



The Scourge of the Lord and the Anxiety of History: The Historiography of the Literature of Silence in the Mongol Empire

Arash Yousefi¹ | Ahmad Fazlinejad^{2*} | Abduroul Kheirandish³

1 PhD Candidate in History of Islamic Iran, Shiraz University, Iran

2 Associate Professor, Shiraz University, Iran

3 Professor, Shiraz University, Iran

* Corresponding Author Email: fazlinejad@shirazu.ac.ir

Abstract

This study investigates the early Islamic responses to the Mongol invasion of 619 AH (1221 AD), a crisis that profoundly affected the Islamic world with widespread destruction and upheaval. The catastrophic event disrupted both intellectual and societal stability, as Muslim historians and scholars struggled to interpret and document its impact. Central to the discussion is the concept of "The Rhetoric of Silence," which describes scholars' tendency to avoid critically analyzing the invasion and its implications.

Moreover, the Mongol invasion shattered prevailing religious and historical beliefs. Prior to this event, Islamic thought was anchored in the idea of Dar al-Islam—the sphere of Islamic governance supported by divine favor, with an anticipated expansion under God's guidance. The devastating defeat at the hands of the Mongols challenged this worldview dramatically. Historians faced deep questions about divine justice, human agency, and what it meant for a supposedly protected realm to face such devastation.

Furthermore, Islamic historiography at the time lacked a framework for analyzing a large-scale defeat by non-Muslims. The authors emphasize that scholars lacked the framework to interpret why Islamic rule, traditionally associated with divine favor, could falter. This intellectual gap led to an era of paralysis. Theologians responded by turning to religious interpretations, framing the invasion as divine punishment for moral lapses within the Muslim community. This explanation resonated with a belief that God tests and punishes believers to guide them back to righteousness. However, while this view provided psychological relief, it sidelined a more uncomfortable analysis of human failures, such as poor military strategy or flawed leadership.

The findings indicate that, for the first four decades following the Mongol invasion, early Islamic historiography entered a period marked by what the author calls a "literature of silence." This literature was not devoid of historical accounts but rather lacked deep, critical examination. Instead, scholars chose to frame the conquest through a theological lens, focusing on divine retribution and reducing human responsibility.



This approach served two purposes: providing a coping mechanism for widespread fear and destruction while maintaining spiritual stability amid the chaos.

By attributing the invasion to God's will, the community found comfort, deferring the need for a painful self-assessment of military or political failures. The concept of *Taklif*—human responsibility to act—was deliberately set aside. By emphasizing divine will as the primary force, scholars avoided scrutinizing strategic errors and leadership shortcomings. This choice reflected an intellectual environment unprepared for a secular analysis of defeat. The resulting literature offered an indirect commentary on events, marked by metaphors and vague language, signaling an unwillingness to confront the harsh realities of the invasion.

Religious scholars also wove the invasion into apocalyptic narratives, using Quranic references and Hadiths about trials before the Day of Judgment. This reinforced the idea that the Mongol conquest was not just an isolated event but part of a divine and inevitable cosmic plan. Such a perspective further justified the lack of practical, strategic responses or reevaluation.

Notable historians like Ibn al-Athir demonstrated this pattern in their work. Despite his firsthand knowledge of the devastation, Ibn al-Athir expressed reluctance to delve into its full horror, often framing his hesitation as arising from the immense scale of the suffering and divine influence. This approach revealed discomfort with directly engaging with the practical failures of the time. The use of metaphorical and indirect language reflected the broader trend of non-engagement, allowing scholars to defer comprehensive reflection.

The study concludes that the "literature of silence" encapsulated the early Islamic world's struggle to process the Mongol invasion. This historiographical silence was more than an absence of analysis; it was a conscious choice to avoid deep scrutiny, rooted in religious beliefs that placed divine will above human agency. While this interpretation offered spiritual comfort, it postponed necessary intellectual and strategic shifts.

Framing the Mongol invasion as a divine test or punishment provided a means of psychological reassurance, enabling scholars to sidestep examining leadership or strategic shortcomings. This response had long-term implications for how future Islamic scholars approached similar crises, illustrating the tension between religious interpretation and the need for rational, practical analysis. Although later Islamic historiography began to integrate more nuanced views and strategic insights, this initial phase set a precedent for prioritizing theological explanations over critical assessments. The "literature of silence" thus highlights the complex balance between faith and reason in the face of profound challenges, reflecting the broader intellectual struggles within medieval Islamic thought.

Keywords: the Scourge of God, the Rhetoric of Silence, Dar al-Islam, Mongol Empire, Apocalypse.

References

Books

- 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Kāsānī, Abūbākr bīn Mas'ūd, (1394 HQ). *Badā'e' al-Šanā'e' fī Tartīb al-Šarā'e'*, Beyrūt: Dār al-Ketāb al-'Arabī. [In Persian]
- Āšūrī, Dārīyūš, (2013). *Farhang-e 'Olūm-e Ensānī*, Tehrān: Našr-e Markaz. [In Persian]
- Āžand, Ya'qūb, (2008). *Maktab-e Negārgarī-ye Harāt*, Tehrān: Mo'assese-ye Ta'līf, Tarjoma va Našr-e Ātār-e Honarī-ye Matn. [In Persian]
- Āžand, Ya'qūb, (2021). *Ostād Moḥammad Sīāh-qalam*, Tehrān: Entešārāt-e Bāyīgānī. [In Persian]
- Biran, Michal, (2007). *Čīnngis k̄ān (Makers of the Muslim World)*, Oxford: One World Publications.
- Childs, Peter, Fowler, Roger, (2006). *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Crone, Patricia, (2005). *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dehḳodā, 'Alī Akbar, (1998). *Loḡat-nāme-ye Dehkhodā, zīr-e nazar-e Moḥammad Mo'in va Seyyed Ja'far Šahīdī*, Mo'assese-ye Loḡat-nāme-ye Dehkhodā, Tehrān: Entešārāt va Čāp-e Dānešgāh-e Tehrān. [In Persian]
- D'Ohsson, B. Abraham, (1834-5). *Histoire des Mongols, depuis Tchinguiz-Khan jusqu'à Timour Bey, ou Tamerlan*, La Hay et Amsterdam Les frères Van Cleef.
- Giovanna Calasso, Giuliano Lanci, Medievaloni, (2017). *Dār al-islām / dār al-ḥarb: Territories, People, Identities*, Volume 40 de Studies in Islamic Law and Society, Brill.
- Grousset, René, (1986). *Emperātūrī-ye Šahrānavardān*, tarjome-ye 'Abd al-Ḥoseyn Meyīkadeh, Tehrān: Šerkat-e Entešārāt-e 'Elmī va Farhangī. [In Persian]
- Ḥā'erī, 'Abd al-Hādī, (1989). *Īrān va Jahān-e Eslām (Pažūheš-hā-ye Tārīkī Pīrāmūn-e Čehreh-hā, Andīseh-hā va Jonbeš-hā)*, Mašhad: Entešārāt-e Āstān-e Qods-e Ražavī. [In Persian]
- Ḥāfez Abrū, 'Abdollah bin Lotfollāh, (2001). *Zobdat al-Tavārīk*, tašhīḥ Kamāl Ḥāj Seyyed Javādī, Tehrān: Vezārat-e Farhang va Eršād-e Eslāmī va Sāzmān-e Čāp va Entešārāt. [In Persian]
- Hitti, P. K. (2000). *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh (Kitāb Al-I'tibār)*. Translated from the Original Manuscript by Philip K. Hitti with a New Foreword by Richard W. Bulliet, United Kingdom: Columbia University Press.
- Ibn al-Aṭīr, (1385 HQ). *Al-Kāmel fī al-Tārīk*, Beyrūt: Dār al-Šāder. [In Persian]

- Ibn Vāsel, Jamāl al-Dīn Moḥammad bin Sālem, (1990). Tārīkh-e Aīyūbīān (Mofarej al-Korūb fī Aḳbār-e Banī Aīyūb), taṣḥīḥ Ḥoseyn Moḥammad Rabī', tarjoma-ye Parvīz Atābakī, Tehrān: Enteshārāt va Āmūzeš-e Enqelāb-e Eslāmī. [In Persian]
- Jackson, Peter, (2017). *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Joveynī, 'Aṭāmālek, (2006). Tārīḳ-e Jahān-gošāī, taṣḥīḥ Moḥammad Qazvīnī, Tehrān: Enteshārāt-e Donyā-ye Ketāb. [In Persian]
- Jūzjānī, Menhāj Serāj, (2012). Ṭabaqāt-e Nāṣerī, Kābol: Bonyād-e Farhangī-ye Jahāndārān-e Ġūrī. [In Persian]
- Lambton, Ann, (2000). Dowlat va Ḥokūmat dar Dowre-ye Mīāne-ye Eslām, tarjome-ye 'Alī Moršedī-zādeh, Tehrān: Mo'assese-ye Farhangī Enteshārātī-ye Tebyān. [In Persian]
- Mīnovī, Mojtabā, (1990). Tārīḳ va Farhang, Tehrān: Šerkat-e Sahāmī-ye Enteshārāt-e ḳārazmī. [In Persian]
- Morgan, David, (2011). Moḡol-hā, tarjome-ye 'Abbās Mokhber, Tehrān: Našr-e Markaz. [In Persian]
- Morgan, David, Stewart, Sarah, (2018). *The Coming of the Mongols*, Series of The Idea of Iran, Vol. 7, in association with The London Middle East Institute at SOAS, New York and London: I.B. Taurus.
- Nasavī, Šehāb al-Dīn, (1991). Naftat al-Mašdūr, taṣḥīḥ Amīr Ḥoseyn Yazdgerdī, Tehrān: Našr-e Vīrāstār. [In Persian]
- Nasavī, Šehāb al-Dīn, (2005). Sīrat-e Jalāl al-Dīn Mankobernī, taṣḥīḥ Mojtabā Mīnovī, Tehrān: Šerkat-e Enteshārāt-e 'Elmī va Farhangī. [In Persian]
- Našrollāh Monšī, Abu al-Ma'ālī, (1966). Kalīla va Demna, taṣḥīḥ va towzīḥ Mojtabā Mīnovī Tehrānī, Tehrān: Enteshārāt-e Dānešgāh-e Tehrān. [In Persian]
- Paris, Matthew, (1889), *English History from the Year 1235 to 1273*, trans by J. A. Gilles, London: H.G. Bohn.
- Qeys-e Rāzī, Šams al-Dīn Moḥammad, (1935). Al-Mo'jam fī Ma'āyīr Aš'ār al-'Ajam, taṣḥīḥ Moḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Vahhāb Qazvīnī, Tehrān: Maṭba'e-ye Majles. [In Persian]
- Rāzī, Najm al-Dīn, (1933). Meršād al-'Ebād men al-Mabda' elā al-Ma'ād, be ehtemām-e Ḥoseyn al-Ḥoseynī al-Ne'matollāhī, Tehrān: Maṭba'e-ye Majles. [In Persian]
- Šarīf al-Raḏī, (1404 HQ). Šarḥ Nahj al-Balāḡa. 20 j. Qom: Maktabat Āyatollāh al-'Ozmā al-Mar'ašī al-Najafī. [In Persian]

Articles

- Bakhšī, Ekhtyār, Nūrmand, Aḥmad, Khazāne-dārlū, Moḥammad 'Alī (2022).

- Jelveh-hā-ye Āyāt-e Qor'ān dar Nafsat al-Maṣḍūr, Pažūheš-hā-ye Qor'ānī dar Adabīyāt, 7 (10), 86-104. [In Persian]
- CAHEN, C. (1970). ABDALLAṬĪF AL-BAGHDĀDĪ, PORTRAITISTE ET HISTORIEN DE SON TEMPS: Extraits inédits de ses Mémoires, *Bulletin d'études Orientales*, 23, 101–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41603307>
 - DeWeese, D. (1987). The Influence of the Mongols on the Religious Consciousness of Thirteenth Century Europe, *Mongolian Studies*, 5, 41–78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43193054>
 - 'Edālat, 'Abbās, (2010). Farzīye-ye Fāje'e-zadegī: Ta'sīr-e Pāydār-e Fāje'e-ye Moğol dar Tārīkh-e Sīāsī, Ejtemā'ī va 'Elmī-ye Īrān, Bokhārā, 77 va 78, 227-262. [In Persian]
 - Fingesten, P. (1984). Delimitating the Concept of the Grotesque, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 42(4). <https://doi.org/10.2307/430215>
 - Karīmī, 'Alīrezā, Ja'farzādeh, Kobrā (2020). Barrasī-ye Padīde-ye Rū be Rošd-e Entezār va Monjī-gerāyī (Mahdaviyat) dar 'Aṣr-e Īlkhānān. Faṣl-nāme-ye Tārīkh-nāme-ye Īrān ba'd az Eslām, 11(25), 123-147. DOI: 10.22034/jiiph.2020.12606 [In Persian]
 - Kheyrandīš, 'Abd al-Rasūl (1997). Boḥrān-e Tamaddon-e Eslāmī dar 'Aṣr-e Moğol, Nāme-ye Pažūheš, 4. [In Persian]
 - Kheyrandīš, 'Abd al-Rasūl (2011). Tamarčī yā Tamūrčī, Nāmī barā-ye Moğolān (dar Nakhostīn Manābe'-e Īrānī-ye 'Aṣr-e Tahājom-e Moğol). Pažūheš-hā-ye 'Olūm-e Tārīkhī, 3(1), 73-82. [In Persian]
 - Moḥammadī, Moḥammad, Khojaste, Farāmarz, Dehqānīān, Javād, (2022). Taṣvīr-hā-ye Sūrre'ālīstī dar Nafsat al-Maṣḍūr, Zabān va Adabīyāt-e Fārsī, 31, 181-200. [In Persian]
 - Sa'īdī, Modarres, Jorfī, Moṣṭafā (2017). Ya'jūj va Ma'jūj: Taḥavvolāt-e Šenākhtī-ye Mosalmānān darbāre-ye Zīstgāh-e Ānān tā Dowre-ye Moğol, Faṣl-nāme-ye Tārīkh va Tamaddon-e Eslāmī, 1 (13), 75-100. [In Persian]
 - White, James, (2017). Satire in the Paintings of 'Mohammad-e Siāh Qalam, *Iranian Studies*, 52/2.

References English, French and Article

- Biran, Michal, (2007). *Chinggis Khan (Makers of the Muslim World)*, Oxford: One World Publications.
- Childs, Peter, Fowler, Roger, (2006). *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Crone, Patricia, (2005). *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Giovanna Calasso, Giuliano Lanci, Medievaloni, (2017). *Dār al-islām / dār al-*



ḥarb: Territories, People, Identities, Volume 40 de Studies in Islamic Law and Society, Brill.

- Hitti, P. K. (2000). *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh (Kitāb Al-I‘tibār)*. Translated from the Original Manuscript by Philip K. Hitti with a New Foreword by Richard W. Bulliet, United Kingdom: Columbia University Press.
- Jackson, Peter, (2017). *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Morgan, David, Stewart, Sarah, (2018). *The Coming of the Mongols*, Series of The Idea of Iran, Vol. 7, in association with The London Middle East Institute at SOAS, New York and London: I.B. Taurus.
- Paris, Matthew, (1889), *English History from the Year 1235 to 1273*, trans by J. A. Gilles, London: H.G. Bohn.

Article

- CAHEN, C. (1970). ABDALLAṬĪF AL-BAGHDĀDĪ, PORTRAITISTE ET HISTORIEN DE SON TEMPS: Extraits inédits de ses Mémoires, *Bulletin d'études Orientales*, 23, 101–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41603307>
- DeWeese, D. (1987). The Influence of the Mongols on the Religious Consciousness of Thirteenth Century Europe, *Mongolian Studies*, 5, 41–78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43193054>
- Fingesten, P. (1984). Delimitating the Concept of the Grotesque, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 42(4). <https://doi.org/10.2307/430215>
- White, James, (2017). Satire in the Paintings of ‘Mohammad-e Siāh Qalam, *Iranian Studies*, 52/2.

French

- D'Ohsson, B. Abraham, (1834-5). *Histoire des Mongols, depuis Tchinguiz-Khan jusqu'à Timour Bey, ou Tamerlan*, La Hay et Amsterdam Les frères Van Cleef.