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BOOK FOUR

LATER CENTURIES
(From the Fall of Baghdad [686/1286] to 1111/1700)

Part 1. The Fall of Baghdad

Chapter XL

FALL OF THE ‘ABBASID CALIPHATE

The Mongol invasion which shook the world of Islam to its very foundations in the seventh/thirteenth century was an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of mankind. A people, hitherto unknown even to their neighbours, pouring forth from the bare and bleak plateau of Karakorum (Mongolia), and with lightning speed overran the Asian and European continents from China to Hungary and East Prussia, and built up the largest empire known to man. These people were the Mongols or Tartars as called by their contemporaries. Their invasion inflicted more suffering on the human race than any other incident recorded in history. They lived in a wild and primitive state of society. “They are,” says Matthew Paris, “inhuman and beastly, rather monsters than men, thirsty for and drinking blood, tearing and devouring the flesh of dogs and men. . . . They are without human laws.”¹

The Mongol storm burst on the Muslim world in two separate waves. The first dates back to 616/1219 when Chinggis Khan² (599/1155-625/1227), who first as leader of a band of adventurers and later installed as their ruler in 605/1206 welded these barbarians into a strong and well-disciplined military force, attacked the Empire of the Khalifat al-Shah (470/1077-629/1231) which at the height of its power stretched from the Ural Mountains to the Persian Gulf and from the Euphrates to the Indus excluding the two Iranian provinces of Khorasan and Fars. The second wave broke on Khorasan in 604/1206 when Chinggis Khan’s grandson, Hulagu Khan (614/1217-664/1266), was selected by his brother, Emperor Xang Xan (610/1211-655/1257), and the

¹ The word is derived from the root mung which means brave.
³ His actual name was Temuchin. The title of Chinggis or Zingis Khan was presented to him by his people in recognition of his rising power. The word zin means great; gis is the superlative termination.
great-qur'ān, i.e., the Mongol national assembly, held in 649/1251, to annul the 'Abbasid Caliphate of Baghli to and the Ismā‘īlīs of Alamūt and Qāhīstān in North Iran.

The first invasion, which probably could not have been averted, was provoked by a frontier incident in which the Governor of Uruzgan, a frontier town in Khwāzirzān, murdered a number of Mongol traders alleged to have been spies. Thereupon Chinggis Khān despatched an embassy consisting of two Mongols and one Turk to the Court of 'Ala al-Dīn Muhammad Khwāzirz Shah (557/1161–62/1172) to protest against this violation of the laws of hospitality and demanded that he should hand over the Governor to them or prepare for war. In reply Khwāzirzān Shah behaved in a queer fashion which was both foolish and arrogant. He killed the Turk and turned back the two Mongols with their beads shaved off. Upon this the Mongols held a qur'ānī and decided to attack Khwāzirzān.

This is not the only evidence of Khwāzirzān Shah's misjudgment. According to the contemporary historian, Ibn al-Fahri (d. 632/1234), 'Ala al-Dīn Muhammad had already destroyed or weakened the neighbouring Muslim States in order to build up an unstable, sprawling empire, so that in the dark hour of trial when, instead of showing any signs of resistance, he adopted the ignominious course of continued retreat, and left his unfortunate subjects at the mercy of the relentless enemy, there was no Muslim power left to protect or defend them. His gallant son, Jalal al-Dīn Mankubur (617/1220–629/1231), however, put up stiff resistance against the full might of the Mongol attack and for years continued to show acts of great heroism in unequal battles till, unaided and deserted, he met his tragic end. By his desperate and indomitable courage against the Mongol blast of death, this dauntless prince has left a permanent mark of gallantry in the annals of Muslim history.

A big factor which hastened the Muslim downfall was the atmosphere of intrigue prevailing in the Muslim world on the eve of the Mongol invasion. According to Ibn al-Fahri and al-Maqrizi (706/1304–96/1412), the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Maqrizi (570/1180–622/1225) actually encouraged the Mongols to attack Khwāzirzān, little knowing that his own house was destined to perish at the hands of the same irresistible foe. The storm burst in 616/1219 and soon engulfed Transoxiana, Khwāzirzān, the territories lying north of the river Indus, and North Iran, till, instead of turning south or west, it swept across the Caucasus into South Russia, finally to advance as far away as the Baltic and the Adriatic.

The second wave of invasion struck Khurāsān in the beginning of 654/1256; the Caliphate of Baghli was destroyed in 656/1258 by Hulagu Khān who had earlier wiped out the Ismā‘īlī stronghold at Alamūt in North Iran in 646/1250. The Mongol army advanced further into Syria, sacked Aleppo, and threatened Damascus into surrender in 650/1259. It was at 'Am Jalūt (Goliath's

Spring) near Nazareth, however, that the Mongol tide was firmly stemmed by the gallant Mamluks of Egypt who gave them a crushing defeat in 659/1260.

After the death of Jalal al-Dīn Mankubur this was the first Muslim victory in thirty years and it broke the spell of the Mongol invincibility.

The Mongols were essentially an engine of destruction. They mowed down all resistance and their opponents “fell to the right and left like the leaves of winter.” They have been described by Sir Henry Howorth as one of those races “which are sent periodically to destroy the luxurious and the wealthy, to lay in ashes the arts and culture which grow under the shelter of wealth and easy circumstances.” According to 'Ala Malik Juwaini, Hulagu Khān's secretary, who was appointed Governor of Baghdi after the destruction of the 'Abbasid Caliphate, Chinggis Khān described himself at Baghdi as the “scourge of God” sent to men as a punishment for their great sins.

The bewildering extent of the blood-thirsty fury, insatiable thirst for massacre, and devastating destruction which brought unprecedented suffering for the greater portion of the civilized world, would be just impossible to believe, had the facts not been confirmed from different sources, both Eastern and Western.

All historians agree that wherever the Mongols went they exterminated populations, pillaged towns and cities, wreaked special vengeance upon those who dared to resist them, converted rich and smiling fields into deserts, and left behind the smoke of burning towns. In the words of Chinggis Khān himself, quoted by Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allah, the famous Prime Minister of the Mongol period in Iran and the author of Jāmī‘ al-Tawārīkh: “the greatest

\[\text{\footnotesize Footnotes:}\]

3. 'Abd al-Dīn 'Ala Malik Juwaini (d. 682/1283) who belonged to a distinguished family of ministers and administrators was one of the chief Iranian officers whom the Mongols found indispensable in the civil service. He was Hulagu Khān's secretary and had served him throughout his campaign. He was appointed Governor of Baghdi by Hulagu Khān a year after the conquest of the city and held this position for twenty-four years. His famous book which was completed in 658/1260 contains a first-hand account of Hulagu Khān's military exploits and is one of the most authentic books on the history of this period. It deals with the Mongols, the Khwāzirzān Shahs, and the Ismā‘īlīs and ends with the events of the year 655/1257.

970
joy is to conquer one's enemies, to pursue them, to see their families in tears, to ride their horses, and to possess their daughters and wives." In old Mongol traditions there is a story that the future world conqueror was born with a piece of clotted blood on his hands. The senseless destruction, cruelty, outrage, spoliation, and the lightning speed of the Mongol attack have been described by Jwainai in the pity sentence uttered by a fugitive from Merv: "They came, they uprooted, they burned, they slew, they carried off, they departed." To have an idea of the brutal lust of conquest and ruthless ferocity shown by the Mongol hordes it would suffice to trace the wanton disregard of human life shown by them in some of the many prosperous cities and towns they ravaged. They reduced to ashes the city of Balikshu which was known for its magnificent palaces, gardens, and parks stretching for miles on the banks of the river Sughul; put one million people to the sword in Sanaqand; and brutally massacred all the inhabitants of Tirmidh and Sabizwir. Khwarizm suffered an equally tragic fate. According to Jwainai, 1,200,000 persons were killed in the city. Amongst the scholars and saints who perished was the famous Shashik Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 618/1221). In Balikshu the Mongol army came back a few days after the city's destruction to kill the poor wretches who might have survived the first holocaust, and, having dragged them out of the hiding-places, butchered them in the true Mongol fashion. Bknikh, where a Mongol prince lost his life, was wiped out of existence, and orders were issued not to even let babies alive in their mothers' wombs. This kind of sadism was not a stray incident, for Ibn Alkhizar characterizes the Mongols as a people who "spared none, slaying women, men, and children, ripping open pregnant women and killing unborn babes." At Naix they made a heart of over 70,000 people. Merv, which was at the height of its glory, suffered, according to Ibn Alkhizar, a loss of 700,000 persons, but Jwainai puts the figure at 1,200,000, excluding those whose bodies were hidden at obscure retreats. The survivors were traced out, as in Balikshu, and mercilessly killed. Nishapur, which was like the bright Venus in the galaxy of cities, was completely razed to the ground and every living thing, including animals, was massacred. Pyramids of skulls were built as a mark of this ghastly fest of military "triumph." According to Mirkhwand, 1,047,000 men were butchered in the city in addition to an unknown number of women and children. He adds, however, that forty artisans and craftsmen were given shelter and transported course of universal history and geography," is the most celebrated. Though it is a general history of the world, yet it contains a detailed and highly authentic account of the Mongol Emperors from the time of Chinghiz Khán to the death of Sulidan Qilhas.

* Jwainai, op. cit., p. 105.
* Jwainai, op. cit., p. 133.

Fall of the 'Abbdal Caliphate to Mongolia. In Herat these barbarian hordes set up a new record by putting 1,600,000 men to the sword. These figures give an idea of the cold-blooded, passionless cruelty of the invaders who, in the words of Matthew Paris, "spared neither age, nor sex, nor condition." Jwainai mourns the loss of life in Khwarizm in the following words: "Not one-thousandth of the population escaped... if from now to the Day of Judgment nothing hinders the growth of population in Khwarizm and 'Iraqi 'Alam, it cannot reach one-tenth of the figure at which it stood before." With the destruction of the scores of cities of fame also perished the priceless treasures of art and literature. The letter of Ibn Khallikán (608/1211-681/1282) which he wrote from Mosul after his flight from Merv to al-Qādi al-Akrām Jamāl al-Dīn abu al-Jassar 'Ali, vizier of the King of Aleppo, pathetically describes the nature of the Mongol cataclysm. In this letter, written in 617/1220, the author pays his last tribute to the libraries of Merv which had made him forget his dear ones, his home, and country, and to the advanced state of civilization in Khwarizm which, according to him, "in a word, and without exaggeration, was a copy of paradise." He proceeds to laud the achievements of his doctors, saints, scholars, the monuments of science, and the virtues of the authors of this region and then laments the tragedy of Merv in these words: "Those palaces were effaced from the earth... in those places the sacred-ows answer each others' cities and in those halls the winds moan responsive to the siren." Ibn Alkhizar describes the loss of life and culture in the same strain: "Those Tartars conquered... the best, the most flourishing, and the most populous part thereof [the habitable globe], and that whereof the inhabitants were the most advanced in character and conduct." The reckless assassination of thousands of scholars, poets, and writers, and the destruction of universities and colleges wrought irreparable damage upon Muslim civilization which had flourished for centuries with such remarkable vitality: Transoxiana and Khwarizm were the worst sufferers. Fertile plains and valleys in these regions were turned into wilderness. The great highways of Central Asia on which passed the merchandise of China to Western Asia and Europe also lay deserted.

For twenty years after the death of Chinghiz Khán in 625/1227, the Mongols continued to pillage Kurdistán, Ādharbajján, and regions to the west of Iran, at times massingng right up to Aleppo. But the Caliphate of Bagdad had survived. The inevitable occurred in 626/1228 when Hülagu Khan stormed Bagdad after he had extirpated the Ismā'īli power at Alamut in 624/1226. The city which had been the metropolis of Islam for more than five centuries (132/749-658/1258) was given over to plunder and flame. The massacre,
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according to Dıyârıkâbi (d. 982/1574) in his Tîrâkâd â-CHânis, continued for thirty-four days during which 1,800,000 persons were put to the sword. For days blood ran freely in the streets of Baghâlid and the water of the Tigris was dyed red for miles. According to Wâsif, the sack of Baghâlid lasted forty days.

15 To quote Kîtâb al-Fâlakî, "Then there took place such wholesale slaughter and uncontrolled looting and excessive torture and mutilation as it is hard to be spoken of even generally; how think you, then, its details!"
16 Al-Mustâlim bi Allah (604/1208-646/1250) who was destined to be the last Caliph of this renowned dynasty was beaten to death, and, according to another version, trampled on by horses.

The sack of Baghâlid was a supreme catastrophe of the world of Islam and of the Arabo-Persian civilization which had flourished so richly for many hundred years. Its magnitude surpassed the devastation of other cities, because the political and psychological implications of this tragedy had a far greater import. The Caliph was regarded as the spiritual and temporal head of the Muslim world and even in its days of decline the Caliphate of Baghâlid had retained the semblance of Muslim unity and homogeneity. Baghâlid, therefore, was more than a city. It was a symbol. With the end of the Caliphate this symbol also vanished. It was also the centre of the most advanced civilization of the time and from it emanated the rays of knowledge which illuminated the world. The destruction of Baghâlid, therefore, meant the extinction of learning. With it were destroyed the great literary and unique treasures of art, philosophy, and science, accumulated through hundreds of years. Books were consumed to ashes or thrown into the river. Mosques, colleges, hospitals, and palaces were put to fire. The awful nature of the cataclysm which completely blocked the advancement of knowledge in Muslim lands, and, thus, indirectly in the whole world, is, in the words of Percy Sykes, "difficult to realize and impossible to exaggerate." 14 No wonder the great Sa‘îdi (589/1184-691/1291) was moved to write in far-off Ghâzâl an elegy on the destruction of Baghâlid and the fall of the Caliphate, which has gone down in Persian poetry as one of the most pathetic poems of all times.

What deepened the sombre effects of this tragedy was the fact that, with the extermination of men of learning and the total destruction of Muslim society, the spirit of inquiry and original research so distinctly associated with Arabic learning was practically destroyed. Western Asia was now plunged into darkness as earlier Khurâsân and Transoxiana had been wrapped in gloom. The two races—Arabs and Iranians—which together had contributed to the medieval world the highest literary and scientific culture parted ways. For centuries Arabic had been the language of religion, science, and philosophy in Iran, and all thinkers and scientists had chosen Arabic as the vehicle of expressing their thoughts. But henceforth Arabic lost its position of pri-

Fall of the 'Abbadid Caliphate

tyle and its use was restricted mostly to the field of theology and scholastic learning. The Arabs themselves lost even the shadow of a major role in Islamic history. The fall of Baghâlid, therefore, was also an ominous sign of the loss of Arab hegemony.

The Mongol invasion by its accumulated horror and scant respect for human life and moral values produced an attitude of self-negation and renunciation in general and in Persian poetry in particular. The pantheistic philosophy of Abu ‘Abd al-‘Abbâs (Ibn ‘Arabi) henceforth made a strong appeal to the minds of subsequent mystics such as Aḥmad Kirmānī, Aḥmad al-Ma‘rîkhâb, and Jâmi.

The infinite havoc caused by this cataclysm constitutes a melancholy chapter in the history of Muslim civilization. What Juwaini had called the famine of science and virtue in Khurâsân15 came true of all lands stretching from Transoxiana to the shores of the Mediterranean. Never, perhaps, had such a great and glorious civilization been doomed to such a tragic fall. This tragic fall was not, however, a tragic end, for this civilization rose again and produced within two centuries and a half three of the greatest empires of the world, and though the main current of its thought changed its course even, before and long before, its political recovery, it produced the world’s first destroyer of Aristotle’s logic in Ibn Ta’limiyah and the first sociologist and philosopher of history in Ibn Khaldûn.

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15 Juwaini, op. cit., p. 4.

87 “Abd Allah ibn Pa‘dî Allah Wâsif, Tîrâkâd-i Wâsif, p. 87.