

The Mongol Muslim Mausoleum – in Iran, Central Asia and China

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Mongol rulers were typically buried in unmarked and hidden grave, and amateur archeologists and scholars have unsuccessfully scoured Mongolia for the gravesite of Chinghiz and other Mongol khans and western Iran for that of Hulegu, founder of the Ilkhanids. In contrast, Muslim rulers and important members of their courts, at least from the tenth century onward, particularly in Iran and adjacent areas of the eastern Islamic lands, were buried in elaborate domed tombs. When Mongol princes and amirs converted to Islam, they adopted the Muslim practice of building domed tombs over their graves. This paper compares three examples erected in the 14th century by Muslim rulers of the Mongol period in three different regions – the tomb built by the Ilkhanid ruler Uljaytu (r. 1303-16) at Sultaniya in northwest Iran; a second built by the Chaghatayid ruler Buyan Quli Khan (r. 1358) at Bukhara; and the relatively unknown tomb of the Yuan prince Ananda (d. 1307) at Guyuan in Zhangbei county of Hebei province in northern China — to show how the same form and traditions associated with it were interpreted differently in different areas of the Mongol empire.