

Sufi Ritual and the Mongols: the Sama' in Ilkhanid Iran

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According to the Mamluk biographer al-Safadi, in the winter of 703/1303, a Sufi shaykh named Mahmud b. Diwana promised the Ilkhanate to Ala-Frieng, son of Ilkhan Geikhatu, and shortly after, was cut into two at the order of the furious Ilkhan. We learn of Ala-Frieng's failed attempt at the throne also from Rashid al-Din, who addresses it as a conspiracy of Mazdikite *ghulat* parties to overthrow Ghazan. Yet, al-Safadi's terse account curiously centers not on the heresy trails at the Ilkhanid court, but on the ritualized interaction between Ala-Frieng and Shaykh Mahmud. According to al-Safadi's sources, in the midst of a *sama'*, as the shaykh and the prince were ecstatically whirling together, the shaykh placed his own cap on the prince's head proclaiming him sultan.

Examining al-Safadi's account of Ala-Frieng's 'plot' alongside other similar and dissimilar references to the *sama'* in Ilkhanid narrative and hagiographical sources, this paper aims to explore several related questions: to what extent did the Sufi ritual, conducted, for example, by/for Sufi visitors to the *ordu*, provide a setting for cross-cultural interactions and exchanges, whether in the form of dialogue or conflict? How does the Ilkhanid participation in *sama'* ceremonies relate more broadly to our views of the Sufis as cultural mediators between Islam and the Mongols? Furthermore, in the case of Ahmad Teguder, Judith Pfeiffer argues that by partaking in private *sama'* sessions, the Ilkhan was creating "an additional space of authority *outside* the Mongol customs." Do the cases of Teguder, Ala-Frieng and others indicate the increasing centrality of Sufi practice for the ritualized aspects of Ilkhanid political culture, and if so, how do these changes relate on a broader scale to the process by which Sufi discourses became as Shahzad Bashir argues, "one of the primary mechanisms for channeling power" in fourteenth to sixteenth centuries Iran and Central Asia?