

Empire and Knowledge: Patronage for the Islamicate Astral Sciences under the Mongols

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It has long been recognized that under the Mongols' rule in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the astral sciences witnessed their heyday in Islamic world and China. It has also been recognized, although often with some reservation, that the development of astral sciences could not have been achieved without the generosity of Mongol patrons. The Mongols' patronage, however, is generally presented as an outside factor that facilitated the development of science and is been viewed as independent from the scientific practices of astral science experts. In this paper I propose to approach the development of astral sciences under the Mongols from the perspective of patronage networks. I will discuss the Maragha observatory's unique position in the history of patronage for astral sciences in the Islamicate world. I will also analyse the state and individual patronage for Muslim astral science experts in Yuan China. I will argue that the patronage for the Islamicate astral sciences, institutionalized in both khanates, shaped the development of the Islamicate astral sciences under the Mongols. Bringing the patronage networks to the fore will not only highlight the often-overlooked role of patrons in scientific developments, but will also offer a better understanding of the development of astral sciences in its institutional and social context.