

## ON THE HULAGUID KHANS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SUFI SHEIKHS

**ABSTRACT:** This article describes the historical role of Sufism in the adoption of Islam by the Hulaguids and explains why Sufism was the easiest approach for the Mongol pagans. This study also further supports the assertion that Sufism was one of the most successful forms in which Islam spread. The Mongol rulers, having established central power in the cities of South Azerbaijan – Tabriz, Sultaniye, Maragha – nevertheless endured constant pressure from the Mongol nobility, which unlike the ruling Hulaguid dynasty formed a serious political opposition. To establish themselves in this territory, the Mongol rulers needed the support of the local Muslim population. The only way to ensure this support was to accept Islam as a state religion, which was done by Ghazan Khan. However, this process took time. The Islamic religion seemed too complicated to the Turko-Mongol pagans and shamanists. The most accessible form in which the Islamic religion could be perceived was thus Sufism, which appealed to them with its mystical elements, tales of miraculous healings, and even curses of Sufi sheikhs. In turn, the sheikhs of the Sufi orders sought friendly relations with the Hulaguid rulers in order to achieve their highest goal – the spread of Islam. In return, the Hulaguid rulers gave them much financial and moral support, which the Sufis enjoyed (as clearly indicated in the letters of Rashid al-Din Fadl-allah, most thoroughly studied by E. Browne at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). It was obviously a multi-hued process, rich with interesting events and accompanied by vivid episodes related in sources.

I have collected and used wide-ranging examples from a variety of sources and scholars in one article. I cite the works of Al-Juvaini, Mustouvi Kazvini, Rashid al-din Fadl-allah, Fadl-allah ibn Ruzbihan Khunji, Tawakkul ibn Bazzaz, together with research, editing and translation of these sources by modern scholars.

**KEYWORDS:** Ilkhanate, Uljaytu Khan, Sheikh Safi al-din, Sufism, Golden Horde

### INTRODUCTION

The Sufi brotherhoods are known to have emerged in the East in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. They were initially informal associations of mystics that emerged spontaneously to promote “ways of searching for the Truth.” Some of them evolved into structured organizations – medieval orders. The basic structure of the orders included relations between a teacher or a guide (Arab. *murshid*) and a student (Arab. *murid*). Sufi orders were significant in disseminating Islam in various regions of Asia Minor, Egypt, Central Asia, Africa, etc. The most famous of them are Bektashiye and Mevleviye in Turkey, the Safaviye order founded in Southern Azerbaijan, and the North-African Tirjaniye and Sanusiye, the most influential orders in the modern and contemporary periods. Of these, the Safaviye order in Ardabil was of special interest. In 1501 Shah Ismail I, a descendant of the order's founder Safi-al-din Ishaq Ardabili, took support from the Turkic tribes (Qizilbash, who were his murids) and created a powerful state. How did the Safaviye order achieve such a high status? The Sufi order Safaviye dates back to the period of Turko-Mongol rule (Lane 2011, p. 256) in Azerbaijan. It was then that Sufism's esoteric course experienced its renaissance.

Sufis were probably the only “preachers” in Islam. In the Middle Ages, infidels were often forbidden to enter mosques. This was to avoid desecration of the mosques due to curiosity or mocking disrespect. Islamic law stated that before anyone could be told to recite the Qur’an by heart or to say a prayer (Arab. *namaz*), they first had to submit to the will of God. Consequently, every Muslim had to know sufficient Arabic to pray in the language of the religion. However, people often could not commit to something they did not understand and were unfamiliar with. Thus, one of the attractions of Sufism was that in the *khanegah*,<sup>1</sup> public order and religious law did not prevail over the well-being of the individual’s soul. A curious infidel could take a more active part in the overall process of deciding to convert to Islam. This path to conversion could also, indirectly but effectively, involve observing a miracle, or at least listening to an account of one: perhaps about healing or relief of pain, for Sufis were well-known for performing such feats. This was important to non-Muslims, who were often eager to turn to any person, regardless of their estate. The main consideration was that the person’s reputation allowed hope of help in adversity. For example, Safi al-din Iskhaq Ardabili, a remarkable Sufi saint, was one of the most influential sheikhs in Southern Azerbaijan in the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century. He always instructed his children: “Sons of mine, when you are distributing bread, do not distinguish between friend and enemy or between righteous (*mö’min*) and infidel” (*Şeyx Səfi Təzkiyəsi*, p. 728). Such contacts could prompt a non-Muslim to think about the perfection of Islam (Hodgson 2013, p. 724), especially as this concerned the Mongol-Tatar conquerors, among whose people the religious exclusiveness of Islam was still alien, and the pagan-shamanistic traditions predominated. Most of those following the Sufi leaders in this region were Turkic.

Sufism thus provided a more accessible approach to Islam and attracted a broad range of people. It was therefore often referred to as Folk Islam.

#### THE MONGOLS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SUFI SHEIKHS IN THE PRE-HULAGUID PERIOD

It is of note that the Mongol Khans showed trust and respect towards the Sufi sheikhs long before Ghazan Khan’s conversion to Islam. We have looked at the common development and popularity of Sufism and the reasons for its spread through a broad section of the local population. We now address its popularity within the circles of the Mongol ruling house.

It is easy to show this popularity by referring to many examples from the history of Turko-Mongol rule, which indicate close links between representatives of the rulers and Sufi figures from Genghis Khan’s reign. Interesting early information relating to the siege of Khorasan cities can be gleaned, for example, from Al-Juvaini’s writings. During Genghis Khan’s invasion, the Khorezmshahs, beset by internal discord, lost the battle despite outnumbering the Mongol army<sup>2</sup> threefold and soon vanished. No contemporaries could imagine that such a powerful state with its huge army could fall so quickly to an enemy with only one-third of its military force (Bunyatov, p. 154). Scholars offer the following data on the sad fate of the inhabitants of Khorezmshah cities: In Khorezm (Khiva) in 1221, it was said that every soldier of the 50,000-strong Mongol army was

<sup>1</sup> According to M. Hodgson, a *khanegah* “is a building for Sufi activities, where they perform zikr and where a sheikh or several sheikhs lived, receiving traveling Sufis and teaching to disciples. The word is of Persian origin” (p. 1054).

<sup>2</sup> The first clash of Khorezm troops with Mongol detachments took place in 1218 (according to Bunyatov, p. 134).

ordered to kill 24 Muslims before any of their property could be taken (Lane 2011, p. 248). Ziya Bunyatov quotes the same information from Juvayni about the number of people killed by the Mongols along with the specific description of the events in the city of Gurganj, in which a massacre took place (Bunyatov, p. 153).

[...] And what blood was shed, women raped and murdered, children left at their mothers' breast! But this was just one of the districts of Khorasan!

wrote An-Nasavi of Nasa, the first city of Khorasan, where the Mongols killed 70,000 inhabitants (Bunyatov, p. 153). However, craftsmen and artisans were often spared Mongol ferocity, unlike their less fortunate fellow citizens. They were often taken east to apply their craft in other parts of the empire (Blair, p. 98). Some 100,000 craftsmen were taken to Mongolia from Gurganj alone (Bunyatov, p. 152). Khorasan suffered painfully for the sins of the Khorezmshahs. Perhaps the number of the slain and the degree of destruction have been exaggerated, but the resulting trauma was tragic, and the extent of the devastation was immense. Such were the “methods of Mongol madness”. We know that at that time Najm ad-Din Kubra, a disciple of Abd al-Qahir as-Suhrawardi and the founder of the Kubrawiya Sufi order, “lived and worked at the Amu Darya”. He also led the local resistance movement (Hodgson, p. 508) against the Mongols.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it is reported that Genghis Khan personally, repeatedly, and persistently asked the famous Sufi teacher and founder of the Kubrawiya order to take advantage of a safe corridor from the besieged city. The saint refused but allowed his disciples to take this escape route (Lane 2011, p. 248). This story of the noble self-sacrifice of the saint clearly shows that even in that early period (the era of Genghis Khan) the “barbarians” (Tatars) often demonstrated their respect for scholars and their teachings, in accordance with the Book of Great Yasa, which stated that “he [Genghis Khan – N.A.] esteemed wise men and ascetics of all opinions” (Chingis Khan, *Сокровенное...*, p. 266).

#### THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE HULAGUID KHANS AND THE SUFI SHEIKHS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE EVENTS OF THE LATE 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Wars and plunder continued, but the nature of the conquerors and rulers was changing. How many sons Genghis Khan (1155/1162–1227) had is not known for certain, but shortly before his death his legacy was distributed between four sons recognized as his successors: “Jochi, Chagatai, Ogedei and Tolui” (Chingis Khan, *Сокровенное...*, p. 280). His youngest son Tolui received Mongolia, and Tolui's sons – Möngke and Kublai – adopted the title of Great Khagan. Their possessions included China, where they ruled on behalf of the Yuan dynasty.

According to Chinese sources, in 1279 Kublai declared himself the emperor of unified China.<sup>4</sup> His brother Hulagu Khan in his turn founded the great state of the Hulaguids,

<sup>3</sup> The first Mongol khan to convert to Islam was Berke (Bereke) Khan (1257–1266) – Golden Horde Khan; the first independent khan in a juridical sense (Tabuldin, p. 9–10). It is known that he adopted Islam from the followers of Central Asian sheikh Najmad-din Kubra, who lived in Bukhara (Tiesenhausen, p. 379).

<sup>4</sup> Kublai Khan stated: “If you possess your body, hold your spirit. Possessing the spirit, can your body run from you?” expressing in that manner his adherence to Tibetan Buddhism, which is confirmed by the source *Tarikh-i Jahan Gusha*.

centered in Azerbaijan. Hulagu Khan and other Ilkhanids were also “granted special applause” for their justice, farsightedness and their art of governance. The Mongol invaders’ desire to be involved in the cultural life of the population of the newly created state was expressed in different ways, ranging from Hulagu Khan tasking Nasr al-Din Tusi with building the Maragha Observatory to his patronage of philosophers and thinkers, science, and art. The increased popularity and interest in Sufism during the early Mongol-Tatar invasions may be explained as “the symptoms of the spiritual distress of desperate people, battered by the horrors and despair inflicted by the Mongol invasions.” Under Hulagu Khan’s rule, Sufis, not so limited by law and rituals as the Sunni ulama (lit. knowledgeable, learned, that is: religious scholars), enjoyed particular support from the populace and patronage from the ruling elite, and proliferated. The groups of wandering *kalandars* (unkempt wandering dervishes)<sup>5</sup> became a common sight, while the more traditional *khanegahs* (Sufi gathering places) offered shelter even to ordinary travelers. Sufi murshids gave assistance to “ruling circles, Mongols, Turks and Tajiks,” receiving in return generous patronage as their reward. Meanwhile, local Mongol representatives plunged into the spiritual life of their provinces, even though they perceived these contacts as a challenge to their own beliefs (Melville and De Nicola).

Rashid al-Din Fadlullah thus presents very detailed information on the political events of the Hulaguid House of the late 13<sup>th</sup> century:

the beginning of disagreement between Ahmad and Prince Arghun, the arrival of Arghun in Baghdad from Khorasan, and the return to Khorasan.

It is known that after the death of Abaqa Khan, Sultan Ahmad reigned. He was the son of Hulagu Khan and the brother of Abaqa Khan, whose son was Arghun. Similarly, after the death of Arghun, supreme power passed not to his son Ghazan Khan, but to Kaykhatu and then to Baidu. Thus, the throne and the land of the Inju<sup>6</sup> were not subject to lineal descent. However, Arghun Khan, the heir of the same Abaqa Khan, and his son Ghazan Khan demanded a hereditary transfer of the throne together with the Inju lands and troops (Ali Zadeh, p. 292). These disagreements intensified following Ahmad Khan’s approach to the Mamluks. History has shown that Arghun and his supporters achieved their goal, albeit through persistent struggle and organized insurgencies (Lane

<sup>5</sup> There are several definitions of *kalandars*. In this case they are wandering mystics, roaming, begging, and obeying the minimum of Islamic prescriptions.

<sup>6</sup> This word was not found in Mahmud Qashqari, except a form “«*inç- ايچ* – *ıçı sakın, yüregi dölek. Buradan alınarak “köngül inçmu” denir ki, “yürek dölek mi” demekdir. “إنچ کندى*”, مقنع (*peçeli*) adındaki karganmış kimsenin şehridir; harap olmuşdur” (Divanü Lüğat-it-Türk, V, III, p. 437). In *Ancient Turk Vocabulary* (Nadelyaev, *Drevnieturskiy*) it exists in the form İNCÜ, which is for “hereditary: *incü bayçılarqa qalan kesmisi joq* – no tax for hereditary owners of the gardens” (Nadelyaev, *Drevnieturskiy*, p. 210). According to B. Vladimirtsov, primarily in Mongolian nomadic society, *incu* was a certain social position: “*inji inu xatun-u-nöker*” – *inci* – companions, servants of the noble dame”. Writing about *incu* as an institution of ancient Mongol society, the researcher states: “This name was for people who were appointed by a family as part of the marriage dowry of a girl in the family” (Ali Zadeh, p. 166). By V. Barthold’s definition, “the belonging of territory to specific estates and the personal dependence of individuals on members of the ruling house were equally designated by the term *incu*...” (see V.V. Barthold, p. 27). B. Vladimirtsov also noted: “The specific possessions of princes were called *injü, inji*, which included *ülüs* and *nutug*” (73, p. 165). Later on, the definition of this word was restricted to royal lands.

1999, p. 490–492). During these events, Ahmad and Arghun Khan were often mentioned as being in close contact with Sufi sheikhs. This is what the great vizier and historian Rashid al-Din Fadl-allah had to say about his further friendship with the Sufis:

[Ahmad] greatly respected Sheikh Abd ar-Rahman, so he called him Father, and Ishan Mengli [Hisan Mngli or Rashid ad-Din Ishan – N.A.], who was a murid of Babi Ya'qub [Pir of the Tarika (spiritual path) Kalantariyye – N.A.], who lives in Aran<sup>7</sup> with his brother. He often went to the house of the Ishan, and the Ishan's house was nearby. Since he devoted himself to the zeal of the dervishes with music and dancing, he seldom engaged in the management and regulation of state affairs... (Rashid-ad-Din, p. 173).

At the direction of Sheikh Abd-ar-rahman and Sahib Shams ad-Din, he sent Qutb al-Din Shirazi the most literate [person] in the world as an ambassador to Misr... [25 VIII 1282] (Rashid-ad-Din, p. 153).

[Ahmad] was influenced by a certain "Isan Mngli", with whom he danced a ritual dance (*sema*), and who was a naib and a caliph [confidants of Sufi heads – N.A.] of Babi Yaqub,<sup>8</sup> the head of the brotherhood of dervishes living in Aran. Ilkhan asked Babi Yaqub for mystical support in 1284 to put down the revolt of his nephew, Prince Arghun (Aubin, p. 41).

In that difficult period when Ahmad's and Arghun's relations were heated, sources note that during the battles between the troops of the warring khans, the former resorted to the protection of Sheikh Babi and his associates, while the latter sought support from Abu Yazid.

Having reached Bistam, Arghun intended to visit the grave<sup>9</sup> of the saint Sultan-al-Arifi Abu Yazid (May Allah sanctify his dearest soul!). He visited the grave in a desperate bid to ask the saint to intercede with the Lord for victory and success, and Ahmad found refuge with Sheikh Babi, asking for help from him and his *Taba'i* (comrades). Finally, events revealed who was closer to God [lit. 'truth' – N.A.] (Rashid-ad-Din, p. 153).

The writer's final sentence in completing his narrative of this episode relates to the historical events. In the early stages, as Rashid al-Din points out below, Ahmad triumphs. According to envoy Tabut (Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Safar), Arghun is on the run.

However, the political situation then changed dramatically. Finally, Ahmad was overthrown and a decree was issued for his execution in revenge for the blood of Konkurtai. On the night of Thursday, the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Jumada al-ula, year 683 [10 August 1284], corresponding to the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Altynch,

<sup>7</sup> Geographical area in Azerbaijan.

<sup>8</sup> In honor of Babi Yaqub, the mausoleum was constructed in Babi village (Fuzuli region of Azerbaijan). In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, N.V. Khanykov noted a Kufic inscription on it, which was translated later, with the following content: "...ordered the sheikh ascetic to construct this mashhad (the tomb) dedicated to Babi Yaqub ibn Ismayil Gur Khar in the year 672" (Khanykov, p. 109). In 2011 by order of the Ministry of Culture, the archeological excavation of the tomb was carried out.

<sup>9</sup> The word "tomb" is absent in the original text. However, expressions used in the text are traditionally applied only to the deceased, which suggests that it was the tomb of the saint Abu Yazid. Those words are underlined by us in the Persian text.

in the year of the Chicken, he was killed in the same way that he killed Konkurtai (Rashid-ad-Din, p. 168):

Hasan Mengli boiled him alive in water. Arghun buried Ahmad according to the Mongol custom, wrapped in black felt (Aubin, p. 42).

It is significant that both Hulaguid princes sincerely believed in prayer to those Muslim sheikhs. It is obvious that Sultan Ahmad embraced Islam and held his faith to the end of his days. Most writers accept that in trying to establish relations with the Egyptian Mamluks, he became the first Ilkhan to accept Islam. On the other hand, Arghun Khan has always been described as an adherent to Buddhism. Nevertheless, the fact that he believed sincerely in the power of prayer to Allah indicates that at that time the beliefs of the Ilkhans were ill-defined and syncretic.

There is another incident in the life of Ilkhan Arghun, in which he clearly demonstrated his tolerance on an issue concerning a Sufi friend. The poet-mystic Ala ad-Daule al-Simnani was a childhood friend. He was born into an aristocratic family of the Persian court bureaucracy, which was in close contact with the ruling circles of Mongol Iran. The young Simnani planned to rise to the highest rank in the Ilkhan court, especially after his lifelong friend Prince Arghun became khan. However, he left the divan. After a mystical vision in 1286, the young poet abandoned his career and responsibilities, deciding to devote himself completely to his calling, which Arghun accepted with genuine understanding.

Considering the period when the khans Arghun, Kaykhatu, and Baidu ruled, we cannot ignore the lives and works of a myriad of Sufi poet-mystics of the time. The greatest of these Sufi poets were Jalal ad-Din Rumi and Saadi Shirazi, the first of whom died in 672/1273 at the age of 66, the second in 690/1291 at an unusually old age, about 110 lunar years (Browne 1920, p. 105). Both of these poets were in close contact with the ruling circles of their time. Saadi was on friendly terms with the *Sahib divan* (the great vizier) Shams ad-din Muhammad ibn Muhammad Juvayni and his brother Ala ud-Din from the noble Juvayni family, and even with Abaqa Khan himself (Browne 1920, p. 106).

#### THE STORY OF GHAZAN KHAN, ZAHID GILANI AND SHIRVANSHAH

One of the most promising representatives of the Ilkhans was Ghazan Khan (1295–1304). “You are amazed how there can be such bravery in so ordinary a man!” – a Christian monk, who long lived at Ghazan’s court, wrote of him (Krymskiy 1914–1917, p. 13). The name of this Ilkhan is associated with a series of reforms that were recorded as Ghazan Khan’s “Kanun-name” and the patronage of many working in the sciences and arts (including his tasking the great vizier Rashid ad-din with writing the world history, *Jami al-Tawarikh*), as well as the declaration of Islam as the state religion.

Based on the source *Safwat-us-Safa*, Edward Browne in *A History of Persian Literature in Modern Times (1500–1924)* confirms Ghazan Khan’s particular veneration of the Sufi murshids. Thus, the author quotes events from the life of the head of the Tariqat Zahidiyye, Zahid Gilani, during the reign of Arghun Khan (1284–1291). It is known that initially Zahid “led two farms: one in Siyahrud, another in Khilya-keran, near Astara” (Aubin, p. 41). Later on, he set out to spread his teachings and seek followers north of the Kura River, in Gushtasfi, in a district of Shirvan. However, his appearance was met with resistance from the population, who demanded a demonstration of his magical abilities. There was a man of high secular and spiritual status in the region, Sayyid Burhan

ad-din Muhammad, who enjoyed great prestige. Zahid answered all his questions well, convincing him of the purity of his mission. After that, Shirvanshah Akhsitan III, who by that time had moved his residence to Gushtasfi because of the endless wars between the Hulaguids and the Jochids from Derbent to Baku (Aşurbəyli, p. 161), became an adherent of Zahid. The Gushtasfi *jamaat* (congregation) he headed built a *zaviyye*<sup>10</sup> for Gilani. Gradually Sheikh Zahid became revered across the region and urged more and more of his followers to spend more time working on the lands managed by his *zaviyye*,<sup>11</sup> which at first aroused discontent only among some representatives of the Kesranids.

However, the outcome turned out to be very sad for the Shirvanshahs:

“Sometimes the curses of Muslim saints”, wrote Browne, “were no less effective than their blessings.”

A certain prince named Siyamak [Siyamerk – N.A.],<sup>12</sup> the son of the Shirvanshah, going to the Mongol camp spoke very dismissively of the followers of Sheikh Zahid and threatened to return to destroy and burn their houses of prayer. When this was reported to the sheikh, he merely remarked that the name of Prince Siyamak must have originated in *مرگسیاه* (*marg-siyah* or ‘black death’ – N.A.). Immediately afterwards, because of his barbarous treatment of the people, Siyamak drew the wrath of the Mongol ruler, who dressed him in black felt<sup>13</sup> and had him trampled to death.<sup>14</sup>

Rumors of Sheikh Zahid’s miracles soon spread far and wide:

Many rulers and noblemen, as well as peasants and artisans in the cities, openly became his followers (*murids*) and disciples, and, giving themselves up to prayers and vigils,

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<sup>10</sup> The building for the activities of the Sufis, where sheikhs lived, received wandering Sufis and taught disciples. Synonyms are *tekke*, *khanakah*, *taqiyya*, *ribat*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Bazzaz testifies about the “Akhsitan’s great respect for Sheikh Zahid, for whom the inhabitants of Gushtasfi and the Shirvanshah himself built a prayer house, which soon became a place of worship for the holy sheikhs and pilgrims” (cited in Aşurbəyli, p. 161).

<sup>12</sup> The Kesranid dynasty Shirvanshah Akhsitan III (1283–1294) had two sons: Siyamerk and Key Kabus. In a note of the year 1294, read by B. Dorn, there is a name “malik Keukavus ibn Akhsitan,” who inherited from Akhsitan III. One of the reasons to inherit by Keukavus is described in detail in *Safwat-us-Safa*, where there is a note that “Akhsitan III passed away in Gushtasfi due to mental disorder... and it happened while Sheikh Zahid, who lived until the year 700 (1300/1), was alive. (...) Sheikh Zahid was at that time 65–67 years of age” (Aşurbəyli, p. 135–136, 161).

<sup>13</sup> Felt was present in all spheres of Mongol life. It was noted in many travelers’ descriptions of their homes: “Homes are round... high in the middle there is a round window... walls and roofs are covered with felt and the doors are also of felt”. A further example: “When someone was deadly sick, they put a spear on the house wrapped in black felt”. They also made some idols out of felt “in the human image...” (Plano Carpini, p. 6; 10; 7–8), and so on.

<sup>14</sup> In the source *Safwat-us-Safa* it is said that after Siyamerk’s barbaric treatment of the inhabitants, Arghun, the son of Abaqa Khan (1284–1291), summoned him and ordered that he be wrapped in black felt and “kicked to death.” It is known that the Abbasid caliph al-Mutasim was executed by Hulagu Khan in the same way, because the Mongols did not like to shed royal blood. According to the report by Clavijo, “at the court of Timur it was such a custom that influential people were usually executed by hanging, and less noble ones were beheaded” (*Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo to the court of Timur at Samarcand*, p. 150). Similar traditions were shared by Ottoman Sultans, where such executions extended only to vassals, but not to representatives of the royal houses, “not to shed royal blood.”

neglected their farming and the cultivation of their fields, which had a negative effect on the welfare of his state... (Aşurbəyli, p. 161).

Akhsitan III, rallying to the ideas of his son Siyamerk, decided to cause a flood on the lands of the Gilani community and destroy them. Shirvanshah threatened to throw the murids into the water and drown them, and destroy the prayer house. According to Jean Aubin, “appreciating the value of the Gushtasfi lands occupied by Zahid’s community of adherents”, the Shirvanshah reflected on the “mournful consequences of the spread of the doctrine that drew crowds to Sheikh Zahid” (source). However, during an unexpected attack of violent insanity, Akhsitan suddenly died. Ibn Bazzaz explains this phenomenon purely and simply as the impact of Zahid’s “evil art” (Aubin, p. 47).

The next episode was a “demonstration of the sheikh’s power by telepathy” under Ghazan Khan’s rule, which made such a deep impression on the Sultan that “the latter insisted on kissing the foot of a saint...” (Browne 1920, p. 41).

Interesting information about Sadr ad-Din is also available in the source *Tazkire-yi Sheikh Safi*,<sup>15</sup> which was already used in the article earlier. This is a translation of the work of Ibn Buzzas *Safwat-us-Safa*. It was carried out by order of the Safavid Shah Tahmasib I (1524–1576), since Turkic (Azerbaijani) was the native language of the dynasty. It was also spoken at the Safavid court. The translation was entrusted to the famous royal translator of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Muhammad bin Hussein Katib Nishati, who slightly modified the title of the work to *Tazkire-yi Sheikh Safi*. According to the source, we can form an idea of the number of adherents of Sufi murshids and orders in the ranks of the Hulaguid army and officials of high rank, and the members of the ruling house of the Ilkhan dynasty at that time. The source says that:

Sultan Ghazan was a murid of Sheikh Zahid, while Emir Kutluk Shah was the murid of another murshid, a certain teacher named Sheikh. The two murids were always arguing: whose devotees were more righteous? They then decided to conduct a test with a meal (*sufra*): Let all those who have an honorary position (*adilāsani*) in the army, come to the feast (*gilan*)... The Emir and the Sultan stood on their feet and personally served those seated and watched to see who would eat what. It turned out that the Sheikh’s murids ate of everything, but Sheikh Zahid’s murids did not touch the forbidden food... At some point, Jamal ad-Din Ali [the son of Sheikh Zahid – N.A.], fearing to offend the Sultan, stretched out his hand to eat (bread), but Safi ad-Din pushed him back in time...

As a result, in this trial, victory went to the Sultan, or rather to the pupils of Zahid Gilani. The next test was based on dancing (*səma*):

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<sup>15</sup> The first bibliographic information about *Tazkire-yi Sheikh Safi* appeared in the bulletin *Melanges Asiatiques*, published in St. Petersburg in 1869 by the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Empire (189, p. 249). It was presented as a translation of Ibn Buzzas’s *Safwat-us-Safa* from Persian into Turkic. The British orientalist Ch. Rieu also called one of the manuscripts of the work *Tazkire-yi Sheikh Safi* kept in the British Museum as a translation of *Safwat-us-Safa* into Turkic. In 1965 Professor S. Ali Zadeh, informing about the manuscript of Nishati’s work stored in the Saltykov-Shchedrin Library in St. Petersburg, called it *Tazkire-yi Sheikh Safi*. According to the scientist, the word *tezkiye* (‘memories, comments’) is in both the introduction and the title of Nishati’s manuscript. In total, 5 Nishati’s manuscripts have been preserved in various book depositories around the world.



Sultan Ghazan, sitting on the throne, drew his sword and commanded: “Anyone who rises to dance will have his head cut off”. A melody was played, but no one dared to dance, except for one of Sheikh Zahid’s murids. Hearing an *avaz* (‘voice’), he was foolish and, having no regard for the will of the sultan, got up, went to the center of the meeting, and joined the dance. His Majesty the Sultan, seeing this, let go of the sword, began to weep, brought a handkerchief to his eyes, and said: “My goal was precisely this – to see that wonderful moment when you are troubled neither by fear of the sultan nor by prohibiting law, and you can immerse yourself in this beautiful state of ecstasy...” (*Şeyx Safi Təzkirəsi*, pp. 111–112).

#### ULJAYTU KHUDABENDE AS ONE OF THE BRIGHT PATRONS OF SUFISM

In general, in the Middle East in the era of the Mongol invasion, cooperation between khans and Sufi sheikhs was very widespread. For example, the famous Uzbek Khan (khan of the Ulus of Jochi) held in great esteem the Sufi sheikh Seyyid Ata, who to some extent influenced his religious views and was his patron in every way; or the great Berke Khan (1257–1266) of the Golden Horde, who was in close contact with the Sufi Kubreviyye sheikh, Seyfeddin Baharzi. In the case of Uljaytu Khan, the role of a mentor was played by the somewhat mystical Barak Baba. Such persons usually embodied something supernatural that was “appropriated” or used by the Khans to assert their authority and the power of the dynasty (Pfeiffer, p. 44). According to Faruk Sümer, “the beloved sheikh of Uljaytu Khan must have occupied an important post in the Ilkhanate court” (Sümer, p. 210). According to al-Ayni’s *Iqd al-Juman* (vol. 4, p. 423), Baba was often at the court of Uljaytu and headed diplomatic missions of the Ilkhanids to Damascus (706/1306) (Pfeiffer, p. 45). In Persian sources, his name is mainly mentioned in connection with Uljaytu Khan’s campaign in Gilan:

The population of Gilian, hostile to Shiism, opposed his ambassadorial mission for the Ilkhans and executed Barak Baba.

His remains were later transferred from Gilan not to Tabriz, where Uljaytu’s honored brother and predecessor, Ghazan Khan, was buried, but to Sultaniyye, where Uljaytu Muhammad Khudabende built a khanegah and a tomb<sup>16</sup> for Sheikh Barak.

There were hundreds of Sufi sheikhs in the Ilkhan Empire at that time, but only Barak Baba was granted a tomb and a khanegah in the capital. Nevertheless, there is little information about the Sheikh in written sources. This “information failure” may have occurred because this type of Sufi activity did not leave a historical mark in the form of a tariqat or school, one outstanding example of which was the strong, contemporary, and also Azerbaijan-based independent Safaviyye order.

There is another telling example from the lifetime of Sultan Uljaytu. Writing about the architecture erected in Sultaniyye, the 15<sup>th</sup>-century historian Fazlullah ibn Ruzbihan Khunji gives important information about Sultan Uljaytu’s worship of the Ardebil sheikh Safi: “In his [Safi ad-Din – N.A.] biography (*Kitab-i-Sirat*), it is said that when the

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<sup>16</sup> The Sheikh’s shrine became the last refuge for the remains of Suleyman Shah, the son of Uljaytu, who died at an early age. Sultaniyye was destined to survive in the history of the Ilkhans for Uljaytu Khan’s famed project in town planning, which is confirmed, in particular, by Abu al-Qasim Kashani: “... the sultan turned Sultaniyye into a second Tabriz” (*Kashani* 1348, p. 47).

righteous sovereign Sultan Uljaytu (1304–1316) completed the construction (*ta'mir* – “reconstruction, repair”) of Sultaniyye (in 1305/1313), he called a benedictive meeting, which was attended by 400 noblemen, ulama, mystics and holy elders. The meeting was chaired by Sheikh Sharaf al-Haqq ad-Din Darjazini. It was the Sultan’s desire that the Ardebil sheikh adorn [زینت] the event with his presence at the assembly. The Sheikh knew that if he refrained from eating at the feast, the sovereign might take offense, but in his righteousness he resisted taking food (*navala*) from the Sultan.<sup>17</sup> He accordingly referred to his age and sent his son Khvaja Sadr al-din (1305–1393) (*Fadlullah Rashid ad-Din* 1957, pp. 234–233).

[...] Sadr al-Din was a young man who had not yet cut roses in the garden of asceticism [...] and did not refuse to eat food [...] Upon his return to Ardebil, Safi ad-Din appointed him his successor [...] (*Fadlullah*, p. 77–78).

In this passage several facts are presented: the reverence rendered to the Sheikh Safi (the desire “that the Ardebil sheikh adorn the assembly with his presence”?), the meetings that noblemen, mystics and holy elders (Sufis) assembled together, the construction erected in Sultaniyye, and the ascetic traditions of the Sufi tariqas and their sheikhs, in particular Safi ad-Din, as well as the attitude of the latter to Sultan’s property.

The Sufi sheikhs were apparently in close contact with the Mongol khans. The Islam disseminated among the Mongols (since the times of Gazan Khan) was far from the strict Islam of the Sunni clergy.

It was rather a *People’s Islam*, chosen by Turkmens, who recognized and ensured the rise of such a wonderful master as Sheikh Safi ad-Din Ardebili.

These charismatic Sufi masters would have bridged the gap between the gravity of the traditionalist mullahs and the shamans of the steppe (Lane 2011, p. 260).

#### THE SUPPORT GIVEN BY THE KHAN OF THE GOLDEN HORDE TO SUFI SHEIKHS IN AZERBAIJAN UNDER CHOBANID RULE

We know that the wars caused by the disagreements between the two Mongol ulus over Hulagu Khan’s establishment in Azerbaijan hampered the development of relations between the peoples living in their territories. Nevertheless, in their mutual enmity, the ruling circles of both khanates at times supported representatives of their region who were disliked by their enemies.

In the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the rule of the Hulaguid dynasty in Azerbaijan was replaced by emirs of the Chobanid dynasty, the Hulaguid emirs. The Chobanid ruler in Azerbaijan, Melik Ashraf Chobani (1344–1356), was described by almost all historians as a cunning ruler, a cruel tyrant, and an oppressor. He not only ruined the country and the working population, but from time to time, under various pretexts, imprisoned his emirs, viziers, and other noblemen, and confiscated their property and possessions. Many members of the nobility, for one reason or another, were forced to flee their lands or go into hiding. Among them, we note the name of an ancestor of Shah Ismayil Safavi, the haji Sadr al-Din Ardebili, son of the Ardebil sheikh Safi ad-Din Iskhak.

<sup>17</sup> O. Efendiyeu compares this statement with one from Ghazali’s *Ihya ulum al-din*: “for most of the sultans’ property is currently illegal” (*Fadlullah*, p. 133).

All the narrative sources describing the first years of Sadr al-Din's spiritual government associated it with changes in the political situation in the country, namely the dismemberment of the Ilkhan Empire and, as a result, intervention in political and social life (Abbasi, p. 294). At least when rebellion was prepared in Tabriz against Ashraf Chobani, who "razed Azerbaijan to the ground," Sheikh Sadr al-Din was one of those held principally responsible for its planning. Melik Ashraf sent one of his emirs, Orgunshah, to the Ardebili Dar al-Irshad. Sheikh Sadr al-Din, given his strength, understood that he could not resist the forces of the Emir. Therefore,

[...] in about 1354, together with some of his caliphes, he moved to Gilan, to his faithful companions, and remained there for some time (Abbasi, pp. 294–295; Ali-Zade, pp. 360–361).

During the reign of Melik Ashraf, the rival Golden Horde was ruled by Janibek Khan. While in Gilan, Sadr al-din maintained contacts with his Azerbaijani adherents and the caliph of Dar al-Irshad, and was also able to establish relations with Janibek. We note that according to Hamdallah Qazvini in his *Tarikh-e-gozideh*, among the emigrants from Azerbaijan was Sheikh Kijiji, who settled in Sham (Syria). At the same time, Qazi Muhyi ad-Din appealed to Janibek to oppose Ashraf. Of course, Janibek was interested in the conquest of Azerbaijan and counted on taking it, given the domestic political situation there. He invaded Azerbaijan with a large military force in the year 758 (1356/1357). The Azerbaijani Shirvanshah Kavus and his army also participated.

All these opposition forces, including Sheikh Safi ad-Din, were united under the protection of Janibek. Later, another sheikh, Sheikh Muhammad-Balygchi (Ali Zadeh, p. 361), moved over to the opposition. These events clearly demonstrate that besides their political interests, the khans of the Golden Horde, as well as the Ilkhanids, tried to maintain a respectful and peaceful attitude towards the Sufis of the Safaviye order.

While Azerbaijan was temporarily subdued by Janibek, nevertheless, and probably "thanks to the wholehearted patronage, support, and assistance of the Golden Horde khan Janibek, in 1356 Sheikh Sadr al-Din resumed again his authority as an influential Safavi leader, at the head of the Ardabili Dar al-irshad. However, at this time he was a leader with rich experience of political and social unrest."<sup>18</sup> This leader was the last in the line of a brilliant dynasty of Safavi sheikhs, laying the foundation for the future rule of the celebrated shahs of the Safavid state.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, from the examples of all the episodes from sources listed in the article and related to the names of Genghis Khan, Ahmad Tekuder, Arghun Khan, Ghazan Khan, Uljaytu Khan, and others, we had the opportunity to observe how the Mongol rulers, regardless of their religious affiliation, revered and trusted the Sufi saints. Initially joining the most primal forms of Sufism, the Ilkhans gradually perceived them as integral traditions of their religious life.

At the beginning of the study, we asked ourselves: How exactly did the Sufi order of Safaviye, as one of the few in history, manage to achieve state status? In the course of the study, it turned out that it was most likely the Ilkhans' veneration of the Sufi

<sup>18</sup> Later on, around 1375, with a special purpose, Sheikh Sadr al-Din sent a number of caliphes, including a poet named Sheikh Qasem-e Anvar, to Gilan and Khorasan.

sheikhs, their encouragement, and support that caused this strengthening of the political power of this order. The culmination of the event was the provision of assistance to Sadr ad-din by the Golden Horde Khan Janibek, which finally approved the spiritual authority of the Safavid dynasty of sheikhs in the Ardabil order.

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Fot. 1. In honor of Babi Yaqub the mausoleum was constructed in Babi village (Fuzuli region of Azerbaijan)



Fot. 2. Mausoleum of Sheikh Juneyd (Gusar region of Azerbaijan)



Fot. 3. Tomb of Sheikh Zahid Gilani



Fot. 4. Tomb of Sheikh Jamal ad-Din Tabrizi in Lenkoran region of Azerbaijan