

MONGOL INVASION OF IRAN SHATTERING THE ARAB PRIDE

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 20, 2020

The Mongol invasions of the 13th century represents a watershed in the Muslim history of Iran. In 1256 Hulegu, a grandson of Chingiz Khan, completed the Mongol conquest of Iran. In 1258, he conquered Baghdad and put to death the last Abbasid Caliph there, thus abolishing the caliphate. Naturally, Muslim historians took an apocalyptic view of these invasions. The well-known account of Ibn al-Athir is typical:

For several years I put off reporting this event. I found it terrifying and felt revulsion at recounting it and therefore hesitated again and again. Who would find it easy to describe the ruin of Islam and the Muslims...? O would that my mother had never borne me, that I had died before and that I were forgotten!...The report comprises the story of a tremendous disaster such as had never happened before, and which struck all the world, though the Muslims above all. If anyone were to say that at no time since the creation of man by the great God had the world experienced anything like it, he would only be telling the truth...It may well be that the world from now until its end...will not experience the like of it again.¹

This utter sense of helplessness and dismay, or whatever you may call it, stands in dark contrast to the jubilant mood prevailing among the Arabs when they were able to conquer Iran after weakening it by a series of raids. On the other hand the Persians evinced the very same feeling of shock and helplessness at the sudden and unexpected appearance of the Arab rule as already seen. One can still find its echoes in the Pahlavi texts.

Historians have tended to echo these sentiments, but the contemporary historians tend to view the events of the 13th century in an objective manner and cite its effects on Iran; namely better internal security, economic progress due to regular trade between Western Europe and the Far East and tolerant latitude towards minorities which deprived Sunni Muslims or Orthodox Islam of its dominance.

As the Mongols tended to have Christian wives, they tended to be empathetic towards Christians and could have turned Christian too, but

1 Excerpted from Bertold Spuler's *History of the Mongols*.

they ultimately seem to have preferred to go with the flow and adopt Islam for pragmatic reasons as it was well established in Iran by then and that decision turned out in their favor historically.