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Armenian Involvement in the Latin-Mongol Crusade: Uses of the Magi and Prester John in Constable Smbat's *Letter* and Hayton of Corycus's "*Flos historiarum terre orientis*," 1248-1307

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Abstract

This paper examines the issue of how Armenians and Nestorians in the Mongol service used the Western legends about the Orient to influence the crusading plans of the Latin Christians between 1248 and 1307. In particular, it considers the role of the ruling elite of Cilician Armenia as mediators between Mongols and Franks in *Outremer*, first discussing the *Letter* of Cilician Constable Smbat (1248), and then examining the treatise "*Flos historiarum terre orientis*" by Hayton of Corycus (Het'um/Haitonus, 1307) with the crusading proposal contained in it. This article examines the narrative techniques used by Smbat and Het'um to produce a positive image of the Mongols/Tatars for Western readers in a wider cultural context of contemporary European perception of the Orient. In particular, it researches how Smbat incorporated the stories about the Magi and Prester John into the description of the Mongol Empire and the spread of Christianity within it. Special attention is given to a comparison of Armenian sources written for internal (Armenian) and external (Frankish) readers. This article also develops a hypothesis that Armenian diplomacy used Louis IX of France's letter and his envoy William of Rubruck to enforce the position of the Cilician king Het'um I at the Mongol court in 1254.

Keywords

Christian-Mongol relations – Cilician Armenia – crusading project – Nestorians – Prester John – the Magi – historical imagination – diplomacy – Constable Smbat – Hayton/Het'um of Corycus

Introduction

After the fall of Acre in 1291, many people in western Europe declared their intention to take the cross and go on crusade. Some of them elaborated detailed projects about how to regain control over the Holy Land. At that time, Cilician Armenians also proposed crusading projects. Unfortunately, however, these Armenian crusaders are traditionally underestimated in Western perspectives on crusading.¹ For a better understanding of the Crusades, we should not limit our study to Western and Moslem perspectives, but also pay attention to perceptions of the crusading idea by eastern Christians.

In turning my attention to such perceptions, the main questions I ask in this paper are as follows: How did Armenians arrange their relations with the Tatars and Latins/Franks during the late crusading period? What arguments did Armenians use in order to involve the Latins in an alliance with the Mongols? How was the *Letter* of Cilician Constable Smbat (1248) influenced by the Franks' perception of the Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century? How did the Armenians and Nestorians in the Mongol service use the Western legends about the Orient to influence Louis IX's crusading plans in 1248-1254? And how

1 I found only five works devoted exactly to the Het'um's *Flos* and published in the main European languages during the last century: Wolfgang Giese, "Asiekunde für den kreuzfahrenden Westen. Die 'Flos historiarum terrae orientis' des Hayto von Gorhigos (O.Praem.) aus dem Jahre 1307," *Secundum regulam vivere. Festschrift für P.Norbert Backmund O.Praem.* G. Melville (Hrsg.) (Windberg, 1978), 245-264; D.D. Bundy, "Het'um's *La Flor des Estories de la terre d'Orient*: A Study in Medieval Armenian Historiography and Propaganda," *Revue des études arméniennes*, n.s. 20 (1986-1987): 223-235; Het'um of Armenia, *A Lytell Cronycle. Richard Pynson's Translation (c 1520) of La Fleur des histories de la terre d'Orient (1307)*, ed. G. Burger (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Het'um of Armenia, *Die Geschichte der Mongolen des Hethum von Korykos (1307) in der Rückübersetzung durch Jean le Long "Traitez des estas et des conditions de quatorze royaumes de Aise" (1351): kritische Edition mit parallelem Abdruck des lateinischen Manuskripts Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, R 262*, ed. S. Dörper (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998); Glenn Burger, "Cilician Armenian métissage and Hetoum's 'La Fleur des histories de la terre d'Orient,'" *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. J.J. Cohen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 67-83.

did Hayton/Het'um of Corycus describe and interpret the Mongols' military activities in the Middle East in order to construct their positive image of his crusading treatise of 1307 for the Western readers?

In providing answers to these questions, I employ methods of close reading, content analysis and textual analysis of chosen sources,² including a comparative approach, and some methods used in the so-called "history of books," as well as models of the reconstruction of cultural perspectives, historical imagination and political uses of the past elaborated in the research of Thomas Allsen,³ Bernard Hamilton,⁴ Peter Jackson,⁵ Igor de Rachewiltz,⁶ and Felicitas Schmieder,⁷ among others. I begin with the description of Frankish-Armenian-Tatar relations in the thirteenth through early fourteenth century Middle East, first looking at rumors about the Orient that reached western Europe and at how they were used and interpreted there. I will examine the efforts of the Armenian elite of the Cilician Kingdom to produce a positive image of the Tatars as potential allies of the Latin crusaders and a new crusade project proposed by the aristocrat Het'um in 1307. Then, I will consider different approaches that Armenians used to describe the Tatars "for themselves" and "for Western readers." I will consider the construction of the arguments and the narrative strategies applied by the authors for different purposes. Finally,

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- 2 A few publications are good examples: L.H. Hornstein, "The Historical Background of *The King of Tars*," *Speculum* 16, no.4 (1941): 404-414; D. Higgs Strickland. *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 192-209; A. Leopold, *How to Recover the Holy Land. The Crusade Proposals of the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); R. Urbański, *Tartarorum gens brutalis. Trzynastowieczne najazdy mongolskie w literaturze polskiego średniowiecza na porównawczym tle piśmiennictwa łacińskiego antyku i wieków średnich* [The Thirteenth-Century Mongol Incursions in the Polish Medieval Literature in Comparison with the Literature of the Latin Antiquity and Middle Ages] (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2007).
- 3 T.T. Allsen, "The Cultural Worlds of Marco Polo," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no.3 (2001): 375-383.
- 4 B. Hamilton, "Prester John and the Three Kings of Cologne," in *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes*, ed. Ch.F. Beckingham and B. Hamilton (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 171-185.
- 5 P. Jackson, "Hülegü Khan and the Christians: the Making of a Myth," in *The Experience of Crusading*, vol. 2, ed. P. Edbury and J. Philips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 196-213.
- 6 I. de Rachewiltz, "Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia," *East Asian History* 11 (1996): 59-74.
- 7 F. Schmieder, "Christians, Jews, Muslims—and Mongols: Fitting a Foreign People into Western Christian Apocalyptic Scenario," *Medieval Encounters* 12, no. 2 (2006): 274-295.

I will return to the framework within which any information received about the newcomers had to fit.

The Franks, Armenians and Mongols in Outremer

When members of the First Crusade entered Cappadocia and Cilicia, they received unexpected assistance from the Armenian princes. The local Armenians were, for the most part, migrants from Greater Armenia after its conquest by the Seljuks following the battle of Manzikert in 1071. In 1187, the kingdom of Cilician Armenia became a recognized political entity. Armenian king Leon I (1187-1219) participated in the crusaders' siege of Acre. Perhaps because of frequent intermarriage with Armenian aristocracy, the Franks treated the Armenian Church with great respect. Throughout the twelfth century the Armenian and Roman Churches drew closer together, and a union of churches was established in 1198. The Kingdom of Armenia was inaugurated on the feast of Three Kings (January 6, 1198) as a vassal state of the Empire, in communion with the Roman Church.⁸

In the thirteenth century, the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, situated in the Eastern Mediterranean, was constantly under the pressure from the Seljuks. The only hope for Armenians to save their Kingdom was a new crusade directed at recovering neighboring Jerusalem, conquered by the Saracens in 1187. The thirteenth century saw three unsuccessful crusades undertaken by the Latin Christians to the Holy Land. Nevertheless, the arrival of the Mongols in Persia in the 1230s-1240s, and with it the possibility of a Latin-Mongol alliance, provided a chance for the survival of the crusader states of *Outremer*. In 1243-1244, the Mongols had conquered the Seljuk Sultanate of Iconium and came to the borders of the Cilician kingdom. The Armenian Constable Smbat and later his brother King Het'um I (1226-1270) undertook a long journey across Asia to submit their allegiance in person to the Great Khan in his capital Karakorum in 1247-1250 and 1253-1255, respectively.⁹ The Mongols guaranteed Cilician autonomy under the suzerainty of a Great Khan and freedom of religion. In 1256-1258, Īl-khān Hülegü/Hulawu, brother of the Great Khan Möngke/Mangu,

8 J.D. Ryan, "Toleration Denied: Armenia between East and West in the Era of the Crusades," *Tolerance and Intolerance: Social Conflict in the Age of the Crusades*, ed. M. Gervers and J.M. Powell (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 57; T.S.R. Boase, "The History of the Kingdom," in *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, ed. T.S.R. Boase (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 19.

9 For more details, see: Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, "Submissions to the Mongol Empire by the Armenians," *Mongolian and Tibetan Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2009): 76-103, in particular 84-94; Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220-1335)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

conquered Mesopotamia, including Baghdad, and destroyed the Abbasid Caliphate. At that time, Mongol expansion and power were reaching their zenith, and, because the Mongols believed their mission to be the total subjugation of the world, any future ally must first acknowledge their overlordship. Such a condition was, of course, inimical to the Latin states in *Outremer*. Moreover, in the eyes of the Latins, the Tatars were seen initially as the fulfillment of the Prester John stories. However, after the destruction of Hungary and Poland in 1241-1242 and closer inspection of papal envoy John of Plano Carpini (*Pian de Carpine*) in 1246-1247, they were viewed as semi-barbaric pagan hordes threatening Europe.¹⁰ Therefore, with the exception of the principality of Antioch, ruled by Het'um's son-in-law Bohemond VI, the Latin Christians refused the idea of an alliance with the Mongols directed against Egypt.

In 1260, a combined army of Hülegü, Het'um I, and Bohemond VI invaded Syria, sacked Aleppo in January, captured Damascus in March, and occupied the Ayyubid principalities in Syria and Palestine. But the death of the Great Khan Möngke in the previous year forced Hülegü to divert his attention eastward to the election of the new Great Khan disputed by Möngke's brothers Kublay and Arikboge. Hülegü became preoccupied with the defense of his northern border threatened by Berke, khan of the Golden Horde. For this reason, Hülegü stopped his expansion in Palestine and left there only a small garrison of around ten to twenty thousand men. The Latin Christians in *Outremer* imagined that they, in turn, would suffer a Mongol attack. However, except for an assault on Sidon in late July or early August, the blow never fell upon them. In August, Qutuz, the Mamluk sultan of Egypt, aided by the benevolent neutrality of the Franks who allowed him to pass through their territory and supplied him with victuals, led his army into Syria.¹¹ On September 3, 1260, in the battle of Ain-Jalut, not far from Jerusalem, this Mongol force led by Ket-Bugha (Ketboge, Kitbuqa) with the alien Armenian troops was defeated by Qutuz.¹² The Mamluks reoccupied most of Syria and ravaged Antioch and Cilician Armenia the following year. In 1266, Sultan Baybars turned on Cilicia and pillaged it for twenty days. Two years later, on May 12, 1268, the Mamluks stormed

10 Rachewiltz, "Prester John," 67-68.

11 P.W. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191-1374* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 87. For more details see also: R. Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks—the Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Peter Jackson, "The Crisis in the Holy Land in 1260," *English Historical Review* 95 (1980): 481-513.

12 "500 men from Cilicia." Sirarpie der Nersessian, "The Armenian Chronicle of the Constable Smpad or of the 'Royal Historian,'" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959): 160.

Antioch, and a terrible massacre and destruction ensued. This observed pattern of sporadic Mongol aid and subsequent Egyptian vengeance continued into the early fourteenth century.

The 1261-1266 war for succession of the Great Khan marked the disintegration of the Mongol Empire into four rival states under the formal suzerainty of the Great Khan in Khanbalik (Beijing). By the time Latin Christians were able to tolerate the idea of an alliance with the Mongols, Mongol power in the Middle East had slowly declined. Western Christendom was completely unprepared when the Īl-khān Ghazan/Cassan, with Armenian and Georgian support, invaded Syria in October 1299. On December 24, Ghazan inflicted a decisive defeat on the Mamluks near Homs. In January 1300, Damascus surrendered, but the following month Ghazan retreated to Persia, and it was not long before Mamluks were able to re-occupy the territory he had seized.¹³

The chronicles report that immediately after the fall of Damascus, Ghazan sent an embassy to Boniface VIII who in turn sent it to the kings of France and England. Again, in 1302, a report circulated that Ghazan had appealed for aid to the pope with the promise of his willingness to restore the Holy Land to the Christians. Although the Western rulers had not responded affirmatively to Ghazan's pleas, Oljaitu, Ghazan's successor, was still hopeful of assistance; and in May 1305, he sent envoys to the pope, Philip IV, and Edward I.

A new project of joint crusade was proposed at that time by a nephew of King Het'um I. In 1307, Het'um Patmich (also known as *Haitonus Armenus*, *Hayto de Curcus*, or commonly Hayton of Corycus) was at the papal court in Poitiers (France). There, Het'um presented his project of a new crusade with the assistance of the Tatar rulers—Īl-khāns—of Persia. He also described ten parts of Asia, Egypt, and the history of the Tatars and their current relations with the sultans of Egypt. Het'um's information was written down by a scribe, Nicolas Falcon, in Old French and then translated into Latin at the request of Pope Clemens V. Het'um's work, generally known as "Flos historiarum terre orientis" or "La flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient," is distinctive and compelling for the range and depth of his knowledge, since he was a first-hand observer of many of the events he describes. On the other hand, description of Armenian-Mongol relations by Het'um is very much contested. It cannot be treated

13 Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus*, 104. See also: Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "Whither the Ilkhanid Army? Ghazan's First Campaign into Syria (1299-1300)," in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 221-265; R. Amitai-Preiss, "Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War against the Mamluks," in *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy*, ed. R. Amitai-Preiss and D.O. Morgan. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 57-72; A.D. Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks. War and Diplomacy during the Reigns of Het'um II (1289-1307)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

without taking into account all necessary historical and ideological background.¹⁴ For a better understanding of Het'um's treatise, I shall put it in the context of the writings, ideas, and rumors of the epoch.

Baptised Mongol Rulers, Prester John, and the Magi

The crucial problem the Westerners had with such a Mongol alliance was precisely that the Mongols were not Christians. Due to Western Christians' experiences, as well as to theological and, moreover, canonical theories, the Christians could not trust a heathen ally: they urgently needed a Christian partner.¹⁵ The Armenian elite along with the Nestorian Christians, whose colonies were dispersed around Asia dominated by the Mongols, made numerous attempts to promote an image of Mongol rulers as friends of the Christians. Moreover, the propagandists who were in favor of the Mongol alliance raised hopes by suggesting that the Khans were close to baptism or even by spreading rumors that they had already been baptised.¹⁶ The image of Prester John, a powerful Christian king of India of the Magi/Three Holy Kings lineage, was produced in twelfth-century western Europe in the course of a twenty-year struggle between Pope Alexander III and Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa. At about that time a letter "written" by Prester John began to circulate in western Europe probably produced by the supporters of the Emperor who attempted to control the church.¹⁷

The Prester John story continued to shape the imagination of the Franks long after its original purpose had been forgotten.¹⁸ News of the turmoil caused by the Mongol invasion of Central Asia in 1218-1220, and of the plight of the Muslim world, reached the crusaders and raised considerable hope among them. In Franks' minds, the Mongols were connected with the mythical people of Prester John, or of his son David, and were viewed as Christians, thus potential allies of the crusaders. In 1221, to the armies gathered round Damietta in

14 The edition of the French text of Het'um's *La flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient* is *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents arméniens, II*, ed. C. Kohler (Paris: E. Leroux, 1906).

15 Schmieder, "Christians, Jews, Muslims," 287.

16 Schmieder, "Christians, Jews, Muslims," 287.

17 Hamilton, "Prester John," 176-177.

18 M. Münkler, *Erfahrung des Fremden. Die Beschreibung Ostasiens in den Augenzeugenberichten des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), 187-205; H. Franco, "La construction d'une utopie: l'Empire de Prestre Jean," *Journal of Medieval History* 23 (1997): 211-225; U. Knefelkamp, "Der Priesterkönig Johannes und sein Reich—Legende oder Realität?" *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988): 337-355. See also the recent discussion by A. Knobler, "The Power of Distance: The Transformation of European Perceptions of Self and Other, 1100-1600," *Medieval Encounters* 19 (2013): 434-480, at 440-443.

Egypt, James of Vitry (Jacobus Vitriacus) “publicly preached that David, king of the two Indies, hastened to the help of the Christians, bringing with him most ferocious peoples who will devour like beasts the sacrilegious Saracens.”¹⁹

In the same year of 1221, the chronicle of Alberic of the Three Fountains (*Albericus Trium Fontium*) recorded that King David came to Cumania and Russia where he destroyed some countries and killed many thousands of Cumans and Russians. In his entry for the following year, Alberic specifies that King David and his army are called Tatars by the Hungarians and Cumans.²⁰ Under the year 1223, Ricardus of Sancto Germano records: “The king of Hungary notified the pope through his ambassadors, that a certain King David, commonly called Prester John, with an unlimited multitude of people, had come to Russia. He had left India seven years ago, carrying the body of the blessed Apostle Thomas; and in one day they killed 200 000 Russians and Cumans (Plavci) . . .”²¹ With the withdrawals of the Mongol forces led by Jebe and Subetei in 1223 “the rumour that had spread on their behalf, vanished in no time.” The hope of the crusaders aroused by the coming of the Prester John or David to their rescue turned out to be false.²²

Then, in the course of the disastrous Mongol invasion into Poland and Hungary—that is into the true Latin Christendom—the Tatars were perceived as the fulfilment of Saint John’s *Apocalypse*²³ and the Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius (ca. 700). According to the alarming letters of the Catholic bishops, abbots and monarchs, which Matthew of Paris (1195/1200-1259) included in his *Chronica Majora*, Tatars were seen as Gog and Magog, as wild peoples confined by Alexander the Great within the Caspian Mountains (*Mons Caspius*) with the Iron Gates (*Porta Ferrae* or *Portae Caspiae*), and who finally escaped their prison to destroy the world. And the Jews were accused of being secret allies of the Mongols since the latter were also seen as the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes (*decem tribuum Judaeorum*).²⁴ A terrible and mysterious mythical Jewish horde was hidden somewhere in the East, awaiting the signal of the Antichrist

19 D. Sinor, “The Mongols in the West,” *Journal of Asian History* 33, no. 1 (1999): 1-44, at 4.

20 Alberich von Trois-Fontaines (Triumfontium) Ordo Cisterciensis, “Chronica,” *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, vol. 23, ed. Paul Scheffer-Boichorst (Hannover 1874), 911-912.

21 *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, ed. C.A. Garufi (Rome, 1936-1938), vol. 7/2.

22 Sinor, “The Mongols in the West,” 5.

23 Revelation 20:7.

24 A.-D. von den Brincken, *Fines Terrae. Die Enden der Erde und der vierte Kontinent auf mittelalterlichen Weltkarten* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1992), 89, 94, 105; A.C. Gow, “Gog and Magog on Mappaemundi and Early Printed Maps: Orientalizing Ethnography in the Apocalyptic Tradition,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 2, no. 1 (1998): 1-28.

to pour out its annihilating force upon Christendom from their secret retreat within the Caspian Mountains (so-called *iudei inclusi*).²⁵ Matthew of Paris refers to the identification of the Mongols with the Ten Lost Tribes in the *Chronica Majora*²⁶ and reports a rumor that the Jews planned to furnish arms and supplies to the Mongols.²⁷

The long expectations of the powerful and magnificent Prester John, the King of India, who will assist the Christians in their struggle against the Saracens, were interrupted so radically with the Mongol invasion of 1241–1242. Nonetheless, at the same time Matthew of Paris cites the letter of Ivo de Narbonne with possible explanations for the very unexpected Mongol appearance in Europe. In the first position, Ivo placed the note that the Mongols invented that they left their motherland in order to recover the Three Kings' relics from Köln.²⁸

According to Denis Sinor, Throughout the history of Mongol relations with Europe, contacts, both hostile and friendly, were established and maintained in two theaters of operation. Information flowed through two separate channels. Interaction between Mongols and the West took place either in *Outremer*, through the crusaders, or in Eastern Europe, mainly through Hungary. This two-pronged approach, be it peaceful or warlike, is seldom taken into account by historians.²⁹

This account could explain why in the imagination of Latin Europe, the Tatars had actually two faces: positive, as the enemies of the Saracens in *Outremer*, and negative, as cruel barbarians, cannibals, and as a possible harbinger of

25 S. Lewis, "Tractatus adversus Judaeos in the Gulbenkian Apocalypse," *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 4 (1986): 543-566, at 543. For more details see also: A.C. Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age, 1200-1600* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 53-57; S. Menache, "Tartars, Jews, Saracens and the Jewish-Mongol 'Plot' of 1241," *History* 81 (1996): 319-342.

26 "Creduntur isti Tartari, quorum memoria est detestabilis, fuisse de decem tribubus, qui abierunt, relicta lege Mosaica, post vitulos aureos; quas etiam Alexander Macedo primo conatus est includere in praeceptis montibus Caspiorum molaribus bituminatis." Matthaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani, *Chronica majora*, ed. H. Richards Luard (London, 1872-1873), 4:77. See also: A.R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1932).

27 Matthaei Parisiensis, *Chronica majora*, 131.

28 Matthaei Parisiensis, *Chronica majora*, 272. Namely, the bones of the Three Kings "unearthed" in 1158 in Milan's suburbs and transferred to Cologne cathedral in 1164. Hamilton, "Prester John," 176-177.

29 Sinor, "The Mongols in the West," 22.

the approaching Last Judgment/Doomsday. It also could explain why hopes and expectations were so rapidly replaced with disappointments and despair, which sometimes fancifully intermingled in the Western perception of the Mongols.

In 1245, Matthew of Paris noted the return of the (Dominican) friar Andrew (of Longjumeau?), who was sent by the Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) to the Orient two years ago, and found a Mongol army—probably of Baiju-noyan—in the Middle East—45 days beyond Acre. The friar Andrew told that the King of India, Prester John, was defeated and killed by the previous Mongol Khan who married his (John's) daughter. And now their son, that is son of this Christian queen and grandson of the Prester John, is the Great Khan of the Tatars. Andrew also told that he met there a familiar of the Great Khan Ögedei (1229-1241), the Nestorian churchman Simeon, better known as Rabban Ata, who had been sent to Greater Armenia sometime between 1235 and 1240. A man of high reputation, he exerted his influence in favor of Christians living under Mongol domination.

In 1245, Pope Innocent IV sent four, or by some accounts three,³⁰ missions to the Mongols in order to obtain more correct and precise information about who they actually are: Were they Gog and Magog, or an army of the Prester John, or the descendants of the enigmatic Magi who came to Bethlehem to adore the Nativity of Christ? This curiosity is why these early Western envoys produced such perfect ethnographic descriptions of the Tatar mores and customs in their reports, which were then used by Vincent of Beauvais (1190-1264) in his *Speculum Historiale* and Roger Bacon (1214/20-1292/4) in his *Opus majus*.³¹ The envoys tried to identify this unknown people.

The Dominican friar Ascelin found the Mongol army only in 1247 somewhere in Greater Armenia between Tiflis and Tabriz. Ascelin stayed in the camp of Baiju-noyan, who was commander-in-chief of the Mongol forces in the Middle East, from May 24 until July 25, 1247. Simon of Saint-Quentin, one of Ascelin's companions, wrote a brief account of the expedition (*Historia Tartarorum*); some parts of it were included by Vincent of Beauvais in the last three books of his *Speculum Historiale*.³² The Mongols were filled with fear when the Dominicans arrived in their camp. There was a rumour that Franks were following the friars. The Mongols asked Ascelin and his companions carefully as to whether or not many Franks had been ferried over to Syria as one of

30 G.G. Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin and the Dominican Mission to the Mongol Baiju: A Reappraisal," *Speculum* 46, no.2 (1971): 234-236.

31 J. Charpentier, "William of Rubruck and Roger Bacon," *Geografiska Annaler* 17 (1935): 255-267.

32 Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin," 236.

their merchants reported. The Mongols had obviously heard of Louis IX of France's Crusade.³³ Probably, Baiju and his advisors thought that this Crusade would be a Frankish act of revenge for the destruction of Poland and Hungary in 1241–1242.

The Dominican friars were condemned to death because they had refused to genuflect before Baiju and because they maintained that the pope was greater than the khan; only the pleas of Baiju's eldest wife saved Ascelin and his companions.³⁴ Ascelin punctually followed papal instruction. He was sent to the first Mongol army that he could find in Persia to exhort the leader of that army to stop despoiling men, especially Christians, to accept Christianity, and to do penance for his sins. The content of Baiju's return letter to the pope confirms this. He rejected this plea of Innocent IV and reiterated that it was God's will that the Mongols rule the world. He then ordered the pope to come personally and make his submission; if not, the pope was to be considered an enemy.³⁵

Ascelin's embassy also visited Rabban (Rhaban) Ata, the Nestorian Catholicos (church leader/patriarch), in Tabriz/Tauris, to whom the Dominicans carried papal letters.³⁶ Vincent of Beauvais, copying from Simon of Saint-Quentin, records the popular rumor that that Chinggis Khan married the daughter of King David, son of Prester John, and that the mother of Ögedei Khan was thus a Christian.³⁷

Interestingly, contemporary Armenian chroniclers never mentioned Prester John or King David and their relations with the ruling Mongol dynasty. At the same time, the papal envoys who visited *avant-garde* of the Mongolian troops—led by the generals Baiju-noyan and later by Eljigidei and stationed in the Greater Armenia—as well as Nestorian envoys sent by Eljigidei to Louis IX repeated once and again the stories about Mongol Khans—sons and grandsons of the Prester John, their respect to the Christians in their domains and even conversion of Güyük Khan.

Contemporary Armenian chronicler Kirakos Ganjaketsi in his description of the first invasion of the Mongols in 1220 noted rumors that accompanied their coming:

False information arrived concerning [the Mongols], to the effect that they were magi and/or of the Christian faith, wonder-workers, and that

33 Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin," 244.

34 Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin," 241, 249.

35 Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin," 248-249.

36 Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin," 244.

37 Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin," 233.

they had come to avenge the Christians from the tyranny of the *Tachiks*.³⁸ And it was said that they had with them a portable tent-church, as well as a miracle-working cross, and that they would bring an ephah of barley and put it before this cross and all the troops would take from it and give it to their horses, yet the supply would not be exhausted, for when all of them had finished taking, the original amount remained. The same was true for their own food. Such were the false rumours that filled the land. Therefore the inhabitants of the land did not fortify themselves in, to the point that one lay priest took his people and even went before them with hooded crosses. The enemy put them to the sword, one and all. Thus finding many people unconcerned, [the Mongols] destroyed and ruined numerous places.³⁹

On the one hand, Kirakos's story—unfortunately neglected by the majority of scholars—demonstrates that the Oriental Christians also had expectations—mixed with the eschatological ones—of the coming of the easternmost Christian army to liberate them from the Muslim domination.⁴⁰ The rapid destruction of the powerful Muslim empire of Khwarazmshah by an unknown army was initially perceived by many Armenians as caused by the Christian army, since the Christians were seen as natural enemies of the Muslims.

On the other hand, the rumours, mentioned by Kirakos, arrived to Armenia in a well-elaborated form. The unknown army is Christian, led by the (descendants of?) the Magi. This note, in turn, makes possible an allusion to the well-known Gospel story of adoration of the Magi.⁴¹ This army has a precise aim: “to avenge the Christians from the tyranny of the *Tachiks*.” The coming of the army is accompanied by miracles: “they had with them a portable tent-church, as well as a miracle-working cross.” The rumours could be spread by merchants or pilgrims. In his report of 1247, Carpini had stressed the Mongols' tendency to

38 *Tachiks*—the Muslims, in medieval Armenian sources.

39 K. Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, trans. R. Bedrosian (New York, NY, 1976), 166, available online at <http://rbedrosian.com/kgi.htm>.

40 “For this is the end of time; and precursors have spoken about the Antichrist and the arrival of the sons of destruction. We too are frightened by the revelations of blessed men borne up by God, aided by the Holy Spirit in predicting the future, and especially the true command of our Savior and God which states: “I shall lift up nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom and this will be the beginning of their sufferings [Matthew 24:7-8].” Moreover, our patriarch, Saint Nerses prophetically spoke about the destruction of Armenia by the Nation of Archers, destruction and ruin encompassing all lands, which we have witnessed with our own eyes.” Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 193-194.

41 Matthew 2:1-12.

conquer by guile rather than by force.⁴² Similarly to other nations, the Mongols could strengthen their military actions with the “information war” they could start prior to actual military operations. This story has many common features with one, quoted by Matthew of Paris describing the invasion of 1241-1242, about the Tatars’ rush to Köln in order to recover the bones of the Magi. In the long plethora of rumours, selected by Mathew of Paris from the contemporary correspondence, some could be deliberately produced by the Mongols or rather even by Christians being on their service.⁴³ They could get information about fears and expectations circulating in a given country from early captives, merchants, and envoys. Then the rumours were disseminated through released captives, merchants, and envoys. Thus the Mongols or the Nestorians on the Mongol service could use Christian lore and eschatological expectations for their own purposes when approaching the Christian countries. This is a good example of the early use of the “information war.”

In his chronicle, Kirakos also described atrocities committed by the Mongols against Christians in many parts of the Greater Armenia. Shortly after the Mongol conquest of the Greater Armenia, things changed. “Now at the beginning of 691 Armenian Era [1242/43], an edict arrived from the Khan to his soldiers and commander in the East ordering them to set up as a replacement for Chormaghun (who had gone deaf) a certain commander Bach’u-ghurch’i [Baiju].”⁴⁴ Before this entry, Kirakos introduced a chapter devoted to the “Rhaban of Syria.”

Providential God Who wills life to all (through His love for mankind) made manifest among them [the Mongols], a pious, God-loving man of Syrian nationality named Simeon or Rhaban-at’a. He was known as the father of the Khan, since in Syriac *rhaban* means *vardapet* [doctor of the Church], while in T’at’ar [Mongolian], *at’a* means father. As soon as he

42 C.H. Dawson, *The Mongol Mission. Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1955, reprinted 1980), 41.

43 Mathew mentioned in 1241–1242 a certain Englishman who became a spy working for the Mongols. There was European scribe Richardo (“Ricardus notarius... interpres Latinorum”) in the Mongol service who wrote in Latin the letter of Īl-khān Hulagu to the Louis IX in 1262 and the Mongol memorandum of Īl-khān Abagha to the Council of Lyons in 1274. P. Meyvaert, “An Unknown Letter of Hulagu, Il-khan of Persia, to King Louis IX of France,” *Viator* 11 (1980): 245-260, at 251. For an excellent brief account on Mongol diplomacy and intelligence, see P. Jackson, “The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered,” *Mongols, Turks and Others—Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. R. Amitai and M. Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 249-252.

44 Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 240.

heard about the merciless killing of Christians occasioned by the T'at'ar troops, he approached the Khan and beseeched him for a letter to give to his troops, commanding them not to kill innocent men the way they were doing—men who had not warred against them—but instead to let them alone so that they might serve the king. With great pomp, the king sent Rhaban himself to his commanders with a written order that all obey his command.

When Rhaban arrived, many things became propitious for the Christians, and the killings and captivity ceased. Likewise he built churches in Tach'ik cities, where previously no one dared utter the name of Christ—even in Tabriz and Naxchawan, which were yet more inimical to the Christians, so much so that Christians did not dare appear or walk about openly, to say nothing of constructing a church or erecting a cross.

Yet [Rhaban] erected cross and church, and the sounding-board was heard day and night. Christians openly took their dead for burial with hooded crosses, Gospels and worship, as is the Christian custom, while those opposing them were put to death. No one dared come out against [Rhaban's] order. On the contrary the T'at'ar army revered him like their king and without him they neither planned nor did anything.

His merchants, [people] who had his *tamgha*, that is to say his insignia and letter, boldly circulated throughout the lands and no one dared approach those [merchants] who mentioned Rhaban's name. Instead all the T'at'ar commanders gave him gifts from their booty.

[Rhaban] was a man of pious conduct, also modest in eating and drinking. Once a day, during the evening, he ate a small amount of food. Thus God visited His people in exile with the care of this kind of man. He baptised many of the T'at'ars; and on account of his marvellous behaviour and great honour, everyone was terrified by him.

The events described happened here [in Greater Armenia] in 690 A.E. [1241].⁴⁵

Probably Kirakos did not exaggerate the influence of the Rabban Ata on Mongol politics in the Near East, since both papal envoys sent to the region in 1243-1247—Andrew of Longjumeau and Ascelin—had an audience with the Rabban Ata in Tabriz. Moreover, Rabban Ata felt independent enough to send his own letters to the pope separately from the letters issued by the Mongol general Baiju.

By fulfilling the Mongols' desire to conquer the Near East, Rabban Ata also strengthened his own dominance and that of his co-religionists in the region

45 Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 237-239.

of the Nestorian sect origination. The Mongolian elite gave to Rabban Ata and his people so much credit, because they could use the network of their co-believers living in the recently conquered lands, and in the future to use other Nestorians as spies and heralds of rumors in the lands Mongols just planned to conquer in the near time.⁴⁶ Thus, the Nestorians in the Mongol service deployed more subtle tactics to achieve the same goal—to crush the enemies of the Great Khan.

My hypothesis is that Rabban Ata's activities were motivated not only by the interests and aims of the Mongol elite, but also by his intention to promote Nestorian community in the Near East. The conquest of Baghdad with the see of the Nestorian patriarch/Catholicos could strengthen the influence of the Nestorians in the region.⁴⁷ The well-known feature of the Mongol administration was their preference to use foreigners to rule certain conquered countries. The Khitans, Uighurs, Muslims or even Latin Christians, such as Polo family, were employed in the administration of the Yüan China. Quite possibly, Rabban Ata planned to strengthen his own power by ruling through his co-believers. At this point, interests of the Nestorians coincided with those of the Mongol elite.

Baiju also sent two envoys—Aibeg and Sargis—to the pope with Ascelin. Sargis was certainly a Christian, probably a Nestorian. Matthew of Paris in *Chronica Majora* records that the pope received two Mongol envoys in the summer of 1248 and addressed a letter to Baiju dated November 22, 1248.⁴⁸ But at that time, Baiju was replaced by another Mongol general—Eljigidei/Algigidai.

According to Carpini's account, Mongols ordered to the Caliph of Baghdad to come in person to the Khan and to acknowledge Khan's overlordship. Eljigidei was sent to the Near East to defeat the sect of assassins in Persia and to conquer Baghdad. He conceived the idea of securing the support of the

46 As there were many prominent Christians amongst the Mongols, and as they were largely attacking Muslim lands, they were viewed as champions of a resurgent Christianity in the Middle East against the previously dominant Muslims. When Baghdad was besieged by Hülegü in January 1258, al-Musta'sim, the Caliph of Sunni Islam, sent the Assyrian Patriarch Mar Makkikhā II (1257-1265) among other envoys in an attempt to placate the Mongols. Kenneth Scott Parker, "The Indigenous Christians of the Arabic Middle East in an Age of Crusaders, Mongols, and Mamlūks (1244-1366)," (Ph.D. Diss., Royal Holloway College, University of London, London, 2012), 60-61.

47 Hülegü and Doquz Khatun gave the Nestorian Catholicos the "palace of the Arab kings" in Baghdad. *The Monks of Kúblai Khân Emperor of China*, trans. E.A. Wallis Budge (London, 1928), 223.

48 Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin," 238-239.

Franks for a simultaneous attack on Egypt, so as to prevent the Sultan of Egypt from coming to the assistance of the Caliph.⁴⁹

The Mongol letters brought to the pope by John of Plano Carpini in November 1247 and Ascelin in late summer or early autumn 1248 made depressing reading: the Mongols demanded total submission, and even a friendly message sent by the aforementioned Rabban Ata urged the pope to make peace with the Mongols. Carpini brought the alarming news that the new Great Khan Güyük (1246-1248), son of Ögedei, supposedly favourable to Christians, was preparing an all-out attack against all Christian nations and kingdoms of the West.⁵⁰

It is important to note that Louis IX and his army departed from France in the Crusade before the Mongol letters were received in the West. On September 17, 1247 Louis IX arrived at Cyprus, and established his residence with Henry I de Lusignan at Nicosia. At that time, Nestorians and Armenians realized that the Priest King could be very useful for their aspirations of the Frankish-Mongol alliance and began to employ the King of India and the Magi in their relations with the Franks in *Outremer* as early as 1248.

*Haec est terra, de qua tres Reges venerunt in Bethleem: Uses of the
Three Holy Kings and Prester John in the Letter of Smbat*

After the victory of Baiju, accompanied with the Armenian princes, over the Seljuks in Kose-dagh in 1243, King Het'um I sent his brother Constable Smbat along with their father, Baron Kostandin, to Baiju to propose their obedience:

Once this had occurred, when Hetum saw that the sultan had been defeated by [the Mongols] he sent ambassadors and valuable gifts to them to make peace and to place himself in submission. Through the intercession of [the Armenian] prince Jalal, those who came to the great court were presented to Baiju-noyin . . . They were happy and greatly honoured the ambassadors of the king, establishing stipends and horses for them during the winter, so that when spring came they could return to their own land. Thus friendship was established with the king. They gave

49 Recounting the experiences of Ascelin embassy to the Mongol army of Baiju the contemporary encyclopaedist Vincent of Beauvais had made an accusation—that the Mongols pretended to be Christians in order to dupe the Franks and to deflect the crusading forces away from territories that lay within their own current sphere of operations. P. Jackson, “Hülegü Khan and the Christians: the Making of a Myth,” *The Experience of Crusading*, vol. 2, ed. P. Edbury and J. Philips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 211.

50 Sinor, “The Mongols in the West,” 22.

him a written ordinance according to their religion which they call *el-tamgha*.⁵¹

Cilician Armenia was obliged to supply forces and provisions when necessary. Baiju, in turn, promised to provide military protection. "They had first seen Baiju . . . and had confirmed a pact of friendship and submission, then after this they sent the brother of the King, the general of Armenia Baron Smbat to Sain Khan, who had been set on the throne of Chinggis Khan."⁵² Thus Cilician Armenians were in permanent contact with Baiju at the time of Ascelin's visit. In accordance with the rules of Mongol diplomacy, Smbat had to visit Baiju on his way to the Great Khan's court in Karakorum. One can assume that the purpose and result of Ascelin's mission were known to Smbat from Baiju or from someone in his camp.

On February 7, 1248, Smbat Constable, while staying in Samarkand, in Central Asia, on his way to the Great Khan's court, sent a letter to his relative, King of Cyprus Henry I, who was married to Het'um I's sister in 1237. There are few questions we need to answer before proceeding with the analysis of the letter. Why did he write his letter in the middle of his journey, according to his own words, to the Great Khan's court?⁵³ Why did he address the letter to the King of Cyprus? Why do we know nothing from numerous Armenian chronicles about the letter that Smbat possibly sent to his brother and lord, Het'um I? Why did he write about so many things he could not have witnessed with his own eyes while on his journey? Who told to him about the Christian chapel and service at the court of Güyük Khan or about relations between the Mongols and the King of India? Finally, how was the letter transferred from Samarkand to Cyprus?

Smbat could not use a well-organized Mongol post. It was not his own idea to write the letter before he finished his mission. There were well-informed people who could tell to Smbat so many things about the Mongol empire and the success of Christianity there. These people were interested in having Smbat's letter precisely at that moment, and they were able to

51 Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 246-247.

52 G. Aknerci, *History of the Nation of the Archers*, trans. R. Blake, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 3-4 (1949): 313.

53 "Nunc vero sunt octo menses, quod de die et de nocte ambulavimus. Et modo dicitur nobis quod sumus ad medium arrepti itineris terrae Chan, hoc est, maioris Domini Tartarorum." Io. Laurentii Moshemii, *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica* (Helmstadi, 1741), 49. I also used on-line edition of Vincentus Bellovacensis, *Speculum Historiale* (Strassburg, 1473), vol. 4, XXXII, XCII, see also <http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0003/bsb00035802/images/410>.

transfer it from Samarkand to Cyprus. Obviously, these people were not the Mongols or Muslims or Buddhists. They were Nestorians—mostly of Uighur ethnic background—who constituted a substantial part in the administration of the Mongol Empire. Uighuristan functioned as a reservoir of trained administrative personnel, which the Mongol Khans drew upon extensively. As one Chinese writer put it, “all [Uighurs] with talent or skill served the court.” In other parts of the Mongol domains, the situation was the same.⁵⁴ Many of the core peoples of the vast Mongol Empire from the East identified themselves as part of the Nestorian or Assyrian Church of the East either in full or in part. These included the Kerait, Naiman, Merkit, Ongut, and Uighur tribes. Prominent Nestorian/Assyrian Christians in the bureaucracy at the Mongol Court included: Chinqai, minister to the early Khans Ögedei and Güyük; his colleague Qadaq; and Bulghar, the chief secretary to Möngke Khan with whom Rubruck engaged.⁵⁵ Additionally, many top-ranking Mongol women were Assyrian Christians, such as Sorqaqtani-Beki (d. 1252), the mother to Möngke Khan (1251-1259), Kublai Khan, and Hülegü Khan (d. 1265).⁵⁶ Hülegü Khan’s chief wife, Doquz Khatun was a devout Assyrian Christian and patroness of Christians. Nestorian communities were scattered on the vast territory stretched from China to the Mediterranean, laying on the way by which Smbat had travelled to Mongolia.⁵⁷

Actually the letter was addressed to the crusaders led by King Louis IX of France, who landed on the island at that time, on September 17, 1248. Nestorians were interested in influencing Louis’ further plans. Mongols defeated Khwarazm Shah of Persia and Seljuks in 1220s-1240s, but they still could not conquer Baghdad, the city where the seed of the Nestorian patriarch was situated. Obviously, Nestorians were interested in involving Louis IX and his crusaders in the alliance with the Mongols against the Saracens. The letter of Smbat should be considered as a very important argument in this diplomatic

54 T. Allsen. “The Yüan Dynasty and the Uighurs of Turfan in the 13th Century,” in *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors*, ed. Morris Rossabi, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 267. See also: D.O. Morgan, “Who Ran the Mongol Empire?” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 2 (1982): 124-136.

55 William of Rubruck, *The Mission of William of Rubruck, His journey to the court of the Great Khān Mongke 1253-1255*, trans. Peter Jackson (London, 1990), 23.

56 C. Baumer, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (London: Tauris, 2006), 216.

57 The Nestorian/Assyrian Church spread from Mesopotamia south into Arabia and east along the Great Silk Route into Central Asia. Then it was established in Afghanistan, Tibet, and China in the seventh century, and had success converting portions, at least, of various tribes that would in time make up the Mongol confederation. Baumer, *The Church of the East*, 169-210.

game because of his high status and of the confident relations between the elite of Cilician Armenia and the Franks. The letter of Smbat was to be delivered from Samarkand to Cilicia by the Nestorian merchants protected by Rabban Ata and having the Mongol *tamgha* to ensure their safe travel in the Great Khan's domains.⁵⁸

Smbat wrote about the military successes of the Mongols. Then he stated that there are many Christians in these remote lands, thanks to the Magi:

[Tangut] is the land from which came the Three Kings to Bethlehem to worship the Lord Jesus, which was born. And know that the power of Christ has been, and is, so great, that the people of that land are Christians; and the whole land of Chata believes in those Three Kings. I have myself been in their churches and have seen pictures of Jesus Christ and the Three Kings, one offering gold, the second frankincense, and the third myrrh. And it is through those Three Kings that they believe in Christ, and that the Chan and his people have now become Christians. And they have their churches before his gates where they ring their bells and beat upon pieces of timber.⁵⁹

According to Smbat, Mongol rulers protected Christians in conquered lands. Moreover, the potent Christian King of India became their ally and defeated Saracen kings thanks to the Mongol military assistance:

Let me tell you, moreover, that in the land of India, which St. Thomas the Apostle converted, there is a certain Christian king who stood in sore tribulation among the other kings who were Saracens. They used to harass him on every side, until the Tatars reached that country, and he became their liegeman. Then, with his own army and that of the Tatars, he attacked the Saracens; and he made such booty in India that the whole

58 "His merchants, [people] who had his *tamgha*, that is to say his insignia and letter, boldly circulated throughout the lands and no one dared approach those [merchants] who mentioned Rhaban's name." Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 239.

59 "Letter of Sempad," *Cathay and the Way Thither. Being Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, ed. H. Yule; rev. edn. H. Cordier (London, 1915), 1:162. "Haec est terra, de qua tres Reges venerunt in Bethleem adorare Dominum IESVM natum. Et sciatis potentiam CHRISTI fuisse magnam et adhuc esse, quod gentes illius terrae sunt Christiani; et tota terra de Chata credunt illos tres Reges. Et ego ipse sui in Ecclesiis eorum, et vidi IESVM CHRISTVM depictum, et tres Reges, quorum unus offert aurum, et alius thus, et alius myrrham. Et per illos tres Reges credunt in Christum, et per illos Chan et omnes sui modo facti sunt Christiani. Et ante portas suas habent Ecclesias suas, pulsant campanas suas, et percutiunt tabulas." Moshemii, *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*, 50.

East is full of Indian slaves; I have seen more than 50 000 whom this king took and sent for sale.⁶⁰

Using the stories about the Magi, St. Thomas the Apostle and Prester John—well-known in late medieval Europe—Smbat made an effort to persuade the Frankish readers that, besides the Saracens, there are so many Christian peoples and the Mongols are one of them.

Et accepit exercitum suum et exercitum Tartarorum, et invasit Saracenos: *Promoting the Frankish-Mongol Alliance*

A careful analysis of contemporaneous texts produced by the papal envoys reveals Smbat's polemics with John of Plano Carpini's report, submitted to Innocent IV in November 1247. The papal envoy described the Mongols as cruel and hypocritical barbarians. Moreover, Plano Carpini stated that he was personally present in Karakorum in November 1246, when the new Great Khan Güyük was inaugurated on the *kuriltay*, at the congress of Mongol noblemen, and proclaimed a march against the Western peoples. In his message to the pope written on November 3, 1246, Güyük Khan demanded subjection from the pope and Western rulers. The content of this message was known to Smbat when he wrote his own letter in Samarkand.⁶¹ Thus, Smbat deliberately made efforts to soften Güyük's arrogant demands and to overturn Plano Carpini's anti-Mongol arguments in order to produce the image of the Mongols as friends of the Christians and their allies in the war against the Saracens.

The only way Smbat could get information on the Güyük's reply to the pope was through a deliberate information leak, organized by the Nestorian clerks from the Great Khan chancellery. William of Rubruck mentioned the Nestorians

60 "Letter of Sempad", 162. "Sciatis praeterea quod in terra Indiae, quam sanctus Thomas Apostolus convertit, est quidam Rex Christianus, qui erat in magna anxietate positus inter alios Reges Saracenos. Faciebant enim ei violentiam undique, usque ad illam horam qua Tartari venerunt in illam terram, et ipse factus est homo illorum. Et accepit exercitum suum et exercitum Tartarorum, et invasit Saracenos; ita quod tantum lucratus est infra terram Indiae, quod tota terris Orientis plena est sclavis Indicis; quorum plus quam quinquaginta millia vidi, quos dictus Rex ceperat, et mandaverat venum dari." Moshemii, *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*, 50-51.

61 "Sciatis quod Dominus Papa misit nuntium suum praedicto Kan, et mandavit et dicere utrum esset Christianus annon, et quare miserat gentem suam ad concubandum mundum, et quare faciebat intersici pauperes. Cui respondit Kan, quod Deus mandaverat avis sui set sibi, quod mitteret gentes suas ad gentes pessimas intersiciendas. Super hoc quod mandavit utrum esset Christianus, respondit quod Deus sciebat; et si Dominus Papa vellet scire, veniret, et videret et sciret." Moshemii, *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*, 51.

as the high office clerks at the courts of Sartaq, Batu and Möngke many times.⁶² According to Rubruck, Nestorians were Uighurs/Iugures by their ethnic origin, and formed an educated class in Mongol society:

And they dwelt in certain cities, which afterward were brought in subjection into Chingis Can: whereupon he gave his daughter in marriage into their king. Also the city of Caracarum itself is in a manner within their territory: and the whole country of King or Presbyter John, and of his brother Unc lied near into their dominions: saying, that they inhabit in certain pastures northward and the said Iugures between the mountains towards the South. Whereupon it came to pass, that the Moals received letters from them. And they are the Tartars' principal scribes and almost all the Nestorians can read their letters.⁶³

It enables me to make a suggestion that the Armenians and the Nestorians coordinated their diplomatic activities.

The main intention of Smbat as well as of the Nestorians was to promote alliance of Crusaders and Mongols. This idea was illustrated in Smbat's letter through uses of Prester John's cooperation with the Mongols as a good example (*Et accepit exercitum suum et exercitum Tartarorum, et invasit Saracenos*). On the other hand, this statement was also used for justification of Het'um I submission to the Great Khan.⁶⁴

62 Sartaq was the oldest son of Batu Khan, the ruler of the Golden Horde, whose headquarters were situated on the lower Volga.

63 Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 141-142. "Et isti fuerunt habitantes in ciuitatibus, qui post obediuerunt Chingis Cham: vnde ipse dedit regi eorum filiam suam. Et ipsa Caracarum est quasi in territorio eorum: Et tota terra regis siue presbyteri Iohannis et Vnc fratris eius circa terras eorum; Sed isti in pascuis ad aquilonem, illi Iugures inter montes ad meridiem. Inde est quod ipsi Moal sumpserunt literas eorum. Et ipsi sunt magni scriptores eorum: et omnes fere Nestorim sciunt literas eorum." William de Rubruquis, *Itinerarium ad partes Orientales*, available online at <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/h/hakluyt/voyages/rubruquis/complete.html>.

64 According to Jean de Joinville, courtier of Louis IX: "in order to free himself from subjection to the Sultan of Iconium the King of Armenia went to the King of Tatars, and to obtain help from him became his vassal." J. de Joinville, "The Life of St. Louis" trans. M.R.B. Shaw. Joinville and Villehardouin, *Chronicles of the Crusades* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 200.

Smbat's letter also reinforced statements of the Nestorians Marc and David, envoys of Eljigidei, the Mongol general-governor in Persia.⁶⁵ They reached Cyprus on December 14 and delivered Eljigidei's letter to King Louis IX on December 20, 1248.⁶⁶ Eljigidei declared the Mongols' tolerance to all the Christian peoples in conquered lands, proposed the reconstruction of the destructed churches (*et Ecclesiae destructae reaedificerunt*) and wished the Franks victories upon all their enemies. Marc and David added to the letter that the mother of the Great Khan Güyük is daughter of Prester John and of the Christian faith, that Güyük himself was baptised on the fest of Epiphany, *Dies epiphanorum*, also known in the Christian West as *festum trium regum*, and that his eighteen sons and many noblemen were also converted at that time.⁶⁷ Thus, they in many ways repeated the story written by Smbat. In order to achieve a much needed effect, Smbat and Nestorian envoys of Eljigidei just told the Franks exactly what they were ready to hear and wanted to hear, the stories about the Three Holy Kings and the Christian King of India, that is stories invented by the Franks themselves.

After reading the letters of Smbat and Eljigidei, Louis IX assembled his council, described by Odo, bishop of Tusculan, in his letter to the pope. According to Odo, the King asked Eljigidei's envoys about the current state of the Tatars. In particular, he wanted to know more details about their baptisms. Louis IX also asked the envoys about why the mission (of Ascelin) was so poorly received by Baiju. The envoys replied that Baiju (*Bachon*) is a heathen who surrounded himself with Moslem advisors; as a result, they were not well

65 Andrew of Longjumeau recognised David. He saw David in the Tatar camp during his previous mission. Vincentus Bellovacensis, *Speculum Historiale*, vol. 4, XXXII, XC, see also <http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0003/bsb00035802/images/409>.

66 J. Richard, *La papauté et les missions d'Orient au Moyen Âge (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1998), 73-74; J.M. Fiey, *Chrétiens Syriaques sous les Mongols (Il-Khanat de Perse, XIII^e-XIV^e s.)* (Louvain: CSCO, 1975), 12. F. Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden. Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13.-15. Jahrhundert.* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1994), 80. The Latin translation of Eljigidei's letter was published in: Moshemii, *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*, 47-48; Vincentus Bellovacensis, *Speculum Historiale*, vol. 4, XXXII, XC, see also <http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0003/bsb00035802/images/409>.

67 "Dixerunt etiam nuntii, quod iste qui nunc agit in sceptris, KIOKAI nomine matrem habent Christianam, filiam Regis qui vocatur Prebyter IOANNES, ... baptismi sacramentum suscepit in die Epiphaniae cum decem et octo filiis Regum, et plures alii, maxime Capitanei. ... Erchilchai ... Christianus est." Moshemii, *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*, 52-53.

accepted or treated.⁶⁸ They stated that he was to be replaced in his office by Eljigidei. They also answered in details some other questions. Then they told that forty years ago the Mongols left their country (*terra Trahetar*), which had no cities, towns and villages but was abundant with pastures. The envoys described the Tatars' way of life and the military potential of the Great Khan.⁶⁹ Eljigidei also proposed military cooperation directed against the main Saracen monarchs, the Caliph of Bagdad (*Baldak*) and the Sultan of Egypt (*Soldanus Babiloniae*), to the King of France.⁷⁰ Louis IX should undertake a campaign against Egypt next summer while the Mongols would attack the Caliph of Bagdad.⁷¹ According to the Louis IX's courtier Jean de Joinville, "Whilst the King was tarrying in Cyprus, the great King of the Tatars sent messengers to him, greeting him courteously, and bearing word, amongst other things, that he was ready to help him conquer the Holy Land and deliver Jerusalem out of the hand of the Saracens."⁷² Eric Voegelin has pointed out that:

[Eljigidei's] letter differs from all the others originating from Mongol authorities in that it is not in substance an order to submission . . . On the whole, the letter, always supported by oral explanations and commentaries of the envoys, attempts to create the impression that the Mongol court was largely christianized and the Khan himself baptized, so that a military entente and ensuing campaign could be considered as a crusade against the common enemy, Islam. The question has frequently been raised whether the ambassadors were impostors and the letter forged.⁷³

68 "Bachon vero homo paganos est, et habet Saracenos Consiliarios, et ideo male receipt nuntios vestros." Moshemii, *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*, 53.

69 "Dixerunt, . . . habet omnes fere Capitaneos, cum innumera multitudine equitum et hominum . . ." Moshemii, *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*, 52.

70 "Hac occasioned dictus Erchelchai, audito Regis Franciae adventu, misit ad eum nuntios cum litteris antedictis; qui denunciaverunt ei esse Tartarorum propositum, in hac aestate proxima obsidere Calipham de Baldak; et rogabant Regem ut Aegyptum aggrediretur." Moshemii, *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*, 52.

71 E. Voegelin, "The Mongol Orders of Submission to the European Powers, 1245-1255," *Byzantion* 15 (1941): 378-413, at 380.

72 *The Memoirs of the Lord Joinville*, ed. E. Wedgwood (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1906), 58.

73 Voegelin, "The Mongol Orders," 380. "A new examination of this question, by M. Pelliot assembles in a convincing way all reasons for the genuineness of the document. The offer is the first of a whole series of similar ones extended at a later date by the Persian Khans to the Kings of France. It is, however, unique for its time, and was followed immediately afterwards by orders of submission of the same type as those brought back by the Franciscan and Dominican missions to Innocent IV." Voegelin, "The Mongol Orders," 380.

My suggestion that the Eljigidei's letter was written by Nestorians of his chancellery as a part of a wider project can explain this difference.

The letters of Smbat and Eljigidei, as well as the story told by the Eljigidei's envoys to Louis IX, had to minimize the negative impression made by the poor treatment of Ascelin in Baiju camp, by the latter's letter to Innocent IV, and to counterbalance in advance a possible negative effect of Plano Carpini's report and Güyük's response to the pope. Being in Karakorum and seeing himself as the lord of the whole world, Güyük-Khan could give an arrogant response to the pope. At the same time, Eljigidei, being located at the western forefront face-to-face with the many powerful enemies and not trustworthy subjects and vassals, was bound to correlate his tactics with unpredictable circumstances.

One may suggest that the rulers of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia coordinated their activities with the influential elite of the Nestorian Diaspora.⁷⁴ The Armenians and the Nestorians had the same goal, to destroy the Saracen power in the Middle East through forming the alliance of the Mongols and the Franks/Crusaders. As we can see, the idea of the joint Latin-Mongol crusade was formulated and put into circulation for the first time in 1248.

Et ibi erant sacerdotes Armeni: Hetum I Uses the Letter of of Louis IX

Louis IX wrote to Güyük the Dominican friar Andrew of Longjumeau with the tent-chapel and then sailed to Egypt. There, he was defeated, captured and then released for a ransom. After all these adventures, the King disembarked in the Levant to rebuild Accon. While waiting for the return of Andrew of Longjumeau's mission, he sent William of Rubruck to the Great Khan in 1253.

Güyük's reign was extremely short, as he died in the spring of 1248, less than two years after his ascension to the throne. His widow Oghul Qaimish continued to administer his affairs. Sometime in 1250 she received Andrew of Longjumeau, then on his second mission to the Mongols. Oghul Qaimish presented the French embassy to her subjects as one suing for mercy, and her reply to Louis IX was couched in terms as intransigent and peremptory as had been those of her late husband.

William of Rubruck, the Franciscan monk and the envoy of Louis IX to the Mongols, wrote in his report that when he arrived at the court of Sartaq on

74 In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, relations between Armenians and other Christians became much less antagonistic at the ecclesiastical and at the political levels than they were before. This open attitude of the Cilician court and prelates towards the Greeks, Franks, and Syrians was politically motivated. Jos J.S. Weitenberg, "Armeno-Syrian Cultural Relations in the Cilician Period (12th-14th c.)," in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. H. Teule, C.F. Tauwinkl, B. ter Haar Romeny and J. van Ginkel (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 342-344.

August 1, 1253 he found Armenian priests there. They translated the king's letter into Turkic, probably the Qypchaq/Cuman language, which was widely used in the Mongol empire:

Afterward I delivered to him your Majesty's letters, with translation thereof into the Arabic and Syrian languages. For I caused them to be translated at Acon into the alphabet and dialect of both of the said tongues. And there were certain Armenian Priests, which had skill in the Turkish and Arabic, and that companion of David who knew Syriac, Turkish and Arabic. Then we departed forth, and put off our vestments, and there came among us certain scribes together with the foresaid Coiac,⁷⁵ and caused our letters to be interpreted. Which letters being heard...⁷⁶

Then Sartaq sent William of Rubruck to his farther Batu who in turn sent Louis IX's envoy directly to the Great Khan Möngke. All three Mongolian rulers had heard Louis IX's letter in translation made by the Armenian priests. Rubruck mentioned this fact in his description of the audience at the Great Khan's court, which the Franciscan reached on December 27, 1253. Several days before the audience, when Rubruck was still on his trip to Karakorum, he was told by a secretary of the Great Khan chancellery:

that in the letter which Batu was sending to Mangu Chan it said that you were asking for an army and help against the Saracens from Sartach. At that I began to wonder greatly and also to be worried for I knew the gist of your letter and knew that there was no mention of this in it, save that you admonished him to be the friend of all Christians, to exalt the Cross, and to be the enemy of all enemies of the Cross. I was also afraid that, since the interpreters were Armenians from Greater Armenia with a deep hatred of the Saracens, they had, out of loathing for them and to do them harm, interpreted your letter more strongly in accordance with their own desires. I therefore kept quiet, not saying anything for or against, for I was

75 "... a certain Nestorian named Coiac, who is a man of great authority in Sartach's Court". Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 117. "... quendam Nestorinum Coiat nomine, qui est vnus de maioribus Curiae suae."

76 Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 119. "Tunc obtuli ei literas vestras cum transcriptis in Arabico et Syriano. Feceram enim eas transferri in Acon in vtraque litera et lingua. Et ibi erant sacerdotes Armeni, qui sciebant Turcicum et Arabicum. Tunc exiuimus et deposuimus vestimenta nostra: et venerunt scriptores et ille Coiac, et fecerunt literas interpretari. Quibus auditis..."

afraid to contradict Batu's words lest I should be falsely accused without reasonably cause.⁷⁷

If Rubruck's suggestion was based on real facts, the Armenian priests at Sartaq's court used their unique opportunity and translated Louis IX's letter filled with the general remarks on peace, friendship and Christian faith as a direct appeal for help in his war with infidel Saracens. Perhaps in this way Armenians intended to provoke the Mongols' march into Syria and Palestine. It could give a chance of survival to the remaining Crusader states after the dramatic failure of Louis IX's crusade in Egypt in April 1250. Now only the Mongols were able to stop the rise of the Egyptian superpower in the Middle East and to rescue the Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia. The comparison of Smbat's letter with the statement of Nestorian envoys of Eljigidei at the Louis IX's court suggests that Armenians deliberately promoted the idea of military cooperation between the Mongols and the Christians in the Middle East in order to coordinate their military campaigns directed against the Caliph of Baghdad and the Sultan of Egypt. It cannot be excluded that Het'um I personally coordinated this rather sophisticated project.

At the beginning of his travel to the Great Khan's court in 1253, Het'um I held a meeting with the clergy and princes of Greater Armenia in the village Vardenis. Among others, there was "the priest Barsegh who was an emissary to Batu."⁷⁸ The *Chronicle* attributed to Smbat's Constable said that Het'um I's guide in this travel "was a certain cleric named Barsegh, who had taking the same rout on many occasions."⁷⁹ It means that Barsegh prepared the king's visit at least to Sartaq and Batu. Probably, Barsegh was among the Armenian priests at Sartaq's court mentioned by William of Rubruck.

Then Hetum I took with him many of the clergy to Batu and his son Sartaq who was a Christian. Hetum was honoured by them with many privileges. Then they sent him to Mongke Khan on a long journey on the other side of the Caspian Sea. Those who departed [from Batu] left on the six of the month of Marer [on the thirteenth of May 1254] ... They came to Khara-Khita and crossed into Tatarstan on the forth of the month Horhi [the thirteenth of September 1254] on the celebration of the feast of the Cross, and they saw Mongke-Khan seated in venerable glory.⁸⁰

77 Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 149.

78 Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 303.

79 "Smbat Sparapet's Chronicle," 108 [<http://rbedrosian.com/cssint.htm>].

80 Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 303-304.

The Armenian king travelled the same way, Sartaq-Batu-Möngke, as William of Rubruck several months before. Sartaq, Batu, and Möngke heard Louis IX's letter in the version translated by the Armenian priests with the king of France's "appeal" for military assistance. Thus, Het'um I found a well-prepared ground for his idea of the Frankish-Mongolian alliance at the courts of the Mongol rulers. The key figure in this plan was the aforementioned Armenian priest Barsegh. On November 1, 1254, Het'um I left Möngke Khan's court and after eight months of travel through Central Asia and Persia reached the village of Vardenis, where he once again held a meeting to tell about the results of his mission. According to Kirakos Ganjaketsi, who was personally present at the meeting, Het'um I "awaited the return of the priest Barsegh whom he had sent to Batu once more to show him the documents and orders of Mongke Khan so that [Batu] also would write orders of the same sort."⁸¹ One cannot exclude that Barsegh was among the Armenian priests, or even that he was the leader of that mission, who translated or rather re-wrote Louis IX's letter in accordance with the plan of Het'um I. It is at that time Möngke gave Persia to his brother Hülegü, who left Mongolia to the Middle East in 1255—shortly after the departure of the Armenian king from the Great Khan's court. One cannot say if it was the result of the Armenian-Nestorian sophisticated plan or not, but it fits with the Het'um I's intentions.

At the time when William of Rubruck and Het'um I visited Möngke and Hülegü was sent to conquer the Middle East, Armenians made their first known effort to persuade the Franks that the Armenians should succeed in the baptism of a Mongol ruler. In the summer of 1254, a man visited Pope Innocent IV in Anagni, Italy, calling himself the Armenian "presbyter Iohannes," the personal chaplain of Sartaq. "Presbyter Iohannes" assured the pope that he was sent by Sartaq as an envoy but on the way he was captured by the Emperor Conrad IV (1250-1254). The Emperor detained him in Sicily and took away all the letters, including the letter in which Sartaq declared his subjugation to the pope. Only after the death of Conrad IV in May 21, 1254, the captive was released and could arrive at the papal court in Anagni.⁸² The Armenian Iohannes informed Innocent IV that Armenian priests baptized fifty thousand Tatars.⁸³ Inspired with such news on August 29, 1254, the pope sent with Armenian priest "Presbyter Iohannes" a letter to Sartaq, whom he praised as "illuminated with the Divine light" (*divino collustratus lumine*).⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Sartaq died sometime in 1255 or 1256, and the entire story ended with his death.

81 Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 306.

82 Richard, *La papauté et les missions*, 77-78.

83 Richard, *La papauté et les missions*, 88.

84 Richard, *La papauté et les missions*, 78.

There is a good example of the Latins' expectations and their use by the Armenians. The need for a miracle produced a miracle as in the case of the Prester John who slowly moved with his enigmatic kingdom from Inner Asia to India and then to Ethiopia being in focus of the Franks' expectations from the mid-twelfth to the mid-sixteenth century. Any disillusionment produced by the new travels and discoveries only stimulated new expectations and further searches for his kingdom in other parts of *orbis terrarum*. This highly portable kingdom (*De Regno Preto Ioannis*) is still presented in the famous *Cosmographia* of Sebastian Münster.⁸⁵

De nihilo enim faciunt magnos rumores

On the basis of this historical context, I now propose to trace changes in descriptive strategies of contemporary Armenian authors and of the next generation who described the remote past without personal experience. I shall also demonstrate the difference in narratives produced in Greater Armenia and in Cilicia, addressed to an Armenian or Latin/Frankish reader. A surprisingly intriguing and detailed picture can be formed on the basis of these descriptions of the Armenian-Tatar relations.

There are descriptions of Het'um I's travel to Möngke in 1253-1255 in writings of Kirakos Ganjaketsi,⁸⁶ Grigor Aknerci⁸⁷ and Het'um of Corycus. According to Kirakos who personally interviewed the king, "[Het'um] gave the Khan gifts and was honoured by him according to his dignity. He remained at the *urdo* for

85 S. Münster, *Cosmographiae universalis libri VI* (Basiliae, 1552), 1159-1162.

86 Kirakos Ganjaketsi (1201-1272), an Armenian monk who lived in the northeastern part of the Greater Armenia. In 1236 Kirakos was captured by the Mongols and forced to serve them as one of their scribes. Thus he learned Mongolian. In 1241 he was already at work on his *History of Armenians*. In 1255 he interviewed King Het'um I upon the latter's return from a visit to Möngke Khan. For details see also: Kirakos Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, trans. Robert Bedrosian (New York, NY, 1976), available online at <http://rbedrosian.com/kg.html>; J.A. Boyle, "Kirakos of Ganjak on the Mongols," *Central Asiatic Journal* 8 (1963): 199-214; J.A. Boyle, "The Journey of Het'um I, King of Little Armenia, to the Court of the Great Khan Mongke," *Central Asiatic Journal* 9 (1964): 175-189; R. Bedrosian, *The Turko-Mongol Invasions and the Lords of Armenia in the 13th-14th Centuries* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1979), 22-27.

87 Grigor Aknerci (1250-1335) is presumed to have been born in Cilicia around 1250. A colophon dated 1312/13 speaks of Grigor as the abbot of Akner monastery in Cilicia. His *History of the Nation of the Archers* differs from the works of other Armenian historians. As the product of a Cilician author in his early 20s when the work was completed in 1273, this history lacks the immediacy found in the compilations of the eastern Armenian eyewitnesses to the Mongol conquest and domination, such as Kirakos Ganjaketsi. For details see also: Grigor Aknerci, *History of the Nation*, 269-399; Bedrosian, *The Turko-Mongol Invasions*, 38-41.

fifty days and [Möngke Khan] gave him a noteworthy edict that no one dare harass him or his country. He also gave him a document proclaiming freedom for the church everywhere.”⁸⁸ Grigor, at least twenty years after the event, gives a more general description: “When he came to the Khan, by the will of God he was honoured by the Khan who bestowed upon the King of the Armenians high rank and fiefs. Everything he asked for according to his desire was granted him.”⁸⁹

Het’um of Corycus offers quite a different story of the incredibly successful mission of his glorious uncle Het’um I:

The first thing that the King required of the Emperor was that he and his men should become Christians, and that they should be baptised; the second, that he required that perpetual peace and love should be between the Tatars and the Christians; the third, he required that in all the lands that the Tatars had conquered and should conquer, the churches of the Christians—as priests, clerics, and all the religious persons—should be free and delivered of all taxes. The fourth was that the King required of Mango was to give help and council to deliver the Holy Land out of the Saracens’ hands, and to put it again into the Christians’ hands.⁹⁰ The fifth, was that he required to give commandment to the Tatars that were in Turkey, that they should help to destroy the city of Baldach and the Caliph (that is chief and teacher of the false law of Mahomet). The sixth, was that he required a privilege and the ability to command help from the Tatars that were near the realm of Armenia when he should require it. The seventh request was that all the lands that the Saracens had taken that were of the realm of Armenia, that was to come into the Tatars hands, should be restored freely unto him; and also all the lands that he might conquer against the Saracens that he might hold them without any contradiction of the Tatars in rest and peace. When Mango Khan understood the requests of the King of Armenia, before his barons and all his court he answered and said: “Because the King of Armenia is come from countries far away into our empire of his own free will, it is merely so that we shall fulfill all his requests . . .” When Mango Khan had finished all the petitions and requests of the King of Armenia, soon after, he caused a

88 Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 304.

89 Aknerci, *History of the Nation*, 325-327.

90 “Après reouest le roi que pleüst à Mango Can doner aide e conseil à delivrer la Terre Sainte des mains des Sarrazins, e rendre cele as Crestiens.” *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents arméniens, II*, 164. There is also English translation of the source available on-line: [<http://rbedrosian.com/hetumint.htm>].

bishop to christen him—which bishop was chancellor to the said King of Armenia; and after, he caused all his household servants to be christened, and many other, both men and women . . .⁹¹

Mongol encouragement of Het'um I may have extended to a promise to help in the reconquest of some of his provinces, conquered earlier by the Saracens. Neither Kirakos nor any other contemporary Armenian chronicler ever mentioned the rather sensational baptism of Möngke and all his court, contrary to their habit to mention every Mongol prince or princess who was known as a Christian even if it were only rumoured. It means that Het'um of Corycus “forced” the Great Khan Möngke (1251-1259) to make promises in accordance with Het'um's own political programme addressed to the Franks and fitted in some points with the obligations proclaimed by the contemporary Mongol ruler of Persia, Īl-khān Ghazan (1295-1304). Ghazan's appeals to the European rulers for military aid were accompanied, like those of his father,⁹² by statements of his willingness to embrace Christianity, and to turn over to the Christians such lands as he conquered in Palestine.⁹³ This story should also demonstrate the alleged influence of the Armenians at the Mongol court and to indicate the price of Armenian mediation in the Latin-Mongol relations.

Both Smbat and Het'um tried to prepare the ground for real cooperation by attempting to build confidence in a true military alliance with the Mongols. Undoubtedly, the heathen Tatars were infidels. But this could mean that it would be easier to convert them, as compared to the Muslim Saracens. Although the propagandists who were in favour of the Mongol alliance could well raise hopes by suggesting that the Khans were close to baptism or even by spreading rumors that they had already been baptized, they could not really baptize a khan.⁹⁴ Yet Het'um of Corycus, since he dealt with the past and remote East, could do so.

91 “Quant Mango Can ot acompli les peticions du roi d'Armenie, tantost il se fist baptizer par un avesque qui estoit chançalier du royaume d'Armenie, e fist baptizer ceaus de son ostel, e furent baptizés plusors autres homes e femes.” *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents arméniens*, II, 164-165. See also: Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden*, 114-117.

92 Arghun (1284-1291) was pro-Buddhist and also showed great favor to the Christians. His son was baptised Nicholas in 1289 in honor of Pope Nicholas IV. Arghun wrote to Pope Honorius IV in 1285 to suggest a combined attack against Egypt, and in 1287-1288 he sent a Nestorian ecclesiastic, Rabban Sauma, on an official mission to Rome, Paris, and English court at Bordeaux. Fiey, *Chrétien Syriaques*, 47-48.

93 Hornstein, “The Historical Background,” 410.

94 Schmieder, “Christians, Jews, Muslims,” 287.

There is a clear difference in how Kirakos Ganjaketsi and Grigor Aknerci described Hülegü's attitude to Christianity.⁹⁵ According to Kirakos, Hülegü was a Buddhist:

He also built huge homes for the idols, assembling there all craftsmen of stone, wood, and pictures. For there is a people called *toyink* who are sorcerers and witches who, by magical means, make horses, camels, the dead and felt pictures speak. They are all priests with shaven heads and beards and wear yellow cloaks on the breast. They worship everything, especially Shakmonia and Modri. They deceived [Hülegü] and said that they would make him immortal; and he lived, moved, and mounted according to their words and thoroughly gave himself over to their will. Many times during the day he bowed to the ground to their leader, and ate from the dedicatory altar in the house of idols and esteemed it more than any of them. Therefore he especially adorned their temple of idols. Now [Hülegü's] senior wife Doquz Khatun was a Christian and although she frequently reproached him, she was unable to free him from the sorcerers. However, she herself lived piously, aiding and supporting the Christians.⁹⁶

Grigor omitted Hülegü's explicit religious identification and emphasized his love for the Christians: "Hulawu Khan was very good, loving Christians, the church, and priests."⁹⁷ And once again: "He loved Christian folk more than the infidels."⁹⁸

The best example of how the Armenians attempted to persuade the Franks in the necessity of alliance with the Mongols could be traced in a description of the battle lost by Ket-Bugha near Ain-Jalut in 1260. Well-informed Constable Smbat wrote in his *Chronicle* that the battle was lost because of Ket-Bugha,

95 In his letter of 1262 to King Louis IX, Hülegü described himself as both "eager ravager of the faithless races of the Saracens" and a "kindly exalter of the Christian faith." Meyvaert, "An Unknown Letter," 253, 257, 258. "In order to win Louis's support Hulagu stresses his own friendly attitude towards Christians, and underlines the actions he has taken to help them. . . . Hulagu states that he ordered the city of Jerusalem, after its capture by the Mongols, to be restored to the papacy. . . ." Meyvaert, "An Unknown Letter," 250. Hülegü also emphasized his protection of Nestorian Christians during the Mongol assault on Baghdad in 1258. Meyvaert, "An Unknown Letter," 256. For more details see also: Jackson, *The Mongols*, 245-290; Jackson, *Hülegü Khan*, 196-213; Fiey, Chapter II. *Le nouveau Constantin: Hülagu (1256-1265)*, in particular 18-19, 22-23, 32.

96 Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 333-334.

97 Aknerci, *History of the Nation*, 341.

98 Aknerci, *History of the Nation*, 343.

who “did not remain faithful to the khan’s order—which was to remain in his designated place. Rather, he assembled troops . . . and then went and entered Egypt.”⁹⁹ There is nothing about origins or religious beliefs of Ket-Bugha in the *Chronicle*. Kirakos, a contemporary of the event, described it as one of Hülegü’s military actions in Syria directed against the Saracens of Egypt:

He killed many of them and enslaved even more, and, leaving some twenty thousand soldiers as guards, returned to the plain of Hemian to winter. Now the sultan of Egypt gathered many troops and came against the guards of the Tatar army whose chief was a man named Ket-Bugha, a Christian and a Naiman by nationality,¹⁰⁰ a man of great respect who warred valiantly against the sultan. But he was killed with his entire army because the Egyptians were very numerous. They battled in the plain of Mt. Taborakan. Among Ket-Bugha’s warriors were many Armenians and Georgians who were killed with him. This took place in 709 Armenian era [1260].¹⁰¹

The Cilician Armenian Grigor identified Jerusalem as the main aim of Hülegü’s march into Syria and Palestine. Grigor never stated directly that Hülegü was a Christian, but described him as a good Christian pilgrim, almost a crusader

99 Nersessian, “The Armenian Chronicle,” 160.

100 William of Rubruck described the Naimans as the subjects of Prester John. “The country of the Naimans who were Prester John’s own people.” Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 147. “And in a certain plane country within those Alps, there inhabited a Nestorian shepherd, being a mighty governor over the people called Yayman [Nayman], which were Christians, following the sect of Nestorians. After the death of Con Can, the said Nestorian exalted himself to the kingdom, and they called him King John, reporting ten times more of him than was true. For so the Nestorians who come out of those parts, used to do. For they blaze abroad great rumours, and reports upon just nothing. Whereupon they gave out concerning Sartach, that he was become a Christian, and the like also they reported concerning Mangu Can, and Ken Can namely because these Tartars make more account of Christians, than they do of other people, and yet in very deed, themselves are no Christians. So likewise there went forth a great report concerning the said king John.” Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 122. “Et in quadam planicie inter illas Alpes erat quidam Nestorinus pastor potens et dominus super populum, qui dicebatur Vayman qui erant Christiani Nestorini. Mortuo Con can eleuauit se ille Nestorius in regem, et vocabant eum Nestoriani Regem Iohannem: et plus dicebant de ipso in decuplo quam veritas esset. Ita enim faciunt Nestoriani venientes de partibus illis. De nihilo enim faciunt magnos rumores. Vnde disseminauerunt de Sartach quod esset Christianus, et de Mangu Can et Ken can: quia faciunt maiorem reuerentiam Christianis, quàm alijs populis, et tamen in veritate Christiani non sunt. Sic ergo exiuit magna fama de illo Rege Iohanne.”

101 Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 325.

who released the Holy City from the hands of infidels. Grigor also emphasized the guilt of the Franks of Levant who did not support Ket-Bugha against the Saracens:

The city of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre of Christ our God had remained in the hands of the Arabs from the time of sultan Salahatin onward. Hulawu Khan hearing this went against the city of Jerusalem and took it. He himself entered the church of the Holy Resurrection and prostrated himself before the Holy Sepulchre. Leaving a force on the spot he himself returned in peace to the eastern country. Then Kitbuga, who was the commander of the Tatar force, becoming overweening, went out to a place ten days journey from Jerusalem. Then the doglike and lawless Egyptians, learning that the army of the Tatars was living in unpreparedness, gathered their forces and with countless multitudes fell upon the Tatars, killed many of them, put many to flight, and captured many. Again they took Jerusalem, Aleppo, and Damascus. This was with the aid of the Frankish knights, who had not yet become friendly with the Tatars. So this came to pass.¹⁰²

Het'um of Corycus describes Ket-Bugha (Guiboga, Ginboga) as a hero, almost oriental pilgrim and crusader who traveled to recover the Holy Land.¹⁰³ If Kirakos just noted that Ket-Bugha was a Christian and Naiman by his ethnic origin, in Het'oum's story Ket-Buga became a descendant of the Magi who also came from the East: "and he loved and honoured so much the Christians since he was from the lineage of the three oriental kings who came to Bethlehem to adore the nativity of Our Lord."¹⁰⁴ In this way, Het'um of Corycus connected Ket-Bugha, a descendant of the Magi, with the story about these Magi who came from the land of Tangut to adore Christ in his uncle, Smbat Constables', letter of 1248. Thus, the story was completed. From the remote oriental country came Christians to recover the Holy Land, but their efforts were unsuccessful since they didn't get the support of the Franks. Thus, Het'um once again emphasized the necessity of the Latin-Mongol alliance.

¹⁰² Aknerci, *History of the Nation*, 349.

¹⁰³ "si come Guiboga se travaillo[i]t de recovrer la Terre Sante." *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents arméniens, II*, 173.

¹⁰⁴ "e molt amoit e honoroit les Crestiens, car il estoit del linage de les III rois d'Orient qui vidrent aorer en Belleem la nativite Nostre Seignor." *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents arméniens, II*, 173-174. See also: P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), 120-121.

In different ways Smbat, Het'um I, and Het'um of Corycus produced the positive image of the Mongols as friends of the Christians and enemies of the Saracens. The Cilician Armenians used the Gospel story on the *Adoration of Magi* who converted peoples of the East and even constructed a legend that some Mongols were descendants of the Magi. They also used the famous legend about Prester John as an ally of the Mongols to promote the project of the common Latin-Mongol crusade.

Dei Filius, per manus Tartarorum, operatus: The Domino Effect

While describing the first appearance of the Mongol troops in Armenian lands in 1220, Kirakos noted “the false rumors” concerning the Mongols who allegedly had come to avenge the Christians from the tyranny of the Muslims.¹⁰⁵ As a captive who spent a lot of time among the Mongols fulfilling functions of their scribe, Kirakos was intelligent enough to “discover” that the Tatars have nothing in common with these rumors.

Evidently, Kirakos’ “discovery” was not exclusively his own. Thus, from the very beginning of the Mongol invasion into the Middle East, it was not a secret for the Armenian elite that all these stories about the Magi and Christian Tatars were “false rumors.” On the other hand, the Armenian elite of Cilicia never deceived its Frankish partners. These false rumors were used by Smbat, Het'um I and Het'um of Corycus for a holy goal, namely, to recover the Holy Land from the hands of the Saracens, which was the aim of the Latins as well. The Cilician rulers used the stories invented by the Franks themselves to promote the Frankish-Mongol alliance and to stimulate the Latins to take up a new Crusade. Ghazan’s success in Syria in 1300 could provide us with a good example on how the expectations of a miracle produced one in the imagination of the Latins.

Narrative accounts as well as numerous letters prove that between February 1300 and September 1300, many Christians in the West labored under the impression that the Holy Land, including Jerusalem with the Holy Sepulchre, was conquered by the Mongol Khan Ghazan from the Moslems and handed over to Christians. The author of the *Gesta Boemundi*, a canon of the church of Trier, affirmed that God wanted to put an end to the misery of the deserted Holy Land. As he could not find even one among the sons of the Church, he chose a Mongol king, a pagan, to fight His wars. The pagan Ghazan appears even in an official letter of Pope Boniface VIII, dated 7 April 1300, to Edward I. Although most chroniclers keep silent on the subject of the religion of “Cassanus,” some present him as a Christian. Thus the *Flores historiarum* and William Rishanger relate his miraculous conversion when he married the

¹⁰⁵ Ganjaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, 166.

daughter of the Christian king of Armenia. Subsequently the whole Mongol dynasty embraced Christianity.¹⁰⁶

According to the Western chronicles, the Īl-khān conquered not only the Holy Land, but also Egypt. He returned Jerusalem to the Christians and reserved Egypt for himself.¹⁰⁷ On Epiphany, 1300 (January 6) he sang mass, together with the king of Armenia, in the Holy Sepulchre.¹⁰⁸ From Jerusalem the Īl-khān wrote allegedly to Boniface VIII asking for bishops, clergy, settlers and peasants to be sent to the Holy Land. The Īl-khān, it was alleged, also wrote to the masters of the Hospitallers and Templars to come to the Holy Land and recover their castles. Some of the chroniclers even knew about the actual departure to the east of clergymen and contingents of the orders, and the king “sang mass in Jerusalem” and the “Tartars were baptised in the Jordan.”¹⁰⁹

The collective image of this non-event derives from a complex set of circumstances that accumulated in the year 1300. According to Sylvia Schein, it was the year of Jubilee. The influx of pilgrims to Rome and the Jubilee celebrations, which were echoed all over Europe, played a crucial role in transforming an ephemeral event in the Levant into an allegedly major happening.¹¹⁰ I would like to add that the fertile soil for this metamorphosis was prepared during the several decades by the efforts of the Oriental Christians as well as by their Latin co-believers. Several times the news was brought to western Europe by envoys and missionaries that Prester John was killed by the Mongols. But it is impossible to kill a legend. In the Western imagination the Orient was inextricably connected with the Magi, Noah’s Arc, Prester John, and the Iron Gates in the Caspian Mountains, built by Alexander the Great.

Het’um of Corycus visited western Europe with his project of a new Crusade only several years after this new wave of stories about baptized Tatar rulers who intended to recover the Holy Land. And if Het’um would have told nothing about it, his story would probably be considered as inadequate.

106 S. Schein, “*Gesta Dei per Mongolos* 1300. The Genesis of a Non-Event,” *English Historical Review* 94, no. 373 (1979): 805-806. See also: Hornstein, “The Historical Background,” 404-414.

107 “Rex vero Cypri est constitutus rex Jerusalem per magnum Casanum principem Tartarorum qui totam illam terram libere concessit populo Christiano. Ipse vero sibi retinuit Babiloniam et Egyptum.” Schein, “*Gesta Dei per Mongolos* 1300,” 807.

108 “Et in die Epiphaniae Domini fecerunt solemniter celebrari in Hierusalem ad gloriam Christi; et Rex Tartarorum fecit se baptizari cum gente sua.” Schein, “*Gesta Dei per Mongolos* 1300,” 807.

109 According to the *Chronicon Petri Cantinelli*, “Item rex Hermini cantavit missam in Jerusalem in die Epiphaniae Domini, et Tartari baptisati sunt in flumine Jordano, omnes Saracenos, quos inveniebant interficientes preter rusticos quos conservant ad colendum terras.” Schein, “*Gesta Dei per Mongolos* 1300,” 807-808.

110 Schein, “*Gesta Dei per Mongolos* 1300,” 808.