

Art in the Wake of the Mongol Conquests Genghis Khan and His Successors

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Course Description

Is Genghis Khan's characterization "as terrifying as genocide and as dreadful as the plague" (Time, Dec. 31, 1999) sufficient? His legacy entailed the destruction of social and cultural order, but paradoxically, his empire also forged a dynamic relationship between nomadic and sedentary societies. Genghis Khan's successors went on to foster a climate of intense cultural activity in art and architecture, producing complex fusions of artistic traditions between the Middle East and China. These are the major concerns of the course which focuses on the art and architecture produced from the thirteenth century on under Genghis Khan and his successors. Genghis Khan and his Mongol horde traversed Eurasia to create an unprecedented world empire, their most enduring legacy stamped on the lands of Iran and Central Asia through their successors, the Ilkhanid and Timurid dynasties. This imperial order established a new relationship between nomadic groups and sedentary societies, an ongoing symbiosis of "steppe" and "sown." To bolster their claim to rule, successive leaders exploited the knowledge of indigenous bureaucrats and craftsmen to execute their cultural program. Regional artistic traditions were manipulated and transformed into new hybrids that could demonstrate the ruler's might and beneficence to the nomadic elite as well as to the multi-cultural urban populations under their control. As complex embodiments, these works reveal an evolving political structure and social order. The course examines how meanings are encoded through language, forms, and aesthetic features, how they are made legible, and how they may function as propaganda.

The environments from which the Mongols emerged and into which they came are initially considered in terms of the heritage, culture, and ecology of the Mongols and the peoples of the lands they conquered. How did the Mongols remember their nomadic past as the balance of their lives shifted, when they became increasingly sedentarized? Which symbolic elements could be easily translated through the available forms of sedentary art and architecture? In subsequent lectures, key monuments of Ilkhanid and Timurid art and architecture will provide a framework for analyzing different facets of the process of cultural assimilation, the changing Mongol response—at first hostile and then receptive—to the sedentarized cultures that they encountered and then ruled.

Art and architecture were clearly understood as powerful tools that could give shape to a new hegemony and maintain the socio-political order. What makes the Mongol context unique in this regard is the fusion of previously distinct artistic traditions and identities (e.g. Perso-Islamicate, Chinese, Turkic, Inner Asian) into new forms, often by the relocation of groups of craftsmen from across the empire, and the interaction between cultural outsiders and insiders across levels of nomadic and sedentary societies. Which ideological forms did the Mongols and their successors

choose to exploit that were alien to their own tradition (e.g., history, biography, genealogy)? In instances where translation was possible, for example in courtly ceremonial and its settings, what interweavings occur between permanent and impermanent architecture? How were the Mongols accommodated within Perso-Islamic tradition?

Other themes and topics include the structures developed to propagate a new aesthetic; systems of artistic production and patronage; the manipulation of traditional forms and modes of expression; the role accorded to women in Mongol society and the emergence of other patronage groups (religious and bureaucratic elites, the military class); the range of motives for cultural patronage and building; tensions between nomadic and sedentary groups; and continuities and changes in attitude toward the Genghisid-Mongol legacy throughout the period covered by the course.

LECTURES AND READINGS

Introduction

Images of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane from Then Until Now

Readings

- David Morgan, *The Mongols*, pp. 32—111 (chaps. 2—4)

Genghis Khan and the Mongol Imperium

The Mongols of China

Section: Mongols: Storm from the East (film)

Readings

- Morgan, *The Mongols*, pp. 112—174 (chaps. 5—6)
- Morris Rossabi, "The Cultural Patron," from *Khubilai Khan*, 23 pp. (sourcebook).
- * Adam Kessler, "The Mongol Era and the Yuan Dynasty," 23 pp. in *Empires Beyond the Great Wall: The Heritage of Genghis Khan*, pp. 145—167

Arts of the Steppe before the Mongols

Arts of Iran and Central Asia before the Mongols

Section: Landscapes of Empire: Steppe and Sown

Readings

- Joseph Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," 40 pp. (sourcebook)
- * Robert Irwin, "The Emergence of the Islamic World System 1000—1500," pp. 32—61, in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, ed. Francis Robinson

Textiles in Exchange and Use Architecture of Mongol Persia

Section: Nomadic Arts, Ethnography and Material Culture

Readings

- Thomas Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire*, chaps. 1, 2, and 4 (sourcebook)
- Rossabi, "The Silk Trade in China and Central Asia," 13 pp. (sourcebook)
- Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, *Art and Architecture of Islam 1250—1800*, pp. 5—19 (chap. 2)

Art of Mongol Persia

The Art of the Book: Rashid al-Din's Universal History

Section: Image and Ideology

Readings

- * Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, *Art and Architecture of Islam 1250—1800*, pp. 21—35 (chap. 3) (sourcebook and on reserve)
- Priscilla Soucek, "Ceramic Production as Exemplar of Yuan-Ilkhanid Relations," 12 pp. (sourcebook)
- Blair, "Patterns of Patronage and Production in Ilkhanid Iran: The Case of Rashid al-Din," 21 pp. (sourcebook)
- * Blair, *Compendium of Chronicles*, pp. 12—15, 60—90, 114—16

The Great Mongol "Book of Kings"

Tamerlane's Cities: Samarkand and Shahr-i Sabz

Readings

- * Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History*, pp. 1—55

Tamerlane's Tents and Palaces

Section: Role of the Patron

Readings:

- Beatrice Forbes Manz, "The Legacy of Timur," 20 pp. (sourcebook)
- Lisa Golombek, "Tamerlane, Scourge of God," 31 pp. (sourcebook)
- Roy Gonzalez de Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403—1406*, chaps. 12—13 (sourcebook)
- Bernard O'Kane, "From Tents to Pavilions: Royal Mobility and Persian Palace Design," 20 pp. (sourcebook)

Shrine Culture and Women's Piety

Curating the Exhibition: The Legacy of Genghis Khan (Guest Lecturer, Linda Komaroff)

Section: Analyzing Timurid Architecture

Readings

- Golombek, "The Paysage as Funerary Imagery in the Timurid Period," 12 pp. (sourcebook)
- Roya Marefat, "Timurid Women: Patronage and Power," 21 pp. (sourcebook)
- Soucek, "Timurid Women: A Cultural Perspective," 24 pp. (sourcebook).

New Allegiances: Shahrukh's Cultural Program

Forging Genealogies in History and Biography

Section: Constructing Self-Images

Readings

- * Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, pp. 67—157 (chap. 2)
- Eleanor Sims, "Ibrahim—Sultan's Illustrated Zafarnama of 1436 and Its Impact in the Muslim East," 12 pp. (sourcebook)
- Anon., "Synoptic Account of the House of Timur," 10 pp. (sourcebook)

The Timurid Artistic Workshop

The Timurid Visual Idiom

Readings

- Anon., *Arzadasht*, 5 pp. (sourcebook)
- Golombek, "Discourses of an Imaginary Arts Council in Fifteenth-Century Iran," 17 pp. (sourcebook)
- Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, pp. 159—237 (chap. 3)
- David J. Roxburgh, "Persian Drawing, ca. 1400—1450: Materials and Creative Procedures" (sourcebook).

Rival Courts: The Dissemination of an Ideal

On the Margins of Empire: China and Central Asia

Muhammad Siyah Qalam's Nomads and Demons

Section: "Chinoiserie"

Readings:

- Yolanda Crowe, "Some Timurid Designs and Their Far Eastern Connections," 11 pp. (sourcebook)
- Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, "Siyah Qalem and Gong Kai: An Istanbul Album Painter and a Chinese painter of the Mongolian Period," 13 pp. (sourcebook)

Courtly Culture under Sultan Husayn, the Last Timurid Ruler The Artist Bihzad

Readings

- Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, pp. 239—301 (chap. 4)
- Subtelny, "Scenes from the Literary Life of Timurid Herat," 19 pp. (sourcebook)Week 14:
- * Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, pp. 301—327 (chap. 5)

Books:

David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, reprint 1990)

Educational Films:

Mongols: Storm from the East, Films for the Humanities, Inc, 1994. 4 parts:

1. "Birth of an Empire"
2. "World Conquerors"
3. "Tartar Crusaders"
4. "The Last Khan of Khans"