The following report will focus on the darkest hours orthodox Islam went through when the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate in Baghdad was extinguished by the Mongols in the year 1258. It was Rašīd al-Dīn, the Prime Minister (1247-1318), who under two Ilkhāns, i.e. Mongol rulers in Persia, raised Islam to an unexpected height. Many things that followed the extinction of the orthodox Caliphate were paradox: the political leader, Rašīd al-Dīn, who served as Great Vizier at the court of two Mongol Ilkhāns in Iran, Gāzān and Öljeitū, was of Jewish descent. He invested all his personal strength and political ability to the benefit of Islam and the Muslims in Persia. During his political career the Mongol state in Iran enjoyed political stability while most states in the Middle East suffered from political insecurity. His enormous wealth and his generous and bountiful support of Muslim scholars, but also his success in handling the state affairs through many years filled his adversaries with envy. Being 70 years of age, he finally was condemned to death by the young ruler Abū Sa’īd, the 13 years old son and successor of Öljeitū, whom Rašīd al-Dīn served with loyalty as the fifth Mongolian Ḥān in Iran.

Since Rašīd al-Dīn’s death the situation of Mongol Persia deteriorated. Intrigues within the political leadership accelerated the ruin of the Mongol Ilkhānate which finally ceased to exist. We’ll see how Rašīd al-Dīn helped to nurture the hatred against himself e.g. by circulating his theory of the Koran being a cryptograph whose hidden, essential meaning, according to his opinion, can be understood only by few men who are predisposed to understand intellectually the holy book of Islam.
Raşīd al-Dīn was conscious of the fact that his great knowledge and expertise in Islamic sciences could not outweigh the prejudices against his Jewish descent. This was a taint which by no means could be reduced. Raşīd al-Dīn accused no one, but instead he pointed to the fact that two of the greatest thinkers of their time, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ḡazzālī (1059-1111) and Faḫr a-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149-1209), were also much envied. Raşīd al-Dīn had chosen deliberately these two scholars, for each of them, standing at the head of a century, was considered to be sent by God as a reformer of Islam—al-Ḡazzālī at the head of the 6th H. century and Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī of the 7th H. century. So Raşīd al-Dīn could likewise be considered to be a muḫaddid (reformer) of Islam.

The Mongol Invasion

The early Islamic schism between Sunnī and Šīʿī believers was not only a separation of religious concern, but until today this schism culminates in social and political enmity between the two groups of believers, Sunnīs and Šīʿīs. The Caliphs who stood in Baγdād at the head of Sunnī, that is Orthodox, Islam, in spiritual and secular matters as well, were in the 10th century oppressed by the Šīʿī dynasty of the Buwayhids (Būyids). The conflict intensified when in the 13th century Ġingiz Ūan (1167-1227) crossed the border into Transoxania turning against the ḫwārazm-Šāh Muḥammad whose original territory was in the very fertile province in the area where the river Oxus flows into the Aral Sea. His territory became enlarged and stretched finally, though his empire was short-lived, from the borders of India to those of Anatolia. His son, Gālāl al-Dīn (reigned 1220-1231), was defeated by the Mongols in 1231 and his vast territories were annexed by them. The Mongols attacked and annihilated all resistance. Hūleǧū (1218-1265), the first Īlḫān and younger brother of Khubīlī (1215-1264), the Mongol Great-Ūan in China, had been ordered to extinguish the still existing strongholds of the Ismāʿīlīs. The citadel of the Assassins in Alamūt fell in the year 1256. Two years later Hūleǧū attacked Baγdād, the metropolis of Islam. On 15th February 1258 the Caliph al-Mustašīm died being kicked to death. 800,000 people are said to have perished and scarcely