

BOOK FOUR

LATER CENTURIES

(From the Fall of Baghdād [656/1258] to 1111/1700)

Part 1. The Fall of Baghdād

Chapter XL

FALL OF THE 'ABBĀSID 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, poured forth from the bare and bleak plateau of Karakorum (Mongolis) 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 Mongols¹ 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."²

The Mongol storm burst on the Muslim world in two separate waves. The first dates back to 616/1219 when Chingiz Khān³ (550/1155–625/1227), who first as the leader of a band of adventurers and later installed as their ruler in 603/1206 welded these barbarians into a strong and well-disciplined military force, attacked the Empire of the Khwārizm Shāhs (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 Khuzistān and Fārs. The second wave broke on Khurāsān in 654/1256 when Chingiz Khān's grandson, Hulāgu Khān (614/1217–664/1265), was selected by his brother, Emperor Mangu Khān (649/1251–655/1257), and the

¹ The word is derived from the root *mong* which means brave.

² E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. III, p. 7.

³ His actual name was Temuchin. The title of Chingiz or Zingis Khān was presented to him by his people in recognition of his rising power. The word *zin* means great, *gis* is the superlative termination.

great *quriltay*, i. e., the Mongol national assembly, held in 649/1251, to annihilate the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate of Baghdād and the Ismā'īlis of Alamūt and Qūhistān in North Iran.

The first invasion, which probably could not have been averted, was provoked by a frontier incident in which the Governor of Utrār,⁴ a frontier town in Khwārizm, murdered a number of Mongol tradesmen alleged to have been spies. Thereupon Chingiz Khān despatched an embassy consisting of two Mongols and one Turk to the Court of 'Ala al-Dīn Muḥammad Khwārizm Shāh (596/1199–617/1220) 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 Khwārizm Shāh behaved in a queer fashion which was both foolish and arrogant. He killed the Turk and turned back the two Mongols with their beards shaved off. Upon this the Mongols held a *quriltay* and decided to attack Khwārizm.

This is not the only evidence of Khwārizm Shāh's suicidal policy. According to the contemporary historian, ibn Athīr (d. 632/1234), 'Ala al-Dīn Muḥammad 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, Jalāl al-Dīn Mankoburni (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 Athīr and al-Maqrīzi (766/1364–846/1442), the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Nāṣir (576/1180–622/1225) actually encouraged the Mongols to attack Khwārizm, 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, Khwārizm, Khurāsān, 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 Baghdād was destroyed in 656/1258 by Hulāgu Khān who had earlier wiped out the Ismā'īli stronghold at Alamūt in North Iran in 654/1256. The Mongol army advanced further into Syria, sacked Aleppo, and threatened Damascus into surrender in 659/1260. It was at 'Ain Jālūt (Goliath's

Spring) near Nazareth, however, that the Mongol tide was firmly stemmed by the gallant Mamlūks of Egypt who gave them a crushing defeat in 659/1260. After the death of Jalāl al-Dīn Mankoburni 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."⁵ According to 'Aṭa Malik Juwaini, Hulāgu Khān's secretary, who was appointed Governor of Baghdād after the destruction of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, Chingiz Khān described himself at Bukhāra as the "scourge of God" sent to men as a punishment for their great sins.⁶

The bewildering extent of the blood-thirsty ferocity, 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 Chingiz Khān himself, quoted by Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allah, the famous Prime Minister of the Mongol period in Iran and the author of *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh*,⁷ "the greatest

⁵ Henry Howorth, *History of the Mongols*, Part I, p. x.

⁶ 'Aṭa Malik Juwaini, *Tārikh-i Jahānkusha*, Vol. I, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb Qazwīni, Leiden, 1329/1911, p. 81.

'Ala al-Dīn 'Aṭa Malik Juwaini (d. 682/1283) who belonged to a distinguished family of ministers and administrators was one of those Iranian officers whom the Mongols found indispensable in the civil service. He was Hulāgu Khān's secretary and had served him throughout his campaign. He was appointed Governor of Baghdād by Hulāgu 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 Hulāgu Khān's military exploits and is one of the most authentic books on the history of this period. It deals with the Mongols, the Khwārizm Shāhs, and the Ismā'īli sect and ends with the events of the year 655/1257.

⁷ Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allah (645/1247–718/1318), the renowned scholar-administrator of the Ī-Khāni (Mongol) period of the history of Iran, served as Prime Minister under three Muslim Mongol rulers, namely, Ghāzān (694/1294–703/1303) who, along with ten thousand Mongols, embraced Islam on Shābān 4, 694 A.H., and by declaring it the State religion restored its supremacy in Iran; Uljaitu Khuda-bandeh (703/1303–716/1316); and abu Sa'īd (716/1316–736/1335). In spite of his preoccupations as the Prime Minister of a great empire, Rashīd al-Dīn found time to pursue research and write books, both in Arabic and Persian. Of these his *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh*, which, in the words of Quatremère, the French editor of portions of this work, "offered for the first time to the people of Asia a complete

⁴ Also known as Fārāb.

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 in his hands.⁸ The senseless destruction, cruelty, outrage, spoliation, and the lightning speed of the Mongol attack have been described by Juwaini in the pithy sentence uttered by a fugitive from Merv: "They came, they uprooted, they burned, they slew, they carried off, they departed."⁹

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 Bukhāra which was known for its magnificent palaces, gardens, and parks stretching for miles on the banks of the river Sughd; put one million people to the sword in Samarqand; and brutally massacred all the inhabitants of Tirmidh and Sabziwār. Khwārizm suffered an equally tragic fate. According to Juwaini, 1,200,000 persons were killed in the city. Amongst the scholars and saints who perished was the famous Shaikh Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 618/1221). In Balkh 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. Bāmiyān, where a Mongol prince lost his life, was wiped out of existence, and orders were issued not to leave even babes alive in their mothers' wombs. This kind of sadism was not a stray incident, for ibn Athīr characterizes the Mongols as a people who "spared none, slaying women, men, and children, ripping open pregnant women and killing unborn babes."¹⁰ At Nasa they made a hecatomb of over 70,000 people. Merv, which was at the height of its glory, suffered, according to ibn Athīr, a loss of 700,000 persons, but Juwaini puts the figure at 1,300,000, excluding those whose bodies were hidden at obscure retreats. The survivors were traced out, as in Balkh, and mercilessly killed. Nishāpūr, which was like the bright Venus in the galaxy of cities,¹¹ 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 feat of military "triumph." According to Mirkhwānd, 1,047,000 men were butchered in the city in addition to an unknown number of women and children.¹² 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 Chingiz Khān to the death of Sultān Ghāzān.

⁸ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 856.

⁹ Juwaini, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹⁰ E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 428.

¹¹ Juwaini, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

¹² Mirkhwānd, *Rauḍat al-Ṣafa*, Vol. V, p. 46.

to Mongolia. In Herāt 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."¹³ Juwaini mourns the loss of life in Khurāsān 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 Khurāsān and 'Irāq-i 'Ajam, 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 Khallikān (608/1211–681/1282) which he wrote from Moṣul after his flight from Merv to al-Qādi al-Akram Jamāl al-Dīn abu al-Ḥasan 'Alī, 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 Khurāsān which, according to him, "in a word, and without exaggeration, was a copy of paradise." He proceeds to laud the achievements of its 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 screech-owls answer each others' cries and in those halls the winds moan responsive to the simoom." Ibn Athīr 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."¹⁴

The reckless assassination of thousands of scholars, poets, and writers, and the destruction of libraries and colleges wrought irreparable disaster upon Muslim civilization which had flourished for centuries with such remarkable vitality. Transoxiana and Khurāsān 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 Chingiz Khān in 625/1227, the Mongols continued to pillage Kurdistān, Adharbaijān, and regions to the west of Iran, at times marauding right up to Aleppo. But the Caliphate of Baghdād had survived. The inevitable occurred in 656/1258 when Hulāgu Khān stormed Baghdād after he had extirpated the Ismā'īli power at Alamūt in 654/1256. The city which had been the metropolis of Islam for more than five centuries (132/749–656/1258) was given over to plunder and flame. The massacre,

¹³ E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 429.

according to Diyārbakri (d. 982/1574) in his *Tārīkh al-Khāmis*, 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 Baghdād and the water of the Tigris was dyed red for miles. According to Waṣṣāf, the sack of Baghdād lasted forty days.¹⁵ To quote *Kitāb al-Fakhrī*, "Then there took place such wholesale slaughter and unrestrained looting and excessive torture and mutilation as it is hard to be spoken of even generally; how think you, then, its details?" Al-Must'āsim bi Allah (640/1242–656/1258) 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 Baghdād 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 Baghdād had retained the semblance of Muslim unity and homogeneity. Baghdād, 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 Baghdād, therefore, meant the extinction of learning. With it were destroyed the great libraries 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."¹⁶ No wonder the great Sa'di (580/1184–691/1291) was moved to write in far-off Shīrāz an elegy on the destruction of Baghdād 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 Khurāsān 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-

¹⁵ 'Abd Allah ibn Faḍl Allah Waṣṣāf, *Tārīkh-i Waṣṣāf*, p. 87.

¹⁶ Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, Vol. II, p. 98.

vilege 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 Baghdād, 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 ibn 'Arabi henceforth made a strong appeal to the minds of subsequent mystics such as Auḥadi Kirmāni, Auḥadi of Marāghah, and Jāmi.

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 Khurāsān¹⁷ 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 Taimīyyah and the first sociologist and philosopher of history in ibn Khaldūn.

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¹⁷ Juwaini, *op. cit.*, p. 4.