

RADCLIFFE-BROWN LECTURE IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Muhammad and Jenghiz Khan Compared: The Religious Factor in World Empire Building

ANATOLY M KHAZANOV

University of Wisconsin

Fellow of the Academy

IT IS A GREAT HONOUR, indeed, to be invited to deliver the Radcliffe-Brown memorial lecture, and naturally, I am most grateful for the invitation. I have chosen religion as the topic of this lecture because its study was always central to the interests of our great predecessor. Although he was not particularly concerned with a dialogue between anthropology and history—a point his critics often stress—he welcomed comparative studies, and he always insisted that while religion cannot be reduced to society, it is an intrinsic part of the constitution of society (Radcliffe-Brown, 1965: 163).

In this spirit I will attempt to compare the two greatest conquest movements of premodern times, the Arab and the Mongol, which resulted in the creation of world empires, and to analyse the importance of religious factor in these events. This attempt is hardly in the mainstream of current social and cultural anthropology, which does not encourage much comparative studies of historical societies separated in time and space. Nonetheless, I hope this comparison will facilitate a better understanding of some serious conceptual problems that these conquests pose for both anthropologists and historians. The fact that Arab society had a strong nomadic component and that Mongol society was firmly based on pastoral nomadism makes this comparison even more interesting.

The preconditions of these conquests bear some remarkable similarities.

Read at the Academy 15 January 1992. © The British Academy 1993.

The internal situation in Arabia in the second half of the 6th and in the beginning of the 7th centuries was very complicated. There are many good reasons to think that at that time Arabian society was under stress; after all, new religions do not emerge in times of tranquility and prosperity. So, in discussing the origin of Islam one should take into account conditions existing in the entire peninsula. The emergence of a state capable of uniting Arabia was definitely not a response limited to the local situation in Mecca and Medina (for an opposite opinion see Aswad, 1963: 439; Ibrahim, 1990: 75ff, 99ff).

The old thesis of Caetani (1911: 133 ff), that Arabia was suffering from a gradual process of desiccation, has been disputed by many scholars. However, Butzer (1957: 359 ff; cf., however, Donner, 1981: 279, n. 10) has demonstrated that between AD 591 and 640 there was severe drought in the peninsula that would worsen the economy there and particularly affect its nomadic population. Earlier in the 6th century, Byzantium, Iran, and their buffer states, the Ghassanids and Lakhmids, prevented for a time the free movement of nomads to the north (Kister, 1968: 153 ff; Negria, 1981: 26–27), while the occupation of South Arabia by the Abyssinians and later, about the 570s, by the Persians, hampered their migrations to the South. Prior to these events the various indigenous states in South Arabia had been also capable to keep the nomads under their control (Olinder, 1927: 34–37; Pigulevskaia, 1964: 124 ff; Piotrovskii, 1985: 23 ff).

Much has been written about the deterioration of trade in luxury items as an important factor that contributed to the crisis in Arabia (see, for example, Shaban, 1971: 24–25). This hypothesis was recently challenged by Crone, who provided many convincing arguments in support of her opinion. However, a general disorganization of economy and trade in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East (Kennedy, 1986: 3) by the beginning of the 7th century AD should have in any case negatively affected Arabian society.

It is also quite plausible that by the beginning of the 7th century AD Arabia faced a certain overpopulation, while possibilities for sedenterization of the Bedouin within the peninsula were too limited, particularly with a decline of agriculture in South Arabia.¹ Whether this decline, along with some other factors, had caused a nomadization of some of the Arabian population still remains unclear. But there are reasons to suspect that in

¹ This is usually connected with, or symbolized by, the breaking of the Ma'arib dam and the consequent migration of South Arabian tribes to the North (Aswad, 1963: 422). Although many modern scholars dispute the importance of this event, a general decay of irrigation systems in South Arabia in the 6th–7th centuries can hardly raise doubts (Piotrovskii, 1985: 36–37; 134–138).

the first half of the first millennium AD a balance between the 'desert' and the 'sown' in Arabia was for various reasons disturbed (Caskel, 1953: 30 ff; 1954: 36 ff; cf. Höfner, 1959: 60 ff).²

Under such circumstances conquests and consequent migrations were but a traditional solution of the problem, particularly since an external situation in the beginning of the 7th century had become more favourable to the Arabs. While a kind of political vacuum made itself felt in Arabia, the growing weakness of the great powers in the North was becoming increasingly apparent. The Byzantine and Persian empires had been at war for many years and had virtually exhausted each other (Pigulevskaia, 1964). As a consequence, the buffer Arab states ceased to exist (like the Lakhmid state abolished and replaced by the Persian governor in 602), or to enjoy their material support (like the Ghassanids) (Lewis, 1950: 32; Pigulevskaia, 1964: 121–122). Besides, Byzantium was weakened by the strife between different Eastern Christian Churches, and Iran suffered greatly from a growing internal disintegration (Ashtor, 1976: 10). All this opened new possibilities to the Arabs. However, they had yet to be explored and exploited in the best possible way.

The situation in Mongolia at the beginning of the 13th century was in many respects similar. Apparently the balance between the availability of natural resources (principally pastures), the size of herds, and the human population in Mongolia was greatly disturbed (Khazanov, 1980). At the beginning of the 13th century the number of Mongols exceeded their number at the beginning of the 20th century. While Mongol society faced a problem of overpopulation, from the 10th to 14th centuries the climate deteriorated (Jenkins, 1974). No wonder, the Mongols were very interested in getting from the neighbouring sedentary societies not only agricultural products but even stock (Martin, 1950: 58; Vorob'ev, 1975: 330).

Their possibilities in this respect were rather limited. The trans-continental trade on the ancient Great Silk route was at that time in decay (Vorob'ev, 1975: 338), and Mongol relations with China were far from friendly. During the 12th century the Chin considered the Mongols their tributaries and repeatedly took the offensive against them (Martin, 1950: 57–59; Tamura, 1973: 9–11). The weakness of the sedentary states became evident only during Jenghiz Khan's campaigns, after the Mongols had

² Watt (1956: 167; cf. Bishai, 1968: 61–62) even thinks that constant internal fighting in Arabia served to help keep the population sufficiently small for the meagre resources of the desert to support. Cf. a regulation promulgated by a 'false prophet' Musaylimah in the Yamamah that a man should not have intercourse with any woman so long as he had a son alive (Watt, 1956: 136).

united. In the previous period, the Mongols had fought each other. The 12th century was a period of fierce struggle and not only between separate tribal units but also between various tribes, subtribes and even clans. It clearly seems that Mongol society was under stress (Khazanov, 1980).

One may conclude that in their initial stages both the Arabian and the Mongolian conquest movements were aimed at overcoming initial societal crises at a time when an external political situation favoured expansion.

One can extend the comparison even further. In both cases the internal crises were ecological and economic, apparently also social, but as far as the nomads were concerned in no way were the crises spiritual. Although both societies were acquainted with various world and regional religions—with Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism in the case of Arabs, and with Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Chinese religions in the case of the Mongols—this circumstance hardly contributed to their mundane stresses and conflicts.

Perhaps a certain tension between transcendental and mundane orders, to use the terminology of the Axial Age concept (Eisenstadt, 1986), could be felt in sedentary parts of pre-Islamic Arabia, but not in Mongolia. The rare conflicts between rulers and experts in the supernatural in the Eurasian steppes lacked any ideological background and did not exceed the limits of personal rivalry.

And last, but not least, in both the Arabian and Mongolian cases internal crises were solved in a similar way, by successful conquests, expansion, and world wide empire building.

There similarities end, and significant differences between the two cases become evident. Among other things, differences are quite conspicuous in the religious history of the two empires. Since the religious history of the Caliphate is well known, at any rate described in numerous publications, I will dwell more on the ideological foundations of the Mongol empire and on its religious history.

While Muhammad borrowed from existing world religions to create a new one, Jenghiz Khan neglected them entirely. The Arabs initiated their conquests under the banner of Islam, 'to exalt the Word of God', which united brothers in faith. Jenghiz Khan did not suggest and did not think that he needed any universal message to mankind in order to support and to legitimize his claims, although he apparently held a sincere belief in his own charisma and in the patronage of Eternal Heaven, which were virtually the same. This confidence was shared by many other Mongols. 'Together Heaven and Earth have agreed: Temujin shall be lord of the Land!' claimed his supporters (The Secret History of the Mongols, 125 in de Rachewiltz, 1972: 166; see also Hambis, 1975).

Saunders (1977: 42–45) made an attempt, hardly very convincing, to

prove that the Mongol conquests were similar to the Arab ones even in ideological respects, that Jenghiz Khan was, if not a prophet, then a spokesman of Heaven, and that his Yasa (the collection of rules and orders that he left his successors) could be compared with the Koran. In all probability, the main theme of the Yasa was the necessity to maintain the unity of the Royal clan and of the Mongol Empire under the sway of a single ruler (Ayalon, 1971). That was all, or almost all. It is even more difficult to agree with Saunders that the Mongols were motivated in their conquests by a strong religious drive to unify mankind and to establish the reign of peace and justice throughout the world. Peace and order were in no way their goal; they could be at best a by-product of world subjugation.

Besides, a concept of Heaven connected with a concept of sacred kingship had existed in the Eurasian steppes long before Jenghiz Khan. The Heaven (the Heaven Above, the Eternal Heaven) that protected Jenghis Khan and bestowed upon him the power to rule over the world is in fact, the supreme but non-anthropomorphous and not clearly personified celestial god (Tengri) of the Turkic (cf. the Blue Heaven Above of the Orkhon Turks) and the Mongol nomads (Roux, 1956; Roux, 1958; de Rachewiltz, 1973: 28–29; Skrynnikova, 1989: 69).³ This supreme deity could be approached directly, without any priestly intervention, and charismatic leaders were in direct contact with the divine forces.

There is an opinion that a concept of Heaven-sanctioned kingship as it existed among the Orkhon Turks and the Mongols of the 13th century (Roux, 1959: 235 ff) had been borrowed from sedentary peoples and was strongly influenced by Chinese conceptions of the Son of Heaven and the Mandate of Heaven (de Rachewiltz, 1973: 28–29; Franke, 1978: 18–19; cf. Esin, 1980: 46–47, 94). However, a similar concept had already existed among the Scythians (Khazanov, 1975: 42 ff) and probably other ancient Iranian-speaking nomads. This suggests that the sources of supposed influence could vary. After all, a concept of sacred kingship was widespread in many societies other than China. Nor should one dismiss the possibility that the concept could originate independently in Eurasian nomadic societies, particularly in the initial periods of their state building and corresponding confrontation with sedentary societies (see also Golden, 1982: 48).

On the other hand, during the period of the single Mongol empire the concept of Heaven-sanctioned universal kingship apparently underwent some development. In previous nomadic states Heaven, first sanctioned

³ The term 'tengri' goes back to Hsiung-nu times, to the IIIrd century BC, or even earlier (Clausson, 1972, s.v.).

the rulers' power over their own people; in the Mongol empire it gave them power over the whole world.

It is quite possible that Jenghiz Khan was not only a political innovator (Khazanov, 1984: 237 ff), but to some extent a religious innovator as well. During his reign and the reign of his immediate successors, the concept of the Heavenly Divinity so characteristic of the religions of the Altaic-speaking nomads and of the Altaic peoples in general, was elaborated as a result of their political achievements and their encounter with the different religions of sedentary peoples, both the monotheistic religions, like Christianity and Islam, and the religions of China (see also Earthy, 1955: 228–232).

Heaven began to be conceived not only as the supreme Sky deity, but also as the omnipotent God who had an absolute power over human beings and who entrusted Jenghiz Khan and his successors with the Divine Mission to rule over all countries and peoples (on this, among others, see Plano Caprini in Dawson, 1955: 25, 38, 43). 'By the power of Eternal Heaven,' was a standard introductory formula of the Mongol chancelleries in the 13th and even in the 14th centuries (Pelliot, 1922–1923: 24; Voegelin, 1941; Kotwicz, 1950; Dawson, 1955: 85, 202–204; Sagaster, 1973; see also Mostaert and Cleaves, 1952).

The concept of Heaven as the highest omnipotent divinity might facilitate a kind of religious syncretism, since Tengri could then be merged with the supreme being of any universalistic religion (Franke, 1978: 19).

This may explain Plano Carpini's claim:

They [the Mongols] believe in one God, and they believe that He is the maker of all things visible and invisible; and that it is He who is the giver of good things of this world as well as the hardships (Dawson, 1955: 9; see also Rubruck's account in Dawson, 1955: 141).

Perhaps this development was also reflected by Jenghiz Khan's grandson, Möngke, in his conversation with Rubruck:

We Mongols believe that there is but one God by Whom we die and towards Him we have an upright heart (Dawson, 1955: 195).

The meagre sources at our disposal are insufficient to allow a definite conclusion. The Mongols' trend towards monotheism could reflect not so much their own religious evolution, but a desire of their observers who professed different monotheistic religions. After all, Rubruck was a very keen but biased observer.

On the other hand, the Mongol rulers sometimes might have wished to express their ideas of world domination in language acceptable to those whom they addressed. Thus, Hülagü claimed in his letter of 1262 to Louis

IX: 'God . . . hath in these last days spoken to our grandfather Jenghiz Khan . . . announcing . . . "I alone am God Almighty in the highest and have . . . set thee over the nations and . . . the kingdoms to be made ruler and king of the entire earth, to root out, and to pull down, to throw down, and to destroy, to build and to plant"' (Meyvaert, 1980: 252). From such evidence one may get the impression that Mongol religion, confronted during the period of Great Khans with various world religions, underwent some changes in its dogmatic aspect.

Although parallels with the origin of Islam inevitably come to mind, the differences are conspicuous. The religion of Jenghiz Khan lacked any universal moral and ethical appeal. An impersonal supreme divinity represented by the Eternal Heaven, even in its developing function as an omnipotent God, was neither the God-creator, nor even less the Supreme Judge of the world to whom man is accountable for his actions. It did not promise subjugated peoples anything more than a legitimation of their subjugation. It might inspire the Mongols, but not those whose lot was only to obey the Mongols. If Jenghiz Khan was a religious innovator, unlike Muhammad he definitely was not a religious reformer and prophet. It is not surprising then that even his very limited innovations did not affect Mongol folk beliefs and received no perpetuation. The history of Islam was quite different.

Even if those who think that the Koran originally was addressed only to the Arabs (Sourdell, 1983: 30), it contained a universal message to the whole of mankind, and therefore from the outset had potential for the eventual integration of the victors with the defeated. It had, or developed, a concept of *umma*, a supratribal and supraethnic community of believers from which no one could be excluded for ethnic or social reasons, and into which people are incorporated on the basis of their religious affiliation. Notwithstanding the desire of the Arab conquerors to consider Islam as their national creed and a justification of their privileges, notwithstanding an attitude of the first caliphs, like Umar, and later the Umayyads, who strived to maintain the social superiority of the Arabs over the subjugated population, an empire built on implied religious universalism was ill suited to maintain the principle of a single ethnic group dominating the apex of a social pyramid. Its 'divorce from Arab ethnocentrism,' to use von Grunebaum's expression (von Grunebaum, 1976: 443), was inevitable.

The basis of Mongol religion made this impossible. The Mongols never claimed that they possessed the ultimate truth which excluded all others. Acquaintance with various world religions prompted the Arabs, by contrast, to deny them all, while the Mongols recognized them as the bearers of God's truth in their own way. Hence their different attitude and policy towards other religions. The Mongols never considered them as

ideological rivals, or competitors with their own ethnic faith. They were quite open to the truth of others on the condition that the latter did not challenge Mongol political domination.

As soon as the Mongols became aware of the political necessity to integrate with subjugated societies, only one option was open to them: to adapt to the religions of the defeated. These religions were varied and thus contributed to the disintegration not of the Mongol empire as such, since it has been already fragmented, but of the Mongol commonwealth.

A religious history of the Mongol empire, and of the various states that emerged after its disintegration, serves as an indication of the extent to which the nomads' conversion to world religions, as well as their choice of a specific world religion, depended on political factors.

During the period of the single empire, while the conquests continued, and sometimes even later, the Mongols officially adhered to their old religion, albeit already with some deviations and modifications. Adherence to the old Mongol religion at that time reflected, among other things, the continuing policy of conquests and therefore the general policy of confrontation with sedentary countries and their populations, as well as the desire to maintain the unity of Jenghiz Khan's clan and of the empire in general.

All the first four Great Khans of the Mongol empire remained pagan. The sympathies and preferences that individual Jenghizids displayed towards different world religions were of a strictly personal character. The general Mongol policy towards the conquered countries was hardly influenced to any strong degree by their personal feelings.

One sometimes gets the impression that some Jenghizids played with religious competition among their new subjects and skillfully demonstrated their religious impartiality, if they considered it expedient. To do so was not particularly difficult because in the age of the Mongols, as in all others, there were those who wished to be deluded. Thus, the Great Khan Möngke was regarded by followers of each of the world religions as one of their number. According to Armenian sources, he was baptised. Juzjani reported that on his accession he had recited the Moslem profession of faith, while the Buddhists claimed that he recognized the supremacy of Buddhism over all other religions (Barthold, 1968: 481). Rubruck understood the situation better than many others when he remarked:

... they all follow his court like flies honey, and he gives to them all and they think they enjoy his special favour and they all prophesy good fortune for him (Dawson, 1955: 160).

The general Mongol attitude towards different world religions in the conquered domains was characterized by a political and spiritual

pragmatism. Thus, when Jenghiz Khan conferred special privileges on the Buddhists, and later on the Taoists, these actions played well with his political goals. Jenghiz Khan hoped that the Chinese clergy would win the Chinese common people for him and bring him more subjects, and he directly demanded corresponding actions from them (de Rachewiltz, 1966: 133–134, n. 2).

Even when the Mongols did not use a religion as a mere instrument of political power, their spiritual curiosity lacked any interest in doctrinal problems and controversies. They simply took for granted an idea of metaphysical equivalence of different deities and cults (Olschki, 1960: 153). The Mongol rulers expected positive results on their behalf (divination, prayers for their health and good fortune, magical practices, astrology, etc.), from the supernatural forces represented by different world religions and their agents at their court, just as they expected advantages from their tolerance with respect to different clergies. There is a beguiling story of Jenghiz Khan's meeting with the Holy Taoist monk Ch'ang Ch'un. The aged sage was summoned to the Khan's headquarters against his will, but decided to use the opportunity to pacify the conqueror. During his long and difficult journey he prepared many philosophical and religious arguments to serve this purpose. All this was in vain. The first question that Jenghiz Khan asked was: 'Have you brought any medicine to prolong my life?' (Yao, 1986: 211; cf Waley, 1931: 101). That was the sole interest that Jenghiz Khan had in Taoism.

The Mongol subjects were free to meditate on metaphysical problems and to worship their gods and deities in their own way. What the Mongol rulers would not tolerate were any claims to spiritual supremacy over the whole world. They considered such as contradicting their own claims to universal sovereignty, to their right to rule over the world which had been conferred by Heaven on Jenghiz Khan and his descendants (de Rachewiltz, 1973: 23).

The Baghdad Khaliphate was destroyed in 1258 not because the Mongols were anti-Muslim, but because they did not tolerate any political competitors (Allsen, 1987: 83–85). Otherwise freedom of conscience, to use a modern term, was restricted only to cases considered dangerous to Mongol political supremacy, or a challenge to their own religious practice. Thus, the Mongols often compelled the Russian princes to undergo a ritual of purification by fire before the Khan's headquarters, and the princes sometimes preferred martyrdom to complying with this request (Nasonov, 1940: 27). This reflected not so much a contest between different religions, but rather a political confrontation transferred into the religious sphere. The Russian princes were forced to recognize their subjugated religious status, just as they had to recognize their subjugated political position.

Perhaps Jenghiz Khan's rule that the Muslims should follow the Mongol ritual of slaughtering animals was influenced by similar considerations; at any rate, this is how his son, Chaghatay, conceived it.

The situation changed after the end of conquests and the disintegration of the empire. Despite some differences, the religious policy of the Mongol states in East Europe, Central Asia, Iran, and even China, exhibited the same basic trend of moving from tolerance to an accommodation with the religions of the majority of the sedentary population. 'It is possible to create an empire on horseback, but it is impossible to rule it from that position.' This old wisdom told to the Great Khan Ögödey, a son and successor of Jenghiz Khan, by his Chinese advisor and repeated by Liu Ping-Chung, a Chinese statesman at the court of Qubilay (Chan, 1967: 119), was a historical lesson that the nomadic rulers of sedentary societies were taught time and again by their political experience. As the Empire disintegrated into separate states, the rulers of these states had 'to dismount from the horse', if not literally, then in a metaphorical sense, i.e., they had to reach a *modus vivendi* with the subjugated sedentary population. Among other things they discovered that just tolerating the faith and practices of the subject peoples was not enough. A new historical situation demanded from the nomadic rulers a kind of ideological *rapprochement* with the sedentary majority in their states and propelled them to convert to the religions of those they conquered.⁴

Let me return to comparison again. It is difficult to doubt that Muhammad sincerely believed that he had received a genuine revelation from God. More interesting is why others shared his belief and/or followed a new prophet. In her challenging book Crone (1987: 241 ff) came to a conclusion that the origin of Islam was not connected with any spiritual crisis in Arabia, but rather with a program of Arab state formation and conquests suggested by Muhammad. With respect to the conquests, this is just what I had suspected (Khazanov, 1984: 275), and in this case Islam definitely falls into the category of the religions of confrontation. While a call for conquests without a new religion was insufficient to unite the Arabs, in a long run Islam did not have a chance of becoming victorious in Arabia without successful conquests. Muhammad apparently understood this; hence, his probes in the direction of Syria (Watt, 1956: 106; Sourdel, 1983: 15–16). His immediate successors understood it very well indeed.

⁴ An additional reason for a change of religion in several Jenghizid states might be a desire to display their independence from the Yüan emperors in distant Peiping. Often in a religious history of the nomads of the Eurasian steppes a policy of adjustment went side-by-side with a policy of confrontation, and vice versa. Only sides and political allegiances changed.

But it would hardly be correct to consider Islam as a single man's creation, not only because Muhammad borrowed and used concepts of the other monotheistic religions, but also because his preaching corresponded to a certain ideological climate in Arabia at the beginning of the 7th century. It is true that 'new religions do not spring fully-fledged from the heads of prophets' (Crone, 1980: 12), but it is rare that they spring at all, either because a society lacks prophets, or because as is said in the Bible, 'there is no prophet in his own land.' Apparently, a kind of spiritual crisis, or a 'religious vacuum', in Watt's (1968: 14) term should not be rejected out of hand for the sedentary parts of Arabia. That other prophets besides Muhammad were preaching there is worth noting. Some of them were his contemporaries, others, possibly, had preached even before him; at any rate, with no connection to Muhammad's message (Serjeant, 1953: 121 ff; Piotrovskii, 1981: 9 ff).

A difference with the Mongols in this respect is quite obvious. While in the times of Muhammad the old Arab religion was in decay and new monotheistic concepts received some spread (Watt, 1953: 23, 28, 96; Bravmann, 1972: 25-26), in Temuchin's Mongolia the traditional folk religion was still intact and held a monopoly over the souls and minds of the nomads. While Muhammad aspired to overcome political and social, but also religious disunity of Arabian society, there was no need for prophets in Mongolia because there was no religious disunity there. No wonder that the Mongols never created a world religion themselves, nor strove to spread or to impose their indigenous religion upon others as a means or a symbol of confrontation.

Patricia Crone says: 'Muhammad had to conquer, his followers liked to conquer, and his deity told him to conquer: do we need any more?' (Crone, 1987: 244). Yes, we still do. The first question was put by Crone herself: why did the Arabs become capable of uniting for conquest only in the 7th century?

After all, out-migrations from Arabia had taken place many times in pre-Islamic history. However, only Islam provided the Arabs with a central power, an essential unity, and an ideology that in favourable international conditions could turn perennial migrations and small-scale conquests into a mighty and victorious movement. With Islam, the Arab conquests from the beginning took the form of a religious crusade.

I would also like to pose another question, why in order to achieve unity for conquests did the nomads of the Eurasian steppes not need a new religion and, like the Mongols under Jenghiz Khan, often were quite satisfied with what they had, with their indigenous religions. The same question from the other side of the coin asks, why was the creation of a new religion, Islam, a necessary precondition for the unification of Arabia?

The answer, apparently, is that Arabian society, while having been politically fragmented just like Mongol society before Jenghiz Khan's ascension to power, was much more heterogeneous than the societies of the Eurasian nomads. One may even doubt that the Arabs represented anything like a single society; at best their society can be characterized as a centrifugal and decentralized one, with diffused power and conflicting local interests. A moral element had to be introduced to unite the Arabs, and the new religion became a substitute for a real social and political integration that never took place in the Islamic state. In addition to other reasons, early Islam had to have infidels to help provide a means of integration.

Besides, the Bedouin were less stratified than the Mongol nomads. Social stratification of the desert nomads was weaker and less institutionalized than that of their steppe counterparts (Crone, 1980: 23). The Bedouin were incapable of uniting into a single polity, even less so of initiating a unification of sedentary and nomadic components of Arabian society. It was Islam that provided the necessary cohesiveness and facilitated incorporation of the Bedouin into a supratribal unity. Muhammad overcame divisive tribal loyalties by developing a new concept of political identity and by creating a much higher and holier loyalty to his creed. Several scholars (see, for example, Watt, 1953: 153; Aswad, 1963: 420; Donner, 1981: 8, Cook, 1986: 480) have already pointed out that the original Islam was not only a new ideology, but also a leverage for sociopolitical integration. Islam provided Arabian society not only with the concept of God as creator, ruler, and judge of the World, but also with the larger moral community of the faithful, that assumed a higher authority over rival kinship-based and bounded groups.

No wonder that in the original Islam supreme political and religious authorities were fused. Abu Bakr was proclaimed the 'successor to the Apostle of God' and at the same time the 'commander of the faithful' (Kennedy, 1986: 52).

Jenghiz Khan, who faced similar problems, solved them in a different way. He destroyed the upper segments of Mongol tribal organization, physically exterminated a significant part of the traditional nomadic aristocracy, and channelled the Mongols' loyalty to himself and to his royal clan (Khazanov 1984: 237–239).

One may conclude that the religious histories of the Arab and the Mongol empires were from the outset completely different. Some of these differences can be connected with conspicuous differences between Arab and society of the early 7th century and Mongol society of the early 13th century. The ratio of sedentary and nomadic populations in Arabia is not clear (for different opinions see Donner, 1981: 11; Kennedy, 1986: 21),

but the sedentaries there were quite numerous. The Mongols were pure pastoral nomads.

In Arabia the Bedouin and the sedentaries were linked to each other within a framework of a single linguistic and cultural idiom. Institutions like the *hums*, or the *haram* (the sacred enclaves, sanctuary areas), cults like the Kaaba, and alliances like the *hilf*, fulfilled certain integrative functions for both segments of Arabian society (Kister, 1965: 116 ff; Serjeant, 1962: 41 ff; Donner, 1981: 28, 34–37; Ibrahim, 1990: 52–53). The Mongol nomads opposed the sedentaries in all ways—linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious and political—since the latter lived only outside Mongolia.

In Arabia both components of the society, nomadic and sedentary, were tribal (Donner, 1981: 22). In Mongolia only the nomadic component was present. It was also tribal, but neighbouring sedentary societies were not.

In Arabia different elites coexisted, though not all of them demonstrated a high level of congruity (Fabietti, 1988), and there were different foci of power. In addition to a nomadic aristocracy and to a merchant and financial elite of Mecca and Taif (Ibrahim, 1982), there was a kind of religious aristocracy, that although separate and independent from the nomadic aristocracy, was sometimes connected with it by some common interests (Serjeant, 1962: 41). In Mongolia there was only one, but congruent, elite. Experts in supernatural there operated strictly within this homogeneous, tribal, nomadic society, and in no ways contributed to its unity.

These initial differences led to quite different results. Islam rearranged the previously existing social order and intergroup relations, first in Arabia and then in the conquered countries. The Arabs created an empire based on the new militant religion and the declared goal to spread this religion. While the early Islamic leadership consisted of the sedentary people of the Hijaz (Donner, 1981: 78; Kennedy, 1986: 58), and the Umayyad caliphate was, in Wellhausen's words 'Das arabische Reich', in theory any Muslim was superior in status to any non-Muslim (Donner, 1981: 77), and all Muslims should be equal. This eventually permitted elevating the status of the second-class non-Arab Muslims (*mawālī*).

After its de-Arabization, Islam facilitated the creation of multi-ethnic elites from among Arabs, Iranians, and a little later, Turks. For a time, these elites were interested in the perpetuation of the Caliphate and, even more so and much longer, of the Muslim Commonwealth. From the 10th century, the Buyids, Ghaznavids, Saljuqs, Ayybids, and Mamluks nominally recognized the supremacy of the Caliphate which provided a religious legitimacy to their own power (Piotrovskii, 1984: 178). A caliph remained a symbolic leader of the umma.

The Mongols also built an empire, but its only declared goal was to bring the world under the sway of the Golden clan of Jenghiz Khan. Only in the process of empire-building did they discover the importance of the religious factor. However, the Mongols always preferred to rule alone, and an ethnic criterion based on tribal and clan affiliations and loyalties continued to play an important role in recruiting members of the ruling elite.

Although the new ruling elite was intertribal, and to some extent even interethnic, since it included some Turkic elements, for a long time it remained Mongol dominated and, therefore, rather homogeneous. While the Arab state eventually developed into the multiethnic Islamic state, in all Mongol states, including Yüan China, ethnicity remained the most important criterion of social advancement. No wonder the alien sedentaries who assisted the Mongols in their rule did not care much about the perpetuation of the empire. Their loyalties were primarily of a personal character, to certain Jenghizid rulers or particular lineages of the Royal clan, yet also to their native countries. They were, rather, interested in the disintegration of the Empire.

The Arabs had spread Islam by various means, including force, but ultimately the embrace of Islam became the most important integrative factor. In religious respects the Mongols had nothing to offer their subjects, nor did they ever seek to impose their indigenous religious beliefs, which in any case were of an ethnic type and lacked any universal appeal.

Islam exerted some general sedentarizing trends. In the emerged Arab state the leadership was urban, while nomads occupied a subordinate position. Muhammad disliked the Bedouin and was hostile to the nomadic way of life. At first he even required those of them who had embraced Islam to sedentarize and preached that the nomadic way of life was incompatible with the new religion (Donner, 1981: 79–81, 252; Kennedy, 1986: 48). This demand proved to be unrealistic and was soon abandoned, but the nomads continued to be viewed by Muhammad and his successors with suspicion as second-rate subjects as a potential danger to the state and the *Ridda* wars provided that they had good reasons for their suspicion. The *Ridda* also demonstrated that the Bedouin could not be controlled by persuasion, or by force alone; they had to be given special incentives for their participation in the Arab state, particularly because the pax Islamica established in Arabia denied them their centuries-old tradition of raiding and warfare within the peninsula (Watt, 1956: 106; Kennedy, 1986: 59).

In the initial stage of conquests Arab troops apparently consisted mainly of those settled people from Hidjaz (Donner, 1981: 119, 254;

Kennedy, 1986: 60; cf., however, Pipes, 1981: 167–168). Still military success would scarcely have been possible without mobile, camel-mounted troops recruited from the Bedouin (Hill, 1975: 42–43). Early on the caliph Umar, who considered the Bedouin as fuel for Islam, raised troops from the former nomadic rebels, and the latter actively participated in the conquest of Iraq (Kennedy, 1986: 66).

Recently some scholars raised again the importance of sincere belief in the rise of the Islamic state and its subsequent conquests. It is difficult to agree or disagree with this. It does not take a post-modernist to know how difficult it is to read the minds and souls of our contemporary fellows, no less those of the people who belong to different times and cultures. It is impossible to assess exactly the role of purely religious motivation in the Arab conquest. However, significantly enough, the first caliphs understood quite well that religious persuasion and bright prospects in the afterworld were not enough to guarantee Bedouin loyalty. Their policy was to strengthen it with material rewards in this world in the form of booty, payments, and other grants, including land for settlement and exploitation, attraction of state service, and so forth. The government encouraged the Bedouin to migrate and to settle in the conquered countries, which they did in significant numbers (Bulliet, 1980; cf. Ashtor, 1976: 16 ff).

In the Mongol empire and in all the consequent Jenghizid states, the nomads always occupied dominating positions. Many also migrated to the conquered countries, but they did not sedentarize there, nor were they encouraged to do so by the Mongol ruling elite.

In the Islamic state the tribesmen from Arabia were soon replaced as a major military force, first by Syrian tribesmen, then by soldiers recruited from the sedentary population of Khorasan, and eventually by Turks. Beginning in the 9th century, a distinctive feature of the Abbasid caliphate, and of many subsequent Islamic states, was the divorce of the military elite from the rest of society (Crone, 1980; Pipes, 1981; Kennedy, 1986: 160). As a result, the Bedouin lost their military importance. By contrast, in all Jenghizid states, and even in many of their successors like the Timurid state, the military elite always consisted of the nomads, and they were always closely connected with the rulers by ethnic and tribal ties.

The Arabs initiated the emergence of a new civilization.⁵ The Mongol nomads did not and never could. The Mongol example only confirms that a nomadic society is incapable of creating a new civilization, or a world religion. It is remarkable how little in comparison with the Arab the Mongol conquest changed the religious map of the world. Much less than

⁵ Of the recent literature on the formation of Islamic civilization, one of the most interesting, though controversial, books is Crone and Cook, 1977.

its political and ethnic features. Only temporarily did the Mongols united different, already existing civilizations by a *pax Mongolia*.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the nomads never created any world and universal religion. Ideologically and culturally they depended upon sedentary societies, just as they depended upon them in economic and cultural respects. The economic dependence of the nomads on sedentary societies and their different modes of political adaptation to them carried corresponding ideological implications. As the nomadic economy had to be supplemented with agriculture and crafts, so too did the nomadic culture need sedentary culture as a source, a component, a model for comparison, imitation, or rejection. This especially held true at those times when policies were connected with ideologies, including religious ones (Khazanov, 1990).

The famous dictum of Ernest Renan, 'Le desert est monothéiste', is hardly true, and all the old ideas about the primordial monotheism of camel-herding nomads that some anthropologists (Meeker, 1979: 99–100) are trying to revive now seem groundless in their theoretical premise and in their empirical support. The nomads played an insignificant role in the creation of Islam. Incidentally, the same is true with respect to another monotheistic religion, Judaism.

The nomads lacked two main prerequisites for the emergence of universal religions. Ideologically their societies were characterized by a low level of tension between the transcendental and mundane orders. In social respects they were too homogeneous, too congruent; the level of internal conflicts and their perception in nomadic societies were too weak to create an appropriate ideological and psychological climate. The nomads could only borrow and spread the religions created by others, and did so mainly for political reasons.

Finally, let us recognize that the many various definitions of religion often reflect not so much the differences in their authors' ontological and epistemological speculations as their allegiances to various persuasions of anthropology and sociology and, occasionally, their personal inclinations and attitudes. Like Radcliffe-Brown I will not involve myself in these discussions which to a large extent are fruitless. It was not my intention today to address religion as a system of beliefs, symbols, cults, rituals, practices, superstitions, etc., nor as a basic understanding of the world and a general order of human existence and meaning. The main goal was to re-examine the thesis that religion, together with other natural, social, and cultural forces, moulds the social and political order, while it is simultaneously formed by that very order. That is why the phenomenon of religion does not exist and never has existed in a pure form. It has always combined psychological and economic, social and political, ideological and

cultural factors. Yet above all religion is an historical phenomenon, because it always exists within a definite historical time and space. Radcliffe-Brown made it quite clear when he insisted that 'we cannot . . . understand the social, juridical and political institutions of the ancient societies unless we take the religion into account. But it is equally true that we cannot understand the religion except by an examination of its relation to the institutions' (Radcliffe-Brown, 1965: 163). In this lecture I have tried to follow his exemplary wisdom.

References

- Allsen, T. T. 1987. *Mongol Imperialism. The Policies of the Great Qan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ashtor, E. 1976. *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Aswad, B. 1963. Social and Ecological Aspects in the Origin of the Islamic State, *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters*, vol. 48: 419–442.
- Ayalon, D. 1971. The Great Yāsa of Chinghiz Khan: A Reexamination. *Studia Islamica*, N. 33: 97–140; N. 34: 151–180.
- Barthold, V. V. 1968. *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*. London: Lowe and Brydone.
- Bishai, W. 1968. *Islamic History of the Middle East: Background, Development, and the Fall of the Arab Empire*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bombaci, A. 1965. Qutlu Bolsun!, part 1. *Ural-Altische Jahrbücher*, 36: 284–291.
- Bousquet, G. H. 1956. Observations sur la nature et les causes de la conquête arabe. *Studia Islamica*, 6: 37–52.
- Bravmann, M. M. 1972. *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Bulliet, R. 1980. Sedentarization of Nomads in the Seventh Century: The Arabs in Basra and Kufa. In: Philip Carl Salzman (ed.) *When Nomads Settle. Processes of Sedentarization As Adaptation and Response*. New York: J. F. Bergin Publishers: 35–47.
- Butzer, K. W. 1957. 'Der Umweltfactor in der grossen arabischen Expansion.' *Saeculum*, 8: 359–371.
- Caetani, L. 1911. *Studi di Storia Orientale*, vol. 1. Milan: U. Hoepli.
- Caskel, W. 1953. *Zur Beduinisierung Arabiens*. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Bd. 103.
- Caskel, W. 1954. The Bedouinization of Arabia. In: G. E. von Grunebaum (ed.) *Studies in Islamic Cultural History* (The American Anthropological Association, vol. 56, N. 2, pt. 2. Memoir N. 76). Menasha, Wisconsin.
- Chan, Hok-lam. 1967. Liu Ping-Chung (1216–74). A Buddhist-Taoist Statesman at the Court of Khubilai Khan. *T'oung-pao*, vol. 53: 98–146.

- Clausson, G. 1972. *An Etymological Dictionary of the Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*. Oxford.
- Cook, M. 1986. The Emergence of Islamic Civilization. In: S. N. Eisenstadt (ed.). *Axial Age Civilizations*. Albany: State University of New York Press: 476–483.
- Crone, P. 1980. *Slaves on Horses. The Evolution of the Islamic Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crone, P. 1987. *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Crone, P. and M. Cook. 1977. *Haggarism. The Making of the Islamic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dawson, C. 1955. *The Mongol Mission*. New York: Sheed and Ward.
- de Rachewiltz, I. 1966. Personnel and Personalities in North China in the Early Mongol Period. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. IX, pt. I–II: 88–144.
- de Rachewiltz, I. 1972. The Secret History of the Mongols. *Papers on Far Eastern History*, N. 5.
- de Rachewiltz, I. 1973. Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundations of Chingis Khan's Empire. *Papers on Far Eastern History*, N. 7: 21–26.
- Donner, F. M. 1981. *The Early Islamic Conquests*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Earthy, E. D. 1955. The Religion of Genghiz Khan (A. D. 1162–1227). *Numen*, vol. 2: 228–232.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (ed.) 1986. *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Esin, E. 1980. *A History of Pre-Islamic and Early-Islamic Turkish Culture*. Istanbul.
- Fabietti, U. 1988. The Role Played by the Organization of the 'Hums' in the Evolution of Political Ideas in Pre-Islamic Mecca. *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 18: 25–33.
- Franke, H. 1978. *From Tribal Chieftain to Universal Emperor and God: The Legitimation of the Yüan Dynasty*. München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Golden, P. B. 1982. Imperial Ideology and the Sources of Political Unity amongst the Pre-Cinggisid Nomads of Western Eurasia. *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, t.II: 37–76.
- Hambis, L. 1975. 'Un épisode mal connu de l'histoire de Gengis-Khan.' *Journal des Savants*, janvier-mars: 3–46.
- Höfner, M. 1959. Die Beduinen in den vorislamischen arabischen Inschriften. In: F. Gabrieli (ed.). *L'Antica Societa Bedouina*. Roma (*Studi Semitici*, II).
- Hill, D. R. 1975. The Role of the Camel and the Horse in the Early Arab Conquests. In: V. J. Parry and M. E. Yapp (eds.). *War, Technology and Society in the Middle East*. London: Oxford University Press: 32–43.
- Ibrahim, Mahmood 1982. Social and Economic Conditions in Pre-Islamic Mecca. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 14: 343–358.
- Ibrahim, Mahmood. 1990. *Merchant Capital and Islam*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Jenkins, G. 1974. A Note on Climatic Cycles and the Rise of Chinggis Khan. *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. 18, N. 4: 217–226.
- Kennedy, H. 1986. *The Prophets and the Age of Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*. Longman Press.
- Khazanov, A. M. 1975. *Sotsial'naia Istorii Skifov*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Khazanov, A. M. 1980. The Origin of Genghis Khan's State: An Anthropological Approach. *Etnografiia Polska*, XXIV, N. 1: 29–39.
- Khazanov, A. M. 1984. *Nomads and the Outside World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Khazanov, A. M. 1990. Ecological Limitations of Nomadism in the Eurasian Steppes and Their Social and Cultural Implications. *Asian and African Studies*, vol. 24: 1–15.
- Kister, M. J. 1965. Mecca and Tamīm (Aspects of Their Relations). *Journal of the Economic and Social History of Orient*, vol. III, N. 2: 143–169.
- Kister, M. J. 1968. Al-Hira. Some notes on its relations with Arabia. *Arabica*, vol. XV, N. 2: 143–169.
- Kotwicz, W. 1950. Les Mongols, promoteurs de l'idée de paix universelle au début du XIII^e siècle. *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, XVI: 428–434.
- Lewis, B. 1950. *The Arabs in History*. London: Hutchinson.
- Martin, H. D. 1950. *The Rise of Chingis Khan and His Conquest of North China*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press.
- Meeker, M. E. 1979. *Literature and Violence in North Arabia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Meyvaert, P. 1980. An Unknown Letter of Hulagu, Il-Khan of Persia, to King Louis IX of France. *Viator*, 11: 245–259.
- Mostaert, A. and F. W. Cleaves. 1952. 'Trois documents des archives secrètes vaticanes.' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, XV: 482–495.
- Nasonov, A. N. 1940. *Mongoly i Rus'*. Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR.
- Negria, L. V. 1981. *Obshchestvennyi Stroi Severnoi i Tsentral'noi Aravii v V–VII vv.* Moscow: Nauka.
- Olinder, G. 1927. *The Kings of Kinda of the Family of Akil al-Murar*. Lund-Leipzig.
- Olschki, L. 1960. *Marco Polo's Asia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Pelliot, P. 1922–1923. Les Mongols et la Papauté—documents nouveaux, édités, traduits et commentés. *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, ser. III, t. III (XXIII), N. 1–2: 3–30.
- Pigulevskaia, N. V. 1946. *Vizantiia i Iran na Rubezhe VI i VII vekov*. Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR.
- Pigulevskaia, N. V. 1964. *Araby u Granits Vizantii i Irana v IV–VI vv.* Moscow-Leningrad; Nauka.
- Pitrovskii, M. B. 1981. Mukhammed, Proroki, Lzheproroki, Kakhiny. In: *Islam v Istorii Narodov Vostoka*. Moscow: Nauka: 9–18.
- Piotrovskii, M. B. 1984. Svetskoe i Dukhovnoe v Teorii i Praktike Srednevekovogo Islama. In: P. A. Griaznevich, S. M. Prozorov (eds.). *Islam: Religii, Obshchestvo, Gosudarstvo*. Moscow: Nauka: 175–188.

- Piotrovskii, M. B. 1985. *Iuzhnaia Araviia v Ranem Srednevekov'e*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Pipes, D. 1981. *Soldiers and Islam. The Genesis of a Military System*. New York: Yale University Press.
- Radcliff-Browne, A. R. 1965. *Structures and Function in Primitive Society*. New York: The Free Press.
- Roux, J.-P. 1956. Tängri. Essai sur le ciel-dieu des peuples altaïques. *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, vol. 149: 49–82, 197–230; vol. 150: 27–54, 173–212.
- Roux, J.-P. 1958. Notes additionnelles à Tängri le ciel-dieu des peuples altaïques. *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, vol. 154: 32–66.
- Roux, J.-P. 1959. L'origine céleste de la souveraineté dans les inscriptions paléoturques de Mongolie et de Sibérie. *Studies in the History of Religions. Supplements to Numen*. Leiden: E. J. Brill: 231–241.
- Sagaster, K. 1973. Herrschaftsideologie und Friedensgedanke bei den Mongolen. *Central Asiatic Journal*, 17.
- Saunders, J. J. 1977. *Muslims and Mongols*. Christchurch: Whitcoulls.
- Sergeant, R. B. 1954. Hüd and Other Pre-Islamic Prophets of Hadramawt. *Le Muséon*, LXVII: 121–179.
- Sergeant, R. B. 1962. Haram and Hawtah, the Sacred Enclave in Arabia. In: *Mélanges Taha Husain*, publiés par Abdurrahman Badawi. Cairo: 41–58.
- Shaban, M. A. 1971. *Islamic History, A. D. 600–750 (A. H. 132). A New Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skrynnikova, T. D. 1989. Sakral'nost' Pravitelia v Predstavleniakh Mongolov XIII v. *Narody Azii i Afriki*, N. 1: 67–75.
- Sourdel, Dominique. 1983. *Medieval Islam*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Tamura, Jitsuzo. 1973. The Legend of the Origin of the Mongols and Problem concerning Their Migration. *Acta Asiatica*, vol. 24: 1–19.
- Tekin, T. 1968. *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Publications (Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 69).
- Turan, Osman. 1955. The Ideal of World Domination among the Medieval Turks. *Studia Islamica*, 4: 70–90.
- Voegelin, E. 1941. The Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers, 1245–1255. *Byzantion*, vol. 15: 378–413.
- von Grunebaum, G. E. 1976. *Islam and Medieval Hellenism: Social and Cultural Perspectives*. London: Variorum Reprints.
- Vorob'ev, M. V. 1975. *Chzhurchzheni i Gosudarstvo Tszin (X v. – 1234 q.)*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Waley, Arthur. 1931. *The Travels of an Alchemist: The Journey of the Taoist Ch'ang-ch'un from China to the Hindukush at the Summons of Chingiz Khan*. London: Routledge & Sons.
- Watt, W. M. 1953. *Muhammad at Mecca*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Watt, W. M. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Watt, W. M. 1968. *What is Islam?* New York: Frederick A. Praeger.
- Weber, Max. 1952. *Ancient Judaism*. New York and London.
- Yao, Tao-chung, Ch'iu Ch'u-chi and Chinggis Khan. 1986. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 46: 201–19.