

Revisiting Buddhism in Ilkhanid Iran: Archaeology, Toponymy and Visual Culture*

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Abstract: It is generally agreed that Buddhism, which already came to be known in West Asia during the Sasanian period through commercial exchanges with India, revived in Iran under the Ilkhanids. A pioneering study of Buddhist-Islamic interactions by Elverskog (*Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, 2010) amply demonstrates the importance of the Mongol period for the understanding of the religious contacts between Buddhists and Muslims, with particular reference to the role of Tibet in this unique socio-cultural as well as scientific encounter (the latter subject is explored by several studies, notably *Islam and Tibet – Interactions along the Musk Routes*, 2016). On the other hand, it remains a challenging task as to how the impact of Buddhism on the visual and material culture of Ilkhanid Iran should be reassessed, apart from attributions of unusual architectural remains to former Buddhist sites or interpretations of Buddhist iconographical elements found in manuscript paintings and decorative objects.

Keywords: Iran, Ilkhanid, Mongol, Buddhism, Islam, visual culture, material culture

The presence of Buddhist elements in the art and architecture of the Iranian world, both in pre-Islamic and medieval times, has been widely pointed out.¹ Yet the issue of Buddhism in Iranian art during the Islamic period, particularly with the second advent of Buddhism under the Mongols, requires a synthesis of conventional wisdom and new findings, focusing not only on its Iranian and Islamic contexts, and the changes which it underwent there, but also on its origins. My concern is therefore to search for visual evidence for the prevalence of this foreign-born faith in Iran during the Mongol period, Iranian artists' engagement with Buddhist themes and the assimilation of such themes into Iranian culture.

¹ * This article was previously published as "Buddhism in Iran under the Mongols: An Art-Historical Analysis." in *Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the European Society for Central Asian Studies*, eds. T. Gacek and J. Pstrusińska (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 171-80. The main text and footnotes of the current version have been lightly copy-edited, with a list of further references on this subject as an appendix below, while illustrations have been removed due to the shortage of space. Some of the contents of this article were presented at the international conference, *The Mongols and Religions*, at the Institute of Iranian Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, 16-17 May 2019.

See A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "The Buddhist Heritage in the Art of Iran." in *Mahayanist Art after A D 900, Colloques on Art and Archaeology in Asia, No 2*, ed. W. Watson (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 1972), pp. 56-65; idem, "Recherches sur l'architecture de l'Iran bouddhique 1." *Le Monde Iranien et l'Islam* 3 (1975), pp. 1-61. See also multi-authored entries on "Buddhism" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 4, (New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1989), pp. 492-505.

The following discussion includes a brief overview of Buddhism in Islamic Iran and aspects of Buddhist influence on Iranian art with special reference to that found in architecture and painting. Throughout this discussion I shall follow the process of Persianization in each area so as to discern the uniqueness of the particular mixture of Buddhist and Islamic elements in the Iranian art of the late 13th and early 14th centuries.

It is generally agreed that Buddhism came to be known in Iran during the Sasanian period as a consequence of maritime trade with India, though how much fundamental effect it had on Iranian artistic concepts is open to question.² Even after the predominance of Zoroastrianism and later Islam, Iran, particularly in the eastern provinces, continued to be in frequent contact with Buddhism.³ Besides the rich Buddhist heritage in Afghanistan, a number of Buddhist sites datable to Islamic times have been discovered in Khorasan, for example at Merv.⁴ As Buddhism moved westwards, the norms of East Asian beauty were gradually incorporated into Iranian literature and pictorial vocabulary.⁵ Figures with East Asian traits were, for instance, highly appreciated as the moon-faced Buddha (*bot-i mahruy*) in medieval Iranian culture,⁶ and the Mongoloid facial feature commonly depicted in *minai* wares of the 12th and 13th centuries mirrors this phenomenon.⁷ The emphasis on the linear-drawing techniques found in the illustrations of the *Kitab Suwar al-Kawakib al-Thabita* ("The Book of Fixed Stars") of al-Sufi (probably Fars, 1009-10 or c. 1200-1300; MS Marsh 144, Bodleian Library, Oxford)⁸ is evocative of the pictorial

² For example, the Chehel-Khaneh caves at Zir Rah were known as a Buddhist complex in Sasanian Iran (see W. Ball, "Two Aspects of Iranian Buddhism." *Bulletin of the Asia Institute of Pahlavi University*, nos. 1-4 (1976), pp. 104-27; *idem.*, "Some Rock-Cut Monuments in Southern Iran." *Iran* 24 (1986), pp. 99-103; Ball has also identified the Qal'at-i Haidari caves near Khurmuj as a Buddhist monastery of the Sasanian period (*ibid.*, pp. 95-8); wall-paintings found at a site of Kuh-e Khwaja in Sistan contain Buddhist elements (see T. Kawami, "Kuh-e Khwaja, Iran, and Its Wall Paintings: The Records of Ernst Herzfeld." *Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal* 22 (1987), pp. 25-50. I am most grateful to Dr. Trudy Kawami for drawing my attention to this monument). See also *The Cambridge History of Iran* (hereafter, *CHI*), vol. 3 (2) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 949-64. For Sasanian maritime trade with India, see D. Whitehouse and A. Williamson, "Sasanian Maritime Trade." *Iran* 11 (1973), pp. 43-5.

³ Melikian-Chirvani, "Buddhist heritage", pp. 56-9; R. W. Bulliet, "Naw Bahar and the Survival of Iranian Buddhism." *Iran* 14 (1976), pp. 140-5; *CHI*, vol. 3 (2), p. 957.

⁴ G. Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), pp. 146-9.

⁵ A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "L'évocation littéraire du bouddhisme dans l'Iran musulman." *Le Monde Iranien et l'Islam* 2 (1974), pp. 1-72. See also D. Gimaret, "Bouddha et les bouddhistes dans la tradition musulmane." *Journal Asiatique* 257 (1969), pp. 273-316.

⁶ Melikian-Chirvani, "Buddhist heritage", pp. 60-3. See also H. W. Bailey, "The Word 'But' in Iranian." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 6 (1931), pp. 279-83. For further discussion about the penetration of the East Asian type of beauty into Iranian aesthetics, see E. Esin, "Turk-i mah chihrah (The Turkish Norm of Beauty in Iran).", in *Akten des VII internationalen Kongresses für iranische Kunst und Archäologie, München 10 September 1976* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1979), pp. 449-60.

⁷ See E. Atil, *Ceramics from the World of Islam* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1973), nos. 41-2.

⁸ For this manuscript, see E. Wellesz, "An Early al-Sufi Manuscript in the Bodleian Library in Oxford." *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), pp. 1-26. See also a recent study on this manuscript by Soudavar who has

devices used in figure painting of Chinese or Central Asian origin.⁹ In particular, the convention of vermicular drapery folds found in the al-Sufi illustrations shows a striking resemblance to that used in 7th-century works of the Khotanese painter, Weichi Yiseng.¹⁰ But the Mongol invasion, which took place in the 1220s, facilitated the widespread propagation of Buddhism, resulting in a great deal of disruption in the religious life of Iran and a shift in the faith, though temporary, towards this idol-worshipping polytheistic religion.

Ilkhanid Iran was a multi-religious society. While keeping their shamanistic background, the religious orientation and patronage of the Ilkhans ranged over Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism.¹¹ Buddhism had already gained official status during the reign of the first Ilkhan Hulagu (r. 1256-65). He promoted the involvement of Buddhists in official positions, especially Tibetan lamas (*bakhshi*), but he was also familiar to a certain extent with Christianity, notably through his Nestorian Christian wife Doqoz-khatun.¹² Abaqa (r. 1265-82) followed his father: he protected Buddhists and had Christian wives. His brother, Teguder (r. 1282-84), was baptized but later converted to Islam, though for purely personal reasons. Royal patronage of Buddhism was intensified during the reign of Argun (r. 1284-91). A number of Buddhist monuments were erected, and Buddhists were actively involved in Mongol court life. Argun's son, Ghazan (r. 1295-1304), was brought up as a Buddhist, but finally in 1295 he decided on an official conversion to Islam.¹³ His successor, Uljaitu (r. 1304-16), had a complex religious background: originally a Christian, he became a Buddhist and finally went over to Shi'ism in 1310. The last Ilkhan Abu Sa'id (r. 1316-35) was, however, a Sunni.

What, then, happened in the art of Iran during these 40 years of Buddhist presence? The quest for the Buddhist heritage of Iran must start with architecture, which is, among the various forms and media of art, the most powerful image-propaganda. One of the earliest reflections of Buddhist architectural style can be seen in domed mausolea, a type of which evolved in Transoxiana in early Islamic times—the tomb of Ismail Samanid in Bukhara (c. 900) is a case in point—and became the most popular building type in the architecture of Islamic Iran. The canopy structure, consisting of

proposed a 12th- and 13th-century date (A. Soudavar, "The Concepts of 'al-Aqdamo Asahh' and 'Ya-qin-e Sabeq,' and the Problem of Semi-Fakes." *Studia Iranica* 28 (1999), pp. 262-4).

⁹ For example, see painter's sketches at Dunhuang (S. E. Fraser, "Formulas of Creativity: Artist's Sketches and Techniques of Copying at Dunhuang." *Aribus Asiae* 59 (1999), pp. 189-224).

¹⁰ See M. Bussagli, *Central Asian Painting* (Geneva: Sikra, 1963), pp. 66-7.

¹¹ For Buddhism in Ilkhanid Iran, see *CHI*, vol. 5 (1968), pp. 540-1.

¹² See J. D. Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans: Tartar Queens and Missionary Expectations in Asia." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* ser. 3, 8, no. 3 (1998), pp. 411-21.

¹³ For the conversion of Ghazan, see C. Melville, "Padshah-i Islam: The Conversion of Sultan Mahmud Ghazan Khan." in *History and Literature in Iran: Persian and Islamic Studies in Honour of P. W. Avery* ed. C. Melville (London: British Academic Press, 1990), pp. 159-77; R. Amitai-Preiss, "Ghazan, Islam and Mongol Tradition: A View from the Mamluk Sultanate." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 59 (1996), pp. 1-10.

a square base and a hemispherical dome, recalls the Buddhist stupa.¹⁴ The stylistic impact of the stupa is also visibly pronounced on a type of incense-burner which has been attributed to Khorasan, including what is now Afghanistan, under the Samanids and the Ghaznavids.¹⁵ Given such a direct response to Buddhist architecture, it would not be surprising if Iranians were already fully aware of the style of Buddhist temples (*botkhaneh*) by the time of the Mongol conquest.

Literary sources refer to the existence of Buddhist monuments in north-west Iran during the Mongol period, such as in Khoys and Maragha under Hulagu,¹⁶ in Tabriz under Arghun and in Khorasan (Khabushan) under Ghazan.¹⁷ Archaeological evidence is not abundant, due to the destruction of Buddhist monuments following Ghazan Khan's official conversion to Islam in 1295,¹⁸ but it is sufficient to demonstrate the evolution of Buddhist architecture in Mongol-ruled Iran. The ruin of a rocky complex at Viar near Sultaniyya¹⁹ is one of the few Buddhist remains which escaped the anti-Buddhist movement, thanks to a subtle conversion into a mosque. A non-Islamic feature of this monument is particularly evident in the presence of an elaborately sculptured dragon in stone next to a non-oriented *mihrab*.²⁰ Some iconographic features of the dragon, such as its well-proportioned serpentine body exhaling flames or clouds, are distinct from Islamic-type dragons, which are characterized by their stillness and symmetrical arrangement.²¹ The accuracy of the depiction of the dragon points to the involvement of artists who were conversant with the iconography of the dragon in the Chinese art tradition.²² Another monument to be noted is the Imamzade Ma'sum at Varjovi near Maragha, a cave complex which Warwick Ball has convincingly identified as a Buddhist monastery of the Mongol period.²³ Indeed, despite the later additions of a *mihrab* and Quranic inscriptions, the complex is not

¹⁴ Another possible source for the domed mausoleum in the Islamic Iranian world is the Zoroastrian fire-temple (see R. Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1994), pp. 275-6.). For the stupa, see A. L. Dallapiccola ed., *The Stūpa: Its Religious, Historical and Architectural Significance* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980).

¹⁵ For a study of this subject, see G. Fehervari, "Islamic Incense Burners and the Influence of Buddhist Art." in *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. B. O'Kane (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 127-41.

¹⁶ E.g. the Rasatkhaneh caves at Maragha (Ball, "Two Aspects of Iranian Buddhism", pp. 127-43).

¹⁷ D. Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Il Khānid Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 15.

¹⁸ *CHI*, vol. 5, 542.

¹⁹ G. Scarcia, "The 'Vihar' of Qonqor-olong: Preliminary Report.", *East and West*, n.s., 25 (1975), pp. 99-104.

²⁰ See G. Curatola, "The Viar Dragon." in *Soltāniye III. Quaderni del Seminario di Iranistica, Uralo-Altaistica e Caucasologia dell'Università degli Studi di Venezia*, 9 (Venice: Bosco, 1982), pp. 71-88.

²¹ For Islamic-type dragons, see G. Curatola, *Draghi: la Tradizione Artistica Orientale e i Disegni del Tesoro del Topkapi* (Venice: Poligrafo, 1989), pp. 45-81.

²² For Chinese dragons, see J. Rawson, *Chinese Ornament: The Lotus and the Dragon* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984), pp. 93-9.

²³ W. Ball, "The Imamzadeh Ma'sum at Vardjovi: A Rock-Cut Ilkhanid Complex near Maragheh." *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 12 (1979), pp. 329-40.

completely disguised as Islamic. Rather, several architectural details, for example the circumambulatory layout of the chambers and a circular dome with multi-toothed decoration, betray its non-Islamic nature.²⁴ The erased remains of painted frescoes can be interpreted in the context of iconoclasm in Ilkhanid Iran of the post-1295 period.

The unavailability of reliable Ilkhanid painting pre-dating 1295 makes it difficult to trace the exact course of how Buddhist elements were assimilated into Iranian pictorial concepts during the early Mongol period. Yet three early 14th-century illustrated manuscripts provide a clear picture of the impact of Buddhist iconography on Ilkhanid painting, as well as the tenacity of Buddhism in Ilkhanid Iran: the *al-Athar al-Baqiya* (“Chronology of Ancient Nations”) of al-Biruni (north-west Iran, 1307-8; MS Arab 161, University Library, Edinburgh);²⁵ the *Jami’ al-Tawarikh* (“Compendium of Chronicles”) of Rashid al-Din (Rashidiyya, 1314; MS Arab 20, University Library, Edinburgh; MS 727, Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London);²⁶ and the so-called Great Mongol *Shahnama* (“Book of Kings”) of Firdawsi (Tabriz, c. 1335)²⁷.

The al-Biruni manuscript is remarkable for its *mélange* of different religious themes and iconographic traditions, including those coming from Buddhist art. The most telling example in this manuscript is undoubtedly the scene of the *Annunciation*. Initially derived from the Byzantine prototype,²⁸ the painter did not hesitate to add Buddhist flavor to this very Christian theme. Both the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary are portrayed with East Asian features in terms of facial appearance, robes, ribbons and haloes.²⁹ Exact sources of inspiration for this image are difficult to specify from long-established Buddhist painting. Yet it is possible to compare the image of Gabriel with an 8th century painting of a Bodhisattva now in the Shoso-in in

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

²⁵ For this manuscript, see P. Soucek, “An Illustrated Manuscript of al-Bīrunī’s Chronology of Ancient Nations” in *The Scholar and the Saint: Studies in Commemoration of Abu’l Rayhan al-Bīrunī and Jalal al-Din al-Rūmī* ed. P. Chelkowski (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 103-68; R. Hillenbrand, “Images of Muhammad in al-Biruni’s Chronology of Ancient Nations” in *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars. Studies in Honour of Basil W. Robinson* ed. R. Hillenbrand (London–New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 129-46.

²⁶ For this manuscript, see D. T. Rice, *The Illustrations of the ‘World History’ of Rashid al-Din* (Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 1976); S. S. Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid Al-Din’s Illustrated History of the World* (London: Nour Foundation in ass. with Oxford University Press, 1995).

²⁷ For this manuscript, see O. Grabar and S. S. Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History: The Illustrations of the Great Mongol Shahnama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

²⁸ Soucek, “An Illustrated Manuscript”, p. 148.

²⁹ Haloes were originally developed in Sasanian royal imagery and were adopted in India to highlight the head of the Buddha (M. Bary, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam and the Riddle of Bihzād of Herāt (1465-1535)* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), p. 59). But the Buddhist nimbus may have been re-introduced into the Ilkhanid realm.

Nara.³⁰ Mary recalls the goddess Hariti, an image found near Turfan.³¹ This suggests the involvement of artists with a Central Asian Buddhist background, most probably Uighurs, in Ilkhanid ateliers.³² Buddhist temples are not themselves depicted in the al-Biruni manuscript, but the scenes of *Abraham destroys the idols* (f. 88v)³³ and *Bukhtnassar orders the destruction of the temple* (f. 134v) can be seen as an echo of the actual event that accompanied the conversion of Ghazan to Islam in 1295.³⁴

In the Rashid al-Din manuscript, paintings located in the history of India should be observed with great caution. The sources for the image of *Shakyamuni offering fruits to the devil* (f. 34)³⁵ were not only general sources of inspiration from Chinese painting³⁶ but probably also illustrated Buddhist texts brought by the Indian Buddhist monk called Kamalashiri, who served in the Mongol court, and brought Sanskrit sources of the life and teachings of Buddha to Rashid al-Din.³⁷ Similar Buddhist-Chinese associations can be observed in the *Grove of Jetavana* (f. 276v).³⁸ The story which is depicted here came from Buddhist sources, but the image is more reminiscent of typical Chinese landscape painting.³⁹ What is remarkable in this illustration is that Iranian painters were acclimatized to East Asian pictorial traditions and were engaged in adapting newly acquired elements into their own pictorial settings.⁴⁰ In addition to such iconographic ideas, Buddhist sources may also have facilitated compositional development in early 14th-century Iranian painting. As in some of the album paintings of the Rashid al-Din manuscript now in Berlin and Istanbul, known as the Diez Albums and the Saray Albums,⁴¹ the horizontal arrangement of

³⁰ R. Hayashi, *The Silk Road and the Shoso-in* (New York: Weatherhill, 1975), pp. 145-7, fig. 168.

³¹ *Along the Ancient Silk Routes: Central Asian Art from the West Berlin State Museums*, H. Härtel and M. Yaldiz eds. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Arts, 1982), p. 206, pl. 147.

³² E. Esin, "The Bakhshi in the 14th to 16th Centuries: The Masters of the Pre-Muslim Tradition of the Arts of the Book in Central Asia." in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia 14th-16th Centuries*, eds. B. Gray and O. F. Akimuškin (London: Serinda Publications, 1979), pp. 281-94.

³³ Soucek, "An Illustrated Manuscript", pp. 114-8, fig. 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-5, fig. 20.

³⁵ For further discussion of this illustration, see S. Canby, "Descriptions of Buddha Sakyamuni in the Jami' al-Tawarikh and the Majma' al-Tawarikh." *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), pp. 301-3.

³⁶ For example, see *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, Painting 4 (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1988), pl. 3.

³⁷ T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 84. For Kamalashri, see K. Jahn, "Kamālashrī - Rashīd al-Dīn's 'Life and Teaching of Buddha': A Source for the Buddhism of the Mongol Period." *Central Asiatic Journal* 2 (1956), pp. 81-128. For the political relationship between Kashmir and the Mongol court, see *idem*, "A Note on Kashmir and the Mongols." *Central Asiatic Journal* 2 (1956), pp. 176-80.

³⁸ Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles*, p. 78.

³⁹ For example, see the works of Fan Long (fl. 1227-62; suggested by Canby, "Descriptions of Buddha", p. 303.).

⁴⁰ It was during the Timurid period that faithful copies of Buddhist paintings were made in the Iranian world (e.g. Timurid drawings of Chan Buddhist monks (Iran or Central Asia, c. 1400-50; Diez A. Fol. 73, S53 and S55, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, Berlin); see D. Roxburgh ed., *Turks: A Journey of A Thousand Years, 600-1600* (London: Royal Academy of Art, 2005), cat. nos. 175A-B).

⁴¹ For the Diez Albums, see M. İpşiroğlu, *Saray Alben: Diez'sche Klebebände aus den Berliner Sammlu-*

attendants and the differential size to indicate hierarchy are very comparable to those seen in Buddhist illustrated texts.⁴² Such compositional challenges serve to enrich enthronement images, albeit in a rather peculiar way.

Even in the Great Mongol *Shahnama*, which was produced in the mid-1330s, Buddhist elements are ubiquitous in the surviving illustrations of the manuscript. The decoration that appears in Zahhak's throne is visibly inspired by flaming jewels of Buddhist origin, known as *cintamani*,⁴³ and lotus motifs which evoke those found in the lacquerware of the Song and Yuan periods.⁴⁴ The prince is enthroned with a stately bearing as if he were a Buddhist deity, though it remains unclear to what extent the Buddhist connotations of these motifs—such as auspiciousness and purity—were understood in Ilkhanid Iran. One of the images of Isfandiyar is evocatively Tibetan in terms of posture, suggesting the availability and familiarity of Tibetan Buddhist iconography in Ilkhanid ateliers. Apart from paintings and illustrated texts,⁴⁵ the image of a kneeling man gesturing towards the people around him possibly came to be known through imported wall hangings and woven tapestries, for example a *tanka* hanging of the Tangut empire (Xixia; c. 1030-1227),⁴⁶ which seems to have functioned as a chief decorative element in Buddhist monuments in Iran, possibly together with idols.

In addition to the hangings, the role of textiles in the westward transmission of Buddhist decorative ideas needs to be considered afresh. In South and East Asia, textiles became important media not only as commodities but also as essential items in a religious context. The early development of the silk trade was thus closely associated with the expansion of Buddhism, because of the increased demand for silk for use in

ngen (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1964); for the Saray Albums, see M. Rogers, F. Çağman and Z. Tanındı, *The Topkapı Saray Museum: The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), p. 69, nos. 43-4.

⁴² Similar ideas can be found in the frontispieces of pre-Mongol Islamic manuscripts (e.g. the *Kitab al-Aghani* [probably Mosul, c. 1218-9; see R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva: Skira, 1962), p. 65.] suggested by B. Brend, "The Little People: Miniature Cityscapes and Figures in Persian and Ottoman Painting." in *Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies 2*, ed. C. Melville (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), p. 367.), suggesting that Buddhist art traditions were already known in the early 13th-century Middle East.

⁴³ For this motif, see G. Paquin, "Çintamani" *Hali* 64 (1992), pp. 104-19.

⁴⁴ For example, see H. Garner, *Chinese Lacquer* (London-Boston: Faber, 1979), no. 44. For a further discussion of Chinese lacquer and Islamic design, see Y. Crowe, "The Chiselled Surface: Chinese Lacquer and Islamic Design." in *Silk & Stone: The Art of Asia (Hali Annual Series No. 3)*, ed. J. Tilden (London: Hali Publications, 1996), pp. 60-9.

⁴⁵ For example, see S. Kossak, "Early Central Tibetan Hierarch Portraits: New Perspectives on Identification and Dating." *Oriental Art* n.s., 45 no. 4 (1999-2000), pp. 2-8.

⁴⁶ For example, see *Lost Empire of the Silk Road: Buddhist Art from Khara Khoto (X- XIIIth Century)*, ed. M. B. Piotrovsky (Milan: Electa, 1993), pp. 140-1. The Tangut Empire, which had Tibetan Buddhism as its state religion, was destroyed by the advent of the Mongols, but the existing religious connections between the Tanguts and the Tibetans were adopted by the Mongol rulers. For further information about this empire, see H. Franke and D. Twitchett eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 154-214.

various ceremonies or to wrap religious texts and bodies in for burial.⁴⁷ Silk textiles were imported from South and East Asia to the Middle East essentially as tribute and luxury items. They served to convey East Asian themes westwards into Iran in the wake of the Mongol invasion, and motifs of East Asian origin, such as dragons and clouds, were quickly absorbed into Iranian artistic vocabulary.⁴⁸ Similarly, Buddhist motifs, for example the lotus and the flame, came to be recognized in Ilkhanid Iran chiefly through imported Chinese or Central Asian textiles⁴⁹; they were quickly transplanted across the various media of Ilkhanid pictorial and decorative arts, due in part to the introduction of paper in the process of design making.⁵⁰ Of particular note is the role of the lotus in the development of *Shahnama* iconography in Ilkhanid painting. As we have seen in the image of Zakhak, the lotus motif appears as a device to embellish thrones, but it also functions as heraldry in rulers' costumes in the Great Mongol *Shahnama*.⁵¹ In the earliest surviving copies of illustrated *Shahnama* manuscripts, known as the Small *Shahnamas* (north-west Iran or Baghdad, c. 1300)⁵², the flame is often incorporated into the images of dragons⁵³, which may have been derived from Chinese or Central Asian textile designs,⁵⁴ whereas it is also combined with other animals, for example a *qiling*-like animal, called the *karg*.⁵⁵ Perhaps, Iranian painters found the flame a convenient device to enhance the image of mythical animals.

My final observation touches on Ilkhanid monuments decorated with Buddhist motifs. Interestingly, Islamic and Buddhist elements, such as Qur'anic inscriptions and lotus motifs, appear side by side in religious buildings of the Ilkhanid period.⁵⁶ Such a mixture of disparate motifs was perhaps not so controversial, assuming that by that time the lotus had lost its original Buddhist significance, and that some symbolic

⁴⁷ For further discussion, see X. Liu, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600-1200* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); R. Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 8-9.

⁴⁸ For dragons in Ilkhanid art, see Curatola, *Draghi*, pp. 65-73; for clouds in Ilkhanid art, see Yuka Kadou, "Cloud Patterns: The Exchange of Ideas between China and Iran under the Mongols." *Oriental Art* n.s. 48 no. 2 (2002), pp. 25-36. For further discussion on *chinoiserie* in Ilkhanid art, see Rawson, *Chinese Ornament*, pp. 147-56.

⁴⁹ For example, see J. Watt and A. Wardwell, *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles* (New York: Abrams, 1997), cat. nos. 15-9, 35-47.

⁵⁰ J. Bloom, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 178.

⁵¹ See Grabar and Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History*, nos. 12, 37, 42, 50 and 56.

⁵² For the Small *Shahnamas*, see M. S. Simpson, *The Illustration of an Epic: The Earliest Shahnama Manuscripts* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, figs. 40, 42 and 91-2.

⁵⁴ Watt and Wardwell, *When Silk Was Gold*, cat. nos. 17-8.

⁵⁵ For example, see Simpson, *The Illustration of an Epic*, 177-9, figs. 37-8, 59-61. For the *karg*, see R. Ettinghausen, *Studies in Muslim Iconography: I. The Unicorn* (Washington DC: Lord Baltimore Press, 1950), pp. 101-6.

⁵⁶ See L. Komaroff and S. Carboni eds., *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in West Asia, 1256-1353* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), figs. 151-2.

aspects of the motif had possibly been re-interpreted in an Islamic context. In the case of the lotus border decoration found in the stucco *mihrab* of Sultan Uljaitu at the Masjid-i Jami‘ of Isfahan, the motif, suggesting flowerage, appears to have symbolized a gate to paradise.

Judging from the above discussion, there is no evidence that Buddhism was viewed negatively in Islamic Iran; nor was its art tradition disregarded by Iranian artists. Even though the political situation prevented Buddhism from propagating, the Buddhist heritage was deeply rooted in Iranian soil. The multi-cultural atmosphere made it possible to establish a unique composite of Islamic and Buddhist styles in architecture and a curious amalgamation of Buddhist and Iranian iconography in painting. Owing to the nature of Ilkhanid ornaments, which meant that motifs were transferable from one medium to another thanks to the wide use of paper cartoons for the process of design making, Buddhist elements were soon translated into their own artistic idioms and became fashionable motifs in late 13th- and early 14th-century Iranian art. In sum, the Buddhist contribution is one of the fundamental parameters in assessing the Iranian renaissance in art and architecture.

Appendix: select references on historical and cultural aspects of Buddhism in Ilkhanid Iran (published after 2000)

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