

## **The Ilkhans and Buddhism**

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Hulegu, a grandson of Chinggiz Khan, left for Persia during his brother Mongke's reign and established Ilkhanate there, being the first Ilkhan. One of the most famous descendants of his, Ghazan Khan, was converted to Islam in late 13th century while his relatives in China adhered to Tibetan Buddhism until the end of the empire. Most of the sources of Ilkhanate were written by Muslim historians and they kept silent about the religious situation of Ilkhanate before the conversion.

However, reading between the lines, we can see most of the Ilkhans before Ghazan were devout Buddhists. For example, the 4th Ilkhan Arghun (r.1284-1291) was highly devoted to the Buddhist bakhshis (monks) and used to go on a forty-day retreat after their fashion. He took sulphur and quicksilver as medicine on the bakhshis' advice. During the retreat, other than two or three close associates, no one was allowed near him-save the bakhshis who attended him day and night to discuss their beliefs.

In addition, Bakhshis gave 5th Ilkhan Gaihatu (r.1291-1295) the Tibetan Buddhist name Rinchen Dorji (jewel-diamond). Even though the Muslim historians, including the famous Rashid al-Din, call him Gaikhatu, it seems that he was called the Tibetan name by the contemporaries. On some coins minted during his reign, we find his name Rinchen Dorji (Irencia Turci), not Gaikhatu. He also appears as Rinchen Dorji on the list of princes in one of the most important sources on the Mongol Empire, 'Yuan Shih'. Several Mongol princes got Tibetan Buddhist names when they were born, regardless of their own wills. However, Gaikhatu adopted it for himself and wanted to be called by that name.

What is more remarkable is that the first Ilkhan Hulegu sent big donations to Tibetan Buddhist monks in Tibet, which is recorded in various Tibetan sources. Furthermore, several epistles from Tibetan monks to Hulegu that recently were introduced show us that Hulegu was a pious Buddhist king. He took his Buddhism seriously enough to pass on that identity to his descendents.

In short, Hulegu and his descendents lived in Persia but they kept the same faith as their brothers in China. Through the use of sources in Persian, Tibetan and Chinese, this research will make clearer the religious situation of Ilkhanate before conversion.