different times and locations. A great range of such factors can have determining roles, including and not limited to climate, natural conditions and events, cultural bases and backgrounds, knowledge and technology, governing rulers and policy, interactions with other regions and countries, wars and presence of celebrities.

It is prudent to state that art works of a society, to a great extent, can describe the cultural conditions of that society at time of their conception, therefore in order to recognize and analyze such works the aforesaid factors must be considered.

On the other hand, to better understand cultural conditions and recognizing effective factors on social conditions of the intended time, a great solution is to study the art works of that era.

## II. IRAN: GREAT AND NUMEROUS EVENTS

Iran is known for its strategic location. Such status was more evident in the past, when no airlines were present and ground roads were the most important communication paths between countries. This strategic location acted as a two-edged blade towards this country. Various tragic events, numerous devastating wars, foreign sovereigns and greedy power hungry rulers have established an important part of Iran's history and their effects must be noted on formation of cultures and traditions and also art works.

Iran's history is filled with devastating wars, mostly fought because of other invading countries or conquests of Iranian rulers. Studying Iran's borders in various historical eras shows significant changes in sovereign dynasties and frequent changes in location of capital, all narrate the hardships that this land has endured. Meanwhile, there has been no shortage of prosperity and flourishing social and economical conditions. Between all of these devastating and significant changes, the reason for stability of Iranian cultural identity can be attributed to background and history of Iranian culture accompanied by presence and activities of social celebrities.

## III. MONGOLIAN CONQUEST OF IRAN AND CONSEQUENCES

Among events determining the trend of Iran's history, Mongolian invasion is most probably the most tragic. 40 years of invasion began by Genghis Khan in 1287 A.C. and conquest of Iran and subsequent establishment of Ilkhanate dynasty had deep and lasting impact on history of Iran and the region.

Mongolian invasion of Iran occurred in a time that this country was a leading region in scientific, cultural and artistic fields. Great schools, well-known scientists and artists and also valuable works of arts, architecture and literature in this era depict a growing and developing society. Mongolian invasion of Iran and Ilkhanate dynasty significantly affected this trend. Devastation and destruction brought forth by this war forever changed the direction of social, scientific and cultural path of Iran. Sovereignty of Ilkhanate dynasty great expanses of Middle Asia and Middle East are among the most tragic but significant eras in this history of this region.

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Fig. 1 A sample of Iranian architecture before Mongols' conquest, Dome of Taj-ol-Molk, Isfahans' Jame mosque, 11<sup>th</sup> century

This invasion was triggered by a local ruler of Iran who unknowingly, and unwittingly, killed Mongolian traders and was ended by fall of Ismailian castles and conquest of Baghdad by Hulagu Khan. Sack of Baghdad meant the fall of Abbasid Caliphate and as the seat of Islamic power, this event had unprecedented effects throughout Islamic countries. Hulagu Khan was the founder of Mongolian Ilkhanate dynasty (1265-1335 A.C.) in Iran. Ilkhanate also brought sections of current Anatoly, Iraq and Afghanistan under their rule. The first Mongolian rulers in Iran were affiliated with the great Mongolian ruler in China, but gradually the Mongolian Ilkhanate in Iran became an independent government.

On the other hand, what transpired in this era also clearly affected Mongolian rulers by Iranian culture and civilization. These changes are an example of complex cultural evolutions made in both conqueror and conquered nations.



Fig. 2 Boji-e-Toghrol, A Ilkhanate tomb, 14<sup>th</sup> century

#### IV. EFFECT OF MONGOLIAN WARS ON CULTURE, ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF IRAN

Consequences of this long and devastating war were bitter and significant. Scientists, artists and celebrities were killed and became homeless like other people. No longer was an opportunity for research, innovation, construction and even training new disciples. This long war destroyed whole cities and many art and architecture works and broke the continuous link between generations of artists and architects. Therefore many experiences that were orally transferred to the next generation were lost after the war. This is evident by clear deterioration of quality in architectural works after the war. Structures of this era, the Mongolian Ilkhanate dynasty, are not comparable in quality and stability with that of the pre-war era. On the other hand, after war and establishment of Ilkhanatee, quick and hasty construction was required to amend the numerous destruction brought forth by the war and this contributed to the deteriorating quality in structures.

#### V. IMPRESSION OF IRANIAN CULTURE, TRADITION AND CIVILIZATION ON MONGOLIAN RULERS

As Mongolian invaders were affected by culture, civilization and art of china when confronting that great nation, gradually there were affected by the local culture of conquered regions. Thus such impressions became evident in their tradition, works of arts and architecture. The effects of Iranian culture on tastes, traditions and governing methods are evident especially as of time of Ghazan Khan. He implemented extensive social and economic reforms. These reforms continued in the times of Oljeitu and Abu'Said. Maybe the most contributing factor in inclination of Ilkhanate towards Iranian methods is utilizing Iranian advisers and viziers.

Initially, Mongolian rulers maintained their nomadic nature and changed their location of residence according to the climate of various regions in respect of time of the year. But as of Ghazan Khan and subsequent severance of relations with great Khan in China, urban culture replaced traditional Mongolian lifestyle. The first clear signs of Iranian cultures affecting Mongolian rulers can be seen in this era. Ghazan Khan converted to Islam and ordered the construction of a Mosque and a Bathhouse in cities of Iran. But main impression of Ghazan Khan from Iranian culture, after choosing urban life, can be seen in construction of a tomb complex. He ordered a tomb to be constructed in Shanbe Ghazan Khan, a city near Tabriz, while based on Mongolian traditions the burial place of persons were hidden and unclear. But according to Iranian traditions, Ghazan Khan chose to have distinct and magnificent tomb containing public utility buildings in its surroundings. Maybe it is the most evident impressions of Iranian tradition on Mongolian rulers. Mongolian rulers' support of tomb complexes brought about transition of architecture of these complexes to a new era. The basic pattern for construction of these tombs followed the extrovert pattern of previous eras.

Mongolian tastes in art and architecture clearly were affected by Iranian art and architecture. They employed and supported Iranian architects and artists.



Fig. 3 Oljeitus' tomb in Soltaniyeh

#### VI. EFFECT OF MONGOLIAN TASTE AND NATURE ON IRAN'S ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Mongolian rulers were greatly ambitious, a fact that can be seen in their military conquests. Such ambitious spirit made them interest in great and magnificent buildings remaining from ancient Persian kings of pre-Islam Iran. Abaqa Khan had a great interest in Takht-e Soleyman and this great complex remaining from Sassanid era (224-651 A.C.) –the mighty Persian Empire which became extinct upon Arab invasion– was reconstructed and used by Mongolian rulers. Mongolian rulers' inclination towards grandeur affected the Iranian architectural works of this era and great high rising buildings became a hallmark of architecture in this era.



Fig. 4 Yazds' Jame mosque

Mongolian Ilkhanate had great interest in decorative arts. Before Islam decorative arts were favored and used extensively. But after Islam and ban on a number of decorative arts, especially painting and sculpting limited the use of these arts, although in artists used attractive decorative methods in architectural works that were accepted by religious experts.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Ilkhanate interest in history or Iran and attractive art of this land caused Mongolian rulers, especially after Ghazan Khan, by encouragements and advises of viziers such as Rashīd al-Dīn Tabīb (1247-1318 A.C.) to support decorative arts, especially that of book illustration, calligraphy and painting.<sup>2</sup> New copies were prepared from old Iranian books and inscriptions and many old stories were depicted in miniature painting. Therefore interest of Mongolian Ilkhanate in decorative arts is somewhat alleviated the limitations imposed by religious experts on using decorations, especially paintings. Although many paintings were still that of storytelling and there was less realist paintings in this era, which is caused by religious limitations. However, Ilkhanate supports affected the development of decorative arts, especially lifting the ban on paintings is an important result of these supports.

<sup>1</sup> Geometrical, abstract floral motifs and inscriptions in various forms were used to decorate buildings.

<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that this interest continued towards the next dynasty and flourished in Timurid dynasty.





Fig. 5 a Page of Shah Name, 14<sup>th</sup> century ,Brooklyn museum[6]

Mongolian rulers' fascination with building decoration and colors and colored decoration is an evident evolution in architectural decoration in Iran. Using colored decorations was also limited in Iran after entering of Islam.<sup>3</sup> Therefore architectural decorations were usually conducted uni-colored (natural color of brick or plaster) in combination with cyan or azure tiles or bricks.<sup>4</sup> But in this era and because of Ilkhanate extensive interest in colored decorations, tile works became prevalent and building decorations departed from being uni-colored or bi-colored. Use of colors changed the environment of architecture in Iran. Gradually the solemn, heavy and artistic decoration of the previous era was replaced by colorful joyful and understandable decorations.

<sup>3</sup> The said limitation are not part of Islamic rules and there is no mention of such in Quran .Based on the opinions of some researchers such as Burckhardt and Stierlin ,such limitations was suggested by the profit of Islam for controlling Arabs' inclination toward Idolatry and some religious experts believed that in general these arts should be limited.

<sup>4</sup> Numerous valuable works have been performed in Iran by this method which is among the most valuable works of art in Iran, such as Robat-e-Sharaf ,Isfahans' Jame mosque, Kharaghans' towers and Ardestans' jame mosque .



Fig. 6 Decorations of Varamins' Jame mosque

On the other hand, Mongolian rulers were also inspired by the Chinese culture and art; therefore it made its impact on Iranian culture and art. Arthur Pope considers Mongolian impact beneficial for decoration of Iranian decoration and believes that Iran architectural decorations, which had recessed and became cold and dull was resurrected by lively vegetative motifs derived from Chinese art.<sup>5</sup>[2] Of course there are researchers such as Pirnia believe that the decorations of previous era had higher artistic value.

#### VII. IMPACT FROM CHINESE ART

As mentioned, Mongolians became familiar with Chinese art and culture before Iran and it can be said that the taste of Mongolian rulers was closer to Chinese. Therefore the introduction of Chinese motifs in this era is evident.



Fig. 7 The paint of Mahmood of Ghazni ,14th century ,Library of Edinburgh University[6]

Three types of such impression are recognizable, first is using motifs that were unprecedented and were completely derived from Chinese art. Using dragon motifs in Takht-e Soleyman and Dashkesan Tomb (Near Soltaniyeh) are examples of such impression. Second is the impression of

<sup>5</sup> Pope.A believes that this renovation was made with evaluation not with the placement, meaning that Iranian nature the decorations were preserved but it gained renewed liveliness.



Chinese motifs on Iranian painting, which seems to impress Iranian artists by considering the previous limitations. Paintings from Ilkhanate era show the extent that Iranian painters were affected by Chinese painting. After this era, Iranian paintings advanced significantly and gained its own Iranian identity, which is known as Miniature.



Fig. 8 Floral motif, Naeens' Jame mosque, 10<sup>th</sup> century (before impact of Chinese art)

The third impact from Chinese arts was the changes in abstract Iranian floral motifs (vegetal motifs) affected by Chinese motifs of the same nature. This change is made while Iranian identities of the motifs are preserved, meaning that Iranian Floral motifs (which dates back to Sassanid Era) became thinner and the background of these motifs became more evident. This change was also well received in the next era.

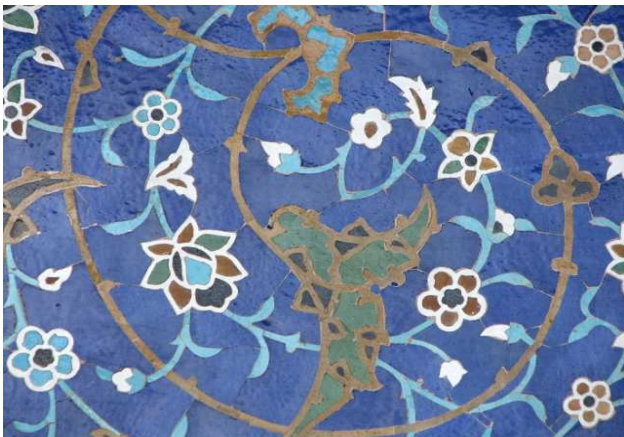


Fig. 9 Floral motifs Entrance of Shahs' mosque in Isfahan, Safavid era, 17<sup>th</sup> century (after impact from Chinese art)

#### VIII. CONTINUING PREVIOUS METHODS AND PATTERNS

Artists and architects of Ilkhanate era had access to the enormous and invaluable treasure of art and architecture experiences of Iran. Despite of devastations caused by the war, they still saw and recognized valuable works of art and architecture from previous eras and their patterns became their models. Iran with its ancient civilization and a culture as old in

addition to capable artists has always been a source of valuable works of art and science if favorable and safe conditions were provided. During Ilkhanate era the main concern of Iranian society was Mongolian sovereignty and alien rulers. But through supports of Mongolian rulers it became a flourishing era for art and architecture of Iran.



Fig. 10 Oljeitus' Mihrab, Isfahans' Jame mosque, 7<sup>th</sup> century

In this regard, Shila Beller and Jonathan Bloom believe that Mongolian conquests were beneficial for Iran when considering architecture and other arts and Iran became a center of cultural and artistic innovation in the Islamic world. Iranian patterns in this era became criteria for evaluating works of art in most of Islamic regions. For example the strong Chahar Eivani pattern (four varanda) became prevalent in Egypt, Morocco and India.



Fig. 11 Chahar Eivani pattern (four varanda), Varamins' Jame mosque, 17<sup>th</sup> century

## IX. CONCLUSION

Mongolian conquest of Iran, the result of personal mistake of a local ruler, changed the fate of Iran and countries of the region. It is evident that after Mongolian invasion the country never returned to the path of progress, which was expanded before her. But as noted, cultural evolution made its own complex path and such interesting changes became evident even in cultural aspects such as works of art and architecture. Culture, art and architecture of Iran and also culture, tradition and taste of Mongolians underwent distinct changes after the war and during Ilkhanate dynasty. Some of these changes continued after extinction of Mongolian rule of Iran. What is known as cultural and social background of Iran is the result of numerous small and large historical events, among which Mongolian invasion one of the most important is. But what is interesting is the preserving of Iranian identity in majority of works of art and architecture despite of all changes and evolutions.

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