

# Effects of The Relationship Between Mamluk and Mongol Dynasties on Sham and Egypt

**BITARA**

Volume 5, Issue 3, 2022: 106-114  
© The Author(s) 2022  
e-ISSN: 2600-9080  
<http://www.bitarajournal.com>  
Received: 21 August 2022  
Accepted: 1 September 2022  
Published: 30 September 2022

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## Abstract

The relationship between the Mamluk and Mongol dynasties has been sparingly discussed scientifically, nevertheless, this relationship has had a great impact on Egypt and Sham. Therefore, this qualitative study aims to scrutinise the effects of this relationship on various aspects, such as political, religious, cultural, social, or economic aspects. The content analysis method based on relevant sources was adopted to collect and analyse data. Findings show that cultural and economic aspects received the most significant impact from the relationship compared to other aspects.

**Keywords:** Mamluk, Mongol dynasties, Egypt and Sham

## Cite This Article:

Mohamad Zaidin Mohamad, Noorsafuan Che Noh, Wan Mohd Khairul Firdaus Wan Khairuldin, Sofyuddin Yusof, Ahmad Fauzi Hasan, Berhanundin Abdullah, Zawawi Yusoff & Mohd Faiz Hakimi Mat Idris. (2022). Effects of The Relationship Between Mamluk and Mongol Dynasties on Sham and Egypt. *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 5(3): 106-114.

## Introduction

The relationship between the Mamluk and Mongol dynasties has helped glorify the development of Islamic civilization and history. This relationship became evident after the Mongol army under Hulagu Khan invaded the city of Baghdad, which was then the capital of the Islamic caliphate. The outright military domination encouraged Hulagu to further expand his empire as far as Sham and Egypt. The emerging relationship made this study more interesting, especially after some Mongol leaders finally embraced Islam and this became the basis for establishing several Mongol Islamic kingdoms. Normally the colonizing nation dominates the colonized nation, but the opposite happened to the Mongols.

## Political Impact

The Mongol's had indirectly influenced the migration of some Asian peoples to West Asia, and they were also the cause of Turkish tribes migrating to Asia Minor, which eventually formed

the nucleus of the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, the Mongol's invasion had caused the migration of the Khawarizmi to Sham and Egypt. Even al-Salih Ayub himself encouraged them to migrate to Egypt with the aim of attracting the Mamluks to his country. Al-Salih Ayub had bought many Mongol captives captured in the wars in the East, the Caucasus and other regions and grouped them all together in his kingdom, which was later known as Mamluk Bahri (Mustafa 1996).

Many Mongols came to Egypt at the beginning of the reign of King Al-Zahir Baybars. They embraced Islam as their religion, and came under the guidance and supervision of Sultan Baybars, who later gave them several territories to live in and administer (Sarur 1938). The Mongol's efforts to create an alliance with the West to confront the Mamluks also failed, although they traded several delegations between themselves. The Mamluks succeeded in completely driving the Crusaders from Sham in 1281 AD and made continuous attacks on the small kingdom of Armenia until it submitted to be governed by Cairo. The Mamluks also successfully defeated the Mongol army in 1276 AD, Iblestin Anatolia in 1281 AD (First Homs War) and again in 1313 AD (Marj al-Safar War), which stopped the Mongol invasion east of the Euphrates River. There is no doubt that the Islamic victory over the Crusaders and Iranian Mongols had a major impact on the failure of the Crusader-Mongol Alliance planned invasion of the Muslims (Amitai & Conermann 2019; Hilal 1997)..

## Religious Impact

The Mongol invasion led to the downfall of most of the political powers in the Islamic East and its subjugation to pagan authority, namely the Ilkhanid kingdom, both politically and culturally. This resulted in a profound transformation on both sides from religious and intellectual aspects. Islam was not a new religion to the people of East Asia in general and for the Mongols in particular. Muslims had reached the most distant areas in East Asia due to trade and commerce, which enabled them to establish an Arab Muslim community there. Their number increased in the Chinese territories after the establishment of the Abbasid state. This number increased in East Asia following the Mongol invasion and other military campaigns. After invading the city of Khwarazm, the Mongols, under the command of Genghis Khan, brought many professionals to enlist their help and experience in building his country. This had naturally led to the consolidation of the Muslim community in the Far East countries and thus, intensified the spread of Islam there compared to the situation before the Mongol invasion (Hamdi, 1994).

Among the factors that helped Islam overcome Christianity in East Asia was the prowess of Muslims in the field of trade, and undeniably, the expansion of Islam was closely related to trade relations and the role of Muslim traders. That is why Islam expanded exponentially in the East in a short period of time and later arrived in a region that practiced Buddhism.

Muslims suffered during the Mongol conquest by being subjected to various kinds of torture in West Asia. Their cities were destroyed, and their religious honor was humiliated after the Mongols demolished and defiled the sanctity of mosques and interrupted the prayers inside. In fact, the Hajj season for these Muslims was disrupted for many years in addition to their most prominent scholars and jurists killed or tortured, while those who tried to escape were arrested.

The Mongol's cruelty was not limited to Muslims only, as even the rest of West Asia that was invaded by the Mongols received the same fate (Hamdi, 1994).

Although the Muslims faced all kinds of torture and persecution in the early days of the Mongol conquest, they remained patient and believed that victory would eventually come their way over these barbarians. Muslims during this torment and persecution still had certain groups that sympathized and believed in them. The Muslims realised their first real victory when Berke Khan embraced Islam, the leader of the Golden Horde (654-666H/1256-1267AD). This saw most locals and Mongols following their leader's stand, whereby almost all Berke Khan's soldiers became Muslims. Therefore, there was a good relationship between Berke Khan and al-Zahir Baybars (Al-Malik al-Zahir Rukn al-Din Baybars al-Bunduqdar) in Egypt, which saw both governments forging a cooperation against their common enemy, namely the Hulagu government in Iran (Ilkhan) (Josephine V.D.B. 2020; Isma'il 2017).

One of the most calamitous effects of the Mongol invasion of Western Asia and their trail of destruction was the creation of strife between Muslims and Christians. The Muslims did not forget what the Christians did to them during the Mongol invasion, thus, when the Muslims of Damascus learned of the Mongol's defeat in Ain Jalut, they immediately rushed to the Christian quarters and began plundering and destroying. They even destroyed churches and killed several Christians (Hilal 1997).

With the gradual decline in Christian influence in East Asian countries, the influence of Islam grew increasingly stronger until Teuku Dar Ahmad embraced Islam and tried to entice his people to embrace this new religion. He used an approach that aroused and instigated the community's interest (*taghrib*) in Islam, instead of forcing his subjects to embrace Islam. However, after his death, the Christians returned to their old ways of oppressing and torturing the Muslims and excluding them from key government positions (Sykes 1963).

The Mongols persisted to live in the state of infidelity, and the Christians continued to persecute the Muslims until Ghazan Mahmud took over the government (694-713H /1295-1314AD). He embraced Islam, and urged all his subjects to embrace Islam too, while making Islam the official religion of the country. Henceforth, Islam began to spread rapidly in the Mongol Ilkhanate kingdom in Iran and indirectly eliminated the influence of Christianity there (Hamdi 1994).

## Cultural Impact

West Asia and East Asia were separate regions before the Mongol invasion. After subduing the political balance in East Asia, namely by attacking China, the Mongol army brought Chinese civilization to West Asia, and then to Europe. Mongol invasion era at the hands of Genghis Khan and his successors in Western Asia was a period in which Muslims faced horrendous adversities, such as murder, torture, and outright extermination. Then, after the situation calmed down and war ended with the Mongols, there came a period where Muslims seemed to repair the damaged caused by the Mongol army. The Mongols themselves were trying to make amends for their unadventurous deeds by repairing the destruction they had done (Hamdi, 1994).

Just as the Mongol army brought Chinese treasures and influence on West Asia, so was the case with the Islamic civilization and their culture. The Mongols knew little and had limited

information about Islamic countries, and they only came to know about it through Muslim traders who talked about the wealth of the Islamic world. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the Mongol army was impatient to dominate the advanced Islamic world compared to Genghis Khan's government and they successfully attacked and conquered Muslim cities, while bringing back to their country the treasures of the Islamic world.

Regarding the colonies controlled by the Abbasid dynasty; it shows that this area was severely affected by the Mongol invasion because the Mongols had destroyed the monuments built by Muslim scholars as well as the symbols that reflect a knowledgeable civilization. Scholars who managed to save themselves from being killed had fled to India, Asia Minor, and other regions. Hence, Iran and Iraq were deprived of the knowledge propagated by this group of scholars. The Eastern Islamic world experienced a darkness void of knowledge that has never happened before. The situation worsened after the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate in 656H/1258AD, until cultural and political development moved to Egypt, and later became the Qibla of Muslims, especially after al-Zahir Baybars revived the caliphate in Egypt (Hamdi, 1994).

However, natural intermixing of the Mongols with Muslims in the East led to the emergence of a new generation of Arabs and Mongols. This mixture produced a revival of intellectual life; then, a group of scholars appeared armed with different views about the Mongols compared to what the Islamic world had known before the Mongol invasion. This resulted in general changes in cultural life, particularly after the Mongols forced the Muslims to accept the original character or culture that the Mongols had brought with them from their homeland. Thus, it can be concluded that the Mongol invasion weakened the position of special literary values in the Transoxania region because the Mongols had killed the indigenous people in that region, which was the nucleus of the Islamic civilization, and then left the country in the hands of a group of Turks who did not understand the true value of Islamic civilization. The migration of intellectuals had the worst effect on the society's civilizational development, leading to widespread ignorance and underdevelopment (Isma'il 2017).

It is also evident that the Arabic language had lost the position it enjoyed before the Mongol invasion in two areas, namely culture and literature, especially after the fall of Baghdad. The Arabic language faced almost the same level of destruction as the Arabic literary materials (books or works). Fortunately, the centre of knowledge in Shah and Cairo had managed to preserve what was left after the Mongol attack. Fate that befell the Arabic language had also befallen the Persian language (al-Qazaz 1970).

The relationship between the Mamluks and Ilkhanids had a profound effect on the cultural aspect. Sham was a battlefield that entertained the Mongols, who destroyed numerous landmarks depicting civilization in each of their attacks. The scholars in Sham took their valuable literary works and books and fled to Egypt, which became the centre of knowledge, and a refuge for knowledge seekers as well as literary and intellectual groups. The Mamluk government also focused on building schools, libraries and attending to the welfare of students. These efforts had a big impact on the local culture (al-Mun'im, 2001).

However, the Muslims should not see the Mongol invasion in a completely negative light because it had strengthened the relationship between the East and West, which in turn had an impact from a literary and material point of view. In addition, Muslims were also influenced by the Mongol army and took advantage of what the Mongols brought from the Far East, such

as the Chinese administrative system that the Mongols adopted and applied in Muslim countries. Special history books had described the events of this era or discussed some specific aspects that had enriched the Arab treasury, which could then present new information as the impact is also evident in many literary works that followed the Mongol invasion. These literary works describe events as well as political and social relations between Mongols and Muslims. Islamic countries were filled with officials, translators and other people of Far Eastern origin who accompanied the Mongols to the new kingdom. These people must have, directly or indirectly, influenced the intellectual life in those countries where they migrated to and settled (Hamdi, 1994).

The Mongol invasion certainly had a negative effect on society due to the chaos and clashes between the government and the people in the invaded areas. Thus, if the Mongol invasion resulted in a stagnation of intellectual and literary values, it was only temporary because the situation recovered after the Mongols began to settle in the countries they conquered. They began to accept the views and thoughts of the Muslim community and gradually began to accept Islamic and Persian civilizations. Besides, many scholars and writers were more open with the Mongols. One famous scholar who emerged during Hulagu's reign was Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, who was famous for his research in astronomy. The Mongols encouraged him by establishing a large observatory in the city of Margha (presently East Azerbaijan Province) called the Ilkhani (Maragheh) Observatory. A library was also established with books seized from Baghdad, Sham and Jazira, totalling more than four hundred thousand books (Isma'il, 2017).

One important effect of the relationship between Mamluks and Mongols in Islamic countries was the expansion of the Persian language outside of Persia. This was due to the brutal actions taken by the Mongol army against scholars, writers, and poets, by burning libraries, as well as destroying schools and Islamic monuments, which caused this literary group to migrate to India and Asia Minor, and they began to spread the Persian language in those countries. The Mongol invasion also introduced many Mongol words into the Persian language and some of them remain in the language until today. There are many words scattered in history, literature and *tarajim* books, which have Mongol, Persian or Turkish origins. Hence, this could be one of the factors that helped the Persian language compete with Arabic (Isma'il, 2017).

The Mongol's influence on Islamic art was significant, while noting that Islamic art was also influenced by Chinese art. This is clear in most of the Islamic art, as artistic relations between China and the countries of the Near East did not develop before the Mongol invasion, rather, it increased significantly after the Mongol invasion. In the early stages, the Mongols destroyed Islamic buildings and priceless archaeological artifacts. However, when they settled down in these Islamic countries, they gradually began to understand the value of local civilization and art. This is clearly indicated by what Ilkahnate did in Persia, which was to develop the country with a mixture of Islamic architecture.

Mongol influence is also apparent in the ceramic industry. Although the Mongol invasion destroyed the largest ceramic industry in Iran, namely with the destruction of Ray in 617H/1221M, and Kashan in 621H/1224M, nevertheless, the ceramic industry was not totally affected except in the production quantity aspect. Evidence was found in a piece of beautiful ceramic with the date of manufacture written on it, thus, indicating that these ceramics were produced some time after the Mongol invasion (Hamdi, 1994).

## Social Impact

One of the consequences of the Mongol invasion of the Islamic East was the huge impact it had on society in the form of the human death toll, diseases, and famines, all because of the military invasion. The epidemic that began usually lingered on for a long time in one area because the rate of infection afflicting the local population was very high and the populace did not have any resistance to the epidemic.

The Mongol invasion and the imposition of strict regulations in the Islamic world affected the treasures of the Islamic civilization and reduced the population. All this undermined the foundation of prosperity and success that had lasted in the Islamic East for five thousand years. One effect of the relationship between the Mamluks and Mongols was the spread of anxiety and fear throughout the land of Sham, which caused many to flee to Egypt. The Mamluk kingdom in Egypt received a wave of refugees because of the Mongol invasion. In fact, just hearing about the Mongol's movement to a certain place would send the locals fleeing to other areas (Isma'il, 2017).

Conversely, the Mongol invasion also had a positive effect on Arab-Islamic culture. This is evident in the descriptions mentioned in special history books that mention about the invasion or describe some related aspects. This has surely enriched the Arab corpus of knowledge (e.g., library) with new information. This is compounded by the existence of general history books or biographies that discuss about the Mongol invasion, the leaders involved and so on. A positive effect is also evident in the existence of numerous literary materials describing the invasion, and the socio-political relationship between the Mongols and the Muslim community. Thus, new words appear in Arabic that are scattered in history, literature and biographies that suggest Mongol, Persian or Turkish origins.

## Economical Impact

The Mongol invasion of the Islamic East had led to more strife and division in the political fabric, while the impact on religion and culture may be the worst hit and facing the greatest danger. All branches of economic life were completely paralyzed due to the fear instilled in the local people during the Mongol invasion resulting in a massive famine that covered the Ar-Rafida valley, Syria, and the Roman colonies. The Mongols, on the other hand, did not starve, because they would burn grain and produce that exceeded their needs. This phenomenon of starving the locals is a common practice in Iraq and one of the factors that caused the massive migration before the fall of Baghdad.

Bad blood between the Mongols and Mamluks led to insecurity in the region and as a result, trade routes were cut off and trade between the two countries declined. Matters worsened when the Mamluks destroyed the port of Iyas, which was one of the ports on the Silk Road to Europe in the Gulf of Alexandretta (İskenderun) in 1321 AD because this port allegedly supported Mongol trade. The relationship was the reason for the debilitating trade with Egypt, Sham, and Hijaz, which was made worse by the lack of security and bandit activities against merchants who brought goods from the East to Basra together with prospective Hajj groups to Hijaz. This indirectly brought prosperity to other regions at the expense of Sham and affected

the arrival of necessary and luxury goods to the country, besides hampering export activities. The traders were also unable to export their goods abroad (Isma'il, 2017).

The movement of trade in the Asian continent was greatly affected after the invasion by Genghis Khan, although it saw better times before the invasion. Nevertheless, the Mongol attack on West Asia brought Europe and Asia closer together and this indirectly facilitated the relationship between the two continents.

War campaigns are usually followed by a period of calm, in which civilizations of both the conquering and conquered nations assimilate. The extent to which the Mongols, who were influenced by the Chinese civilization, had brought the influence of the Far Eastern civilization to the Islamic world is well known. The Mongols had also brought elements of the Muslim civilization to their country, which was accompanied by many Muslim skilled workers and architects who were the captives of the Mongols (Hamdi, 1994).

Brutal attacks by the Mongol army had resulted in chaos and social instability for a short period of time across the Asian region. The economic aspect was also affected, namely with the destruction of buildings and the spread of disease caused massive number of wartime casualties. The number of casualties is estimated to be between two hundred thousand and one million people (Chughtai, 1997).

Nevertheless, at the end of the 7H/13th century, life gradually returned to its previous state. The Mongols at that time had control over territories that extended from East Asia to Central Europe, from Southern Russia to the Persian Gulf. Naturally, land trade routes had also diminished during the invasion and in the period immediately after the invasion. This had a positive effect on the development of sea routes between West Asia and East Asia after the land routes were severely affected (al-Qazaz 1970).

The Mongol invasion of Sham had caused the region to lose much of its commercial revenue due to changes in trade routes, in addition to affecting the strategic importance of its commercial transit areas as some of them were destroyed. Hence, other ports appeared outside of Sham, such as Hormuz, which monopolized trade in the Arabian Gulf and began transporting goods to Tabriz but not to Iraq. The invasion also diverted traders towards the Red Sea, and trade became active across this sea and Egypt after the chaotic effects of the Mongol invasion in Central and Western Asia (Isma'il, 2017).

What is important is that the Mongol invasion led to the emergence of two main trade routes: The first route started from the Black Sea and crossed northern Turkestan to Central Asia and then to China, either through the northern plain known as the Zangaria Plain, or through the Tarim River basin in the south Nian Shan Mountains, or through the city of Hotan in the south. Meanwhile, the second route was the sea route, either from Tarbizon or Alexandretta (İskenderun) Bay to Tabriz and then to Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, then through the Indian Ocean to India and the Far East (Isma'il 2017).

Thus, it is evident that the invasion by the Mongols and after the war had subsided, had led to the development of commercial activities between the continents of Europe and Asia, with the people of Genoa and Venice forming the link between the Mongols and Europe. The Mongol invasion had led to the people of West Asia frequenting the East resulting in the formation of their communities and society over there, and this encouraged them to continue to settle in this region. Migration from Persia to China had increased since the reign of Hulagu and his family in West Asia (Hamdi 1994).

One consequence of the relationship between the Mamluks and the Mongols on the Islamic world was that the Euphrates Valley was cut off as a communication route across the Mediterranean landscape. This area was no longer considered a trade route between East and West, as trade now shifted to two other directions, namely the northern route through Anatolia and Persia, which was controlled by the Mongols, and the southern route through Egypt and the Red Sea, which was controlled by the Mamluks. Hence, Iraq became a victim of abandonment and regression for a period of 5 centuries, when it was previously the centre of the Abbasid kingdom but now only a new Persian protectorate under Mongol influence (Mustafa 1996).

The direct impact of the relationship between the Mamluks and the Mongols on East Arab was concentrated in Iraq, which lost its main role and was now only a shadow of the Ilkhanate kingdom based in Persia. In short, although the Mongol invasion of most parts of the world had some good if viewed from a positive point of view, however, the destruction caused was so vast and immense, especially when it involved a preposterous number of human lives that were lost (al-Qazaz 1970).

## Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the relationship between the Mamluk and Mongol dynasties has had a considerable impact on Sham and Egypt, especially on the cultural and economic aspects. War tends to have disastrous and deleterious effects, and to rebuild from the destruction caused by war will take a long time.

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