The Ilkhans of Persia

- Period of rule of Ghengis Khan’s grandson, Hulegu, in Iran (Persia) from 1256 to 1295
- supposedly dominated in a singularly oppressive fashion by 'pagans' (Hulegu favoured Buddhism but practised little more than ancestral shamanism)
- Ghazan Khan, on declaring his conversion to Islam in 1295, ordered than all Buddhist buildings should be razed to the ground, therefore Buddhism was only the 'official religion' of the Ilkhanate for around 40 years
- Existing evidence of Buddhist buildings in central Asia having been converted into Islamic buildings - cut into rock and therefore have survived
- All religions were supposedly granted freedoms, according to Chingiz Khan's reported precepts. The difference from the immediate past lay in that Islam was no longer in a privileged position, and the non-Muslims no longer had to pay jizya
- Jacobite and Nestorian Christianity also flourished. The most notable Nestorian hierarch of the time was the Catholiкус Yaballaha III, who presided over the whole Nestorian church in Asia from his seat in Iraq
- There seemed a real possibility that the Mongols, at any rate in Persia, would adopt Nestorian Christianity and the Ilkhanate might become a Christian empire - one of Arghun’s son's, the Ilkhan Ojeitu (ruled 1304-16) was baptised Nicholas in honour of Pope Nicholas IV
- already in the 1280s, the Ilkhan Teguder (ruled 1282-4) had declared his conversion to Islam - the religion of the majority of his subjects, and taken on the Muslim name of Ahmad
- Ojeitu is the personification of the evolving, fluid religious melting pot of the Mongol rulers. He had been at one point Shamanist, Buddhist, baptised Christian, and later oscillated between Sunni and Shi'i Islam

Rashad al Din’s testimony leaves an impression of a rule by the Mongols characterised by ruthless and short-sighted exploitation - taxes were levied 20 to 30 times a year "by using the bastinado and torture." the result of misadministration was a "general flight from the land on the part of the peasants" and the reduction of 9/10s of cultivable land to waste

First serious attempts at reform made by Sa’d al-Dawla in Arghun’s reign - succeeded in balancing the books yet resented because he was a Jew and the Mongols did not want to miss out on quick profits

the Persian economy suffered from the effects of a great cattle plague at the same time as the Mongol rulers emptied the coffers with royal extravagance

Sadr al-Din decided to issue paper money after the Chinese model, chao. Chinese lettering appeared on the paper money alongside Muslim confessions of faith

The idea behind the paper money system was that all valuable metals would be driven into the hands of government since the use of valuable metals as currency was forbidden. This result was not achieved - instead, the economy stopped dead and the chao had to be withdrawn

With the succession of Ghazan came the most sustained attempt to right the wrongs of the previous 7 decades - according to Rashad al-Din he made a speech "I am not protecting the Persian peasantry... if it is expedient, then let me pillage them all... you must think too, when you beat and torture their wives and children, that just as our wives and children are dear to
theologian and Sufi 'convert' al'Dawla Simnani (1261-1336) - concerned how to use the wealth donated to him by the Ilkhan Arghun prior to his own withdrawal from the world

Simnani, who had been close to Abaqa Khan and then Prince Argun during his adolescence, described how he experienced a sudden religious crisis, expressed in a trance situation, when he entered the battlefield on Arghun's side against the army of the Muslim Ahmad Teguder - consequent ethical conflict led him to withdraw from the Ilkhan's service as well as worldly service altogether

Shaykh's often had moral dilemmas over gifts - one, after withdrawing from service, could not return the gifts given to him by Arghun Khan, because it was obvious they had not belonged to him in the first place. He also could not keep them - instead he donated the money as alms and converted the land property etc. into endowments

"Keeping a distance" from the Mongol rulers was seen as a virtue - accepting their service and gifts did not harmonise with later Sufism and the views in Sufi circles whose views have come down to us

Some Sufis accepted Mongol donations

imperial patronage of Muslim institutions during early Ilkhanid empire

uneasy relationship between local Muslims and Mongol rulers

Mongols were attracted to wonder-working saints - exact nature of this relationship is difficult to assess

Sufis had a high standing during Ahmad Teguder's reign - Kamal al-Din'Abd al-Rahman is a case in point for the limited use of distinction between 'popular' and 'established' Sufis

- became overseer of all the pious endowments in the Ilkhanate, occupying the same position that Tusi had under Hulegu
- Abd al-Rahman headed Ahmad Teguder's second embassy to the Mamluk sultan upon special request
- Ahmad Teguder called him "my right and left hand"
- Ahmad Teguder took the decision to send an embassy to the Mamluk sultan Qala'un against the decision which the major Mongol princes and amirs had taken during the quriltai - the amirs felt ignored by the Ilkhan

Terse and contradicting sources on the relationships between the sufis and the Mongols, yet sharp distinctions on the major shaykhhs between 'high' and 'popular' (e.g Shamanist) Sufism is not a meaningful way of categorisation

communally celebrated sama sessions described by Rashad al-Din under the reign of Ahmad Teguder

- contemporary authors stress the daily routine and intensity with which Ahmad Teguder engaged in Sufi ceremonies
- these Sufi individuals were a part of Ahmad Teguder's attempt to create an additional space of authority outside of the Mongol customs. established human relationships and inherited hierarchies
- 'brother' and 'father' used by Teguder when addressing Sufis with whom he celebrated implied that such a deconstruction and reorganisation of relationships was intended
- like Genghis Khan, Teguder cultivated relationships with individuals who claimed to be able to establish a connection to the other world - in order to attach a sacredness
to his rule that could counterbalance worldly aspects such as lateral succession, marriage politics and amir appeasement

- Ahmad Teguder’s active patronage of the Sufis should have allowed him to attract those members of the Mongol elite who had already converted to Islam
- Up to 30% of converts to Islam are found among the highest ranking Mongol amirs in the Ilkhanate from the third generation after Hulegu onwards, i.e before Ghazan Khan’s conversion to Islam
- In Ahmad Teguder’s case, sama sessions appear to have played a central role in his daily efforts to consolidate his power, adding a sacred dimension to his authority
- Contemporary evidence in the form of legal documents shows that substantial contacts between the Mongol elite and local Sufi constituencies existed - though later Sufi hagiography conveys an uneasiness about having accepted Mongol donations
- "Sufis without memory" e.g without shrines or literature, emerge as dynamic and sometimes reviled agents in the narrative sources

"Religious diversity under Ilkhanid rule C.1300 as reflected in the Freer Bal’ami"