
This volume of the Variorum Collected Studies contains a selection of 16 articles of the prolific scholar Reuven Amitai, Professor of Muslim History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. These articles, published between 1987 and 2005, focus on different aspects of Ilkhanid history and particularly on the 60 years of war (1260-1323) between the Ilkhanid dynasty and the Mamluk sultanate. This conflict is a topic to which Amitai has also devoted a monograph [*Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)].

The studies are solid scholarly work, making use of pro-Mongols sources (in Persian and Mongolian), of Christian sources (in Syriac and Armenian), but also of pro-Mamluk historiographical texts in Arabic, a rich source of information on the Ilkhans.

The first part of the work (4 articles) is devoted to “Institutions and Historiography”. From a careful study of primary sources, the author here undertakes various cases-studies, such as the early use of the title “Ilkhan” (I). He also adds some elements to the biography of Rashid al-Din, Persian bureaucrat and historian of the Ilkhanid dynasty (III) and emphasizes the importance of the work of the Mamluk historian al-Nuwayri (d. 733/1333) on the Ilkhanid period (IV). The second article, “Turko-Mongolian nomads and the *iqta* system in the Islamic Middle East (ca. 1000-1400 AD)” (2001), is of wider interest. It starts with an enlightened summary on the history of *iqta* system (“revenue generating allotment of land for army officers”, p. 153) and examines the actual implication of Ghazan Khan’s (1295-1304) reforms, but above all it provides an interesting discussion on the nomadic Mongols’ adaptation to a sedentary Muslim environment. Through a very careful examination of the available sources, Amitai argues that in reality, the *iqta* was never fully adopted by the Ilkhanid rulers; an argument that well illustrates their general reluctance to abandon Mongol traditions in favor of Muslim institutions.

Issues of acculturation are also central in the second part of this work (3 articles) despite the rather restrictive title of “The Conversion of Mongols to Islam”. Through a study of the first Muslim Ilkhan ruler Tegüder Ahmad’s reign (1282-84) (V), and a careful reexamination of the Mamluk sources on the reasons behind one of the most famous ilkhaniid conversions to Islam, that of Ghazan Khan (VI), Amitai both deals with the
political implications of these conversions and raises the broader question of the islamization process among the Mongol elites and common population. The author emphasizes the role of Sufis in the spread of a pro-Islamic feeling among the ruling elites, but argues against the supposed analogy made between Sufis and Shamans, used by modern scholars such as Köprülü as an explanation for the successfulness of Sufis (and therefore of Islam) among the Mongols of Iran (VII). By making a distinction between the receptivity of different generations of Mongols to Islam (‘senior’ Mongol officers immigrated to Iranian lands during the military campaigns of Hülegü versus Mongols born after the conquest), Amitai approaches an acculturation phenomenon that goes beyond the field of religion. At the core of this reflection is the adaptation of a nomadic, warlike population in a sedentary, Muslim environment. Here, the author highlights the influence of Muslim Turkish nomads already present in Iran in the process of Mongol acculturation. These questions are raised again in some convincing pages of the work’s last article (XVI, pp. 375-377).

The third and main part of the work, “The War Against the Mamluks” (9 articles), primarily consists of cases-studies dealing with the complex situation in 13th and 14th centuries’ Syria and Palestine. It focuses on the interaction between the three main actors in the area: the Mamluk sultanate, the Mongol Ilkhans and the Latin states. A clear and didactical summary of the situation is proposed in article XIV, “Northern Syria between the Mongols and the Mamluks: political boundary, military frontier, and ethnic affinities” (1999). Some studies are dedicated to military issues and provide very detailed reconstitutions of important battles between Mongols and Mamluks, such as the Mamluk triumph at ‘Ayn Jalut (658/1260) (IX), the Mongol victory of Wadi al-Khaznadadar, in the vicinity of Homs (699/1299-1300) (XV), and the Mongol raids in Palestine during the second half of the 13th century (VIII). These studies include discussions on the number of soldiers, equipments and tactics of the two armies. Issues of diplomacy are raised through the study of the tentative agreements between the Ilkhanids and the Frankish or Western Christian rulers (XI, XIII). Another important matter in this context is the implications of the ‘Mongol imperial ideology’, based on the belief that a divine mandate to rule the world had been given to the descendants of Chinggis Khan (XII). The political impact of this belief, justifying the Mongol territorial expansion, included an aggressive Mongol diplomacy towards the Mamluks (X). Amitai demonstrates how only the weakening of this “imperial ideology” could lead to the signature of a peace treaty (sulh) with the Mamluks in 1323.