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# Political Fragmentation of the Mongol Empire: Islam, Diplomacy, and Power Rivalries in the Middle East 1260-1266 AD

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## Abstract

This article discusses how the rivalry between Berke and Hulagu Khan in 1260-1266 reflects the complex dynamics of power, religion and diplomacy in the Mongol Empire. Berke Khan, the Muslim leader of the Golden Horde, challenged Hulagu Khan's superiority over the Ilkhan supported by Mongu Khan in Karakurum. The rivalry between the two not only became a battle between Mongol factions, but also marked a major geopolitical shift with Islam as one of the unifying elements within Islamic Mongol rule. Through clever diplomacy, Berke Khan forged a strategic alliance with the Egyptian Mamluks to restrain Hulagu's military expeditions into Egypt, especially in the context of the threat to Islamic civilization after the destruction of Baghdad. This study explores how religious identity, diplomatic strategy and political power interacted to shape the historical landscape. It analyzes the long-term impact of the conflict on the stability of the Central Asian region, the Middle East, and the political transformation of the Mongol Empire. Using a historical and geopolitical approach, the study argues that Berke's rivalry with Hulagu Khan became an important episode in history to protect Islamic civilization from attempts at total destruction by the Mongols.

**Keywords:** Mongol Empire, Islam, Rivalry, Diplomacy

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## INTRODUCTION

This article invites readers to explore the famous Mongol Empire in the middle of Middle Eastern geopolitics. The most famous story of the conquest of the Mongols was carried out by Temujin or commonly known as Jenghis Khan. Born from a family of wild nomads on the Eurasian steppe, named Ishugi Bahadur, whose descendants later became an interesting episode in the history of mankind. Although at the beginning of their emergence, they were considered the biggest disaster in the history of mankind, especially Muslims. But history records their achievements in geopolitics in the Middle East to be more interesting

The study of the Middle East in general has attracted a lot of attention from observers and researchers of regional geopolitics. After a long time the politics of the region dominated by Islamic history, now the politics of the Middle East region is owned by newcomers from the Mongols. The Middle East became a sexy political contestation in terms of its geography, the historical genealogy factor that also grew in this region has also been the main attraction of the Mongols who wanted to control the Middle East since the 13th century.

When Jenghis Khan died in 1227 A.D. the vast Mongol territory was divided among his descendants named Jochi, Chagtai, Oghtai, and Touli. Before Jenghis Khan died, he had appointed Oghtai as the Great Khan of Mongol located in Karakuram. The Mongol territory that stretched from Central Asia to Eastern Europe was divided among three other sons. Jochi (Jenghis' first son) received Siberia and Russia, which would later become the Golden Horde dynasty. Chagtai received the former Khawarizm territory, and replaced it with the Chagtai dynasty. Touli received the eastern territories near the Mongol Empire and renamed himself Ilkhan, after overthrowing the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad (Abazov, 2008). Reuven Amitai-Preiss in *Mongols and Mamluks; The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War 1260-1281*, calls the Ilkhan dynasty sovereign over the territory of Iran and Iraq. Although in its development, the Ilkhan army through Hulagu continued to expand its influence to the farthest Muslim territory in Egypt (Kamola, 2019). In the next development, they were opposed by the Mongol forces in the north, led by the khan of the Golden Horde dynasty.

The Great Khan Mongu (1248-1259 AD) in Karakuram expanded the Mongol territory into Iran and Egypt. In this expansion effort, Mongu sent Hulagu to carry out his mission. According to Rashid al Din in *Jami' al-Tawarikh* quoted by Reuven Amitai-Preiss (Amitai-Preiss, 2004), "*Maintain in all matters, both general and particular, the usages, customs, and laws of Genghis Khan. From Oxus and to the far limits of the land of Egypt... beginning with Quhistan of Khurasan, destroy utterly the citadels and fortresses*". Starting in 1255, Hulagu began his military expeditions, conquering the Assassin forces in Alamut, Baghdad, and other major Islamic cities along the road to the west (Egypt).

On the other hand, Berke khan of the Golden Horde strongly criticized Hulagu's actions in Baghdad. Rashid al-Din Fazlullah, a 20-year minister of the Ilkhan dynasty, recorded the Grand Khan of Mongu's strong protest against Hulagu's destruction of muslim territory, as written by David Morgan in *The Mongols: "He (Hulagu) has sacked all the cities of the Muslims, and has brought about the death of the Caliph. With the help of God I'll call him to account for so much innocent blood"* (Morgan, 1993). However, his protest could not stop Hulagu from launching his attacks on other Muslim cities. They were finally halted by the Egyptian Mamluk resistance, in a battle at Ain Jalut in 1260. An important battle in the history of mankind, the civilization-destroying machine finally got a match from the Egyptian Mamluk forces.

Hulagu's attack on Baghdad was one of the reasons for the breakdown of relations between King and Hulagu. Their relationship resulted in *anda* (Mongol blood relations) rupture, leading to a battle east of the Georgian mountains, near the Sirus River (present-day Kur River)

in 1262-1263 (Amitai-Preiss, 2004). The conflict between the two great Mongol powers (Golden Horde and Ilkhan) was *your* first feud that resulted in the Mongols being divided into two, the *Yasaq* the Islamic Shari'a Mongols. According to the *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, *yasaq* in Uighur is *the body of laws and practices decreed by Chinggis [Jengis] Khan and his successors, which gradually came to form a sort of constitution of the Mongol Empire* (Atwood, 2004). To a large extent, the Mongols' dispute has escalated globally through their religious symbols and political diplomacy toward local rulers.

The condition of the Muslim at this time was vulnerable and became a pain in the neck for the Mongols, to the point that it was powerless to get out of their intervention. The emergence of Islamic protagonists from among the Mongols themselves made the instrument of Islamic history more interesting. This was demonstrated by Berke of the Golden Horde who made an impressive performance against Hulagu's dominance in the Middle East. Interestingly, the Islamic protagonists who emerged were not from the established Muslim community at that time, but what Fazlur Rahman calls the "raw material" for the next Muslim orthodoxy (Rahman, 2010).

The question is, why did the rivalry between Berke and Hulagu become important for the Islamic world in building diplomacy and power? To answer this question, we need to look at the changing geopolitical landscape in the Middle East as politics and power evolved. In this case, Berke sought to build political alliances and the power at his disposal to save the last Islamic civilization in Egypt, which was no less important than Baghdad. Indirectly, Berke, who had embraced Islam, had an interest in maintaining Islamic geopolitical aspirations in the Middle East.

This research is adapted from the author's thesis entitled "*Perlawanan Dinasti Golden Horde Terhadap Dinasti IlKhan Tahun 1257-1266 M.*" at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta. In this article, the author develops an analysis on the aspects of political fragmentation in the Mongol Empire with Islam, diplomacy, and power as its instruments. The author argues that these three aspects illustrate the geopolitical complexity of the Middle East region in the 13th century which resulted in political fragmentation in the Mongol Empire.

The year limit in this article is from 1260-1266. The year 1260 became a turning point in the history of the Mongols and Mamluks in Egypt to make an alliance between the political figures of Hulagu, Berke, and Baibars. So that the author uses this year's number as the starting point and 1266 as the final limit of the conflict and the alliance that was built between them. This study aims to describe the political dynamics in the Middle East and the political fragmentation within the Mongol Empire.

While studies on the Mongol Empire have extensively examined its military conquests, administrative systems, and broader patterns of imperial rule, previous scholarship has not provided a focused historical analysis of the political fragmentation that emerged specifically between 1260 and 1266 AD. Existing works tend to discuss the Berke–Hulagu conflict only as a minor subset of larger narratives or emphasize religious conversion without exploring how Islam, diplomatic alliances, and intra-dynastic rivalries interacted to accelerate the Mongol Empire's internal disunity. The findings of this study indicate that political conflicts during this period were not merely the result of personal hostility but were shaped by deeper ideological and geopolitical shifts—dimensions that have not been fully addressed in earlier research. This gap reveals the need for a more integrated examination of how religion, diplomacy, and power competition jointly contributed to the structural weakening of Mongol unity.

The novelty of this article lies in its synthesis of religious transformation, diplomatic maneuvering, and strategic rivalry as interconnected forces behind the empire's political fragmentation. Unlike previous studies that treat Berke's conversion to Islam or the Berke–Hulagu war as isolated developments, this research demonstrates how these factors collectively

reshaped alliances—particularly through Berke’s cooperation with the Mamluks—and redefined political legitimacy within the Mongol world. By situating these events within a focused six-year historical frame, the article offers a new interpretation of the fragmentation process as an outcome of competing ideological visions and shifting regional power structures. This integrated explanation provides a fresh contribution to the historiography of the Mongol Empire by revealing the multi-layered dynamics that ultimately fractured what was once the largest contiguous empire in world history.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of Mongol Islamic history on political fragmentation that began with political interests between the leaders of the Mongol dynasty has not attracted much attention from researchers. As far as the reviews that have been done by researchers, the discussion as a whole and specific to the theme of this research has not been found. As a review of the originality of this research, researchers compare it with several recent scientific works as follows.

Muhammad Abdul Karim in his research in 2024 entitled “Drawing a Geopolitics of Medieval Middle East: Political Alliance and Rivalry among Islamic Caliphates, the Mongols, and the European Kingdoms” analyzes the pattern of diplomatic and military relations between various major powers in the Middle East in medieval times. The study illustrates how geopolitics in the Middle East led to the formation of cross-border alliances in Islamic-Mongol-European history. Furthermore, Karim describes the role of the Mongol invasion of Middle Eastern countries, especially after the destruction of Baghdad in 1258. Their efforts (Mongol forces) represented by Hulagu of the Ilkhan Dynasty were able to forge alliances with European forces to jointly fight the Mamluk army from Egypt after its defeat in 1260. One of the advantages of Karim's research is that it uses an interdisciplinary approach, which serves to be more varied in providing an alternative narrative to the common understanding that the Islamic and Christian worlds are always positioned in the issue of permanent conflict. Moreover, there is little discussion of the internal Mongol conflict.

Peter Jackson's book *“From Genghis Khan to Tamerlane: The Reawakening of Mongol Asia”* was published by Yale University Press in 2024. The book traces the political transformation of Asia in the 13th century from the rise of Jengis Khan to Timur Lenk. The main focus of Jackson's study is the momentum of the revival of the administrative structure of Mongol power and its intellectual and political legacy spread across Central Asia, Persia, China and India. In addition, Jackson also highlights the impact of Mongol rule in Asia on Islamic, Christian, and East Asian cultural exchanges, not to mention transcontinental trade diplomacy (Jackson, 2024). Unfortunately, the book does not specifically mention the conflict that occurred between Hulagu Khan and Berke Khan until several generations later. Nevertheless, this book has made a real contribution in giving a positive stigma to the Mongols, who have been known as a destructive nation, destroying human civilization.

Reuven Amitai Preiss, “Mongols and Mamluks: the Mamluk-Ilkhanid War 1260-1281”, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. This book is a contribution to the historical study of medieval Islamic international relations. This conflict was not only part of a regional military dispute, but also a defining moment in the history of Islam, especially in defending the center of Islamic civilization. Preiss' book provides a detailed overview of medieval Islamic history between the Mongols and the Mamluks. The center of study in Preiss's book is Ain Jalut and Egypt, a historical place for Muslims and Mongol forces, which shows the invincibility of military and diplomatic capabilities. In more detail, Preiss describes the political motives, military structure, and ideology behind the multi-dimensional Mamluk-

Ilkhan-Golden Horde conflict. However, Preiss's research is limited to the period 1260-1281, so the important developments prior to the Ain Jalut war and Berke's turning point motives for fraternizing with Hulagu are not discussed extensively.

Through the literature review, a snapshot of the conflict in the Middle East and Asia is essential to understanding the intersection of military power, Islamic politics, and Mongol expansion in Islamic history. Hulagu Khan, despite legalization from the Great Khan of Karakum, expanded his influence in the Middle East with the legitimacy and symbolism of Jenghis Khan's legacy. This research emphasizes the internal Mongol conflicts that started from a friction to a political alliance, which eventually led to military aggression between the Ilkhan and Golden Horde. The research is complementary to previous studies, as an alternative in describing the political and military escalation among Mongol dynastic leaders.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This article uses historical research methods, the steps in this research are as follows: *First*, heuristics. Researchers searched for written sources from several books and journals. The reading sources were obtained from the library of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, and several campus libraries around and several digital references that can be accessed online. *Second*, Verification. This activity provides criticism of the findings of important reference sources, to test the credibility of sources by comparing them with other sources. In this research, opinions that are quite integral in reading the context of that time are the works of James Chambers, *The Devil's Horsemen: The Mongol Invasion of Europe* and Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks; The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War 1260-1281*. Both works complement each other and provide more understanding of the conflict that occurred and more or less the author refers to these sources. *Third*, interpretation. In the form of providing interpretations of historical events from various data obtained to determine the synthesis. Like the confrontation with the khan who sued the great Mongol khan not only for his desire to seek power, but to normalize relations so that fair laws are enforced throughout the Mongol empire. *Fourth*, historiography. The final stage in a historical research is to write history. This research uses sociology and political science approaches to look at the social conditions behind the conflicts, disagreements and frustrations described by Berke towards Hulagu and the Mongol Empire in Karakum.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Findings

After the death of Mongu Khan the Mongol Empire experienced a succession crisis that resulted in a civil war between Kubilai Khan and Ariq Boga. This event led to political fragmentation among the Mongol Empire's dominions, including the Ilkhan, Golden Horde and Chaghtai. Furthermore, the defeat of the Mongol army in the battle of Ain Jalut in 1260 symbolized the collapse of the Mongol army's dominance in the Middle East region as an invincible army. It also signaled the rise of a new Islamic power that emerged from the Mamluks of Egypt and the Golden Horde in Russia. In this chaos, political diplomacy became the main tool amid the tension of internal Mongol conflicts. Since the time of Hulagu, the Ilkhan tended to be anti-Islamic. On the other hand, Berke of the Golden Horde had embraced Islam and departed from the traditional Mongol rule of yassa. The relationship between the two never found a constructive common ground for unity among the Mongol forces. In that sense, this



situation of Mongol political fragmentation has become a new milestone for Islam towards the Islamization of Mongol politics.

## Discussion

### Conflict in the Mongol Empire: an Analysis

The word resistance in the popular scientific dictionary means confrontation. A confrontational attitude means conflicting opinions and confronting each other. James C. Scott defines resistance as any action taken by a subordinate group that is shown to reduce or reject superordinate claims (Scott, 1981). In his view, resistance according to its form is divided into two parts. First, public or open resistance after being categorized by the open interaction between the subordinate class and the superordinate class. Second, closed resistance, in the form of indirect interactions carried out secretly or hidden by the subordinate class against the superordinate.

Conflict or resistance has never been separated from human life in various forms and colors. No wonder sometimes conflict is needed in human interaction, conflict becomes an alternative to social change to the desired level. Conflict, according to Ralf Dahrendorf, occurs as a reaction to structural functionalism in various societal phenomena. Furthermore, he states that the unequal distribution of power is the driving force for the creation of a conflict (Ritzer & Goodman, 2008). In this view, society is formed through conflict and consensus. A consensus is used to test the effectiveness of the prevailing system in society, so that it can work in the face of challenges.

The Mongol Empire was immersed in endless conflict. Political segregation within the Mongol Empire was evident in the endless family conflicts that led to the normalization of the dynastic conflict. The interests of each Mongol dynasty were above their normative law, the *yassaq*. It further demonstrated political fragmentation and diverse interests, where the Khans (leaders of the Mongol dynasties) had acted more as independent rulers, rather than united in the Mongol Empire in Karakuram (Abazov, 2008).

On the other hand, the egocentrism that was now inherent in every Mongol dynasty led to the dichotomy of one being better than the other. It is this view that settles in their subconscious (Ilkhan dynasty) which feels better and the Golden Horde should not be better than it. It was because the Ilkhan dynasty had access to Karakuram and the support of the Chagtai dynasty that it seemed confident of destroying the Islamic world. This led to a response from the ruler of the Golden Horde (khan) to Hulagu's actions, as shown in an account by Rhasid al-Din quoted by Thomas T. Allsen saying,

*[Hulagu] has destroyed all the towns of the Muslims and over thrown the houses of all the kings of Islam; he has made no distinction between friend and foe and has put the Caliph to death without consulting the aqa [elder brother] and ini [younger brother] (Allsen, 2001).*

The above statement further confirms that Hulagu no longer respects the laws of *yassaq* and prefers to fight, rather than listen to the opinion of Berke as an *aqqa* (old Mongol brother).

Basically, Mongu's political policy towards Hulagu was more directed towards promoting Hulagu to the Middle East. In line with that, the opinion of Jurgen Hebermas as quoted by Noorhaidi Hasan, can illustrate that this situation shows signs of disorientation. This disorientation disturbs at least two levels of independence of the integration of a society (Mongol). The first is system disintegration, which refers to the technical challenges of meeting the basic needs of survival. Second social disintegration, which relates to the practical

challenges of providing normative order, stable social identity, and symbolic meaning and purpose in one's life (N. Hasan, 2012).

Meanwhile, a consensus was being built by the Berke in the form of political diplomacy with the Mamluk Sultans in Egypt. Hulagu's arbitrariness in his military expeditions had committed many violations of the law of *yassa*, such as killing Jochi's son who participated in military expeditions to the west from 1255-1260. In summary, J. A. Boyle in "*Dynastic and Political History of the Il-Khan*" explained that Hulagu's cruelty was without any basis and clarity for the guilt of Jochi's sons named Balaghai, Tutar, and Quli (Boyle, 1968). In addition, Hulagu had also made matters worse by seizing Golden Horde territory in the South Caucasus. In this conflict, the berke made a political alliance with the Muslim forces in Egypt to stop the destructive moves of Hulagu Khan. After his criticism of Mongu's policies failed to change the situation, berke looked for other ways to stop Hulagu's steps, namely by establishing diplomatic relations with Egypt.

Through conflict analysis, Berke's resistance to Hulagu is seen as legitimizing the power of Berke's position in the Golden Horde as the "savior of the Islamic world" and Hulagu's perceived representation of the Great Khan in Karakuram. At the same time, Hulagu's conflict of interest was to establish his influence over the Islamic world so that his name would be recognized in history. Despite its development, Hulagu encountered resistance from Muslims from among the Mongols themselves, who were allied with the Mamluk Sultans in Egypt (Favereau, 2017).

The era of the Mongol Empire as one of the largest political entities in the world has come to an end. It had a powerful military fleet that was unrivaled in its time. But after the death of Jengis Khan, the Mongol Empire declined and political fragmentation began to occur in several regions controlled by his descendants. This conflict led to endless internal conflicts that resulted in political divisions due to high egocentrism by playing regional interests, affecting the map of Islam and regional geopolitics. Ideological and religious differences within the Mongol dynasty also colored the course of Mongol Islamic political power. To counterbalance regional politics, Berke forged a political alliance with the Egyptian sultan of Baibars. The alliance aimed to weaken Hulagu's political influence in the Middle East. On the other hand, the conflict accelerated the political fragmentation of the Mongol empire into small autonomous dynasties, in conflict with each other to form a new world order.

### **Islam, Diplomacy and Power Rivalry**

State or power, according to Ibn Khaldun, can only be established and enforced with the help of social solidarity. Ibn Khaldun elaborated further, social solidarity as a necessity to build sovereignty. Social solidarity in the form of superordinate rulers subordinates. The loyalty shown by Hulagu was certainly intended for the king or the great khan ruler in Karakuram (Khaldun, 2011).

Since the leadership of the Great Khan of Mongu, many changes have been made. The Mongol Empire was immersed in divisions and disputes that were far from a sense of national unity, the Mongol nation. New commonalities have been formed due to the bilateral relationship between the two forces between nomadic and sedentary societies that gave birth to a new consensus to form the Mongol culture. At least they (the Mongols) experienced a cultural transformation in the form of an urbanized society, the inclusion of the role of religion (one of them), has resulted in disputes between them. Although in its development, some of them were accommodating towards Islam, accepting Islam and applying Islamic law in their government.

In the beginning, Berke Khan was at odds with Hulagu Khan over his military expeditions into Muslim territory. Despite the opposition from Berke, Hulagu continued his

military expedition to the west. He did so because he had the legitimacy of the Great Khan of Mongu as Ilkhan.

The title Ilkhan has a special meaning for the Mongols. In its development the title was attached to Hulagu Khan and the generations after him. According to Masudul Hasan in *History of Islam*, the word Ilkhan comes from two syllables namely, "Il" and "Khan". The word "Il" means a representative or representation of the great Mongol khan in karakuram. While "Khan" is a title for rulers of Mongol descent, similar in meaning to the title *Beg* for Turkish rulers, and *Shah* for Persian (Iranian) rulers. The word Ilkhan can be interpreted as the representative of the Mongol Great Khan in Karakuram (M. Hasan, 2013). Reuven Amitai-Preiss considers that the title Ilkhan was deterministically used by Hulagu after the Great Khan of Mongu died in 1259 and was attached as the name of the ruler in the Touli family dynasty (Amitai-Preiss, 2004).

Hulagu centered his rule in Maraghah, Azerbaijan. After conquering several Muslim territories in the Middle East, Hulagu needed to organize his administration, so he chose Maraghah as the center of government and to continue his expedition to the west. It was a strategic location for an adventurer, as there were vast savannahs to feed his troops' horses (Bosworth, 1993). Geographically, the Maraghah was in the center of a region that stretched from the west to the east, between Iran and Egypt. In the north, it bordered the Georgian mountains under the administration of the Golden Horde. In addition, Hulagu Khan, who was a Pagan, Buddhist follower, seemed to hate Islam. His wife, Doqus Khatun, was a Christian. According to James Chambers, Hulagu's hatred towards Muslims can be seen from his determination when conquering Muslim territories, he destroyed all buildings belonging to Muslims and left the church building standing without any significant damage (Chambers, 1979). This was one of the factors that made the khan of the Golden Horde dislike Hulagu's military expeditions, so he protested strongly to Mongu.

In another view, Berke's anger towards Hulagu was due to the disconnection between Berke and the Abbasid Caliphs. According to J. J. Saunders in *A History of Medieval Islam*, the actions taken by Hulagu against Baghdad resulted in the relationship between the Berke and the Abbasids being severed. The emotional closeness that Berke had with the Abbasid Caliphs can be seen for example in Berke's conversion to Islam (Saunders, 1965). The dialogical relationship between the Berke and the Abbasids led the Berke to abandon the religion of his ancestors for Islamic law, which affected the political constellation of the Mongol and Islamic world.

To a large extent, the Islamic world responded to Hulagu's aggression through the Mamluk and Golden Horde dynasties. Berke's resistance movement against the Mongol Empire was a response to the problems he had faced since delegating Hulagu to expand into the Islamic world. The Great Khan's one-sided policy led to disintegration, as the Mongol imperial authority did not care about Berke's intrusions as *aqqa* (old Mongol brother). The resistance movement became a separate study in the development of the Mongol Empire's political conflicts in the Middle Ages. Berke's mobilization is more accurately seen as an act of treason in contemporary (Islamic) studies. Starting from frustration over protests that did not receive appreciation, a sense of disappointment emerged which metamorphosed into a mass mobilization. Mobilization is a positive social phenomenon, as a constructive form of social change

Berke's resistance was a response to Hulagu based on his religious beliefs. Berke became a martyr for the Mongol Empire, the movement had developed into a physical resistance, in the form of a military battle. This battle, between the Golden Horde and the Ilkhan, took place in Tiflis, Georgia in 1263 AD. The battle lasted for a long time and consumed



a lot of energy, time and thought. Both sides did not make much progress in the war, except for fighting on their respective defense lines.

C. N. Filipovitch in *Sejarah Hubungan Internasional* explains that the reasons for war do not apply if the country (region) concerned commits unprovoked military aggression (Filipovitch, 1955). The Mongol civil war certainly had a clear reason, this was the phase where the Mongol Empire experienced decentralization of power. Even during this conflict, no peace efforts initiated by the Great Khan in Karakoram led to a phase of political fragmentation. To consolidate their position, both Berke and Hulagu played their role in building alliances, Berke in this case establishing relations with the Mamluk Sultan in Egypt.

Berke's efforts to isolate Hulagu through alliances and war. As already mentioned, Berke formed a coalition with the Mamluks in Egypt to reduce the pressure faced by the Baibars-led Mamluks. The relationship between Berke and Baibars was harmonious and brought considerable progress, his efforts to stop the pace of his military expeditions to Egypt were successful. In contrast to the alliance between Hulagu and the Crusaders, both tended to be meaningless. As seen in the several attempted attacks by the Ilkhan forces, they continued to fail, until in 1281 Egypt was still not conquered by the successors of Hulagu Khan.

Masudul Hasan describes the closeness between Berke and Baybars as the water of the Volga river flowing into the Nile (M. Hasan, 2013). As a sign of their friendship, Berke married off his daughter to Baybars. The relationship between Berke and Baybars is not known exactly when. But in *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260-1290) Treaties of Baybars and Qalawun with Christian Rulers* P. M. Holt explained, since Michael VIII became the ruler of Byzantium in 1261 the relationship between the two (Berke-Baybars) began to be established. A year later (1262) the relationship between the two became even closer and both undertook cultural transformations that made the relationship between them even closer (Holt, 1995). In essence, the two had established diplomatic relations amidst the feud of the Berke-Hulagu (Abdimomynov dkk., 2024).

Egypt became the last center of Islamic civilization after the fall of Baghdad in 1258. The position of the Mamluk dynasty became important in protecting Islamic civilization from the destructive attacks of the Mongol Ilkhan and his allies from the Crusaders who wanted to control Jerusalem. In addition, Baibars was clever at reading the political map of the region, He sent his diplomats to the New Saray (the Capital of Golden Horde) to coalition against the enemy army (Ilkhan) on the basis of Islamic religious beliefs (Amitai-Preiss, 2005). It didn't take long for Berke to accept the alliance and immediately began an offensive into Ilkhan territory in the south across the Caucasus, conquering Darband and settling in Shirwan in 1262 (Amitai-Preiss, 2004). The Golden Horde led by Noghai (nephew of Berke Khan) had become a serious threat to the Ilkhan forces. However, the Ilkhan successfully counterattacked, Abagha led his forces at that time, successfully repelling the Golden Horde to their demarcation line.

One year later, on January 13, 1263, the Golden Horde made a counterattack that surprised the Abagha Khan with lightning attack tactics in high determination was able to defeat the Abagha Khan (Boyle, 1968). The troops seemed to be more in control of the battlefield, through careful calculation, Berke led directly the Golden Horde troops beat back through the Terekh river. The frozen Terekh river could not withstand the weight of the Ilkhan army that tried to escape and finally broke, not a few Ilkhan troops were trapped and died in the river. This made Hulagu angry with Berke. Ibn Wasil, as quoted by Amitai-Preiss recorded Hulagu's lamentation over the war, *Mongols are killed by Mongol swords. If we were united, then we would have conquered all of the world* (Amitai-Preiss, 2005).

The defeat at the Terekh river had at least weakened the Ilkhan position in the Caucasus region and complicated Hulagu's expansion into Egypt. This victory had given the Golden Horde great legitimacy in the region. The war, which had a religious rather than a political

dimension, had elevated the name of the Khan as the savior of the Islamic world. Berke, as a Muslim, felt called to defend the Islamic world against the actions of Hulagu. At the very least, this introduced the dynamics of religion into Mongol politics, which had been apathetic towards religion, secular and pragmatic, and colored the dimensions of Mongol politics for the next generation.

History did not destine Berke and Hulagu to meet in battle. Hulagu died on his way north before facing Berke, on February 08, 1265 Hulagu died (Chambers, 1979). Upon hearing the news, Berke and his troops moved south to attack the Ilkhan forces, but were stopped by Abagha (Hulagu's successor). Referring to the Chambers opinion, following the death of Berke Khan who was exhausted from the war against the Ilkhan, Berke died on his way to Saray Berke in 1266. If Hulagu had not died before the war in 1265, perhaps the story would have played out a little differently.

The conflict between Berke and Hulagu arose from differences in ideology, religion and regional interests. The rivalry between these two major political actors has a history of important alliances in history, both between fellow Muslims and between rulers of different religions and beliefs. Hulagu in this case preferred to concentrate his military power on the north rather than continuing his expansion to the west. Furthermore, in order to maintain his regional interests, Hulagu made an alliance with the Crusaders to increase his attacks in the Levant and Armenian regions of Cilicia against the dominance of the Mamluk Sultan Baibars (Bosworth, 1993). Indirectly, this conflict reflects the irony in the history of the Mongol Empire, we may agree that such a great power is often divided by internal conflicts. The history of the Mongol Empire in the Middle East in the 13th century emphasizes how important the role of a strong leader is in maintaining unity and good coordination in maintaining such great power, both in the past and present (Uzun, 2022).

### **Geopolitics of Islam and Mongol After Berke-Hulagu**

Berke Khan's resistance movement against the Mongol Empire was, on the one hand, a response to the problems faced by some Muslims. Although his movement led to divisions within the Mongol empire, the khan did so as a critique of the disoriented *yassa* law that had prevailed. The position of the *yassa* became inferior due to the desire for power and domination above all else. Berke's resistance movement was based on the Islamic religion, a rarity in the history of Mongol conquests, where religion was the basis for the movement to begin its military expansion.

The Berke-Hulagu conflict changed the dynamics of power in the Middle East. This conflict not only marked the beginning of a split for the Mongol Empire, but also strengthened the political and military dynamics in a region full of regional and religious interests that could compete with each other. Especially in the aftermath of the King and Hulagu conflict that began in 1263, the political map of the Middle East continued to undergo significant changes. This war made it clear that the Mongol empire was divided into small dynasties that competed with each other with their respective political agendas. The loss of a strong figure or figures capable of mediating conflicts further shows this division towards political decentralization. This plurality can be seen in the next generation, for example, where they stood in their respective regions with political alliances that they developed due to the circumstances that forced them to do so.

On the other hand, the Mamluk Dynasty found its momentum to become an important actor in the history of human civilization. After the fall of Baghdad in 1258 by Hulagu, the Mamluk Dynasty, which originated from slaves, emerged as the main protector of the Islamic world. Their role was further recognized after they defeated the invincible army of the Ilkhan

Mongols at the battle of Ain Jalut in 1260. In the midst of internal conflicts within the Mongol Empire, Baibars, as the Mamluk sultan at the time, took advantage of the ilkhan's weakness to expand his influence in Sham (Syria) and Hijaz. In addition, Baibars protected Islam's second holiest city, Jerusalem, from the Crusaders (Mahamid, 2023; Ryzhenkova, 2023). The Mamluks seemed to be good at playing their role as guardians of important cities in the Islamic world to strengthen their legitimacy as a political leader as well as a military leader who was adept at establishing ties with regional leaders.

The Byzantine Empire in Asia Minor was also quite important. Byzantine accommodative attitude can be seen from its close relationship between the political actors in power (Holt, 1995). This closeness can be seen as a pragmatic effort, before finally being controlled by the Ottoman Turks. They had to balance good relations with the Mamluks, Golden Horde, and Ilkhan to maintain their existence. Numerically, their strength was indeed in the calculations of the mongol and Egyptian mamluk militaries that could be played at any time. However, one of the Saljuk Turkic tribes in the region tried to capitalize on the weakness of the Mongol Empire's hegemony in the region during this time. This group of Saljuk Turks began to seek greater autonomy amidst the geopolitical chaos of the region caused by multidimensional conflicts, until they were eventually transformed into a global power capable of changing Islamic history.

This conflict reflects regional geopolitical rivalries that continue to this day, such as tensions between countries based on religious ideology. Competition for control of strategic areas affects the political and economic stability of the Middle East region, where regional political actors often compete for dominance and legitimacy in the region. To see this competition, we can look at the dynamic political development of the Mongol dynasty in the Middle East, although their political journey is still dominated by endless regional political competition, as seen in the struggle for power by the successor generations of the Mongols after the war of Hulagu.

The influence of power rivalry on Mongol geopolitics. After Berke's death, the Khan Golden Horde was led by Mongke Timur (1266-1280). By genealogy, Mongke Timur was the son of Orda, Jochi's first son. During this period, the Golden Horde dynasty was dominated by Orda's descendants. After Berke Khan there were no more capable Golden Horde Khans and his reign was short-lived, until Uzbek Khan emerged. When Uzbek became Khan of the Golden Horde (1313-1340), he tried and succeeded in setting a new precedent for the Golden Horde dynasty to a more ideal level. In addition, the golden horde-mamluk relationship was severed, after which there were no more relations between the two Muslim states. Instead, diplomatic relations were established between the Mamluks and the Ilkhan who were now led by other Muslim Mongol leaders, such as Taghudar and Ghazan Khan.

The role of Islam in the Ilkhan rule had a positive influence on the Mongol family (Jochi-Touli) and Egypt. As Peter Jackson explains in *The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered*, the Ilkhan government after Hulagu and Abagha no longer hated Islam. His successor, Taghudar Khan (1282-1284) became the first Ilkhan ruler to embrace Islam and had harmonious diplomatic relations with the Qalawun sultan in Mamluk (Jackson, 2005). This relationship signified the political stability of the region in re-establishing the vision of progress for Islamic religion and civilization. Furthermore, in his *Sejarah Da'wah Islam*, Taghudar wrote a statement,

"God has entrusted us with the reins of the kingdom, and this for us is a sacred trust. We have held a meeting attended by religious brothers, the best sons of the nation, generals of the army, commanders of troops, where they all agreed to support the cause of this struggle, by mobilizing all the troops whose number would make the earth look small

and narrow... We emphasize here their determination to fight for our common goal, which is to strengthen the rule of Islamic law, as long as power is in our hands there will be no bloodshed, we will get rid of all human evils and we will spread peace and prosperity all over the earth" (Arnold, 1979).

Unfortunately, Taghudar's reign did not last long. Taghudar was dethroned by his nephew Arghun, who ruled from 1284-1291, the opposite of Taghudar Khan. Arghun was also like their predecessors, choosing to be at odds with Islam and hating it. In the next development, Muhammad Abdul Karim (Karim, 2023) in his research *Drawing a Geopolitics of Medieval Middle East: Political Alliance and Rivalry Among Islamic Caliphates, the Mongols, and the European Kingdoms*, said that Islam at this time experienced massive development. Furthermore, during the time of Ghazan Khan (died 1304), the Ilkhan leader who was a Muslim, had quite good military organizational skills but still considered the Mamluks as a threat. His policy was to fight the Mamluk dynasty over the disputed territory of Syria, although in later developments he was defeated again by the Mamluk forces (Ekici & Kirişoğlu, 2022).

In the course of Muslim history, this period was full of religious nuances to mobilize the masses. Governmental solidarity was built based on the loyalty and religion of the ruling dynasty. Therefore, when the issue of religion was mentioned, it could gain the support of several dynasties such as the Golden Horde-Mamluks, and Ilkhan-Crusaders to establish political alliances and relationships.

### **The Impact of Resistance to Hulagu**

The struggle between the kings and the Hulagu Khan in the 13th century had a significant impact on the Islamic world and the geopolitics of the region. This conflict was not just an internal conflict within the Mongol Empire, but also affected the political and religious stability of the region, which also provided interesting colors. However, there is a uniqueness in the history of the conquests that they have done by starting to rebuild the civilization they had destroyed into a more stable and ideal one.

#### **a. Politics of the Mongol Empire**

In historical records, the Mongol army was an invincible army. Its ability was proven in the conquest of Asia to Eastern Europe. In its golden age, no other nation's power was able to match its strength, Baghdad as the center of Islamic civilization at that time could be destroyed easily in 1258. In eastern Europe, they established the Golden Horde Dynasty, which played a dominant role as one of the saviors of the Islamic world from the civilization-destroying machine (Hulagu's army). On the other hand, Egypt also played an important role in preserving its Islamic civilization; they were able to withstand Hulagu's attack in the Battle of Ain Jalut in 1260. For the first time, Mongol forces were defeated in an open battle since Hulagu's military expedition in 1255.

The fall of Baghdad in 1258 had serious repercussions for the Mongol Empire, which had long adhered to the law of *yassaq*. A traditional law that since the time of Jengis Khan had served as the unifying law of the Mongol nation. But in its development, the law was disoriented due to the ambition of power that hulagu had in his expedition to the west. This led to a prolonged conflict within the Mongol empire that culminated in a battle between them. The resistance came from Berke in the golden horde when the policy issued by Mongu in Karakuram brought destruction to the Islamic world. Even Berke did not hesitate to threaten Hulagu for acting out of line

Berke's resistance to Hulagu Khan shifted towards decentralization of power. The weakness of the leader figure in the Mongol empire led to endless conflicts. This resistance indirectly inspired other Mongol dynasties to fictionalize the hegemony of the Mongol Empire.



As can be seen for example, the Mongol dynasties experienced internal conflict and jostled each other for power in Karakuram.

The great Mongol nation had been divided into autonomous Mongol dynasties. Berke's resistance to Hulagu became the limit of a period in the history of the Mongol empire that prioritized group interests. Ralf Dahrendorf (1978) referred to it as group interest, an interest beyond the Mongol national interest. Furthermore, this led to the adoption of Islamic sharia law in the Golden Horde dynasty and was followed by the Ilkhan to replace *yassa* with Islamic sharia (Amitai-Preiss, 2005).

b. Rebuilding the Islamic World

Berke Khan as the leader of the Golden Horde dynasty was one of the first Mongol political figures to embrace Islam. His resistance to Hulagu as an Ilkhan (representation of the Great Khan in Karakuram) is seen as a form of Muslim resistance trying to get out of the pressure of Ilkhan forces in the region. Especially after the destruction of Baghdad as the center of civilization and spirituality of Muslims at that time. In addition, the Berke-Hulagu conflict has strengthened the role of Islam as a differentiating factor in regional politics with the Golden Horde becoming an important Muslim force in the Mongol Empire.

Revitalization of Islamic power through the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt. Egypt became the center of world attention after the defeat of the Ain Jalut war in 1260 which brought a bad image to the Mongol army. The victory of the Mamluk Slave Troops in Egypt had tarnished the good name of the Mongol troops who had never been defeated and had to accept the bitter reality in Ain Jalut (Di Cosmo dkk., 2021). In an effort to maintain Islamic civilization in Egypt so as not to suffer the same fate as Baghdad, Berke accepted a political alliance with Baibars (Mamluk Sultan) and carried out cultural transformation in the New Saray. Masudul Hasan in *History of Islam* describes the transformation of the results of his relationship with the Mamluk Sultan in Egypt can be seen from the architectural form of buildings that follow the Egyptian style. Buildings built at that time such as madrasahs, mosques, and other beautiful buildings were built during the reign (M. Hasan, 2013).

In addition, Berke moved the capital of the Golden Horde from Old Saray to New Saray (Berke's Saray) which was located near the Volga river. The move of the Golden Horde's capital made the Golden Horde's trade and economic activities increase. On the other hand, this move signaled the political, social, and economic stability of the Golden Horde during the time of Berke Khan to be able to carry out infrastructure and ultrastructure development (Ho, 2012). Another factor that made the Golden Horde experienced a level of progress because it was supported by the geographical location of Saray Berke in the center of a dense international trade route (Yapp, 1970).

Berke Khan was good at protecting the centers of Islamic civilization from the threat of non-Muslim Mongols. Berke Khan's smart move to safeguard Islamic civilization in Egypt was done with the spirit of Islamic unity. This unity may still be small-scale, not yet encompassing the unity of the Muslim Ummah at large. Nevertheless, the spirit of unity that they had created became an important step to keep the center of Islamic civilization in Egypt from suffering the same fate as Baghdad. The position of Egypt was important, because the fall of Egypt as the axis of Islamic civilization led to the downfall of Muslims throughout the world, including Hijaz (the holy city of Muslims) which could be easily controlled by Hulagu.

## CONCLUSION

The internal conflict within the Mongol Empire between the Khanate did not merely reflect personal and political rivalries. Rather, it marked an important shift in the dynamics of the Mongol Empire and the problematic politics of a region rife with power interests. Berke's



resistance to Hulagu was driven by his religious affiliation and his rejection of the great khan's policy in Karakuram towards Hulagu. In addition, berke's resistance became a symbol of Muslim solidarity. This Muslim solidarity was built through cross-ethnicity, which rejected Hulagu's military aggression into Muslim territory, Baghdad in particular. Political diplomacy based on religious values, was able to balance the geopolitical power of the region that was able to have a positive impact on the sustainability of Islamic civilization in Egypt, despite being under pressure from foreign powers. For the Mongol Empire, the conflict accelerated a phase of political decentralization of power that increasingly revealed new boundaries of solidarity based on religion. Moreover, it also illustrated the complexity of the integration of ambition and power within the Mongol empire had become ideologically divergent. Overall, the conflict not only changed the regional political map in the 13th century, but provided important lessons about the influence of diplomacy, power and religion in shaping human history.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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