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The Khan's Court Debate or the Muslim Majlis? On the Migration and Integration of a Mongol Institution in Ilkhanid Iran

This paper examines a vast, yet neglected corpus for Ilkhanid intellectual history, the theological writings of the famous Ilkhanid vizier Rashid al-Din (d. 1317), to explore the contours of the encounter between two parallel institutions: the Islamic tradition of inter- and intra-religious debates and polemics, known as the *Majlis*, especially as it relates to the field of Muslim theology (*kalam*), and the Mongol royal court debate. I suggest that the vizier's treatises, where he responds to the questions addressed to him during court audiences, either by the Ilkhan himself or by the scholars present at his court (Muslims – Shi'is and Sunnis, as well as Christians and Buddhists), on a wide array of theological, philosophical, and scientific topics, evince a process of integration of the Mongol tradition of courtly debates between different religious interlocutors into the Muslim *Majlis*. As reflected in the vizier's works, the *Majlis* becomes, like the Mongol court debate, a stage on which the Mongol Muslim rulers were presented as, moreover, fashioned into intuitive prodigies - divinely inspired representatives of pure reason - who without previous study or training, or even literacy, could attain and convey the most profound intellectual insights and truths on sedentary religions. This integration of the Mongol court debate into the *Majlis* was also instrumental for the broader project of Mongol conversion to Islam, specifically the fitting of the Mongol model of Chinggisid sacral kingship into Islam's framework of prophetic revelation and transcendental salvation by transforming the "brilliant" Mongol rulers into transcendentalist Muslim philosopher-kings.