

Preface

First and foremost, this volume is a narrative history of the Mongol Empire, not only of the unified empire or *Yeke Monggol Ulus*, but also of the post-dissolution period. I attempt to approach the Mongol Empire as I have done since I first began my study of the Mongol Empire as an undergraduate at The College of William & Mary – from the perception of the Mongols. As the Mongols ruled the largest contiguous empire in history, we must understand how they viewed their actions and interests. As so few sources actually come from the Mongols themselves, we will never possess a perfect understanding, but it remains a worthwhile effort.

This volume is also part of a series on Islamic Empires. At first glance, this may seem a devilish ploy as many Muslims viewed the Mongols (as did many others) as a punishment from God for their sins and as infidels of the worst sort. Nonetheless, three Islamic empires emerged from the post-dissolution Mongol state. This transformation was slow and not always obvious to those dwelling in those states.

I endeavour to capture the anxiety that existed in the Islamic world as well as investigate how accommodation to Mongol rule took place. I analyse Mongol relations and interactions with Muslims: not only how the Mongols viewed Muslims, but how the Muslims engaged with the Mongols. In doing so, I hope to explore how the *Yeke Monggol Ulus*, created by a man of no particular religion, was transformed into a number of Islamic empires.

Most of the companion volumes in The Edinburgh History of Islamic Empires series require no explanation of what is meant by that name. The Ottomans, Fatimids and Seljuks were Muslims before they established their empires. The Mongols (as in so many instances) are the exception. Thus, by 'Islamic Empire' I mean a poly-ethnic and multicultural state that possesses a Muslim ruler and uses Islamic institutions, including but not limited to the use of *shari'a*. Additionally, its neighbours must view it as an Islamic state. While themes of conversion will be addressed, the discussion included here will not add significantly to what others have written, although it might suggest new avenues of research.

It is the author's intent to give students and the public (and hopefully, scholars) a solid understanding of the history of the Mongol Empire. The book was written with students in mind and drafts were read by several classes at the University of North Georgia as well as one class taught by Scott C. Levi at The Ohio State University. Despite the varying quality of the early drafts, the students do not appear to have suffered unduly, although the text was alternately hailed as a cure for insomnia and derided as the cause of narcolepsy. I hope the final version has removed these unfortunate aspects. Yet to understand how the Mongol Empire became an Islamic empire and why the transformation occurred, one must start in the beginning, in a region that historically had been quite untouched by Islam.

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