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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Neoplatonism and the Pax Mongolica in the making of *ṣulḥ-i kull*. A view from Akbar's millennial history

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## Abstract

This article argues that *ṣulḥ-i kull* (peace for all) as a specific term was introduced in the 1590s by a small group of avant-garde Neoplatonists who worked at the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar. It was only in the following century that *ṣulḥ-i kull* developed into the ethos that became the ideological mainstay of Mughal rule both internally, for its administrative elites, and externally, vis-à-vis their main rivals: the Uzbeks in Central Asia and the Safavids in Iran. The early stages in the making of this ideology can be followed in some detail by studying Akbar's neglected millennial history, the *Tarikh-i Alfī*. In fact, this vast Mughal world history demonstrates that apart from Neoplatonic *akhlāq*, there was another important building block that so far has been missing altogether in the making of *ṣulḥ-i kull*, that is, the practical model of the Pax Mongolica, as established under Chinggis Khan, the most famous of Mughal ancestors. Most crucially, it is in the *Tarikh-i Alfī* that we find the legacies of Persianate *akhlāq* and Mongol *yasa* (law) married to each other. In fact, it was through *akhlāq* that the peace of the Mongols became the Mughal peace for all.

**Keywords:** Mughal empire; Neoplatonism; Mongol legacy; Mughal historiography; Akbar

Let not merely the enveloping body be at peace, body's turmoil stilled, but all that lies around, earth at peace, and sea at peace, and air and the very heavens.  
(Plotinus, *The Enneads*, V, 1, 2)

The whole world is the house of God. One can reach Him from anywhere, and the path to reality (*ḥaqq*) is everywhere.  
(Chinggis Khan in the *Tarikh-i Alfī*, 6, 3722)

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## Introduction

In this article we will argue that *ṣulḥ-i kull* (peace for all) as a specific term was introduced in the 1590s by a small group of the most avant-garde Neoplatonists who worked at the court of Mughal emperor Akbar. It was only in the following century that *ṣulḥ-i kull* developed into the ethos that became the ideological mainstay of Mughal rule both internally, for its administrative elites, and externally, vis-à-vis their main rivals: the Uzbeks in Central Asia and the Safavids in Iran.<sup>1</sup> What made the term so attractive was that it epitomized the highly cosmopolitan mode of kingship that derived from the works of Nasir al-Din Tusi and Jalal al-Din Dawwani, which have already been extensively studied under the label of *akhlāq*.<sup>2</sup> The latter ultimately derived from Hellenic (mostly Platonic) thought to become the dominant model of kingship in Iran in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions and, more particularly, under the Timurid rulers of Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> Our contention here is that, under the influence of Iranian immigrants, this Neoplatonist-Persianate brand of kingship was thoroughly resourced at the court of the emperor Akbar and, as such, underwent a true renaissance that was to remain in India for at least another century.

The building process of this Neoplatonist renaissance can be closely followed in the genesis of its two foundational literary achievements written in Persian: the *Tarikh-i Alfī* and the *Akbar Nama*. The first was a Mughal world history that aimed to expound the past as well as to herald the end of the millennium and the coming of the messiah. As such, it culminated in the *Akbar Nama*, a Mughal 'New Testament' that set out a new post-Islamic era under the majesty and glory of that messiah, the ultimate philosopher-king, Akbar. As we will see, it is in the *Alfī* particularly that we can witness the process of reconstructing this ideology in the decades leading to the end of the first millennium. Indeed, the *Alfī* enables us to detect another important building block that so far has been missing altogether in the making of *ṣulḥ-i kull*, that is, the practical model of the Pax Mongolica as established under Chinggis Khan, the most famous of Mughal ancestors. Most crucially, it is in this Mughal 'Old Testament' that we find the legacies of Persianate *akhlāq* and Mongol *yasa* (law), married to each other under the still 'pagan' Ilkhanids. Far from being part of a secular or even proto-modern agenda, *ṣulḥ-i kull* itself was constructed on the basis of Neoplatonic and Mongol building materials, to which some monistic Indic elements were added later.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of an English translation, its complex authorship, and its sheer vastness, the *Alfī* has attracted much less scholarly attention

<sup>1</sup> Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Ilker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Din 'Alī Yazdī and the Islamic Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

than its successor, the *Akbar Nama*.<sup>4</sup> But like the latter, the *Alfi* was meant to be a foundational contribution to official Mughal historiography. It was primarily conceived during the 1580s at the very birth of the making of the new Akbari constitution. Since we have already highlighted its Neoplatonic aspects elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> in this article we will concentrate on the chronicle's extensive treatment of Mongol history, which was written in the late 1580s by one of its authors, the historian Mulla Ahmad Thattavi. But before engaging with the Mongols, we will begin by highlighting the Neoplatonic spirit of the *Alfi* to demonstrate that, for almost all its authors, *ṣulḥ-i kull* was indeed a core value in its actual philosophical content. It was an essential element of the Nasirean *akhlāq* tradition, which itself was part of an even more comprehensive Neoplatonic package designed by a collective of philosophers who authored the *Alfi*.

## Neoplatonic soul

### *The Tarikh-i Alfi: A Neoplatonic chronicle*

Before dealing with the *Alfi* we should highlight the millenarian craze that conditioned its very genesis. In 1591 the first millennium of the Islamic era would come to its conclusion. Also ominous were signals in the sky, the appearance of comets as well as the occurrence of a *qirān* (a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter) in 1583. In Iran, the comets were associated with the fate of emperors. As the first comet in November 1577 was linked to the death of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576), Shah Abbas (r. 1588–1629) wanted to avoid the same happening to him when another comet was seen in the sky in August 1592. Hence, he simply vacated the throne for a couple of days and afterwards executed his stand-in—who was the same person who had predicted the Shah's death. This Yusufi Tarkashdoz was a prominent Nuqtawi, that is, a member of an originally Hurufi sect that combined witticism and broad-mindedness with a deep knowledge of the occult meaning behind letters, numbers, and other cosmic signs. Increasingly prosecuted in Safavid Iran (especially in the mid-1570s and the early 1590s), a number of Nuqtawis had moved to India, many of them—often via the Deccan sultanates—ultimately finding asylum at Akbar's court. The subsequent prominence of the Nuqtawis at the Mughal court in the 1580s is illustrated by the official Safavid chronicle of Iskandar Beg Munshi who even labels Abul Fazl a Nuqtawi who 'with his absurd words

<sup>4</sup> See, however, the earlier contributions of Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign with Special Reference to Abu'l Fazl, 1556–1605* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1975), and Harbans Mukhia, *Historians and Historiography during the Reign of Akbar* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976). More recently, see two articles by Ali Anooshahr, 'Dialogism and Territoriality in a Mughal History of the Islamic Millennium', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55, 2–3 (2012), pp. 220–254, and 'Shirazi Scholars and the Political Culture of Sixteenth-Century Indo-Persian World', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 51, 3 (2014), pp. 331–352.

<sup>5</sup> Jos Gommans and Said Reza Huseini, 'Neoplatonic Kingship in the Islamic World: Akbar's Millennial History', in *Between Immanence and Transcendence: Sacred Kingship in World History*, edited by A. Azfar Moin and Alan Strathern (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming 2022).

created the king's inclusive manner that led the king astray from the right path of the Islamic law'.<sup>6</sup> Although we should be wary of taking the Iranian *munshi*'s judgement for granted, it does raise the intriguing question of the extent to which Abul Fazl—co-author of the *Alfi* and author of the *Akbar Nama*—was indeed influenced by Nuqtawi ideas and to what degree the Nuqtawis themselves were behind the Mughal millennial programme as expressed in these two chronicles. Quite tellingly, the *Akbar Nama* was launched in 990, the year the Nuqtawi sage Sharif Amuli had predicted that a king would come to eradicate falsehood. Using his Hurufi skills, following the lettrist system of Abjad, it was indeed Akbar whose name represented that ominous year.<sup>7</sup>

The *Alfi* was designed as a Mughal world history that would cover the events of the previous millennium. Unlike most Islamic histories, it starts neither from Creation nor from the Prophet's birth; instead it begins at the latter's death (*riḥla*), which occurred ten years after his migration to Medina in 622 CE (that is, the conventional start of the Islamic era). The *Alfi* was designed to be superior in scope and content to all other historical works that had been compiled previously and was to include the histories of all Muslim rulers, along with an analysis of their rise and fall.<sup>8</sup> It was loosely conceived to be in three parts. The first part deals with events from the death of the Prophet to Chinggis Khan's conquests. The second continues the chronological narrative to cover the Mongol conquest and its aftermath. The third begins with the reign of the Ilkhanid ruler Ghazan Khan (r. 1295–1304) and ends with events related to the beginning of Akbar's rule and the consolidation of the Mughal empire.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In Iskandar Beg's words: 'in madhab rā dāsht wa u pādshāh rā bā kalamāt-i wāhiya wasī' al-mashrab sākhta az jāda-yi shari'at mūnḥarif sākhta biūd'. To support his claim, Iskandar Beg refers to the letters sent by Abul Fazl to Mir Sayyid Ahmad Kashi: Iskandar Beg Munshi, *Tarikh-i Alamara*, edited by Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1382/2003), Vol. 2, p. 749. Cf. Karim Najafi Barzegar, 'The Nuqtawi Movement and the Question of its Exodus during Safavid Period (Sixteenth Century AD): A Historical Survey', *Indian Historical Survey* 40, 1 (2013), p. 54. Najafi Barzegar gives a somewhat odd, anachronistic translation by adding the adjective 'liberal' to Abul Fazl's ideas.

<sup>7</sup> Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, edited by W. N. Lees and Munshi Ahmad Ali (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1865), Vol. 2, p. 284; Qadi Ahmad Thattavi and Asaf Khan Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi: Tarikh-i Hazar Sala-yi Islam*, edited by Ghulam Reza Tabatabai Majd (Tehran: Intisharat-i Ilmi wa Farhangi, 1382/2002), Vol. 1, pp. 406–407. The idea that the *qirān* happened in 990 and that Akbar is the messiah is also mentioned in a message sent by Maulana Moin al-Din Hashimi Shirazi who stayed in Mecca. Shirazi was harassed by some Muslim jurists in Mecca and when news of this reached India, Akbar wrote a letter to the Sharif of Mecca requesting him to protect Shirazi from the jurists: Mansura Haidar, *Mukātabāt-i 'Allāmī (Inshā'i Abu'l Fazl)* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1998), Vol. 1, pp. 2–3.

<sup>8</sup> Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. 2, pp. 318–319.

<sup>9</sup> In Majd's printed edition, the first part is from pages 27–3526 and covers Volumes 1–4/5. The second part is from pages 3526–4244 and covers Volumes 4/5–7. The third part is from pages 4244–5929 and covers Volumes 7–8. The beginning of the second part is marked with a short introduction by Mulla Ahmad regarding the title of the book and Akbar's order about the book. Similarly, the beginning of the third part is marked with an introduction written by Jafar Beg that mentions that Mulla Ahmad wrote two parts before his death: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 1, p. 3527; Vol. 7, p. 4244.

Akbar initiated the *Alfi* project by putting together a committee of seven members. First were four immigrant scholars from Safavid Iran: Naqib Khan (d. after 1610), Shah Fath Allah Shirazi (d. 1587), Hakim Humam Gilani (d. 1595), and Hakim Ali Gilani (d. 1619). From Herat, there was Nizam al-Din Ahmad Haravi (d. 1594), whose family had been loyal supporters of the earlier Timurid rulers. The other two were Indian-born Muslims: Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni (d. 1615) and Haji Ibrahim Sarhindi (d. 1584). As well as these seven, Abul Fazl, the prime ideologue of the empire, was to coordinate the project, and he also wrote the (now-lost) introduction and epilogue to the book. According to Bada'uni, the plan was that each author would take a week to write the history of one year. After 35 years, however, Akbar appointed Mulla Ahmad Thattavi, a Shi'i convert, to be the only compiler. Before his assassination in 1588, he had finished the first two volumes. It was Jafar Beg (d. 1612)—another Iranian who also served as an administrator and even vizier under Akbar's successor Jahangir—who subsequently finished the third volume. In 1000/1591–92, Bada'uni was commissioned to edit the project, apparently taking care of the first two volumes, while Jafar Beg oversaw the third volume.<sup>10</sup>

At first sight, the background of the authors seems quite diverse, but they were all polymaths, knowledgeable in a wide array of fields such as theology, philosophy, mathematics, medicine, metaphysics, and the occult sciences. Most of them held practical administrative positions and participated in the religious discussions organized by the emperor. At least five of them—Naqib Khan, Bada'uni, Abul Fazl, Nizam al-Din, Mulla Ahmad, and Jafar Beg—were experienced historians, and Naqib Khan was the grandson of the celebrated Safavid historian Mir Yahya (1481–1555) and the son of Akbar's tutor Mir Abd al-Latif Qazvini. He is described by Jerome Xavier, the Jesuit missionary at Akbar's court, as one 'whose office is to read histories'.<sup>11</sup> But Hakim Ali, for example, was not a historian and was primarily known as a medical scholar and an expert on Ibn Sina.<sup>12</sup> He was also Akbar's physician. In addition to Arabic and Persian, at least four of them—Naqib Khan, Fath Allah, Bada'uni, and Sarhindi—had been involved in Akbar's Sanskrit translation project which had started as early as the mid-1570s and which included an extensive collection of data that would also characterize the *Alfi* project.

<sup>10</sup> Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. 2, pp. 198–200, 392–393; Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, p. 3527; Abul Fazl Allami, *Ain-i Akbari*, edited by H. Blochmann (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1872), Vol. 1, p. 116.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Disputations: Catholics and Muslims at the Court of Jahangir (1608–11)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46, 4 (2009), p. 482. It was said that Naqib Khan's historical knowledge was unequalled and that he had learned the seven volumes of Mirkhwand's world history *Rauzat al-Safa* by heart: see Shah Nawaz Khan, *Ma'athir al-Umara*, edited by Maulawi Abd al-Rahim and Mirza Ashraf Ali (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica 112, 1888–91), Vol. 3, pp. 812–817.

<sup>12</sup> Hakim Ali wrote an introduction on Ibn Sina's *Canon of Medicine* entitled *Mujarrabat* that was presented to Akbar: Nur al-Din Muhammad Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, edited by Muhammad Hashim (Tehran: Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1980), p. 88; Abd al-Sattar Lahori, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, edited by Arif Naushahi and Moin Nizami (Tehran: Mirath-i Maktub, 1385/2005), pp. 301–302.

If we look at the group as a whole, most of the authors seem to have been connected to the Neoplatonic philosophical tradition. Indeed, at least three of them can be linked to the Ishraqi or Illuminationist school through the important figure of Shaykh Mubarak Nagori (d. 1592), who was not only Abul Fazl's father but also the venerated teacher of at least two other authors, Naqib Khan and Bada'uni.<sup>13</sup> Crucially though, Shaykh Mubarak himself studied Ishraqi philosophy in Ahmadabad (Gujarat) under Kazeruni, the latter even adopting him as his son.<sup>14</sup> Later on, in Agra, the Shaykh married into the family of Rafi-al Din Safavi, further strengthening the bond between the Mubarak family and the Ishraqi school.<sup>15</sup>

The author with the most impressive Ishraqi credentials was Fath Allah Shirazi. Abul Fazl calls him 'the Learned of the Age, the Plato of all times' and even appointed him to be his sons' tutor.<sup>16</sup> He was a pupil of another influential Ishraqi scholar from Shiraz, Mir Ghiyas al-Din Dashtaki, who had served as the chief religious figure (*ṣadr*) at the Safavid court but was dismissed by Shah Tahmasp in 1533, due mainly to his apparent disregard for Islamic law. Considering the traditional Ishraqi disregard of jurists, religious jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*), this is hardly surprising. What Fath Allah tried to achieve with his patron Akbar in the 1580s should be seen as a repetition of what his teacher Dashtaki had tried to do with his patron Shah Tahmasp about 50 years earlier.<sup>17</sup> At his death, Faizi, Abul Fazl's brother and Akbar's poet laureate, fittingly compared the duo of Akbar and Fath Allah to that of Alexander and Plato:

The world-emperor's eyes were full of tears at his death,  
Sikander shed tears of grief when Plato left the world.<sup>18</sup>

As a typical Ishraqi scholar, Fath Allah's training was not only in philosophy and theology but also in more practical disciplines, which—apart from astrology, mathematics, and the occult sciences—also included statecraft.<sup>19</sup>

With the Safavid court closed to the more radical Ishraqi scholars, Fath Allah followed in the footsteps of his colleagues by moving to the Deccan, where he entered the service of Afzal Khan, one of his former pupils, who

<sup>13</sup> Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, pp. 85–86.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> Azra Nizami, 'Social-Religious Outlook of Abul Fazl', in *Medieval India. A Miscellany* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1972), Vol. 2, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> In Persian: *ʿallāmat al-zamānī Aflātūn al-ʿawāmī*: Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, edited and translated by Wheeler M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press—Murty Classical Library of India, 2017), Vol. 3, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam: Calendar, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal and Ottoman Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 119–120; Anooshahr, 'Shirazi Scholars', p. 335; Seyyed Alireza Golshani and Narges Kavenjoun, 'Amir Seyyed Fathollah Shirazi, a Physician, Historian and Politician in Indian Mughal Empire', *Research on History of Medicine* 1 (2012), pp. 81–86.

<sup>18</sup> In Persian: *shahanshāh-i jahān rā dar wafātash dīda pur nam shud; Sikandar ashk-i ḥasrat rikht ki Aflātūn zi ʿālam shud*, cited in Khan, *Ma'athir al-Umara*, Vol. 1, pp. 100–105.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 103–104.



had migrated to India to become an important adviser to Ali Adil Shah of Bijapur. As a prelude to the later religious discussions under Akbar, the Bijapur sultan organized debates between Muslim scholars and Hindu sages.<sup>20</sup> After the death of Ali Adil Shah, Fath Allah moved to the Mughal court where he reformed the prevailing *madrasa* education and helped rationalize revenue collection, partly by confiscating the *waqf* properties of North Indian ulama. In line with these fiscal reforms, he also facilitated the collection of revenues by devising a new solar (*ilāhī*) calendar to replace the Islamic lunar one, while also introducing old Persian months and feast days. He completed this transition in 1584, just two years after Akbar had instructed Fath Allah to make his contribution to the *Alfi*.<sup>21</sup> It is known that at least one other author of the *Alfi*, the physician Hakim Ali Gilani—the Galen of his time (*Jalinus-i zamān*)—was also considered a student of Fath Allah.<sup>22</sup> More of a question mark in this respect is the historian Nizam al-Din Ahmad, although we know that his son Muhammad Sharif was also associated with Ishraqi philosophy because he wrote a Persian translation and commentary of Suhrawardi's most important work, *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (The Philosophy of Illumination). In this book, he openly discusses various aspects of Hindu religious thought and practice. His work furnishes another example of how Ishraqi thinking provided a means for recognizing the validity of Hindu religious thought and how Illuminationism may have contributed to Akbar's policy of inclusion and universal peace.<sup>23</sup>

Looking beyond the immediate Ishraqi circle, at least one author, Hakim Humam Gilani, can be associated with the so-called Nuqtawis. This was another philosophical movement from Iran that failed to impress the Safavids but found a home at the Mughal court in India. But perhaps equally important for the making of the *Tarikh-i Alfi* is the supportive role of Humam's brother Hakim Abul Fath Gilani.<sup>24</sup> The Gilani brothers had fled their home country of Gilan to arrive at the Mughal court in 1575. Although not an author of the *Alfi* himself, Abul Fath played a crucial role in its genesis, not only through his brother but also by advising Akbar to appoint Mulla Ahmad as its single author after the experiment with the multiple authors had

<sup>20</sup> Anooshahr, 'Shirazi Scholars', p. 342.

<sup>21</sup> He composed the *ilāhī* calendar by using the *Zij-i Sultani* prepared by the Timurid ruler Ulugh Beg (d. 1449) and the *Zij-i Il-Khani* updated by his teacher Mir Ghiyath al-Din Mansur Dashtaki (d. 1542): Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, Vol. 1, p. 277; Khan, *Ma'athir al-Umara*, Vol. 1, p. 104. The *Tarikh-i Alfi* used the *ilāhī* calendar as well as the *hijri* calendar in the third part.

<sup>22</sup> Khan, *Ma'athir al-Umara*, Vol. 1, pp. 568–573; S. A. Husain, 'Hakeem Ali Gilani: A Commentator of Canon of Avicenna', *Bulletin of the Indian Institute for the History of Medicine* 27 (1997), p. 47; Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isnā 'Ashari Shī'īs in India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1986), Vol. 2, p. 183; Amanat suggests a Nuqtawi affiliation: Abbas Amanat, 'Persian Nuqtawis and the Shaping of the Doctrine of 'Universal Conciliation' (*ṣulḥ-i kull*) in Mughal India', in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, edited by Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 371.

<sup>23</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Refractions of Islam in India: Situating Sufism and Yoga* (New Delhi: Sage, 2016), pp. 406–407, 410.

<sup>24</sup> The Nuqtawi affiliations of Abul Fath are suggested by Amanat, 'Persian Nuqtawis', p. 371. It is also reflected in his work and correspondence with the Nuqtawi scholar Mir Sharif Amuli.



failed.<sup>25</sup> He became a close friend of Abul Fazl who said that he ‘really had his finger on the pulse of the age, was an excellent judge of persons, and possessed a large share of humane qualities’.<sup>26</sup> Part of Abul Fath’s success at the court derived, like Hakim Ali’s, from his being a *yunāni* physician. According to Bada’uni, Abul Fath gained surprising ascendancy over the emperor, attaining the highest level of proximity to him. He also accused him, as well as Abul Fazl and the court jester Birbal, of turning Akbar away from Islam.<sup>27</sup> Instead of stressing their credentials in Islamic theology and law, it seems that the members of this circle highlighted their universal, philosophical identity and associated themselves with ancient Greek archetypes. Faizi, for example, who had previously compared Fath Allah to Plato, does the same with Abul Fath, while his own brother Abul Fazl becomes Aristotle.<sup>28</sup>

From a philosophical point of view, the monist Nuqtawi movement was part of the same Neoplatonic family since it held that the universe was created through emanations from a ‘point’ (*nuqta*). As mentioned already, the movement, founded by Mahmud Pasikhani (d. 1427), was an extension of the Hurufi ideology introduced by his teacher Fazl Allah Astarabadi (d. 1394).<sup>29</sup> Although the Nuqtawis focused on Pasikhani as the promised Mahdi, these millennial expectations could easily be transferred, through the transmigration of the soul, to someone else who was willing to embrace their ideas. Indeed, it was Akbar who, just after Abul Fazl’s entry into the court in 1574, invited various Iranian Nuqtawi refugees to his court, among them the Gilani brothers and Sharif Amuli, in 1575 and 1576 respectively.<sup>30</sup>

The millennial frenzy of the Nuqtawis linked up well with the millenarian expectations of the sons and disciples of Shaykh Mubarak, who was considered a Mahdavi (one who considered Sayyid Muhammad of Jaunpur (d. 1505) to be

<sup>25</sup> Although Anooshahr, ‘Dialogism and Territoriality’, p. 224, states that he was one of the authors, he probably mixes him up with Hakim Ali Gilani.

<sup>26</sup> Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, Vol. 5, pp. 429–431. In a recent article, Moosvi translates the relevant passage by adding ‘of pleasing liberal manners’ as an attribute of the Gilanis, which is missing in the original text: Shireen Moosvi, ‘Three Iranian Voices in the Renaissance under Akbar’, *Studies in People’s History* 5, 2 (2018), p. 181.

<sup>27</sup> Bada’uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. 2, p. 211.

<sup>28</sup> Linking Abul Fazl to Aristotle does not necessarily mean, though, that we should read that name as a peripatetic counter figure of Plato. More probable here is the role of Aristotle as Alexander’s adviser. We should also keep in mind that much of what the Islamic world made of Aristotle was significantly based on the ‘Theology of Aristotle’ written by the Neoplatonist Plotinus.

<sup>29</sup> Amanat, ‘Persian Nuqtawīs’, p. 374; Abbas Amanat, ‘Islam in Iran v. Messianic Islam in Iran’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, XIV/2, pp. 130–134, available at <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/islam-in-iran-v-messianic-islam-in-iran>, [accessed 29 June 2021]; Shahzad Bashir, ‘Between Mysticism and Messianism: The Life and Thought of Muhammad Nurbakhsh (d. 1464)’, PhD thesis, Yale University, 1998, p. 54; H. Algar, ‘Astarābādī, Faḡlallāh’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, II/8, pp. 841–844, available at <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/astarabadi-fazlallah-sehab-al-din-b>, [accessed 29 June 2021].

<sup>30</sup> Amanat, ‘Persian Nuqtawīs’, p. 387; Bada’uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. 2, p. 284. In his biography of Mir Sharif Amuli, Shah Nawaz Khan also stresses the alignment of the inclusivist ideas of Amuli and Abul Fazl: Khan, *Ma’athir al-Umara*, Vol. 3, p. 285.

the Mahdi). The brothers Abul Fazl and Faizi were prominent Mahdavis, but they also may have corresponded with the neo-Zoroastrian Azar Kayvan (1533–1618), another author from Shiraz who had attempted to construct a millennial ideology of cosmic and solar kingship for the Safavids along Islamo-Zoroastrian and astrological lines.<sup>31</sup> Like the Nuqtawis, this Azari movement was very close to Ishraqi thinking; one disciple of Azar Kayvan, Farzanih Bahram bin Farshad, made another Persian translation of Suhrawardi's *Hikmat al-Ishraq* when in India.<sup>32</sup> After being rejected by the Persian ruler Shah Abbas (r. 1588–1629), who became quite anxious about this millennial agitation, it appears that Azari thinking, like that of other 'exaggerated' Neoplatonists, found a home in Mughal India. The amalgam of millennialist-Neoplatonist movements—Ishraqi, Nuqtawi, Azari, and Mahdavi—provided the main ingredients for Akbar's imperial ideology as set out in the combined *Alfi* and *Akbar Nama*.<sup>33</sup> Together with the emperor himself, the patrons and authors of these two chronicles should be seen as the Neoplatonic founding fathers of Mughal universal harmony, soon to be framed as *ṣulḥ-i kull*.

### Akhlāq and ṣulḥ-i kull

An important genre within the Neoplatonic political tradition was *akhlāq*, the so-called Persianate wisdom tradition. Muzaffar Alam has shown already how important this tradition has been for the making of Mughal kingship.<sup>34</sup> More so than Alam, we would like to stress the Hellenic—that is, Neoplatonic—background of the post-Mongol *akhlāq* tradition. Its main building blocks were Plato's *Republic*, *Timaeus*, and *Laws*; Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*; and the medical works of Galen, all of which were primarily transmitted through Hellenic (Porphyry) and Islamic Neoplatonists like al-Farabi and al-Razi.<sup>35</sup> Later on, *akhlāq* spread beyond philosophical circles and became integrated into mainstream Islamic society, especially after it was shown to be in agreement with Islamic ethical teaching. This integration was the achievement of

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Sheffield, 'The Language of Heaven in Safavid Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Āzar Kayvān and his Followers', in *There's No Tapping around Philology*, edited by Alireza Korangy and Daniel Sheffield (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), pp. 161–183.

<sup>32</sup> Apparently, the end of the millennium in India occasioned at least two translations of the *Hikmat*, one by Farzanih Bahram ibn Farshad and the other by Muhammad Sharif ibn Nizam al-Din Haravi. The 1599 translation of one Mahmud ibn Haravi, mentioned by Hossein Nasr, seems to be referring to the latter: see Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 163.

<sup>33</sup> In Gommans and Huseini, 'Neoplatonic Kingship' we have explained why these various groups should be seen as branches of a much wider Neoplatonic movement which, in our view, should include the mystical thought of Ibn Arabi and many other Sufi masters.

<sup>34</sup> Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*. Apart from *akhlāq*, Alam also rightly emphasizes the contribution of Sufi *waḥdat al-wujūd* which, for us, raises the question of the extent to which Ibn Arabi fits the category of Neoplatonism, but which we cannot discuss in the context of this article.

<sup>35</sup> Apart from the unavoidable Ibn Sina—Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfī*, Vol. 3, pp. 2184–2195—the *Alfi* reserves a prominent position for the Neoplatonist scholars al-Farabi (ibid., Vol. 3, pp. 1845–1846) and Qutb al-Din Shirazi, the latter even being called 'the chief of the world's scholars' (*pīshwā-yi 'ūlamā-yi 'ālam*) (ibid., Vol. 6, pp. 4093, 4206–4207 and Vol. 1, p. 378).

the eleventh-century historian and philosopher Miskawayh, who in his *akhlāq* work repeatedly stressed the concordance of Greek thought with Islam. The philosopher-cum-astronomer-cum-politician Nasir al-din Tusi (d. 672/1273–74) based his own *Akhlāq-i Nasiri* on Miskawayh's work, while also adding parts on economics and politics. After Tusi, we find two more fifteenth-century works in the genre: *Akhlāq-i Jalali* by Jalal al-Din Muhammad Dawwani and *Akhlāq-i Muhsini* by Husain Wa'iz Kashefi. Both books build on Tusi, but they use a more popular literary style with emphasis on practice rather than theory. All these philosophical advisers wrote their works for kings and/or served in the highest positions at court: Miskawayh worked for the Buyids, Kashifi for Sultan Husayn Bayqara and his family in Herat, and Dawwani for the Aq Qoyunlus. Although Tusi had written his work for the Ismaili prince Nasir-al-Din Abd-al-Rahim b. Abi Mansur—as we will see at the end of this article—he also came to advise the 'pagan' Ilkhanid rulers Hulagu and Abaqa.<sup>36</sup>

The question remains: why were Neoplatonism in general and *akhlāq* in particular such highly attractive propositions for monarchs? The former provided one of the most sophisticated philosophical systems to resolve the relationship of the one and the many: an ideal instrument for ambitious rulers on the lookout for an overarching ideology to create imperial cohesion beyond more specific religious or ethnic denominations. Neoplatonism was a strictly monist system that accounted for plurality. Unity and plurality are reconciled to different degrees at all levels of the Neoplatonic system and nowhere with greater ingenuity than at the level of the so-called Intellect: the celestial realm (*nous*) of Platonic forms between God and the material world as mediated by the soul (*psyche*) and illuminated by the divine light. In terms of its psychology, or science of the soul, Neoplatonism exhorts us to become 'a soul of the All', to shake off our material attachments, and, in various stages of ascent, to return to and find union with God, the ultimate cause, the One. Plotinus himself asks us to lead a contemplative life: 'let not merely the enveloping body be at peace, body's turmoil stilled, but all that lies around, earth at peace, and sea at peace, and air and the very heavens'.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, the *akhlāq* tradition provided more practical tools of how one could rule without taking recourse to the Islamic religious apparatus of sharia and ulama. *Akhlāq* started from the Platonic tripartite division of the soul and

<sup>36</sup> Summary is based on the surveys of R. Walzer and H. A. R. Gibb, 'Akhlāk', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs (consulted online, 30 August 2020); Peter Adamson, 'Ethics in Philosophy', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson (consulted online, 16 August 2020); F. Rahman, 'AQLĀQ', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 1/7, pp. 719–723; an updated version is available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/aklaq-ethics-plural-form-of-koloq-inborn-character-moral-character-moral-virtue>, [accessed 29 June 2021]; George E. Lane, 'TUSI, NAŠIR-AL-DIN', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 2018 online edition, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/tusi-nasir-al-din-bio>, [accessed 29 June 2021]; Maria E. Subtelny, 'A Late Medieval Persian Summa on Ethics: Kashifi's Akhlāq-i Muhsini', *Iranian Studies* 36, 4 (2003), pp. 601–614.

<sup>37</sup> Taken from the extremely elucidating work by Andrew Smith, *Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

envisioned that the soul should free itself from the influence of the body, and, as such, it is reason that should dominate the lower parts of the soul (desire and spirit). It also carried over the Galenic medical analogy from ethics to politics, in which the ideal ruler was compared to a doctor who looks after the souls of his people. Hence the state itself becomes compared to a body, with the ruler analogous to the heart.<sup>38</sup> As in Neoplatonism in general, in *akhlāq*, psychology and politics become deeply entangled: it teaches one to become a philosopher-king of both the self and the state.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, the Neoplatonic prescription of personal self-awareness and enlightenment comes very close to the way our Mughal Neoplatonists perceive *ṣulḥ-i kull*. In his letters, Abul Fath Gilani often stressed his self-discipline (*iṣlāḥ-i khwīsh*) and the purification of his soul, in one of them specifically referring to the prescriptions of *akhlāq* as provided in the works of Nasir al-Din Tusi and Jalal al-Din Dawwani.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as in the Neoplatonic tradition, *akhlāq* linked the equipoise (*i'tidāl*) of the individual soul to that of the state. Following Alam, in *akhlāq* texts,

justice in the ideal state is defined as social harmony and the coordination and balance of the conflicting claims of diverse interest groups that may comprise people of various religions. The ruler, like the good physician, must know the diseases that afflict society, their symptoms and the correct treatment. Since society is composed of groups of diverse interests and individuals of conflicting dispositions, the king must take all possible care for 'adl [justice] to work smoothly, to maintain the health of society and the equipoise (*i'tidāl*) within it.<sup>41</sup>

The supremacy of the Mughals was exactly this exaggerated concern for social harmony (*mashrab-i i'tidāl*), an ideal almost synonymous with *ṣulḥ-i kull*. What is crucial in Nasirean ethics, though, is this linkage between micro- and macrocosms, also expressed in the idea of *siyāsat* or politics, denoting discipline, control, and management in which the king is advised to discipline his own self first, thereby acquiring the moral authority to control and discipline others.<sup>42</sup>

Notably, the first time that the term *ṣulḥ-i kull* is used is in another letter of Abul Fath written to his Nuqtawi friend Sharif Amuli. In this letter, written circa 1588, Abul Fath praises the latter for the fact that he had searched for 'the struggle of humanity' (*iqdām-i insāni*) to reach the real beloved (*ma'shūq-i ḥaqīqī*) without having to await the Last Day. What is more, Mir

<sup>38</sup> See the contributions of Walzer and Gibb, and Rahman in footnote 36.

<sup>39</sup> The last phrase taken from Bernard Boulet, 'The Philosopher-King', in *Companion to Plutarch*, edited by Mark Beck (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 459.

<sup>40</sup> In Abul Fath's words: *faqīr rā ba iṣlāḥ-i khwīsh kār ast* (letter no. 66). He emphasized the necessity of purifying the soul in letter no. 48 written to qadi Nur Allah Shushtari. The reference to *akhlāq* is in letter no. 60: Muhammad Bashir Husain, *Ruq'at-i Hakim Abul Fath Gilani* (Lahore: Punjab University, 1968), pp. 151, 139–144.

<sup>41</sup> Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, pp. 47, 57–58.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 69, 71–72. For Tusi's more specific view on reaching the divine, see Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* (Tehran: Intisharat-i 'Ilmiyya Islamiyya, 1413/1991), p. 35.

Sharif had achieved this stage due to his innate knowledge (*jauhar-i aṣli*), without formal education (*‘ulūm-i rasmīyya*) or external guidance. All this had widened his view to such an extent that it included both friends and enemies, wisdom and foolishness, knowledge and ignorance, good and bad. Abul Fath mentions that, in the bazaar of this world, there is no loss; all is gain (*sarāsar sūd ast*). Then he suddenly introduces the term *ṣulḥ-i kull* which requires one to live with good and evil, accepting one's shortcomings as a necessity of this world. Thus, one should not blame oneself but praise and spend one's precious life coming to an acceptance of one's full being. One should not waste one's time engaging with other issues; one should know oneself and keep oneself busy meditating on this. Abul Fath ends his letter with a hemistich from Najm al-Din al-Razi that once again stresses this importance of self-consciousness.<sup>43</sup>

Looking at these early references, it seems as if *ṣulḥ-i kull* is still more about the individual than about the society. This is confirmed by another instance where we find the term associated with both Plato and Indic yoga. In the *Shariq al-Ma'rifa* (The Sunrise of Gnosis), a rare work attributed to Faizi, something close to *ṣulḥ-i kull* is described as a means to achieve the gnosis of God through the realization of truth and complete unity. Faizi links the very idea to Plato and the Ishraqis and adds the story, also to be found in his brother's *Akbar Nama* (its *Ain-i Akbari*), that Plato was a disciple of one Tumtum the Indian, who himself was a student of the chain of disciples of one Swami Vyasa whose 'rank of greatness cannot be imagined'. After making Plato a student of these ancient sages of India, Faizi moves on with his own rough Persian translations of some of Vyasa's teachings, written in Sanskrit, in order to help people on the path of gnosis. After discussing the way Krishna may help us in recognizing unity, Faizi turns his attention to breath control as a spiritual exercise and self-meditation, which he compares with the Sufi practice of *dhikr*. By reciting the name of the essence, one meditates on their innate universal knowledge and realizes that the heart comprehends all, thereby reaching the level of universal intellect (*‘aql-i kull*) that comprehends God. These practices receive an Ishraqi flavour when the achieved state of 'stability and peace' (*qarār wa arām*) is associated with the heart that beholds the pure light of the soul as an attribute of the absolute essence which comprehends all. As Carl Ernst summarizes it, 'in a very Neoplatonic mode, Faizi contrasts the degrees of light to such an extent that the lower realms of existence appear

<sup>43</sup> These are letters nos. 65 and 54. See Husain, *Ruqa'at-i Hakim Abul Fath Gilani*, pp. 127–129, 150. Najm al-Din al-Razi's poem is meant here as a *dhikr* or mantra to be repeated. It says: 'the heart is the conclusion of the human being and that is the mirror. Both worlds are the covers for this mirror, and the whole qualities of God can appear in this mirror.' He adds that once the human soul (*nafs*) reaches perfection, then the 'whole qualities' will be seen in himself, and the person will understand why he has been created and for what secret he is glorified. Najm al-Din then mentions the poem quoted by Abul Fath in complete form in which the person is called the book of God, the mirror of God's look, and whatever is in this world is already reflected in the person: Najm al-Din al-Razi, *Mirsad al-'Ibad min al-Mabda' ila al-Ma'ad*, edited by Husain al-Husaini al-Ni'matullahi (Tehran: Matba'-yi Majlis, 1312/1933), pp. 2–3.

to be darkness in relation to the higher sources of light'.<sup>44</sup> But apart from the light metaphor, even Faizi's 'stability and peace' may not be that far removed from the Neoplatonist idea of inner peace and self-awareness.

For Neoplatonists in general, without light, it would not make any sense to speak of darkness. In the same way as darkness is a by-product of light, so too is matter nothing but a by-product of the dynamic emanation of God. Intimately associated with matter was evil, which arises when human beings direct their attention towards the material world below instead of the intelligible world above. The regard downwards, as it were, rather than upwards towards the intellect and the divine essences is what contaminates the soul and renders it morally evil.<sup>45</sup> As it ontologically includes good and evil, human existence represents the cosmos, a microcosmos in which all levels of being are combined into one organic individual. A human being is therefore not a social or political being, but a divine being whose purpose was, according to Plotinus, 'to bring back the god in us to the divine in the All'. Hence, the moral precepts of the Neoplatonists concerned the individual person, the goal being nothing less than deification, *eudaimonia* in its most expansive sense. The route to salvation was a sincere and arduous effort of the mind to return to God and forever abrogate any concerns for the body.<sup>46</sup>

Abul Fath and Faizi's ideas appear similar to the way in which Daniel Sheffield<sup>47</sup> describes how Azaris combined bodily practices and celestial veneration to achieve harmony between the body and the cosmos, preferable under circumstances of extreme plurality in the society. This also requires that one must take a detached attitude to partake in 'peace with all' or *sulh bā hama*. This, together with spiritual and bodily exercise, in addition to improving the body's humoral balance through diet, was to achieve the ascent of the soul to the divine presence. Like Faizi, Sheffield connects all this to Plato and the Iranian Neoplatonists, the latter creating a kind of intermediate level, a mesocosm, being the society between the body and the cosmos. In other words, bodily harmony corresponded closely with societal and cosmic harmony.<sup>48</sup>

Neoplatonic notions of personal self-enlightenment and deification bring us finally to Abul Fazl. Looking at his letters, it seems that he started to use the term *ṣulḥ-i kull* near the same time, around 1587, as his friend Abul Fath, albeit

<sup>44</sup> Ernst, *Refractions of Islam*, p. 384. We are grateful to Carl Ernst for providing us with the exact wording of the text.

<sup>45</sup> Good and evil are alike, and dominant evil, like pure evil, is impossible. Existence, which is absolutely good and pure light, shines only upon dominant good: Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, Vol. 4, p. 535.

<sup>46</sup> Christian Wildberg, 'Neoplatonism', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2019 edition edited by Edward N. Zalta, available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/neoplatonism/>, [accessed 29 June 2021]. See also Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002), pp. 157–172, and Dominic J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 73–86.

<sup>47</sup> See his article in this special issue.

<sup>48</sup> Sheffield, 'Exercising Peace'. Such comparisons recur in the literature of *akhlāq* and, again, in the work of al-Razi, *Mirsad al-'Ibad*, pp. 245–258.



in a more philosophical sense. Only three years later, Abul Fazl began to link this to the idea of political tolerance.<sup>49</sup> The Neoplatonic idea of ascending personal enlightenment clearly emerges when Abul Fazl recounts his own philosophical *Werdegang* in the *Akbar Nama*. Abul Fazl considered his decision to join Akbar's retinue a second birth (*wilādat-i thānī*). Hence, he describes how his mind had detached itself from worldly concerns and travelled to 'the world of archetypes' which had suddenly opened a window into the unseen realm. The night that it happened, Abul Fazl had suddenly seen how Akbar had triumphed over the Afghans in far-off Bengal. Later on, the reborn Akbarian continued to improve himself and passed various stages of enlightenment. He had already passed the third stage of universal peace (*ṣulḥ-i kull*) to achieve the fourth stage of universal love (*muḥabbat-i kull*), all thanks to 'divine assistance and the enlightenment of the monarch of fortune'. Wanting to improve himself even further, he then longed for 'the rays of imperial attention' to maybe achieve a fifth birth, to 'attain the felicity of universal acquiescence (*riḍā-i Kull*) whereby the confusion of duality of desire might perish'. But Abul Fazl looked beyond that as he hoped to achieve a sixth, seventh, and even an eighth birth, the latter in the land of the transmigration of souls where there will be nothing more to wish for.<sup>50</sup>

It is quite obvious that all this could only be achieved with the help of Akbar, the 'possessor of universal intellect'.<sup>51</sup> In Neoplatonism, God or the One is not simply a passive object of desire; rather, the One exercises a causal attraction over us. Again, using Plotinus: 'the soul taking that outflow from the divine is stirred; seized with love ... its very nature bears it upwards, lifted by the giver of that love ... there is some glow of the light of the Good and this illumination awakens and lifts the soul'.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Akbar himself should not be seen as the very source of light. Akbar is not God but he is the Soul of the World—or to use the appropriate Sufic idiom: the *insān-i kāmīl*—in guiding us towards unity or, like the sun, towards the creator of the sun.<sup>53</sup> As in the case of the Prophet himself, Akbar's task of enlightenment, rather than his elevated self, should be seen as truly divine. Going back to Abul Fazl's rhetoric, it was Akbar, the world of the soul and the soul of the world, who was begotten in the chamber of light, who increased light in the hidden recesses of the divine presence, who knew the ways of all paths, who was the achiever of universal peace (*ṣulḥ-i kull*).<sup>54</sup> Akbar was the great unifier, whose eyes were with the origin of emanation, who had made unity and multiplicity playmates, who

<sup>49</sup> The first reference to *ṣulḥ-i kull* dates from 996 (1587–1588). The first reference in which the meaning of *ṣulḥ-i kull* combines the personal with the political dimension is from 999 (1590–1591): Abul Fazl Allami, *Mukatabat-i Abul Fazl*, edited by Maulana Muhammad Hadi Ali (Lucknow: Munshi Nawal Kishore, 1280/1863), Vol. 3, pp. 239–243 (letter from 996) and Vol. 3, p. 228 (letter from 999). Unfortunately, in summarizing some of these letters in English, Mansura Haidar too easily assumes the currency of *ṣulḥ-i kull* in the early letters: Haidar, *Mukātabāt*.

<sup>50</sup> Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, Vol. 5, pp. 346–347.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, p. 71.

<sup>53</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfī*, Vol. 1, pp. 253, 381.

<sup>54</sup> Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, Vol. 1, p. 21.



displayed variety but had chosen unity. In other words, an array of worldly involvements did not keep him from spiritual unity.<sup>55</sup> The *Akbar Nama* is full of dualities between the seen and the unseen, the material and the spiritual, the inner and the outer spheres which Akbar, knowing both, brings together in harmony. The awareness of this all-encompassing unity leads to maturity, foresight, impartiality, and calm—in other words, to *ṣulḥ-i kull*, which stood in sharp contrast to the fanaticism (*ta‘aṣṣub*) and blind tradition of the ulama.<sup>56</sup>

As we have seen, the idea of self-awareness was far from new and arrived from Neoplatonic psychology that splendidly combined with politics, as shown in *akhlāq*.<sup>57</sup> Although not yet under the label of *ṣulḥ-i kull*, these psychological-cum-political ingredients are prominent in the writings of all the Neoplatonic founding fathers of the Akbari constitution, who also happened to be the authors of the *Alfi*.

### *Ṣulḥ-i kull and akhlāq in the Tarikh-i Alfi*

In the year 1000 AH (1591–2 CE) Faizi wrote a poem in which he uses the term *ṣulḥ* to refer to Akbar's religious tolerance shown towards believers and unbelievers alike.<sup>58</sup> This was done when Akbar asked Bada'uni to revise, and Mir Jafar to continue, the *Alfi*. Abul Fazl had started to write the *Akbar Nama* in 1588, eventually presenting the first volume in 1596. Only in this period does *ṣulḥ-i kull* become fully developed to combine the philosophical notion of self-awareness with that of religious tolerance, the synthesis of which eventually became the universal civility at the foundation of the Mughal administrative ethos. As such, Abul Fazl subsequently inscribed the term into his chronicle.

The term *ṣulḥ-i kull* is not mentioned at all in the *Alfi*. This suggests that at the time of its production (1582–1590), it was not yet seen as the central tenet of the Akbari constitution. Nonetheless, the philosophical ideas regarding personal self-awareness mentioned above are implicitly addressed in the *Alfi* when referring to Akbar's so-called 'inclusivist temper' or *mashrab-i wilāyat*. It is essentially about accepting all people as they are, believing that all truths are true, seeking unity in diversity, and looking at all creeds with a divine

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 25; Vol. 5, p. 253; Vol. 6, p. 6. See also Vol. 1, pp. 9–10, 15, 19, 31.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, pp. 55–57.

<sup>57</sup> At the time of writing, Rajeev Kinra published a very insightful article that corroborates this association with *akhlāq*, to which he also adds the philosophical and mystical background: Rajeev Kinra, 'Revisiting the History and Historiography of Mughal Pluralism', *ReOrient* 5, 2 (2020), pp. 137–182. We feel, though, that all this is not 'a kind of Enlightenment *avant la lettre*' (p. 159) within Islam but part of a global Neoplatonic Renaissance that goes beyond any specific religion. See Jos Gommans, 'The Neoplatonic Renaissance from the Thames to the Ganges', in *India after World History: Literature, Comparison, and Approaches to Globalization*, edited by Neilesh Bose (Leiden: Leiden University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>58</sup> More particularly, it says that Akbar is at peace with unbelievers and believers to the extent that the unbeliever, whether a Zoroastrian or a Muslim, are equal (*az ānjā ki bā kufr u dīn ṣulḥ dārad....ba ṣhāsh chi kāfar chi mugh chi musalmān*): A. D. Arshad (ed.), *Diwan-i Faizi*, with an introduction by Husain Ahi (Tehran: Intisharat-i Forughī, 1363/1984), p. 82.

eye (*nazar-i haqq*). There is a way to reach God for every individual. In Akbar's inclusive temper, disagreement represents differences and diversity represents unity (*ikhtilāf 'ayn-i itifāq wa kithrat 'ayn-i waḥdat mi namāyad*). In contrast, the prophet's temper or *mashrab-i nabuwwat* made a rigid distinction between true and false (*haqq wa bāṭil*). By comparing these two tempers, the *Alfi* considers Akbar's *mashrab-i wilāyat* superior to that of prophets.<sup>59</sup>

Abul Fath, in a letter from *circa* 1588 uses the same notion, now called *mashrab-i qadīm* (the old temper), which should be combined with self-awareness to understand the natural world (*'ālam-i ṭabī'at*) and the human body (*jismāniyyat*).<sup>60</sup> This 'temper', or simply 'way', is the product of a deep understanding of oneself and accepting the reality of the world. It was this 'broadmindedness' (*wasī' al-mashrab*) that the Safavid historian Iskandar Beg rejected so fiercely when he was reflecting on Akbar's religious policy. At any rate, whether they used the term *ṣulḥ-i kull* or not, it is clear that both Abul Fath and the authors of the *Alfi* were perfectly aware of the connection between internal self-consciousness and external acceptance of worldly realities, as also known in Nasirean *akhlāq*. All this was hardly new; rather, it was another Mughal variation of a well-known Neoplatonic theme in which the inner harmony of the soul is connected to the universal harmony of the world. In this same Neoplatonic temper, kings looked for ancient, universal wisdom to counter the doctrinal criticism of jurists and keepers of sacred law derived from just one monotheist truth.

Returning to *akhlāq*, it should be stressed that, like many Persianate chronicles, the *Alfi* itself ought to be seen as an ethical work that is very much akin to the more general objectives of *akhlāq*. But even in its more specific meaning, *akhlāq* counsels for kings, especially via references to Alexander the Great and Aristotle, figure quite prominently in the *Alfi*.<sup>61</sup> The *Alfi* gives a summary of Alexander's testament in which the two elements—reason (*'aql*) and justice (*'adl*)—are highlighted, with justice being a manifestation of reason as divine quality. The first instrument (*'ālat*) of reason is love and good name (*muḥabbat wa nīknāmi*). The existence of the world depended on justice, and through justice one can rule over the people and their hearts.<sup>62</sup> Another example of specific *akhlāq* advice is the *Alfi*'s story of a meeting that took place between a certain qadi Sa'īd of Nishapur and the Seljuq Tughril Beg (r. 1037–1063). Since he 'came from the desert', the nomadic Seljuq sultan asked the qadi to teach him the civilized manners of the sedentary world. The qadi replied that 'God's grace/favour (*faid-i 'ām*) reaches people according to their capability (*isti'dād*). Since the

<sup>59</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 1, p. 242.

<sup>60</sup> In general, 72 letters written by Abul Fath between 984–997/1576–1589 are extant. In Persian: *niy niy, tā chand az mahsrab-i qadīm wa ṭarz-i mustadrak az 'ālam-i ṭabī'at wa ma'dan-i jismāniyyat sukhān rānda shawad*, translated as 'No, no, how long should I speak about the ancient temper and the method of understanding to realize the natural world and the human body': Letter no. 60, in Husain, *Ruq'at-i Hakīm Abul Fath Gilani*, pp. 142–144.

<sup>61</sup> At least seven advisory books are mentioned in the *Tarikh-i Alfi*: *Wasaya-yi Iskandar*, *Adab al-Salatin*, *Tadabir al-Salatin*, *Adab al-Muluk al-Hukama*, *Tarikh al-Hukama*, *Nasayih Sa'idiyya*, and *Al-Nasihat al-Nizamiyya*.

<sup>62</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 3, p. 1984.

Sultan is bestowed with the right ethics (*akhlāq-i ḥamīda*), he finds the capability to rule. As long as the king keeps this situation and his good manner, he will receive divine's favour.<sup>63</sup> Hence, divine favour directly depended on the king's personal, intuitive knowledge of what was good; as such, the text conveys yet another important Neoplatonic quality of the ideal philosopher-king whose wisdom is innate and not achieved through learning.

At this point, it is important to stress that Akbar was certainly not the exceptional figure for which he is often taken when one only looks at him from a purely South Asian point of view. He was, first of all, following a Timurid legacy of occult-scientific imperialism staged by the post-nomadic rulers who had already concocted their own version of millennial kingship using Neoplatonic (including Neopythagorean) and Sufic ingredients.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, Akbar's court was no more nor less than the most successful case of an almost global, long sixteenth-century Renaissance of Platonic thought which connected his court with various courts—from that of James I in England to Iskandar Muda's in Aceh. As in Europe, where translations of Greek texts had helped to engender this Neoplatonic Renaissance, translations of Sanskrit works, especially from India's rich monist tradition, played another stimulating role at the Mughal court.<sup>65</sup> Of course, equally important for the Mughals was their Central Asian background as descendants of both Timur and Chinggis Khan. Different from later Mughal sources, including the *Akbar Nama*, the *Alfi* pays little attention to Timur as the limelight is clearly focused on Chinggis Khan and his immediate successors. For the Mughals, it was neither the Semitic prophets, nor the ancient Iranian kings, but the Mongol khans who provided the model which, one way or the other, also had to be aligned with the Neoplatonic ideals of *akhlāq* and *ṣulḥ-i kull*.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Vol. 3, pp. 2208–2210.

<sup>64</sup> For this tradition, see Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, p. 253, which highlights the role of Iskandar b. 'Umar-Shaykh (d. 1415) who formulated 'a new political theology grounded in an eschatological absolutism and embodied in his kingly persona'. See also Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, and Matthew Melvin-Koushki, 'Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy', in *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam*, edited by Armando Salvatore and Roberto Tottoli (Chichester: Wiley, 2018), pp. 353–375. That the Timurid story is not unique has been recently demonstrated by Stefan Kamola's dissertation on the Ilkhans and Rashid al-Din (see in particular Chapter 6). Kamola also claims that Rashid al-Din 'consciously harnessed the Illuminationist philosophical tradition' (p. 174), which suggests another direct Neoplatonic link to the *Alfi*. Stefan Kamola, 'Rashid al-Din and the Making of History in Mongol Iran', PhD thesis, University of Washington, 2013.

<sup>65</sup> This started in Akbar's time but continued under the patronage of Dara Shukoh: see Supriyah Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2020). For the translation project under Akbar, see Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). A monist, that is, Vedantic, work that had a huge impact on Mughal courtly mentalities was the *Yoga Vasistha*. For a discussion regarding the rising popularity of the Indic monist tradition at this time, see Jos Gommans, 'Cosmopolitanism and Imagination in Nayaka South India: Decoding the Brooklyn *Kalamkari*', *Archives of Asian Art* 70, 1 (2020), pp. 1–21.

<sup>66</sup> A large part of the *Alfi* is dedicated to the Mongol history. Volumes 5–7 from pages 3525 to 4623 are about the early Mongol history up to the rise of Timur. The Timurid history is discussed in Volume 7, pages 4623 to 4993.

## Mongol archetype

### *The Mongols in the Tarikh-i Alfi*<sup>67</sup>

The Neoplatonic ingredients of the *Alfi* receive their fullest coverage in the history's first volume.<sup>68</sup> As important, though, is the *Alfi*'s elaborate focus on the history of the Great Mongol empire. The *Alfi* is the earliest Mughal source that offers extensive information on the Mongols and their religious views. More importantly, it provided them with a historical, practical model of kingship, later to be epitomized in the notion of *ṣulḥ-i kull*. The paradigmatic importance of Mongol history can be detected in the *Alfi*'s many explicit and implicit comparisons between the Mongol rulers and Akbar. As we will see, many of these comparisons directly address the idea of religious tolerance.

As mentioned already, the *Alfi*'s Mongol section was compiled by just one author: Mulla Ahmad. At a young age the Mulla had been converted to Shi'ism and for the rest of his life he retained a reputation for misusing Akbar's *ṣulḥ-i kull* to express his beliefs a little too enthusiastically, for which reason a Sunni fanatic assassinated him in 1588. More than a Shi'a, though, Mulla Ahmad was, like the other authors, a true polymath. Apart from being an experienced historian, he wrote books on medicine, mathematics, ethics, and lettrism. He was clearly part of the Neoplatonic circle surrounding Abul Fath. Sometime in the mid-1580s, after Akbar became displeased with the progression of the author collective, it was at Abul Fath's suggestion that Mulla Ahmad was assigned the task of writing the *Alfi*, now fully on his own and revising the parts that had been written already.<sup>69</sup> For the extensive Mongol section of the *Alfi*, he used a selection of Ilkhanid and Timurid texts. Most of the information derives from the two earliest Persian works on the early Mongols: Ata Malik Juvaini's *Tarikh-i Jahangusha* and Rashid al-Din Fazl Allah's *Jami' al-Tawarikh*. Juvaini's work is based on his own observation of the Mongol operations in both Central Asia and Iran. It provides a fresh view of the Mongols just after their conquests of the Persianate regions. Rashid al-Din's work, too, provides an early, Ilkhanid view of the Mongols after their conquests. In many ways, both Juvaini and Rashid al-Din represent the closest, most contemporary view of the way in which the early Mongols, and the Ilkhanids in particular, fashioned themselves as kings. For writing the history of the early Mongols, Mulla Ahmad also used a selection of Timurid sources, most prominently Hafiz Abru's *Majma' al-Tawarikh*, Sharaf

<sup>67</sup> When referring to the Mongols in this article, we specifically mean the Mongols who ruled the thirteenth-century Great Mongol empire, rather than anything ethnical nor any of their late-medieval legacies.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of this first volume, see Gommans and Huseini, 'Neoplatonic Kingship', which may be read as a companion to this article. Both serve as prolegomena for our book project *Platonopolis of the East: Philosopher Kings in the Turco-Persian World, 1200–1600*.

<sup>69</sup> Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History*, Vol. 1, pp. 227–235. In his preface to the Mongol history, Mulla Ahmad mentions that Akbar appointed him to continue the book, but he does not mention Abul Fath's recommendation: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, p. 3527. Soon after Mulla Ahmad's assassination, Bada'uni was asked to edit the *Alfi* in 1591 and check the chronology, but it seems he did not really change anything.

al-Din Ali Yazdi's *Muqaddima*, and Mirkhwand's *Rauzat al-Safa*.<sup>70</sup> Far from being a mere copy-cat, Mulla Ahmad compares and criticizes his sources to create his own narrative to fit the wider universalist agenda of the *Alfi*.<sup>71</sup>

Although they obviously were not part of the Islamic world, the Mongols occupy a very substantial part of the *Alfi*. Starting after the death of the Ghurid Sultan Shahab al-Din (r. 1173–1206), the history of the Mongols is presented as an important new era that requires thorough analysis.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the narrative before the rise of the Mongols depicts a world that is unsafe and unstable, oppressed by unjust tyrants and plagued by natural disasters. As the *Alfi* stresses more than once, it was the Mongols who ended the chaos and created a new world order based on law (*yasa*).<sup>73</sup> Written in 995/1587, the Mongol history is given in three chronological parts before and after the major events that happened during the reign of the great Chinggis Khan.<sup>74</sup>

The Mongol account starts with a brief discussion on the Mongols' genealogy. As in other Mongol sources, we find that their ancestry can be traced to Noah via his son Yafith, thus claiming a line distinct from that of the Iranians and the Arabs, the descendants of Noah's other two sons. It is said that Yafith inherited the stone of rain (*jada tash*) as well as Turan from Noah. Later, Yafith's descendants—both Mongols and Turks—conquered Iran, thereby making the Mongols the kings of Iran and Turan at an early stage. By following Yafith's line, the *Alfi* is able to discuss the Mongols without having to engage with the Semitic prophets, including the Prophet, whose biographies are conspicuously lacking in the *Alfi*.<sup>75</sup> Notably, the *Alfi* adds Alexander the Great to Yafith's line, thus making him part of the Turco-Mongolian category of kings who were able to rule over both Iran and Turan.<sup>76</sup> Hence, the Mughals of India could claim an autonomous non-Islamic legacy of imperial rule, not only over the Islamic but, as we will see, the entire world.

<sup>70</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vols 5–7, pp. 3527–4473. Mulla Ahmad had access to more books on the Mongols. For instance, he used Nasavi's *Sirat Jalal al-Din* and an unknown *Tarikh-i Khurasan*. He also benefited from the Mongol history composed on the model of Firdausi's *Shahnama*. However, he did not use Minhaj Siraj Juzjani's *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* which was written shortly after the Mongol invasion of Khurasan due to its negative image of the Mongols. See Minhaj Siraj Juzjani, *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, edited by Captain W. Nassau Lees, Mawlawis Khadim Husain and Abd al-Hay (Calcutta: College Press, 1864), pp. 330–373.

<sup>71</sup> Mulla Ahmad criticized Yazdi's *Muqaddima* for its inaccurate information on the Mongols. Mulla Ahmad often used Hafiz Abru and Mirkhwand's narratives if in doubt about Yazdi's work: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, pp. 3539, 3543, 3556–3557, and Vol. 6, p. 3723.

<sup>72</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, pp. 3525–3526.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, pp. 3531–3537, especially p. 3537.

<sup>74</sup> In the section on the Crusades, Mulla Ahmad discussed the reign of Salah al-Din Ayyubi (1138–1193) and compared him with Akbar. He says that Akbar was superior to Salah al-Din in all respects but particularly in regard to affairs of state. Here, he also reveals the date that he wrote his account on the Mongols: 995/1587. See *ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 3357.

<sup>75</sup> Abul Fazl follows the same logic by connecting Akbar to Adam through Yafith's line: Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, Vol. 1, pp. 201–203. Unlike the *Tarikh-i Alfi* that makes Chinggis Khan a central figure in world history, the *Akbar Nama* does not pay much attention to him, but highlights Timur: *ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 256–267.

<sup>76</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, pp. 3528–3530.

### Chinggis Khan and his law

The biography of Chinggis Khan depicts him as a unique, charismatic person under the mandate of Heaven. His personal ancestry included two outstanding figures in Mongol history: Oghuz Khan and Alanquwa. It is claimed that Oghuz was born a monotheist (*muwahhīd*) who worshipped the God of the Sky and the Earth (*khudā-yi āsmān wa zamīn*). He was also known for his eloquence, and it was said that he could say his own name when he was just a year old.<sup>77</sup> Alanquwa, a descendant of Oghuz, was impregnated by a light (*nūr*) that entered her mouth, and that light ennobled her three sons and their descendants, called *nirūn*. The *Alfi* follows Yazdi's *Muqaddima* by saying that the light entered her mouth while she was sleeping and also repeats Yazdi's poem in which Alanquwa is compared to the Virgin Mary—a comparison that was repeated by Abul Fazl's praise of Akbar's mother. Coming to Chinggis Khan's birth itself, his horoscope was considered highly auspicious since all seven planets gathered in the month of Mizan.<sup>78</sup> Astrologers had previously announced that the coming of Chinggis Khan would be accompanied by a devastating storm. Although there was not even the slightest of winds to accompany his birth, Mulla Ahmad quickly adds that Chinggis Khan was himself that storm since he proved to be as effective in destroying people.<sup>79</sup>

In discussing Chinggisid kingship, Mulla Ahmad builds primarily on Juvaini and Rashid al-Din to stress the importance of reason (*ʿaql*) and justice (*ʿadl*), apart from kindness (*mihrabāni*), security (*amn*), and benevolent action (*ihsān*).<sup>80</sup> More specific for the Mongols, though, are notions like absolute

<sup>77</sup> Rashid al-Din is the main source of this story. He mentions that Oghuz Khan was born as a God-worshipper (*khudā-parast*) and later refers to him as a monotheist who used to recite 'Allāh' in Arabic. His people assumed that he recited it just for fun and for the sake of singing (*ilhān-i samāʿ*) and they did not understand its meaning. Certainly, this part was added by Rashid al-Din to the story of Oghuz Khan to project him as a Muslim. Rashid al-Din mentions that because of Oghuz Khan, his people gradually converted to Islam and became monotheists: Rashid al-Din Fazl Allah al-Hamadani, *Jamiʿ al-Tawarikh*, edited by Muhammad Roshan and Mustafa Musavi (Tehran: Alburz, 1373/1994), pp. 50–51. Yazdi's information comes from Rashid al-Din, but he refers to Oghuz Khan only as a Muslim: Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, *Zafar Nama*, edited by Abd al-Husain Navayee (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnad-i Majlis-i Shura-i Islami, 1387/2008), p. 47; this edition includes the *Muqaddima* used in this article. Mirkhwand and Hafiz Abru followed Yazdi: Mir Muhammad b. Sayyid Burhan al-Din Khawand Shah, *Rauzat al-Safa fi Sirat al-Anbiya wa al-Muluk wa al-Khulafa*, edited by Abbas Parviz (Tehran: Markazi-Khayyam-Piruz, 1339/1961), Vol. 5, pp. 5, 9–12. Mulla Ahmad's narrative on Oghuz Khan is the one mentioned by Rashid al-Din, but he removed the part related to Oghuz Khan's recitation of the word 'Allāh'. He also did not use the term 'Muslim' for Oghuz Khan: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, pp. 3540–3543.

<sup>78</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, pp. 3552, 3555; Yazdi, *Muqaddima*, pp. 71–72. Mirkhwand follows Yazdi and mentions the same story, but he says that the gathering of these planets in the same month gave rise to the storm that took the lives of thousands of people: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, pp. 32–34. Rashid al-Din does not have any of the issues mentioned by Yazdi or Mirkhwand: Rashid al-Din, *Jamiʿ al-Tawarikh*, pp. 310–311. It is important to note that the *Alfi* does not include any of those negative words used by Mirkhwand on the birth of Chinggis Khan, but his narrative is very positive, just like that of Rashid al-Din.

<sup>79</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, p. 3377.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Vol. 5, pp. 3546–3550; Ala al-Din Ata Malik Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, edited by Mirza Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab Qazvini (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1912), pp. 16–25; Rashid al-Din, *Jamiʿ*



obedience (*iṭāʿat*), gratitude for what is given (*dar niʿmat shākīr*), and patience when experiencing difficulties (*dar miḥnat ṣābir*)—these are all well-known qualities in the *akhlāq* genre. Similarly, it is said that the law (*yaṣa*), respect for each other (*iḥtirām-i kuchaki wa buzurgi*), and conformity (*muwāfiqat*) were old Mongol qualities that Chinggis Khan brought to the highest stage.<sup>81</sup> Another crucial characteristic of Chinggisid kingship was the close relationship between king and God. To support the Chinggisid worldview, the *Alfi* again and again repeats the claim of Mongol world rule as formulated in a *yarliḡ* issued by Chinggis Khan: ‘God has bestowed the entire world from the east to the west to Chinggis Khan. Hence, anyone who submits to the Khan remains safe and anyone who resists is destroyed.’<sup>82</sup> As mentioned by Rashid al-Din, although there is room for both sun and moon in the sky, on earth there can be no place for two kings (*dar zamīn chigūna du pādshāh dar mulki bāshand*). As there is only one God who rules heaven, there can only be one king who rules the world.<sup>83</sup> Before his death, Chinggis Khan reminded his children that he conquered the world by the power of God (*qūwwat-i yazdāni*) and the confirmation of heaven (*taʿīd-i āsmāni*).<sup>84</sup>

To reach this point, Mulla Ahmad follows the narratives of Juvaini and Mirkhwand on the enthronement of Chinggis Khan. On that occasion a Mongol shaman called Teb Tengri brought a message in which the eternal God (*khudā-yi jāwīd*) bestowed ‘the inhabited quarter and the seas’ (*rubʿ-i maskūn wa ʿarṣa-yi hāmūn*)—or, elsewhere, ‘the world’ (*rūy-i zamīn*)—on Chinggis Khan and his progeny.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, God bestowed on him the title of Chinggis Khan, meaning king of kings (*shāh-i shāhān*). Following Mirkhwand’s words, the book adds that ‘the simplehearted Mongols’ believed that Teb Tengri ascended to heaven by horse and spoke to God, coming to know all peoples’ secrets. Obviously, all this was conspicuously reminiscent of a similar experience of the Prophet, making the latter less unique. But perhaps more characteristic for the Mongols’ down-to-earth temper regarding such prophets was the fact that Teb Tengri was later to be killed by Chinggis Khan’s brother, probably anticipating the saint’s interest in claiming political power for himself.<sup>86</sup>

*al-Tawarikh*, pp. 581–616. Mirkhwand mentions all these good qualities of the Mongol rulers but does not, like the *Alfi*, emphasize justice: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, pp. 16–31.

<sup>81</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, p. 3538.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 3682.

<sup>83</sup> Rashid al-Din, *Jamiʿ al-Tawarikh*, p. 414.

<sup>84</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3734.

<sup>85</sup> Unlike earlier Mongol rulers who were called the king of the entire world, Ghazan Khan is called the King of Islam (*pādshāh-i Islam*) because the Khan converted to Islam: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3742.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 3582, based on Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, pp. 49–50. Juvaini does not have any of the words used in the *Alfi* about the enthronement, although he gives Teb Tengri’s message: Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, pp. 28–29. Rashid al-Din gives a shorter report on this. Interestingly, Rashid al-Din does not even mention Teb Tengri’s words quoted in the *Alfi*: Rashid al-Din, *Jamiʿ al-Tawarikh*, pp. 420–421. Yazdi Arabicizes *khudā-yi jāwīd* into *Allāh ʿālā*. Yazdi has only two lines on this event, without any detail, suggesting that he did not find it important enough: Yazdi, *Muqaddima*, p. 80.



The intermediate position of Chinggis Khan between God and creation, without the interference of prophets, was also illustrated in the story about Chinggis Khan's war against Altan Khan of Khita (China). Before starting the campaign, Chinggis Khan went up on a mound (*pushta*) alone, uncinched his belt and put it on his neck, opened his garment, and knelt to call the eternal God (*khudā-yi qadīm*) for help. He asked God to send him help from above (*az bālā*) with angels, humans (*ādamiyān*), and fairies (*pariyān*), and demons (*dīwān*) from beneath.<sup>87</sup> A similar ritual took place when Chinggis Khan started the campaign against the Khwarazm Shah, wherein we see Chinggis Khan ascending a hill, fasting, and staying alone there for three days and nights without sleep. He removes his crown (*kulāh-i sarwari*) and, as before, opens his belt (*kamar-i salṭanat*) to ask God for help. On the fourth day, he hears a formidable voice from the sky announcing his victory over the Khwarazm Shah. These words, copied from Yazdi, were meant to demonstrate once again that Chinggis Khan was supported by God—'he who knows the secret and the unseen' (*ālīm al-sirr wa al-khaṭīyyāt*)<sup>88</sup> or, in the words of Rashid al-Din, 'the creator of Turks and Tajiks' (*āfarīnanda-yi Turk u Tazhig*), which here implies humanity as a whole.<sup>89</sup>

The Mongols in the great assembly (*quriltāy*) felt such awe for Chinggis Khan that they removed their hats, put their belts on their shoulders, and knelt before the Great Khan. Juvaini is the only source who mentions that the Mongols knelt before the Khan inside the tent before going outside to kneel together before the sun.<sup>90</sup> The *Alfi* narrates this event and stresses that the ritual was performed for God, the sun, and the Khan.<sup>91</sup> The reference to the sun links up nicely with the more elaborate discussion on sun worship that is given in the *Alfi*'s first volume, another reflection of the work's Neoplatonic leanings.

What does the *Alfi* tell us about Chinggis Khan's own faith? According to most sources, he believed in the eternal God (*khudā-yi qadīm*) and respected God's name in any of the religious traditions.<sup>92</sup> In discussing Chinggis Khan's trust in God, the *Alfi* more specifically draws a distinction between those kings who trust God while possessing worldly power and wealth, and those kings who trust God simply out of necessity. Implicitly making a comparison with his patron Akbar, Mulla Ahmad confirmed that Chinggis Khan's trust

<sup>87</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3752.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 3670. Juvaini does not talk about opening the belt: Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, p. 63. Yazdi adds a poem about God, who is one, but is called with different names: Yazdi, *Muqaddima*, p. 112. Mirkhwand has the same narrative mentioned by Yazdi: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, p. 55.

<sup>89</sup> Rashid al-Din, *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, p. 587.

<sup>90</sup> Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, p. 148. Rashid al-Din refers to this ritual but does not mention the sun: Rashid al-Din, *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, p. 626.

<sup>91</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, p. 3776. At the same time, though, Chinggis Khan dispensed with the old Mongol tradition of sacrificing animals for making an oath or asking God for help. Their greatest oath had also been to the God of the sky, followed by sacrificing a horse, a cow, a dog, and a buck together: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, p. 3559.

<sup>92</sup> The best example of this is Chinggis Khan's entrance to the mosque of Bukhara given in Juvaini and repeated in almost all later sources: Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, p. 82; Rashid al-Din, *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, p. 499.

was definitively of the first type<sup>93</sup> and, due to the Khan's trust, God protected the Khan in his wars.<sup>94</sup> It appears that the *Alfi* is the only Persian source that emphatically connects Chinggis Khan's capacity (*isti'dād*) to his kingship, saying that because of his God-given ability, Chinggis Khan deserved (*mustahāqq*) his dominance over the whole world.<sup>95</sup> As breaking promises was such an unfortunate phenomenon among kings, one of the Khan's most important characteristics was his extraordinary trustworthiness.<sup>96</sup> But still, it is also clear that even Chinggis Khan remained a simple man of flesh and blood: among his greatest joys was the hunt, plundering, and captivating women.<sup>97</sup> It is also stressed that he himself disliked panegyric rhetoric and preferred to use simple words in all his letters or orders.<sup>98</sup> Hence in Chinggis Khan we meet a fairly unassuming and charismatic king who intuitively rules the world under the mandate of heaven.

Selecting from the works of Juvaini, Rashid al-Din, and Mirkhwand, in a separate section the *Alfi* lists various 'wise sayings' (*sūkhanān-i hikmat āmiz*) and 'admirable actions' (*afāl-i pasandida*) of Chinggis Khan. These highlight, for example, Chinggis Khan's policy of creating unity through the arrangement of marriages and cultivating the seeds of love (*tukhm-i muḥabbat*) in the hearts of his sons.<sup>99</sup> The importance of unity (*ittihād*) under the leadership of one leader (*yak kas*) is further illustrated by stories like that of the many-headed snake that dies in the cold because it cannot enter into a hole or the proverb that explains that, although one can break a single arrow quite easily, one cannot do the same to a quiver of arrows.<sup>100</sup> Here the *Alfi* stresses that through unity alone the Mongols were able to conquer the world, and that they could only lose the empire when disagreement (*mukhālifat*) and hypocrisy (*nifāq*) appeared.<sup>101</sup>

The *Alfi* agrees with all the other sources that strict laws and regulations were key for creating and maintaining Mongol unity. The *Tarikh* mentions that Chinggis Khan created regulations (*qā'ida*) and laws (*qānūn*) for every action, and punishment (*jazā'*) for every crime.<sup>102</sup> The *Alfi* also says that no

<sup>93</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, p. 3743. Interestingly, other sources on Chinggis Khan do not refer to these two types of trust.

<sup>94</sup> As a sign of His special favour, God had turned some of the Khan's hair white at a young age as a sign of his greatness (*nishān-i mihtari*): Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3753.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3742. Juvaini mentions that God distinguished Chinggis Khan for his reason and prudence (*ʿaql wa hūshmandi*): Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 5, p. 3665.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3755. Later on, the *Alfi* adds that Mongols did not hunt for the sake of entertainment, but to keep the army ready for war: *ibid.*, Vol. 6, pp. 3744, 3746.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3743; Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, p. 18.

<sup>99</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3749. Juvaini refers to 12 regulations, and Rashid al-Din provides 25 regulations and also quotations: Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, pp. 16–25; Rashid al-Din, *Jamī' al-Tawarikh*, pp. 581–589; Yazdi, *Muqaddima*, pp. 92–94; Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, pp. 53–69. The *Alfi* combines all these regulations to make a comprehensive narrative.

<sup>100</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3746.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3911. Interestingly, the *Alfi* says that the Muslims had great empires when they were united.

<sup>102</sup> The *Alfi* pays a great deal of attention to punishment, as do the other sources: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, pp. 3742–3743, 3753, 3765.

one had ever organized an army in the way the Khan did, and it gives details of the splendid organization of the Mongol army. Here the book quotes Chinggis Khan saying that 'how bad a situation where the army is not afraid of its kings, and the subjects disobey'.<sup>103</sup> To make sure that the laws (*yāsā wa qānūn*) were obeyed over the generations, the Khan ordered the Mongols to allow their children to learn the Uyghur script to record the laws.<sup>104</sup> For Chinggis Khan, power and law were two sides of the same coin: since the ruler kept to the law, the comfort (*āsāyish*) and pleasure (*‘aysh*) of the Mongols could reach the highest level.<sup>105</sup> By contrast, the state cannot survive without laws. When people are uninstructed (*bī tarbīyat*) and undisciplined (*bī sāmān*), the government will become unstable and collapse (*pādshāhi mutazalzil wa munqaṭi‘ gardad*). It was the Khan's strong law(s) that made for disciplined people (*yāsāq-i sakht wa muḥkam-i u ishān rā yāsāmīshi kard*).<sup>106</sup> In sum, the happiness of God and the comfort of the people are related to the actions of the king, and the king's actions must be based on the law—that is, the rules and regulations established by the king himself.<sup>107</sup> For the *Alfi*, it was the law that made Chinggis Khan so distinct from both his divisive predecessors and many of his successors. Among the latter, there was Ghazan Khan, who regrettably neglected the old law (*yasa-yi qadīm*) after his conquests of Syria. For Mulla Ahmad, the message is altogether clearer: even after their conversion to Islam, the Mongols should have stuck to their law and ancestral ideals.<sup>108</sup> Of course, this was not the full story. Like all good rulers, the Chinggisids paid a great deal of attention to the ideals of justice (*‘adl*) and reason (*‘aql*), two other ingredients of the Chinggisid kingship that were very much in line with Alexander the Great and in full conformity with the rules of *akhlaq*.<sup>109</sup> But what really made Chinggis Khan exceptional was his law!

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3744.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3742. Juvaini is the main source of this story and considers the Chinggisid commands the 'Great Yasa' (*yasa nāma-yi buzurg*) that has many commonalities with Islamic jurisdiction: Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, p. 17. Rashid al-Din does not have this part at all, only the Chinggisid commands: Rashid al-Din, *Jami al-Tawarikh*, p. 581. Yazdi gives it a strange name, calling it *shabāshūb*, an equal term for 'Great Yasa': Yazdi, *Muqaddima*, p. 93. Mirkhwand has taken his information on the Chinggisid commands from Rashid al-Din and also the story related to Ghazan Khan who did not follow the Chinggisid commands when he captured Damascus: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, pp. 63–64. The *Alfi* follows Mirkhwand here.

<sup>105</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3748.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3748.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3749. We would suggest that in the case of Akbar, the *Ain* should be seen as Akbar's version of such laws.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3742. Mirkhwand gives his personal experience of the Mongol hunt led by Sultan Husain Bayqara in Badghis. However, he and some other Sufi shaykhs left their lines and went for prayer, but they were stopped by the guards who said that the punishment for leaving the line (*jurga*) was piercing their noses with an arrow. Mirkhwand and his friends were saved only when the chief of the guards, a certain Sayyid Ahmad Mir Akhur, intervened on their behalf. Mirkhwand mentions that he was so scared that he had nightmares for several nights afterwards. He then adds that this way of hunting had survived since Mongol times: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, pp. 68–69.

<sup>109</sup> For example, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* says that when Möngke sent his brother Hulagu to complete the conquests of Iran, he advised him to rule the country based on reason and thinking (*bar asās-i ‘aql*)

*Mongol peace for all?*

As repeatedly stressed by the *Alfi*, an integral part of Chinggisid law was that it did not discriminate against people because of their religion. As mentioned earlier, Chinggis Khan himself was not a follower (*tābīʿ*) of any specific religion, but he understood that religious tolerance was an important issue before God.<sup>110</sup> Different from many of his Buddhist and Muslim colleagues, Chinggis Khan allowed everyone in his conquered territories to 'follow the tradition and keep the religion of their father and ancestors'.<sup>111</sup> Some more detail on Chinggis Khan's understanding of religions is given in the form of a conversation between the Khan and a certain Ashraf, a qadi of Bukhara. The story is not mentioned in the other sources, except for Mirkhwand. In Mulla Ahmad's version, the content is slightly adjusted to stress Chinggis Khan's religious tolerance even more.

According to the *Alfi*, Chinggis Khan asked for a scholar who would be able to help him investigate the Muslim tradition (*ṭarīqa-yi musalmānān*). Thus, this Ashraf and another scholar were nominated for this task. After carefully listening to the qadi, Chinggis Khan agreed on the truth of monotheism and with the need for praying and fasting. He also liked the idea of giving charity to the poor, saying: 'The provision given by God to the people is different. However, the poor's deficiency in provision is compensated by the charity given by the rich'.<sup>112</sup> But he also objected to the idea that the Prophet was the messenger of God (*nabī ilchī ast*). For the Khan, the Prophet was, like

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wa *tadbīr*): Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfī*, Vol. 6, p. 3938. Likewise, it quotes Ögedei: 'perfect reason' (*ʿaql-i kāmīl*) necessitates one's eternity through making a good name while he is alive' (ibid., Vol. 6, p. 3843). The *Tarikh-i Alfī* takes these words from Rashid al-Dīn, but changed 'wisdom' (*khirad*) into 'perfect reason': Rashid al-Dīn, *Jamīʿ al-Tawarikh*, p. 684, a term also often used by Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, Vol. 1, pp. 18–19. Mirkhwand only writes that Möngke asked Hulagu to act according to Chinggis Khan's law: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, p. 230.

<sup>110</sup> Though the *Alfi* borrows these words from Juvaini, it is not part of the Khan's order. In contrast, Juvaini explains that 'it was the *yasa* of Chinggis Khan to view all groups of people (*ṭawāyif*) equally and do not discriminate between them'. Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, pp. 18–19, adds that while Chinggis Khan's children and grandchildren converted to different religions, they did not prefer any group over others; in Persian: *wa az ānch yasa-yi Chinggis Khān ast ki hama-yi ṭawāyif rā yakī shīnāsād wa bar yakdigar fargh nanahad*.

<sup>111</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfī*, Vol. 5, pp. 3658–3659. The story of Kushluk is not the same in our sources. Juvaini gives detailed information on this event and says that Kushluk accepted Christianity, but later converted to Buddhism, and then forced people to convert or follow the Chinese way of dressing (*ba ziy-yi Khitā*): Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, pp. 50–54. Rashid al-Dīn mentions that Kushluk converted for a Buddhist woman he loved and then forced people to choose Christianity (*thālith-i thālātha*) or Buddhism (*but parasti*) or change their dress: Rashid al-Dīn, *Jamīʿ al-Tawarikh*, pp. 464–466. Yazdi gives a shorter narrative, saying that the woman was Christian. Interestingly, only Yazdi changes the words 'the enemy of the religion' (*ʿadū-yi dīn*), mentioned first by Juvaini and followed by others, to 'bad religion' (*bad dīn*): Yazdi, *Muqaddima*, pp. 104–106. Mirkhwand does not mention the Buddhist woman, nor Christianity or any Chinese dressing: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, pp. 73–74.

<sup>112</sup> Here, *Tarikh-i Alfī* does not follow Mirkhwand's narrative completely. The *Alfi* uses more Mongol terminologies and tries to explain the issue from the Mongol perspective. For instance, it uses the *yasa* and *yusun* for the sharia, and *ilchī* for the Prophet. The *Alfi* also allows Chinggis Khan to explain some the issues like the zakat: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfī*, Vol. 6,

himself, the servant of God (*banda-yi khudā*), who—apart from commanding armies—sent messengers (*ilchīyān*) to different regions and their peoples. Chinggis Khan also disagreed with qadi Ashraf on the issue of the hajj, saying: ‘the whole world is the house of God. One can reach Him from anywhere, and the path to reality (*ḥaqq*) is everywhere.’<sup>113</sup> Agreeing with the Khan, qadi Ashraf argued that the reality of the hajj is to pay respect to God’s messenger and give charity to the needy people who live there. The *Alfi* ends this story by saying that qadi Ashraf declared the Khan to be a Muslim, but the ignorant preacher (*wā’iz-i nāqiz-i maḥd*) who accompanied him rejected the qadi’s words because of the hajj issue. Finally, the *Alfi* deliberately ignores Mirkhwand’s statement that the path to reality goes through that house which is the Ka’ba.<sup>114</sup> Here Mulla Ahmad seems to agree with Chinggis Khan—and implicitly also with Akbar—that there is a path to God from everywhere.<sup>115</sup>

If we leave Chinggis Khan to see how the *Alfi* deals with his successors, it continues strikingly to celebrate the religious tolerance of his eastern successors Ögedei (r. 1229–1241), Möngke (r. 1251–1259), and Kublai (r. 1260–1294). Of course, this mostly concerned Muslims, but the key message is one of tolerance for all religions. Starting with Ögedei, his rule is highly praised for its generosity, justice, kindness, modesty, and good governance. It says that he sent orders to announce that: ‘no creature (*āfarida*) has the right to disturb others and the strong should not suppress the weak’.<sup>116</sup> As far as his religious policy is concerned, the book mentions that Ögedei punished a Turk for lying about a dream in which Chinggis Khan had urged the killing of Muslims.<sup>117</sup>

The *Alfi* is equally positive about the religious policy of Möngke who heavily punished those who acted against Muslims.<sup>118</sup> It shows that Möngke’s policy was perfectly in line with the laws of Chinggis Khan and he could, like his grandfather, be trusted on the heavenly mandate. The *Alfi* depicts Möngke almost as a scholar-king deeply interested in Euclidian mathematics (*ūsūl-i Oqlidus*) and astronomy, who even attempted to bring Nasir al-Din Tusi to his court to erect an observatory there.<sup>119</sup> Although it failed, Tusi was eventually able to build the famous one at Maragha, albeit not for Möngke but for the Ilkhanid ruler Hulagu. Indeed, also in connection to Möngke, the *Alfi* mentions

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pp. 3721–3722. In contrast, Mirkhwand’s narrative on this conversation is shorter and does not include the words on the Prophet: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, p. 127.

<sup>113</sup> *Tarikh-i Alfi* gives a Quranic verse here that is not mentioned by Mirkhwand: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3722.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, pp. 3721–3722; Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, pp. 127–128.

<sup>115</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, pp. 3721–3722.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 3839.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* The information on Ögedei comes from Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, pp. 150–191. Rashid al-Din calls this man *tāzi zabān*, a Persian term often used for non-Turks: Rashid al-Din, *Jamī‘ al-Tawarikh*, p. 687. Yazdi calls Ögedei the perfect king (*pādshāh-i kāmīl*) and also relates this story: Yazdi, *Muqaddima*, pp. 174–175. Mirkhwand also has this story but does not identify the person: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, p. 148.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, the plot of one Sidi Qut in Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, pp. 3872, 3910–3911.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, pp. 3982–3983.

that astrologers (*munajjimān*) had managed to set an auspicious day for the enthronement, but cloudy weather and non-stop rain threatened to spoil the event. Suddenly, however, the weather improved, the rain stopped, and sunshine allowed the enthronement ceremony to take place exactly as predicted.<sup>120</sup> At his enthronement, Möngke expressed his wish that all creatures (*jumla-yi aṣnāf-i maujūdāt*) should live in comfort (*āsāyish*) and security (*amniyyat*), just like human beings. To enact that wish, he ordered that no one should participate in fights (*munāzi‘āt*) or show hostility (*khuṣūmat*) towards each other, but that everyone should spend their time in social gatherings and enjoyments (*tamāshā wa ‘ishrat*). Sounding almost like a radical modern-day environmentalist, Möngke even ordered that minerals (*jamādāt*) and plants (*nabātāt*) should be safe, declaring that no one should cut trees, disturb the earth, or pollute the flowing water.<sup>121</sup>

In the rare instance where the Mongol narrative is directly linked to that of the chronicle's patron, Akbar, we find a comparison of Möngke's order with a similar, but more durable, one by Akbar possibly from 987/1579.<sup>122</sup> Mulla Ahmad wonders why people endowed with reason (*arbāb-i ‘aql*) and perceptiveness (*kiāsat*) should be astonished by this story because Möngke's order was only valid for one day, whereas Akbar's order, which was also for the security and comfort (*amn u āsāyish*) of all creatures, lasted much longer as he earmarked several days (*chand rūz-i mūtabarrik*) when no one was allowed to shed the blood of animals. Subsequently, the *Alfi* invites intelligent people (*‘uqalā’*) to look at this issue with fairness (*inṣāf*) to see who would be superior: the Mongol Khan, who dedicated only one day to the 'comfort/repose for all' (*āsāyish-i ‘ām*), or Akbar, who enforced and observed this *āsāyish* for all time? Then it concludes that if the Khan is praised after 400 years for appropriating only one day for the comfort of all, then Akbar should be praised until eternity by all creatures in all kinds of praises. It then finishes by praying for Akbar's health, long life, and victory over his enemies.<sup>123</sup>

Ali Anooshahr takes up this example to suggest a possible precedent for *ṣulḥ-i kull* in the roughly synonymous term *āsāyish-i ‘ām*. The latter term, however, is not peculiar to the *Alfi* as it derives from Rashid al-Din's earlier narrative. Indeed, Rashid al-Din uses the word in the context, mentioned above, of nonviolence towards animals. Rashid al-Din himself, though, probably got the wording from Juvaini, who gives the same details on Möngke's decree but adds that it was an example of Möngke's concern about spreading justice and his 'compassion with all' (*raʿfat-i ‘ām*)—Rashid al-Din also using *raʿfat*, but without

<sup>120</sup> Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, pp. 29–30, mentions that *nayyir-i ‘āzam* appeared. This is not confined to Möngke as the relation between the kings, the stars, and the planets are given in several other places in the book as well. For instance, the *Alfi* refers to the unknown sages (*ḥukamā*) saying that the stars and the planets affect the life of the king: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3854.

<sup>121</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3903.

<sup>122</sup> Badaʿuni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. 2, p. 261.

<sup>123</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3903. It should be noted that Jafar Beg's introduction to Part Three, which praises Akbar, uses many of the keywords like 'security', 'comfort for all', and 'justice' that are also used by Mulla Ahmad.



‘ām or ‘for all’. Thus, it seems that Mulla Ahmad used Juvaini’s wording of *raʿfat-i ʿām* and translated it into *āsāyish-i ʿām*. Now one wonders why Mulla Ahmad would not have rendered Juvaini’s *raʿfat-i ʿām* straight away into *ṣulḥ-i kull*. The obvious answer would be that at the time of writing this part of the *Alfi* was either not yet that current at the court or, alternatively, that it simply meant something different. Here we assume both: although this Mongol instance of nonviolence towards animals may certainly have contributed to the making of the later *ṣulḥ-i kull*, the latter was yet to become that more general ideal of Mughal kingship. As such, it is part of our wider argument that the Mongols provided a practical, historical model for *ṣulḥ-i kull*, but that its deeper philosophical meaning derives from Neoplatonism, following a distinct trajectory.

On a more practical level, Mulla Ahmad continues to praise the policies of Möngke. For example, following the arrangement under Chinggis Khan, Möngke gave special privileges and tax exemptions to certain religious specialists, from Muslim Sayyids, scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*), and saints (*mashāyikh*), to officials, priests, and monks from Christian and Buddhist denominations. Hence, like Chinggis Khan, as a ruler Möngke did not differentiate between religious groups.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, the *Alfi* praises Möngke for introducing at court a class of experts, scribes (*kātibān*), and secretaries (*munshiyān*) from various peoples living in the empire—among them Persian, Uyghur, Khitay, Tibetan, and Tangqut—so as to have all these groups represented and to enable the court to communicate with these people in their own languages and scripts. The *Alfi* stresses that this policy was unprecedented and that it was an ‘admirable tradition (*rasm-i pasandida*) that all kings should emulate’.<sup>125</sup>

Staying in the Far East, Kublai poses another interesting model of Chinggisid rule. If we are to believe the *Alfi*, Kublai believed the best religion was obedience to the Khan. This is the message behind the story taken from Rashid al-Din about some Muslim traders who visited the Khan and presented their gifts. Once when the Khan offered them food, they refused to eat it as it was the same meat prepared for the Khan. An Uyghur minister called Senge, who was hostile to the Muslims, took this as an opportunity to upbraid them. Angry with the Muslim merchants, the Khan ordered that people must slaughter animals in the Mongol tradition (*ṭarz-i Mughul*) by making a hole in the animal’s chest. The order was to execute and confiscate the property of anyone who refused to do so.<sup>126</sup> Later, however, the Khan abolished this order after finding out that it would negatively affect trade. More interesting than the story itself is that the *Alfi* takes this as an opportunity to criticize the Muslim traders for disobeying the Khan’s order. It particularly denounces the Muslim jurists who legitimized such stupid behaviour. As the *Alfi* argues,

<sup>124</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3913. Rashid al-Din gives the same categories: Rashid al-Din, *Jamīʿ al-Tawarikh*, p. 844.

<sup>125</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 3914. Juvaini mentions this issue, but does not praise it: Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, p. 89. Rashid al-Din only says that the deceased kings would follow this tradition if they were alive, but he does not praise it: Rashid al-Din, *Jamīʿ al-Tawarikh*, p. 847.

<sup>126</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 4177.



the reason for the Mongol way of slaughtering a sheep was to let its blood flow away, which is exactly the ritual slaughter prescribed by Islamic custom. Thus, the idea was the same but performed differently. This is clearly one of the *Alfi*'s attempts to square Mongol custom with Islam, but, at the same time, it offers a welcome opportunity to publicly censure the main representatives of the latter —the ulama—whose resistance to Kublai's rule was rooted in stupidity (*ḥimāqat*), bigotry (*ta'assub*), and corrupted belief (*i'tiqād-i fāsīd*) in the guise of religion (*dīn*). They should have known that to show obedience to the king of the time, the *ulu al-'amr*, was the most important commandment of Islamic law.<sup>127</sup> In other words, it is perfectly clear, for the *Alfi*, that the king's orders stand above religion.

In another story involving Kublai, we find that the *Alfi* can be read as an attempt to further synchronize Islam with the Mongols. The latter are neither Muslims nor unbelievers but monotheists, a category that actually incorporates both. At one time, Kublai was informed about a Quranic verse in which God ordered the killing of non-believers (*mushrikīn*). Becoming angered, the Khan gathered together some Muslim scholars to demand an explanation and to give some clarification about who was to be considered an unbeliever. When a good explanation was not forthcoming and Kublai threatened to execute all Muslims, a young Hanafi student advised the Khan that if he looked at all the Muslim law schools (*madhāhib*) he would find that they all disagreed with him on this issue. In the end, it was the Shafi'i and Samarkandi scholar Maulana Hamid al-Din who saved the day by giving a new interpretation of the Quranic verse that was in line with the Chinggisid understanding. According to him:

an unbeliever is someone who does not write the name of God above official orders (*yarligh*). If we find such a person, we will kill him. And anyone who writes the name of God above the official orders, he is a monotheist (*muwaḥḥid*) and his killing is not mentioned in any place in the Qur'an, but his life and properties are protected by God.<sup>128</sup>

The Khan found this interpretation utterly convincing: the Mongols believed in God, and writing His name above the royal orders was a good Chinggisid tradition.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 4177. Rashid al-Din has only the story without any of the words mentioned in the *Tarikh-i Alfi*: Rashid al-Din, *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, pp. 921–923. Mirkhwand also has this story, taken from Rashid al-Din. In contrast to Mulla Ahmad, Mirkhwand says that the Khan was not able to abolish his command because the *yasa* did not allow the Khan to change his words. So, his advisers told him just to punish anyone who wanted to report Muslims for slaughtering animals: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, p. 211.

<sup>128</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, pp. 4178–4179.

<sup>129</sup> *Tarikh-i Alfi* has taken this story from Rashid al-Din, who gives a slightly different version: 'You [the Khan] are not an unbeliever (*mushrik*) because you write the name of God above the order (*yarligh*). The unbeliever is the one who does not know the name of God, assumes a partner for Him, or denies God': Rashid al-Din, *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, pp. 922–923. Whereas Yazdi does not have it, Mirkhwand also narrates the story in detail, although he mentions that it was some Jews who

The last Mongol ruler whose religious views are discussed in the *Tarikh-i Alfī* is Kublai's son Timur.<sup>130</sup> Based on Rashid al-Din's narrative, it tells the story that during the reign of Timur, a certain Mongol prince named Ananda became Muslim because he grew up in the house of a Muslim aristocrat. Ananda's father did not object to the conversion and, once he succeeded his father as the ruler of Tangqut, many of his Mongol subjects also converted to Islam. When Ananda visited Timur, the latter asked him the reason for his conversion and even showed interest in converting himself. In his answer to the Khan, Ananda explained the central position of human beings in the hierarchy of creation and the fact that nothing can be compared to them since they are judged according to their deeds. Ananda added that the Mongols themselves were monotheists (*muwahhid*) and, as a result, God elevated them to become the kings of the world. At that stage, the *Alfī* breaks in on Rashid al-Din's narrative by praising Timur's mother, presented as a very intelligent woman (*‘āqiltarīn*) who told her son that the Khan must not interfere in people's religion and referred to some Mongol rulers who had already converted to Islam. Quoting her: 'the kings need supporters (*daulat khāhān*) and not people of the same religion (*ham madhhab*)'. She added that the supporter who follows another religion is a thousand times better than the enemy who follows your religion. The *Alfī* ends this story by saying that Timur was interested in Islam as he found it a good religion, and he announced that anyone who wished to do so could convert and that no one would object to it.<sup>131</sup>

### Conclusion: Mongol *akhlaq*

In its discussion of various Mongol imperial models, the *Alfī* also tells the story of the Ilkhanid ruler Abaqa Khan (r. 1265–1282).<sup>132</sup> Although not a Muslim himself, he allowed the Muslim scholar Nasir al-Din Tusi, that most famous

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informed Abaqa Khan about the verse and encouraged him to kill the Muslims. Abaqa Khan refused their interpretation of the verse and sent a letter to Kublai to ask his opinion about the issue. Then, Kublai gathered some Muslim scholars and discussed the verse with them. Surprisingly, Mirkhwand writes that Kublai convinced the Muslims scholars in a public debate that Chinggis Khan is equal to Muhammad, and that Mongols and Muslims should tolerate each other. He also adds that Kublai issued an order to make Mongol translations of the Quran, the Torah, the Bible, and Buddhist texts. He also ordered religious scholars to attend his court for debates: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, pp. 212–213.

<sup>130</sup> Rashid al-Din, *Jamī‘ al-Tawarikh*, pp. 951–953.

<sup>131</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfī*, Vol. 6, pp. 4239–4241; Rashid al-Din, *Jamī‘ al-Tawarikh*, p. 952. Other Mongol women also seem to have similar pragmatic attitudes towards religion. The *Alfī* gives at least two examples. First is Sarquqiti Begi the wife of Tolui, Chinggis Khan's son. It praises her for being very intelligent (*‘āqila-yi jahān*) and says that though she was a Christian by faith, she funded the construction of a *madrasa* in Bukhara under the direction of Sayf al-Din Bakharazi. She also supported the Muslims and appropriated salaries and charities for them: Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfī*, Vol. 6, pp. 3897–3898. The second example is Urghana who was Buddhist (*but parast*), but supported the Muslims: *ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 4006.

<sup>132</sup> George E. Lane, *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth-Century Iran: A Persian Renaissance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); David Morgan, 'The "Great Yāsā of Chingiz Khan" and Mongol Law in the Ilkhānate', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49, 1 (1986), pp. 163–176.

of *akhlāq* authors, to stand before the throne and read out his advice for the king on the occasion of his enthronement.<sup>133</sup> Although this happened, the *Alfi* assures us, Abaqa knew all Chinggisid laws by heart.<sup>134</sup> Two aspects of the story exemplify the assimilative agenda of the *Alfi* as a whole. First, the story poses Tusi as a wise Persianate philosopher who is perfectly able to combine his knowledge of astrology with *akhlāq* and other, deeper kinds of wisdom by quoting an unknown philosopher: 'the mind of the just king is the mirror of the invisible (*mughayyibāt*) that become visible in the light that rays from the divine' (*khātir-i padshāh-i 'ādil 'āyina-yi mughayyibāt ast ki az asha'a-yi anwār 'ālam-i quds 'aks pazir mishawad*).<sup>135</sup> So we find Tusi giving Abaqa advice grouped in two sets of ten which offer a selection from the traditional *akhlāq* literature involving issues of unity (*ittifāq*), strong will (*'azimat*), high mindedness (*'uluww-i himmat*), patience (*ṣabr-i ziyād*), and meritocracy (*bar qadr-i istihqāq wa isti'dād*).<sup>136</sup> These injunctions confirm what we have already noticed above: by speaking the language of *akhlāq*, the Mongols become *ex post facto* Persianized. For the patron and the authors of the *Alfi*, this was necessary in order to make the Mongols comprehensible and acceptable as kingly models.

Secondly, looking at Tusi's counsel, it is even more remarkable that not only do the Mongols speak *akhlāq*, but that Tusi speaks Mongol! The first set of advice roughly represents the words of Chinggis Khan. This becomes notable in the advice for the king to uphold his father's tradition and pay attention to those who were trusted by his father and reward them accordingly. Most of all, the advice admonishes the reader to respect everything that relates to the great *yasa* and to punish those who act against it and those who disobey the Khan.<sup>137</sup> What we see before our eyes is the marriage of Nasirian *akhlāq*, as represented by a Mongolized Tusi, with Chinggisid *yasa*, as represented by a Persianized Abaqa. Only at the very end of the episode, when the *Alfi* itself prays for the Khan in words (*pādshāh-i miskin nawāz*) more befitting a Mughal Padishah than a Mongol Khan, do we become aware of the contemporary relevance of this marriage.<sup>138</sup> Once again, it reminds readers of the *Alfi* that

<sup>133</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, pp. 4030–4033.

<sup>134</sup> *Tarikh-i Alfi* quotes Kublai saying that 'any Chinggisid who knows Chinggis Khan's *bilig*s very well, he deserves to be the Khan even if he is young in age': Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, p. 4236.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 4074.

<sup>136</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp. 259–261, 262.

<sup>137</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, pp. 4030–4031. For Chinggis Khan's words and deeds, see *ibid.*, Vol. 6, pp. 3742–3755. Tusi's counsels are so close to Chinggis Khan's words and deeds that one may think that Mulla Ahmad just reproduced Chinggis's words and attributed them to Tusi. He also stresses the fact that Abaqa Khan strictly followed the Chinggisid legacy by declaring that 'everyone may keep the customs and religion of their fathers and in that respect should not interfere or disturb one another' (*har kas rūsūm wa 'āin ābā' wa ajdād-i khud rā nigāh dāshta az ta'arruḍ digarī dast-i khud rā kashida dārad*). Mulla Ahmad has taken the narrative on Tusi from Mirkhwand, but he has changed them slightly to fit his work. Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, 274–275, gives 17 pieces of advice.

<sup>138</sup> Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Vol. 6, pp. 4031–4032. Mirkhwand mentions *khan-i miskin nawāz*: Mirkhwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Vol. 5, p. 275. Abul Fazl also mentions similar epithets for Akbar like '[one] who rubs balm on the festering wounds of the hearts' (*marham band-i nāsūr-i dīl*

the history of the Mongols will repeat itself under the Mughals. As in the case of Abaqa, Akbar will build his kingdom on a marriage between Persianate *akhlāq* and Pax Mongolica. In fact, it is through *akhlāq* that the peace of the Mongols will become the Mughal peace for all.

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*khastagān*) or ‘plaster for the broken hearted’ (*mūmiyā-yi shikasta dīlān*): Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, Vol. 1, pp. 4–5, 20–21.

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