

The Islamization of Hülegü: Imaginary Conversion in the Ilkhanate¹

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As is well known, Hülegü, Chinggis Khan's grandson and the founder of the Ilkhanate (r. 658-664/1260-65) never converted to Islam. Moreover, as the man who annihilated the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258), that had led the Islamic *umma* for more than half a millennium, Hülegü was often portrayed—albeit mainly outside his realm—as one of the great destroyers of Islam. Yet, around the mid-seventh/fourteenth century we find at least two different conversion stories related to Hülegü in both Ilkhanid and Mamluk sources, both allegedly originating in Baghdad. This paper aims to present these narratives and analyze their origin and use in the context of the later or post-Ilkhanate period. I may say already at this stage that I have

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more questions than answers, and that my explanations as to why such stories were invented are rather speculative.

Apart from the intriguing statement of Ibn Bazzāz (d. 794/1391), that Hülegü embraced Islam together with Berke, Khan of the Golden Horde (r. 654-665/1257-67), by Sayyid Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq al-Tirmidhī, the teacher of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī,² we have two fuller and earlier references to the first Ilkhan's alleged conversion. The simpler one, ascribed to the Baghdadi historian al-Kāzarūnī (d. 697/1298) and appearing in Hülegü's biography in various Mamluk biographical dictionaries from the mid-seventh/fourteenth century onwards, ascribes the conversion to the request of a Georgian princess.³ The second one, which is a full-fledged conversion story, appears in *Mukhtaṣar akhbār al-khulafā'* (Abridgement of the history of [the Abbasid] Caliphs), ascribed to Ibn al-Sā'ī (d. 674/1276), the notable Baghdadi historian,

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²Ibn Bazzāz, *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā'* (Tehran, 1994), p. 195. Berke is considered the first Mongol prince to adopt Islam, yet his conversion is usually attributed to the Kubrawī shaykh Sayf al-Dīn al-Bākhazī. See D. Dewese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde* (Philadelphia, 1994), pp. 83-90. On Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq see F. D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and present, east and west* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 96-118.

³Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 747/1348), *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, ed. 'U. 'A. Tadmurī (Beirut, 1995-2004), lvii, p. 182; Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363), *al-Wāfi bi'l-wafayāt*, ed. Helmut Ritter (Beirut, 2008), xxvii, p. 400; hence Muḥammad b. Shākir al-Kutubī (d. 764/1363), *Fawāt al-wafayāt* (Beirut, 2000), ii, p. 581; Ibn al-Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470), *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wal-mustawfā ba'd al-wāfi* (Cairo, 2005), xii, pp. 51-52.

but probably not written by him (see below). A similar version appears in *Tiryāq al-muḥibbīn fī sīrat sulṭān al-‘arīfīn Aḥmad Ibn al-Rifā‘ī* by Taḳī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Wāsiṭī (d. 744/1343-4), a biography of the founder of the Rifā‘iyya order, the members of which allegedly converted Hülegü. I will deal with the two cases separately before trying to reach further conclusions about the functions of these conversion stories.

1. The Georgian princess’ request: The Mamluk Version

This naïve story is ascribed to al-Zāhīr b. al-Kāzarūnī (d. 697/1298), a Baghdadi historian who wrote a history of the Caliphate and took part in Ilkhanid administration.⁴ He ascribed the story to al-Najm Aḥmad b. al-Bawwāb, the illuminator (*naqqāsh*), the resident of Marāgha. The latter was a polymath, well-versed in astronomy, mathematics and engineering, who was employed at the Marāgha observatory, had access to Hülegü and was familiar with the figures

⁴ Zāhīr al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī Ibn al-Kāzarūnī’s surviving work, *Mukhtaṣar al-ta’rīkh*, is a short history from the creation to the fall of the Abbasids, including a rather benign description of the Mongol conquest. Najm al-Dīn b. al-Bawwāb is mentioned in this book as one of Kāzarūnī’s sources (*Mukhtaṣar al-Ta’rīkh*, ed. M. Jawwād [Baghdad, 1970], pp. 266-280, p. 273 for Ibn al-Bawwāb). Ibn al-Kāzarūnī was also a teacher of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, the famous Baghdadi historian (*Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, Talkhīs majma‘ al-udabā’* [Tehran, 1995], i, p. 550, iv, pp. 141, 204, 424; Dhahabī, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām*, lvi, p. 39).

mentioned in the story.⁵ The translation below follows al-Dhahabī, whose version seems to have been the source of the other compilers:

al-Najm Aḥmad b. al-Bawwāb the illuminator, the inhabitant of Maragha, told me: Hülegü wanted to marry the daughter of the king of the Georgians [*malik al-Kurj*]. She said: Only if you will convert to Islam (*ḥattā tuslimu*). He said: Tell me what I shall say. They presented him the two testimonies (*al-shahādatayn*) and he acknowledged them, and the Khwājā Naṣīr al-Ṭūsī⁶ and Fakhr al-Dīn the astronomer⁷ were his witnesses for that. When she heard of that, she agreed [to marry him]. The *qāḍī* Fakhr al-Dīn al-Khilāṭī⁸ came [to

⁵ On Najm al-Dīn see, e.g., Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majmaʿ*, ii, pp. 552-3; iii, pp. 149-50; iv, p. 203.

⁶ On al-Ṭūsī, Hulegu's chief astronomer and one of the leading Muslim polymaths see e.g. "al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Reference.

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<http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-t-u-si-nas-i-r-al-di-n-COM_1264> last accessed January 5, 2015.

⁷ There were several astronomers called Fakhr al-Dīn in Marāgha. The one mentioned here is probably Fakhr al-Dīn al-Marāghī (Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majmaʿ*, iii, pp. 149-50), or Fakhr al-Dīn Abū al-H 'Alī b. Tāj al-Dīn al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn Yūsuf b. Ḥammād al-Khazāʿī al-Jārdahī, al-Dāmghānī (Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majmaʿ*, iii, pp. 79-80).

⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Khilāṭī (d. 680/1281 or 682/1283 or 686/1287-8), one of the founding fathers of Marāgha, who was not only a *qāḍī* but also a physician, astronomer and Sufi see e.g. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majmaʿ*, iii, pp. 54-56; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, lviii, p. 356 al-Ṣafadī, al-Wāfi, xviii, p. 515.

perform the ceremony]. al-Naṣīr [al-Ṭūsī] vouched for her [the princess] and al-Fakhr the astronomer [vouched] for the sultan. They signed the [marriage] contract in the name of Tāmār Khātūn,⁹ daughter of king David,

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son of Īwānī, for the sum of 30,000 dinars. Said Ibn al-Bawwāb: I wrote the letter on a white satin fabric.¹⁰

In the other sources, the story ends here but al-Dhahabī adds:

And I wondered at his [i.e. Hülegü's] conversion to Islam. I said [i.e. al-Dhahabī]: If this is true, then perhaps he said [the two testimonies] with his mouth, due to his lack of attachment to [any] religion, and Islam did not enter his heart - and God knows best.¹¹

⁹ Tamar, daughter of Jigda Khatun and of the Georgian king David Ulu, who fought with Hülegü in Baghdad, is mentioned in the *Georgian Chronicle* (p. 351), but without any reference to her marriage to Hülegü. She is not to be confused with the famous Georgian queen, Tamar Khatun (r. 579-609/1184-1213), and her granddaughter Tamar Khatun, known also as Gurji Khatun, who married the Seljuq sultan of Rum Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kai Khosraw II (r. 633-42/1236-45). See Kartlis Ckhovreba, A History of Georgia,, tr. D. Gamqrelidze, M. Abashidze, and A. Chanturia; ed. R. Metreveli and S. Jones (Tbilisi, 2014), pp. 324, 328, 335, 336, 351, 370-1; online edition (last accessed on December 19, 2014) at <http://www.science.org.ge/books/Kartlis%20cxovreba/Kartlis%20Cxovreba%202012%20Eng.pdf>

¹⁰ See n. 3.

¹¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Ta' rīkh al-Islām*, lvii, p. 182.

Indeed, earlier al-Dhahabī mentions that ‘in the Mongol manner [Hülegü] was not attached to any religion, although his wife was a Christian’,¹² there referring probably to Hülegü’s famous wife, Dokuz Khātūn, and not to the Georgian princess.¹³ Such a Georgian wife is not mentioned among Hülegü’s wives as described by Rashīd al-Dīn or in the Timurid *Mu‘īzz al-Ansāb*.¹⁴ The Georgian chronicle also does not mention it, thus no wonder that the Mamluk sources doubt the story. The logic behind it is in any case a bit blurred: why should a Christian princess be interested in Hülegü’s Islamization? More often the Georgians tried to enforce the Christianization of those who married their daughters.¹⁵ The story does not present Hülegü in a favorable light:

¹² Ibid., p. 181; see also al-Şafadī, al-Wāfi, xxvii, p. 399. Both refer to Quṭb al-Dīn al-Yūnīnī (d. 728/1328) as the source of this information; indeed it appears in Hülegü’s biography in al-Yūnīnī’s work, where the conversion story is not mentioned: Quṭb al-Dīn al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl mira’t al-zamān* (Jalalabad, 1955), i, pp. 357-60.

¹³ For Dokuz Khātūn see Ch. Melville, ‘Dokuz Khātūn’, in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dokuz-doquz-katun>, last accessed January 2, 2015.

¹⁴ For Hülegü’s wives, see Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍlallāh, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh*, ed. B. Karīmī (Tehran, (1338/1959), ii, pp. 678-9; tr. W. M. Thackston, *Jami‘u’t-tawarikh* [sic] *Compendium of Chronicles* (Cambridge, MA, 1998-9), ii, pp. 471-2 (5 wives, all Mongolian); ‘Mu‘īzz al-Ansāb’, in A. K. Muminov (ed.), *Istoriia Kazakhstana v persidskikh istochnikakhvol. III* (Almaty, 2006), p. 74 (13 wives).

¹⁵ See e.g. Ibn al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr for the Crusading Period*, tr. D.S. Richards (Ashgate, 2008), iii, p. 244, where around 630/1233 a Seljuq prince of Erzurum converts to Christianity in order to marry a Georgian queen and becomes the King of Georgia. The queen later desired a certain Mamluk and was ready to let him

his conversion is described as lip service motivated by his desire to marry the Christian princess. The people mentioned—all of them well known figures from the Marāgha observatory—indeed knew each other, and Ibn al-Bawwāb, and were close to Hülegü. In other words, the anecdote could have happened, although it is not mentioned in the astronomers' biographies.¹⁶ The story might have been invented to slander these astronomers, who were willing to convert Hülegü despite his lack of faith: at least Fakhr al-Dīn al-Khilāfī is described by al-Ṣafadī—again citing al-Kāzarūnī—as someone who was ignorant of Islam (*jahala*) and drank wine.¹⁷ Yet, this is hardly a satisfying explanation. In general the story seems to belong more to the realm of *adab* (*belles-lettres*) and literary *topoi* than to the realm of history.

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2. The Fire Ordeal: The Ilkhanid Version [?]

The second conversion story is more elaborated. Its most extensive version appears at the end of Ibn al-Sā'ī's *Mukhtaṣar akhbār al-khulafā'*. Ibn al-Sā'ī (d. 674/1276) was a famous Baghdadi historian, and a highly prolific writer, who was active under both the Abbasids and the Ilkhanids. He was the librarian of the Niẓāmiyya college during al-Mu'taṣim's reign, and of al-Mustaṣirriyya college under the Ilkhanids, until 671/1272-3. He was both a Shāfi'ī scholar and a Sufi, whose compilations include history, law, traditions (*ḥadīth*), Qur'ān commentaries, biographies—including those

stay Muslim as long as she could have him. This may echo the story of the marriage of Queen Rusadan to Ghiyāth al-Dīn, a Seljuq prince who was kept captive in Georgia, after she had forced him to embrace Christianity.

¹⁶ This is reminiscent of the cases in *ḥadīth* criticism, where when the *isnād* is too good, the tradition looks fake.

¹⁷ al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, xviii, p. 515.

of Sufis—and *adab*, and was famous especially for his many works on the Abbasid Caliphs. Most of the works ascribed to him, however, have not reached us, perhaps due to the conquest's upheavals.¹⁸ Already Rosenthal doubted the authority of *Mukhtaṣar akhbār al-khulafā'*, ascribed to him by the Baghdadi publisher on the authority of the Ottoman bibliographer Hajji Khalifa (d.1067/ 1657).¹⁹ The unimpressive book does not fit Ibn al-Sā'ī's fame as a historian. Moreover, while the book's last page gives the year 666/1267-8 as the date of its completion, the immediately preceding part refers to the contemporaneous Muslim rulers, including the post-Ilkhanid dynasties of the Chobanids (735-58/1335-57) and Sarbadarids (737-82/1337-81), that rose to power more than half a century after Ibn al-Sā'ī's demise. As the conversion story appears immediately before this list of rulers, its date and the identity of its compiler remain obscure.²⁰ Moreover, the text refers to the Abbasid Caliph in Cairo as legitimate,²¹ thereby suggesting that the book was written or at

¹⁸ See F. Rosenthal, 'Ibn al-Sā'ī', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, 2014. Reference. HEBREW UNIVERSITY. 16 December 2014 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-al-sa-i-SIM_3350>, and see there for his extant works; N. Ma'rūf, *Tārīkh 'ulamā' al-Mustanṣiriyya* (Baghdād, 1965), ii, pp. 74-8, esp. the list of works on p. 77.

¹⁹ Rosenthal, *ibid.*

²⁰ Pseudo-Ibn al-Sā'ī, *Kitāb mukhtaṣar akhbār al-khulafā'* (Cairo, 1309/1891-2), title page, pp. 136-42.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

least edited in the Mamluk realm, where—unlike Ilkhanid Iran—this Caliph was acknowledged.²²

The story of Hülegü's conversion is brought after the short account of the reign of the last Abbasid Caliph, al-Musta'şim, which focuses on a grisly description of the Mongol conquest of Baghdad, highlighting the role of the Shī'ī vizier, Ibn al-'Alqamī, in the Mongols' arrival. The author then gives a general description of the dynasty (73 caliphs; ruled for 514 (*hijrī*) years; every sixth caliph was murdered), and cites the tradition, which he ascribes to al-Ṭabarī, according to which 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib predicted that the Caliphate would be given to the descendants of Abū al-'Abbās until it would be taken by the barbarians (*'ilj*) from Khurāsān, who have small eyes and broad faces (i.e. Mongoloid features).²³ He then moves to a description of Hülegü, whom he calls the Tyrant (*al-tāghī*), saying that he embraced Islam two months before his death, then bringing the conversion story that explains the reason for Hülegü's Islamization. The story goes as follows:

²² For the Abbasid Caliphate in Egypt, see B. Lewis, 'Abbāsids', *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, 2015. Reference. HEBREW UNIVERSITY. 03 January 2015 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/abba-sids-COM_0002>

²³ Pseudo-Ibn al-Sā'ī, pp. 126-8. This tradition, probably originally referring to the Turks, is cited in various versions in connection to the Mongol conquest of Baghdad and its apocalyptic nature. See M. Biran, "Violence and Non-Violent Means in the Mongol Conquest of Baghdad," in Robert Gleave, ed. *Violence in Islamic Thought*, vol. II, forthcoming.

The reason for his [Hülegü's] Islamization was that when he, with the Mongols and Tatars, destroyed the land and worshippers (*'ibād*) and hurt the radiant Islamic religion (*al-milla al-bayḍā' al-islāmiyya*) and its adherents, two great Companions of God (*wālī*) of the Aḥmadiyya order (*al-ṭā'ifa al-aḥmadiyya*)—who were familiar with Allāh, the Almighty, and with His messenger, may peace and prayer be upon him—devoted themselves to him [Hülegü]. [They were] the master (*al-Khāja*) Muḥammad al-Darbandī, who was born there, the sheikh of the Caucasus mountain, (whose family was) originally from Wāsīt, the scholar and doer of good deeds (*al-ālim al-āmil*), and the shaykh Ya'qūb Maḥdūm al-Jahanāyn ('he who is served in the two worlds'). They reached him (Hülegü) at Thulth, one of the districts (*a'māl*) of Salmās,²⁴ together with a great crowd of their followers, the dervishes (*fuqarā'*). The two advised him, saying: 'You are a venerable and wise king; someone like you should believe in the true religion and bring its triumph'. He said: 'If you provide me with a definite proof of the validity of the religion of Islam, I will follow it'. They brought him legal proofs based on tradition, and supported it with rational arguments, but in vain. He said: 'I want to have clear-cut evidence and irrefutable proof that even these Mongol and Tatar horse-herders can understand'. The two [sheikhs] said: 'Do what seems to you [necessary]'. He ordered that a great fire be lit, and a fire that was never seen before in those regions was kindled. He

²⁴ A city and district in the western part of the Persian province of Ādharbāyḍjān., near lake Urmiya. See C.E. Bosworth, 'Salmās'.', *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, 2015. Reference. HEBREW UNIVERSITY. 03 January 2015 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/salma-s-SIM_6560>

ordered that copper be melted for them and bitter poisons be prepared, and this was done while they were watching. In front of Hülegü was one of his children, who was less than ten years old. The Darbandī master snatched him, and cried out to his Sufi brother, the shaykh Ya‘qūb. He (Ya‘qūb) ordered those who were with the two (sheikhs) to enter the fire. All of them entered the fire and Hülegü’s son was with them. [Hülegü] was extremely angry, worried and in agony. A few hours passed until the fire was extinguished. The Darbandī, may God sanctify his secret and spirit, came out, and with him [came] Hülegü’s son, holding a green apple in his hand. Hülegü rushed to him and asked him how he was and (the son) said: I was in a beautiful garden and from its tree I plucked this apple. They also drank the molten copper and the deadly poison, and it did not hurt them, by the leave of God Almighty. Hülegü embraced Islam, bolstered the Muslim religion, and stopped hurting the Muslims due to the virtuous power (*baraka*) of the preferred Rifā‘iyya order (*al-ṭā’ifa al-Rifā’iyya al-murdiyya*), may God be pleased with it. More than twenty renowned Aḥmadī sheikhs were present at this ceremony, among them Shaykh Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Abdallāh al-Manī‘ī al-Baṭā’ihī, Shaykh Thābit b. ‘Abdallāh b. Thābit al-Wāsiṭī, Shaykh Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Na‘īm al-Baghdādī al-Ḥanbalī and others, may God sanctify their secrets.

The story ends with a verse that praised the Rifā‘ī Companions of God.

A shorter version of this story appears in al-Rifā‘ī’s biography, *Tiryāq al-muḥibbīn fī sīrat sulṭān al-‘arifīn Aḥmad Ibn al-Rifā‘ī*, compiled by Taqī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Wāsiṭī (d. 744/1343-4). The author was a Shāfi‘ī lawyer and traditionalist as well as a Sufi, who spent time in Damascus and Mecca, in addition to

his native Iraq.²⁵ This version credits the same two sheikhs with converting not only Hülegü, and also all his army (*jamī* ‘*asākirihi*), an act that put an end to the Mongols’ atrocities, thereby saving Islam and the Muslims. According to this version, the Rifā‘ī sheikhs told Hülegü that Islam is the true religion and

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what he believes in is false. ‘Hülegü ordered that copper be melted and that the molten copper be given to them and to their disciples to drink. They drank the poison and so did their disciples. Then they entered into the great fire, and it was extinguished— and God has reinforced the *sunna* and with them. He supported the religion (*al-milla*). Hülegü and his people converted to Islam and ceased from hurting Islam’.

The *Tiryāq* version includes the fire ordeal and the copper drinking, but not the part dealing with Hülegü’s son. It also gives more details on the two sheikhs who converted Hülegü, whom I was unable to locate in other contemporary sources. According to the *Tiryāq*, the two were among the most honorable sheikhs of Fārs, and the disciples of the famous Rifā‘ī Shaykh ‘Izz al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Fārūthī al-Kāzarūnī (614/1217-695/1296). The latter, a well-known figure in the Mamluk biographical literature, was famous as both a versatile religious scholar—Qur’ān reader, commentator, preacher, traditionalist, Shāfi‘ī lawyer—and a renowned Sufi sheikh, with many disciples and the ability to perform *karamāt*. Born in Wāsīt, in 629/1231-2, he went to study in Baghdad. Later he performed the *ḥajj*, and in 690/1291 reached Damascus, where he was appointed as a preacher and taught at various colleges.

²⁵ See e.g. al-Ṣafadī, *A ‘yān al ‘aṣr wa-a ‘wān al-naṣr* (Beirut and Damascus, 1998), iii, 30; and the first page in the *Tiryāq*.

While initially winning great respect in Damascus, he was dismissed after a mere year and returned to Wāsit, where he died in 695/1296. He gained success among the Mongols, and was especially close to the famous Ilkhanid merchant and Mongol administrator of Fārs, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Tibbī, who used to give him a thousand *mithqāl* every year and paid his debts.²⁶ As far as I can tell, however, the two converting sheikhs (or Hūlegü) are not mentioned among al-Fārūthī's disciples in the biographical literature, nor in al-Fārūthī's surviving Sufi writings.²⁷ The two sheikhs are mentioned in other Rifā'ī works only on the basis of the *Tiryāq* or later Rifā'ī works.²⁸ I was unable to positively identify the other Sheikhs mentioned in the pseudo-Ibn al-Sā'ī text.²⁹

²⁶ See e.g. al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, lx, pp. 206-9, lxi, p. 71; al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, viii, pp. 6-15; Ibn Rāfi' al-Sulāmī, *Tārīkh 'ulamā' Baghdād al-musammā Muntakhab al-mukhtār* (Baghdad, 1938), pp. 18-20, 84-86. For al-Tibbī see, e.g. R. Kauz, 'The maritime trade of Kish during the Mongol period,' in L. Komaroff (ed.), *Beyond the legacy of Genghis Khan* (Leiden, 2006), 58-9.

²⁷ 'Izz al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Fārūthī, *al-Nafḥa al-miskiyya fī al-sulāla al-Rifā'iyya al-zakiyya* (al-Āsitānah, 1301/1883); idem, *Kitāb irshād al-muslimīn li-ṭarīqat shaykh al-mutaqīn* (Cairo, 1307/1889).

²⁸ The two shaykhs and the conversion story are mentioned in al-Fārūthī's biography, brought by the anonymous editor of his *al-Nafḥah al-miskīyah* in the book's first pages (pp. 2-3), but not in the text itself; the editor often cites the *Tiryāq* which was probably his source for this anecdote; Abu 'l-Hudā Efendi al-Rāfi'ī al-Khālīdī al-Ṣayyādī *Tanwīr al-abṣār* (Cairo 1306/1888-9), p. 28 mentions among the people of Fārs the great wālī al-sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Makhdūm Jahānayn al-Ḥusaynī al-Najjārī, who heard from 'Afīf al-Dīn 'Abdallāh al-Maṭarī- from the latter's father Jamāl al-

Before moving from the details to the narrative, a few words about the Aḥmadiyya-Rifāʿiyya are in order. The order, founded by Aḥmad al-Rifāʿī (ca. 500/1106 - 578/1182) in Lower Iraq's marshlands, between Wāsiṭ and Baṣra, became highly popular already in the twelfth century, spread rapidly to Egypt and Syria and was highly popular among the Anatolian Turks since the thirteenth century. Whether his founder approved of it or not, already by the twelfth century the order acquired its extravagant reputation for

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performing miracles such as riding lions, eating snakes and mostly passing through fires. The famous traveler, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, who visited Wāsiṭ in 727/1327, frequently mentions the strange practices of the order's devotees, including fire-walking and fire-swallowing, while the Mamluk theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who attested to connections between the Aḥmadiyya and the Mongols, often attacked the Rifāʿī

Dīn al-Maṭarī, from al-Fārūthī. Yet it is hard to determine whether this refers to 'our' Makhdūm al-Jahānayn.

²⁹ al-Fārūthī, *Kitāb irshād*, p. 129, mentions among Rifāʿī's disciples al-Sheikh Shaykh ʿAlī b. Naʿīm al-Baghdadi- mentioned also in the *Tiryāq* (p. 16), who may have been the father of Aḥmad b. ʿAlī mentioned in pseudo-Ibn Sāʿī; Shaykh Thābit b. ʿAbdallāh b. Thābit al-Jaʿrāwī al-Wāsiṭī (p. 131) may be identical to may be identical to Shaykh Thābit b. ʿAbdallāh b. Thābit al-Wāsiṭī of pseudo-Ibn Sāʿī. The most interesting disciple of al-Rifāʿī mentioned there is Shaykh Aḥmad al-Yasawī al-Turkistānī al-Khutanī (p. 129).

sheikhs for their pyrotechnical activities, denouncing it as tricks rather than miracles.³⁰

The Aḥmadiyya appears in another Ilkhanid conversion story, which seems closely connected to Hülegü's narrative- the tradition about the more historically-sound Islamization of Hülegü's son, Aḥmad Tegüder (r. 680-82/1282-84).³¹

According to al-Dhahabī, Tegüder took the name Aḥmad because 'one of the sheikhs of the Aḥmadiyya [i.e. al-Rifā'iyya] went into the fire before Hülegü, and Aḥmad was then a child (*tifl*). The shaykh picked him up and went into the fire. His father called him Aḥmad and presented him to the Aḥmadiyya. They would come visit him and made Islam attractive to him. He converted while still a youth (*shāban*)'.³² Al-

³⁰ C. E. Bosworth, "Rifā'iyya." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2013. Reference. National Library of Israel. 02 October 2013

<http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/rifaiyya-SIM_6296>; J. Pfeiffer, 'Conversion to Islam among the Ilkhans in Muslim narrative traditions: The case of Aḥmad Tegüder', PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2003, pp. 377-383.

³¹ On Tegüder, see P. Jackson, 'Ahmad Takudar', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, i/6, pp. 661-2 at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahmad-takudar-third-il-khan-of-iran-r> (last accessed on January 2, 2015); R. Amitai, 'The conversion of Teguder Ilkhan to Islam', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, xxv (2001), pp. 15-43; J. Pfeiffer, 'Conversion to Islam,' *passim*.

³²-al Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, , li, p.140; MS British Library Or. 1540 fol. 23b-24a as cited in Amitai, 'The conversion of Teguder', p. 18; Pfeiffer, 'Conversion to Islam', p. 356; and see there 356-61 for a discussion of other occurrences of this theme in

Dhahabī's testimony was repeated by various Ottoman writers, who also presented Tegüder as martyr for Islam and as mass converter. Yet, while all of them retained the connection to the Aḥmadiyya-Rifā'īyya, which was a highly popular order in the Ottoman realm, many omitted the fire trial in order to historicise the tradition.³³ Indeed most of the Ilkhanid conversion stories- as opposed to their later counterparts in the Golden Horde or the Chaghadayid Khanate, are basically historical account devoid of legendary details like those appearing in Hülegü's and Tegüder' stories.³⁴

The common features to both Hülegü's and Tegüder's stories are the fire trial and Hülegü's son passing in the fire, while still a youth, together with the Aḥmadī sheikhs. Al-Dhahabī's short version, however, is basically an etymology of the name Aḥmad, taken by Tegüder—or given to him. It also includes Hülegü's presentation of Tegüder to the Aḥmadiyya, both elements that do not appear in Hülegü's story, while the apple incident is missing. Moreover, neither Hülegü nor even Tegüder is converted immediately after the fire ordeal according to al-Dhahabī, who ascribed Tegüder's conversion to the (non-Rifā'ī) shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān.³⁵ Both narratives seemed to be based on a similar stock *topos*.³⁶ In fact, al-Dhahabī's version can be

Mamluk sources. See also Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi*, ii, p. 255; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh duwal al-Islām* (Beirut, 1985), pp. 381-2.

³³ For details, see Pfeiffer, 'Conversion to Islam', pp. 362-9.

³⁴ Pfeiffer, 'Conversion to Islam', p. 399 (She was unaware of Hülegü's story).

³⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, li, p.140; for 'Abd al-Raḥmān see Amitai, 'The conversion of Teguder', 20-22.

³⁶ Pfeiffer suggested that the story was connected to Tegüder's letters to the Mamluks, which spread widely among Mamluk sources. Yet those seem to be of a rather different genre than the two stories here.

seen as an extrapolation of Hülegü's story, more suited to al-Dhahabī's views, since, as we saw in the case of the Georgian princess, he doubted Hülegü's Islamization.

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The fact that Taqī al-Dīn al-Wāsitī, the *Tiryāq* compiler, and al-Dhahabī studied together in Damascus,³⁷ reinforces the possibility of the two stories coming from a common stock, in either Iraq or Syria. Pfeiffer suggested that relating Tegüder's Islamization to the Aḥmadiyya in al-Dhahabī's narrative was meant both to formulate his conversion in understandable terms for his audience and to highlight its bizarre and 'unorthodox' nature, as the Rifā'īyya were notorious for their non-normative.³⁸ Hülegü's narrative, however, probably originated in Aḥmadiyya circles and was certainly meant to praise them. Strangely enough, however, the connection between Aḥmad Tegüder and the order is not mentioned at all in the Rifā'ī versions of Hülegü's narrative.

A feature common to the two narratives is Tegüder's young age at the time of the fire trial. Indeed, in his letter to Qalāwūn, Tegüder himself claims that he converted to Islam in his early youth.³⁹ However, since according to Rashīd al-Dīn, Tegüder arrived in Iran from Mongolia only after Hülegü's death, in late 666/early 1268,⁴⁰ it is unclear how he could have been given to the Aḥmadiyya (which we have

³⁷ al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān al'aṣr wa-a'wān al-naṣr* (Beirut and Damascus, 1998), iii, 30.

³⁸ Pfeiffer, 'Conversion to Islam', pp. 382-3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 317, where the letter is cited; see Amitai, 'The conversion of Teguder', pp. 18-20, where the unlikely possibility that the fire trial took place in Mongolia is discussed.

⁴⁰ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Ta'rikh-i mubārak Ghāzānī*, ed. K. Jahn (Prague, 1941), p. 10; cited in Amitai, 'Conversion of Teguder', p. 17.

no reason to believe reached Mongolia); nor could he been present in Salmās in Hülegü’s time as our story claims.

It appears that the attempt to look for the historical background of this legendary story is futile, and not only because fire trials are a common *topos* in Mongol (and other) conversion stories.⁴¹ In fact, the whole story of Hülegü’s conversion is a typical *karamāt* story: The *Akḥbār* story with all its major elements—an infidel king asking for proof of the validity of Islam; a fire ordeal; shaykh carrying the king’s son into the fire with him and bringing him out with an apple (and/or pomegranate), that the child said he had picked from a beautiful garden; and the subsequent drinking of poison—appears as a *karamāt* prototype in two seventh/fourteenth-century works: the Sufi guide *Nashr al-maḥāsīn al-ghāliya fī faḍl al-mashāyikh al-ṣūfiyya* by the Sufi and scholar al-Yāfi‘ī (694/1298-768/1367) and the major biographical dictionary of the Shāfi‘īs, al-Subkī’s (d. 771/1370) *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā*. In al-Yāfi‘ī’s work the story appears twice: in the chapter devoted to *samā‘* (hearing spiritual music; Sufi ritual), as many sheikhs used to enter the fire in a state of *samā‘*,⁴² and in the chapter devoted to the difference between *karāmāt* and other kinds of miracles (*mu‘jiza*, a greater miracle than the *karāmāt*). There the story is brought as an example of a *karāma* performed in time of need, e.g. when an

⁴¹ See D. Dewese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde* (Philadelphia, 1994), pp. 159-79.

⁴² ‘Abdallāh b. As‘ad al-Yāfi‘ī, *Nashr al-maḥāsīn al-ghāliya fī faḍl al-mashāyikh al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. I.‘A. ‘Awdī (Cairo, 1961), p. 329; see the citation in <http://shamela.ws/browse.php/book-12798/page-178> (last accessed December 30, 2014).

infidel king is asking for proof of the validity of Islam.⁴³ In al-Subkī's work, the story appears as a part of the classification of *karāmāt*, inserted under the entry for Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī (d. 245/859), an early wandering ascetic, who was also a traditionalist and a Shāfi'ī.⁴⁴ Al-Subki's description of Abū Turāb's *karāmāt* leads

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to a discussion of the *karāmāt* of the Prophet's companions. Among them, Khālid b. al-Walīd (d. 21/642), the famous general of the Islamic conquests of the first/seventh century, is described as someone who drank poison and was not affected by it. Al-Subkī then brings a list of the various kinds of *karamāt*, in which the twenty-fifth and last item is titled "immunity to poisons and other kinds of damaging things" (*'adam ta'thīr al-samāmāt wa-anwā' al-mutlifāt fīhim*).⁴⁵ It is under this heading that the story appears. The wording in al-Subkī's and one of al-Yāfi'ī's versions is very similar, and in both the fire trial is preceded by other miracles (transforming another object into gold and bringing water to a dry land) which, however, do not convince

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

⁴⁴ -al Subkī, ii, pp. 306-44, for the biographical details see 306-7; and see Mojaddedi, Jawid. "Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. Brill Online, 2014. Reference. HEBREW UNIVERSITY. 20 August 2014 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/abu-tura-b-al-nakhshabi-COM_23350>.

⁴⁵ Subkī, ii, pp. 342-3 and see also http://shiaweb.org/books/alensaf_2/pa47.html (last accessed December 30, 2014); His classification of the *karāmāt* is cited in Y. al-Nabhānī, Jāmi' *karāmāt al-awliyā'* (Beirut, 2001), i, pp. 47-50. See also al-Yāfi'ī, Nashr al-maḥasin al-ghāliyya, p. 329, in <http://shamela.ws/browse.php/book-12798/page-178> (last accessed December 30, 2014).

the king, who requires the fire trial and the poison drinking also. While so far I was unable to locate a pre-Mongol version of this story, the references to Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī and the character of the works suggest that the story was around long before the Mongol period, and only later was it fitted to Hülegü.

Why and when and where was this *karāmāt* narrative connected to Hülegü? I suspect that this happened in the 730-40s/1330-40s, perhaps soon after the collapse of the Ilkhanate, that is, more or less when the *Tiryāq* was being compiled and by the time around which the *Mukhtaṣar akhbār al-khulafā'* was compiled or edited. It surfaced in Sufi-Shāfi'ī circles, in either Iraq or Syria, regions that retained close scholarly connections even while the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks were at war and certainly after the 723/1323 peace treaty.⁴⁶

The question 'why' is more complicated and also quite fuzzy. One obvious motive was praising the Rifā'iyya, perhaps even against the background of Ibn Taymiyya's polemic against them.⁴⁷ But certainly it was also useful to make Hülegü a Muslim for other reasons. First, he was an important Chinggisid, interested in scholarship and religions and aware of their political value, and other faiths also tried to make him their own: In the late thirteenth-early fourteenth century many Christian sources appropriated Hülegü as a Christian⁴⁸, while in the letters written to him by Buddhist monks from his Tibetan appanage he was referred to as "The Bodhisatva

⁴⁶ See e.g. R. Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 202-213.

⁴⁷ For Ibn Taymiyya's polemics against the Rifā'iyya see Pfeiffer, 'Conversion to Islam', pp. 385-8.

⁴⁸ P. Jackson, 'Hulegu Khan and the Christians: The making of a myth,' in P. Edbury and J. Phillips (eds.), *The Experience of Crusading: Defining the Crusader Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 196-213.

Prince Hülegü" and taught to observe the popular Buddhist lay practice known as *uposatha*.⁴⁹ Yet the Muslims also had reasons other than religious competition or prestige for making Hülegü a Muslim. If the destroyer of the Abbasid Caliphate had already embraced Islam before his death, then Islam's conquest of its conquerors became faster, and God's intention in bringing the Mongols into the Muslim world became clearer.⁵⁰ Moreover, if Hülegü converted to Islam, the entire Ilkhanid dynasty, not only the rulers from Ghazan onwards, can be seen as a 'normal' Muslim dynasty. The atmosphere in the post-Ilkhanid

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realm, where the Ilkhanate era looked like a golden age of peace and stability, might have given rise to such narratives. While the scattered references brought in this study suggest that there were several different stories about Hülegü's Islamization, they seemed to remain marginal and could not compete with his more prevalent image as the par-excellence infidel who destroyed the Caliphate.

Whatever the real reason behind the Hülegü conversion stories was, they certainly show that by the mid-seventh/fourteenth century, Mongol conversion was integrated into the Islamic established genre of conversion stories and literary *topoi*. The famous mythical conversion stories of the ninth/sixteenth century from the

⁴⁹Dan Martin and Jampa Samten, 'Six Tibetan Epistles for the Mongol Rulers Hulegu and Khubilai, and for the Tibetan Lama Pagpa', forthcoming in the Elliott Sperling *Festschrift*. *Uposatha* is the Buddhist day of observance.

⁵⁰ For Islamic justifications of the Mongol invasion and the fall of the Caliphate, see M. Biran, *Chinggis Khan* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 113-14.

Golden Horde and the Chaghadayid realms⁵¹ apparently had their modest precedents in the mid-seventh/fourteenth-century post-Ilkhanate sphere.

⁵¹ For the Golden Horde see Deweese, *Islamization*. For the Chaghadaids see S. C. Levi and R. Sela, *Islamic Central Asia: An anthology of historical sources* (Bloomington, 2010), pp. 149-153.