

**Nomadic Dynasties and the
Decline of the Muslim World:
Evidence from Iran, Iraq, and
Central Asia (1037-1505)**

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The year 1037 refers to the beginning of the establishment of the Seljuq Empire in the Eastern Caliphate. The Safavid Dynasty was established in 1502.

- At least until the eleventh century the Muslim World was more advanced than the West.
- At some point a divergence took place.
- The question of why a 'puzzle' & controversy

- I will test the hypothesis that the recurrence of nomadic conquests and rule from about the eleventh to the sixteenth century was the main cause of the stagnation/decline.
 - Argue that nomadic institutional characteristics were in conflict with and obstructive to development of institutions that could lead to economic development.
 - Particularly the impact on development of private property was negative, persistent uncertainty undermined incentives & resulted in long term stagnation and decline.

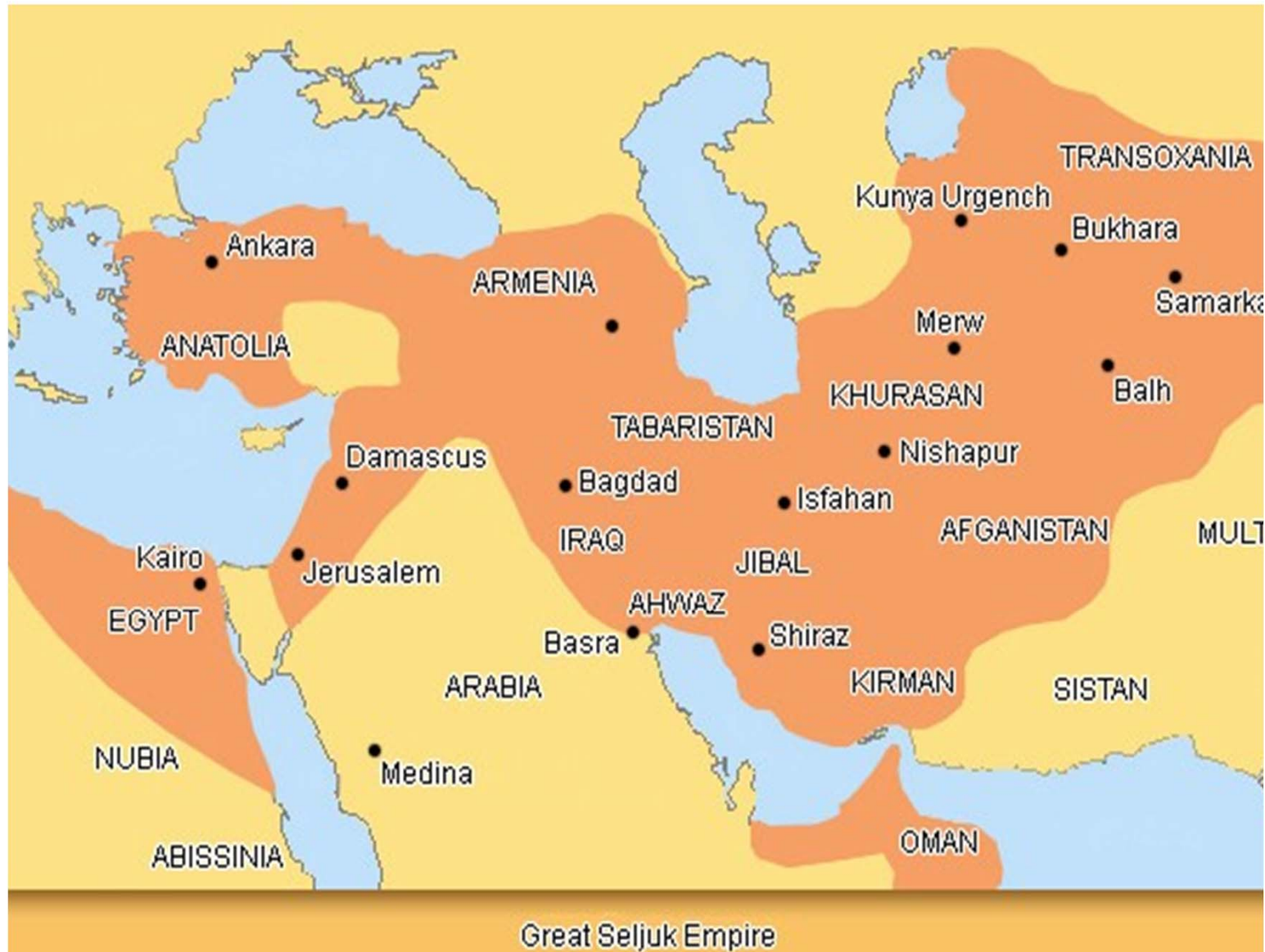
Area Under Study

- Evidence used from Iran, Iraq, and Western and Southern Central Asia.

During the period, with some exceptions, these territories were ruled under a single conqueror or a major nomadic dynasty.

- Nomadic conquests extended well beyond this area.
- See maps in order to grasp the magnitude of these conquests.

Seljuq Empire

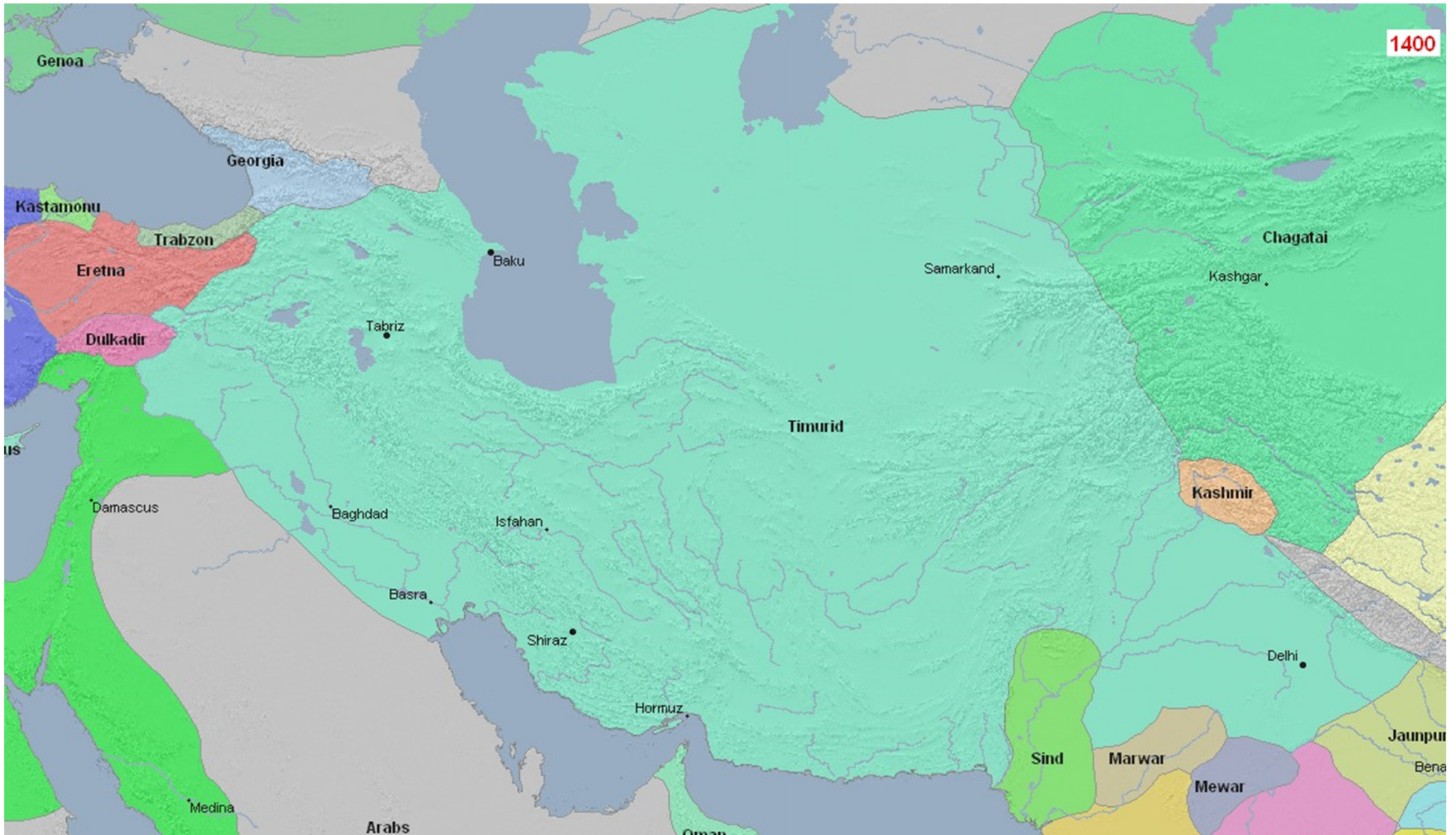


Mongol Empire

Mongol Empire, A.D. 1294



Timuria Empire



- Many scholars have noted the importance of nomadic conquests in the history of eastern civilizations.
- Central in the dynastic theory of the celebrated fourteenth-century Arab historian Ibn Khaldun is the role of nomadic dynasties.
- The prominent historian of European feudalism Marc Bloch noted: only in Western Europe and Japan were there no further tribal invasions after about the tenth and eleventh century.

Bloch: the cessation of tribal invasions may have been a contributor to the distinct pattern of development in Western Europe.

Period:

- Beginning the eleventh Century: Seljuq rule, to the sixteenth Century the rise of the Safavids and the major expansions of the Ottoman Empire.
- It should be noted that by the sixteenth century Europe had undergone major structural and institutional changes and the divergence had already taken place.

Conceptual Frame

- The theoretical underpinning is institutional economics as formulated by Douglas North (1990: 3).
- As many economic historians have, I assumed a central role for institution of private property in economic development.

Definition of Property rights

- Definitions in economic literature are limited to private property in advanced capitalist societies, not relevant to our discussion.
- We are dealing with rights that may not either be fully absent or developed.
- Also interested in the dynamic direction of change in the rights: positive or negative

- **Used three somewhat inter-related criteria:**
 - **Security: perpetuity** of rights, versus **arbitrary confiscations, destruction of property**
 - **Clarity:** presence of a specific owner with well-defined rights; versus **presence of competing claimants** on land, e.g. levels of land grantees with land owners and peasants; **communal land ownership, privatized land grants with the potential of revocation**, etc. are unclear.
 - **Mechanism of transfer: peaceful**, non-discriminatory, and **non-coercive market**, inheritance, & gift-giving, mechanism, & reclamation of dead-lands versus **military** and other **forceful** transfers.

III. Literature Review

No time for adequate review.

- A recent study by Timur Kuran is widely referenced.
- Argues: **egalitarian** (division of merchant inheritance within a polygamous household among wives and children), **static, and immutable Islamic Law, *shari'a*, obstructed accumulation of capital.**
- **My argument:** nomadic dynasties challenged the very essence of **private property**, and **marginalized the Muslim Law** at a time when **Western Europe underwent structural transformations.**

- Consensus that the early Muslim commercial and property laws were flexible and dynamic (Kuran agrees)
- The requirement of conformity of the Law to the Qura'anic statements and the sayings of the prophet, *hadith*, generally referred as an immutable and static characteristic is outcome of the triumph of the conservatives during the **ninth and tenth centuries**.
- Nevertheless the **property and commercial law continued to evolve positively into the eleventh** century sometimes in ways that were **not in full conformity with the *Qur'an* and the *hadith***.

- **Most importantly a major regressive interpretation** of the property law that is **contrary to the basic Islamic tenets** took place during the **late eleventh century**. The renowned Seljuq vizir Nizam ul-Mulk and his contemporaneous Muslim jurists interpreted the **Muslim ideal of god as the ultimate owner to the *sultan*'s divine ownership right over all land**.
- For a religion whose **prophet had adamantly denied any divinity** and repeatedly stated that he was a man like everyone else, **claiming divinity for the *sultan* could even be considered apostasy!**
- The interpretation is reminiscent of the idea of tribal khan being the theoretical owner of all tribal lands, & provided religious sanction for the arbitrary confiscations. It also implied monopoly for the *sultan* in arbitrariness.
- The **thirteenth century Mongols did not even pretend to adhere the Muslim law. They followed the Mongol tradition of the *yasa***.

Nomadism

- Nomadism is adaptation of production to arid climatic conditions through specialization in pasture and periodic mobility.
- Mobility prevents specialization in handicrafts thus the first main division of social labor that between pastoral and industrial, does not take place, no significant accumulation of productive capital and know how. **Nomadic production technology is conservative it reproduces a simple economy.**
- Mobility & access to animal power have contributed to **nomadic military power.**

- Because of conservative technology wealth can only be attained through use of military power and plundering the wealth of others.
- Tribal alliances increased military power and potential for plunder. Sometimes presence of capable military leaders resulted in formation of nomadic empires.
- Technological conservatism obstructed evolution of a complex sociopolitical hierarchy with lasting political centralization. Once the external conditions, individual leaderships, and potential for plunder changed the tribes tended to return into disunity.

	Remaining Dynasties	Disintegration of the Dynasties
<p>Seljuqs major expansion (1038-1072)</p> <p>most Central Asia, Iran, Iraq, Syria most Anatolia, Palestine, Georgia, & Armenia</p>	<p>Initial split of the Empire: Seljuqs of Kirman, (1041-1187), Seljuqs of Rum, Anatolia (1077-1307), The Great Seljuqs, Eastern Iran & parts of Central Asia (1118-1157), Seljuqs of Iraq & Western Iran (1118-1194)</p>	<p>Various remnants of Seljuq tribal leaders called Atabacan, e.g., Atabakane Fars, Atabakane Kirman, etc., also ghurian, & other tribal leaders ruled in different parts and fought each-other, Kharazmshahian also split</p>
<p>Mongols: Chengiz (1220-1227) Northern China, most Central Asia, parts of Iran Central Asia, parts of Iran Hulagu (1253-1265) remaining parts of Iran & conquest of Iraq & Syria Georgia & Armenia</p>	<p>Chagatai, son of Chengiz & his descendents parts of Central Asia (1259-1324) Ilkhanids, descendents of Hulagu (1295-1335) Iran, Iraq & parts of Central Asia</p>	<p>Jalayerian (1340-1410), Chubanian (1335-1356), Ilkhania, Several Atabakn, Southern Iran, Ale Mozaffar, Qar Quyunloo (1375-1468), Armenia, Azarbaijan, & Iraq Also various urban movements known as 'sarbedaran' overtook power in parts of Khrasan, Gilan, Mazandaran, & Kirman</p>
<p>Timurids: Timur (1370-1405), Central Asia, Pakistan, part of Northern India, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Armenia Azarbaijan, Georgia, Most Anatolia</p>	<p>Timurids (1405-1526) Central Asia & Khorasan</p>	<p>Aq Quyunloo, (1478-1490), Iraq, Jalayerian (1340-1410), remnants of Timurids, others</p>

- Periods of unified rule short, breakup into a few dynasties, eventually into small principalities.
- Nearly the entire five hundred years accompanied with warfare & destruction. The major conquerors involved in expansion, the split dynasties warfare to neutralize internal tribal autonomy or external conquest, minor rulers fighting each other.
- Political disintegration followed by a new conquest, due to the proximity to the steppes of Central Asia.

Nomadic Impact on Land Ownership Rights

Security:

- A new conquest resulted in massive confiscations and the rise of a new landed elite.
 - At the beginning of the eleventh century, most land owners in Iran and Central Asia were of Persian descent.
 - At the time of the Mongol invasion, many were of Turkish descent.
 - After the Mongol invasion, the composition of the land-holding elite changed drastically.
- Property rights were also negated by turning agricultural lands into pastures,
- and by destruction of the irrigation networks and cultivated lands.

Clarity

- In settled agriculture each farmer can cultivate an identifiable plot and aspire to claim ownership over it.
- Nomadic possession or usufruct right of pasture is a tribal communal sharing.
- With development of a tribal hierarchy, the elite assumed ownership claim over the pastures. But the tribesmen had to be maintained and the produce shared, albeit unequally: unclear private/communal proprietorship.
- In a tribal federation, it was unclear whether the lands were owned by the chief leader, nomadic elites, or jointly by all tribesmen. Also not clear whether the tribesmen were free or forced soldiers, they had to participate at war. Ambiguity existed at all levels.

- The Mongol term *ulus* denotes both the politico-military organization and the tribal lands controlled by tribal khans.
- Chengiz Khan divided his empire into four *uluses* each going to one of his sons and there were multi layers of sub-*uluses*.
- He viewed himself not only the leader, but also the owner of the tribesmen and delegated this ambiguous ownership/leadership position downwards.
- Similar but less hierarchical organizations and subdivision existed among the Turkish tribes. The Seljuqs granted large territorial grants, *iqta'*, with layers of subdivisions.

Ambiguity in territorial grants

- In theory, the ruler owned all lands, in practice grants were often de facto recognition of territorial control by the tribal elite.
- It was unclear whether the grantee viewed himself as tax collector, owner, or plunderer of the assigned lands.
- There were competing claimants on land: different layers of land grantees and their tribal contingents, private landowners, *malik*, and peasants.

Administrative and Islamic Impacts on Land Tenure

- Nomadic conquerors lacked institutions and skills needed to rule, hired skilled sedentary administrators.
- Primary objective of administrators was maintaining **central rule** which required systematic tax collection for payment to the army and bureaucracy.
- Nomadic territorial grantees controlled both tax collection and local military contingents. They could, and often did, refrain from channeling taxes to the treasury.
- Tax collection depended on the monarch's military ability to force or threaten to force the elite to pay. The **enforcement mechanism was thus primarily military and only secondarily administrative.**
- Centralized rule with semblance of order was always short lived.

Privatization Tendencies

- While arbitrariness persisted, it was modified during the post-conquest periods.
- Over time political decentralization reduced the state's claim over large territories contributing to a privatization trend.
- Under an existing dynasty, land grants tended to become hereditary.
- Also the market mechanism and the Islamic legal system had a chance to prevail.
- The comparative **privatization processes** was **disrupted** by a **new conquest** and the rise of a new ruling elite.

Economic Conditions

- Conquests, destruction, violation of the property rights, persistent states of warfare, and political instability resulted in economic devastation and decline.
- The Mongol conquests most destructive.
- Extent and scope of economic devastation depended on the relative weight of nomadic versus settled institutions.

- Seljuqs were least destructive: prior to conquest had settled in the Iranian plateau, and converted to Islam. Unlike the Mongols there is no evidence of major massacres, massive enslavement of urban craftsmen, and deliberate attempts at annihilation of the cities.
- Also, the post-conquest dynasties were less destructive than the conquerors. Under the influence of their reformist administrators, some rulers tried to improve the economic conditions.
- Warfare among disintegrating dynasties were comparatively less brutal than the initial conquerors, property rights were less insecure, and some tried to reconstruct their economies.
- Dynastic disintegrations, however, followed by new massive destructive conquests.

Comparison of Seljuq and Ilkhanid Taxes

Regions of Il-Khan state	In Il-Khanid dinars	
	Bureau of Taxes	Bureau of Taxes
	Pre-Mongol	1335-40
Arabian Iraq	30,000,000	3,000,000
Persian Iraq	25,000,000	2,333,600
Azarbaijan	20,000,000	2,160,000
Arran & Mughan	3,000,000	303,000
Shirvan	1,000,000	113,000
Gushasfi	1,000,000	118,500
Georgia	1,000,000	1,202,000
Rum (Asia Minor)	15,000,000	3,300,000
Great Armenia	2,000,000	390,000
Upper Mesopotamia	10,000,000	1,925,000
Eastern Kurdistan	2,000,000	201,500
Khuzistan	3,000,000	325,000
Fars	10,500,000	2,871,200
Shabankara	2,000,000	266,100
Kirman & Makran	880,000	676,500
Total	126,380,000	19,185,400

Source: Petrushevsky (1960) *Zemledelie i agranie otnosbeniya i Iran XIII-XIV vv*, M. L. Cited in Petrushevsky, 1968: 498.

- Not examined the factors that contributed to the development of Western European capitalism.
- Assertion that the inheritance system of primogeniture evolved out of European feudalism was an important contributor to the rise of capitalism

- Despite the differences, parallels be drawn between the disintegration of the Seljuq and the Carolingian (750-887) empire in Western Europe.
- Carolingian empire land grants together with obligation of service were given to the family members and other tribal notables.
- After Charlemagne territorial rivalries and claims to independence ensued and the empire began to disintegrate and was ruled by the elite tribal leaders.
- Overtime the land grants together with obligations and titles became hereditary, albeit with limited instances of confiscations by the kings or the powerful lords.
- One person inherited the land, the title and the obligations,
- Land remained undivided and the system of primogeniture evolved.
- The system of primogeniture was subsequently transferred to other forms of property.

- In the Muslim world ample examples of land grants in return for military and bureaucratic services.
- The grants and the relevant obligations and titles often remained within the same family.
- Usually, after the death of the grantee, the ruler either issued a renewal or a powerful family member usurped the land and the title.
- These lands were not subject to division through the inheritance law.
- In comparison to Western Europe, however, frequent dynastic changes resulted in massive reallocations and redistributions of the land grants.
- Thus the land grants, and in general private property rights did not evolve in a comparable extent as those of Western Europe.
- The main difference, thus, may have been the frequency of the nomadic conquests.