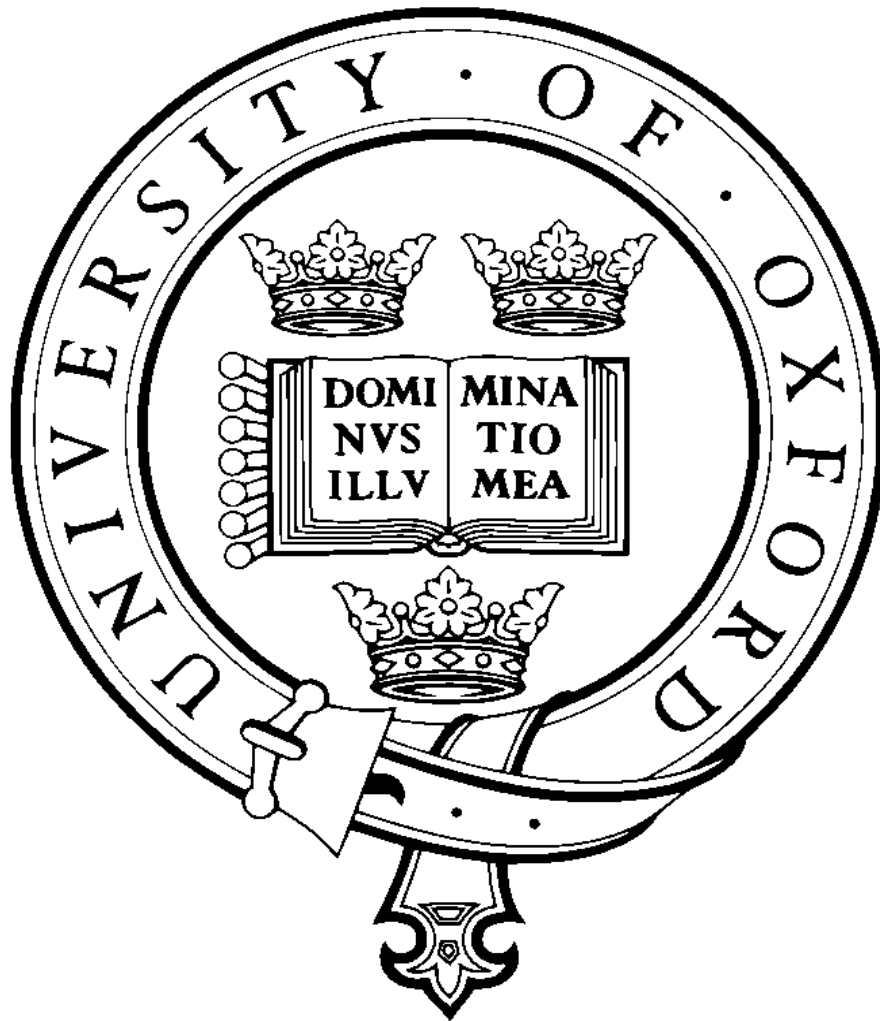


# Agents of the Ordu: Unravelling Ilkhanid networks in Medieval

## Eurasia



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## Abstract

This dissertation proposes a new interpretation of Mongol diplomacy, examined through the case of the Ilkhanate, the Mongol polity that ruled Persia from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century. It argues that diplomacy in the Mongol world cannot be understood as an exclusively outward-facing practice between states, but must instead be conceived as a continuous process of negotiation that was at once internal and external. The study introduces the figure of the *agent* to describe the individuals who mediated between Mongol rulers and their diverse subjects, shaped the conduct of governance and sustained the political life of the empire. By focusing on these agents and the networked connections they created, the dissertation redefines the concept of “encounter,” reconstructing the connective tissue of Eurasian politics as it was lived at court, in chancery, and across frontiers.

Diplomatic activity in the Ilkhanate, as in the wider Mongol Empire, was embedded in a system of compromise, patronage, and brokerage. Agents (whether administrators, clerics, nobles, or merchants) negotiated at the *ordu* not only for themselves but also for their own communities. They acted as mediators who translated political objectives across linguistic, cultural, and religious divides, while simultaneously advancing the interests of their constituencies. This dual role gave them significance beyond formal rank or office, as their effectiveness depended on their ability to occupy positions of “*betweenness*” within wider networks of power. Drawing on the conceptual tools of network analysis, the dissertation shows that influence in the Ilkhanid polity often derived from their ability to bridge “structural holes” between communities that otherwise lacked access to one another.

The Ilkhanid case offers a particularly rich field for analysis because of the abundance of sources from different cultural traditions. Persian, Arabic, Armenian, Syriac, Latin, and Mongolian texts provide complementary perspectives on the same actors and events, enabling a reconstruction of diplomacy as a process shaped by multiple voices. Persia’s religious plurality, its contested

geopolitical position within the Mongol world and in the Middle East, and its importance within long-distance travel and commercial networks created conditions in which brokerage was indispensable. Agents thrived in this environment, leveraging their embeddedness in different communities to mediate disputes, channel information, and broker alliances. Compromise emerges in this context as a structural principle of Ilkhanid governance, which depended on balancing competing claims within a multicultural polity.

This study builds upon, but also departs from, the work of Thomas Allsen. Allsen has demonstrated the Mongols' role in promoting cultural and technical exchanges across Eurasia; this dissertation extends his insights to the political and diplomatic sphere, arguing that mediation was not a one-way transmission of Mongol norms but a two-way process in which subject elites actively reshaped imperial policy.

The concept of "internal diplomacy" is central to this analysis. Much of Ilkhanid diplomatic activity was directed inward, towards the maintenance of balance between the ilkhan and the empire's diverse elites. Envoys and negotiations were not reserved for external polities, but were central to managing the loyalties of nobles, administrators, and religious communities within Persia itself. By treating these interactions as diplomatic in nature, the dissertation challenges narrow definitions of diplomacy rooted in early modern state practice, and situates the Ilkhanid court within a broader, actor-centred history.

The dissertation is organised in two parts. The first examines internal diplomacy. Chapter one reconstructs the Mongol conquest of Persia and the political circumstances that gave rise to the Ilkhanate. It analyses the relations between the Ilkhans and their military aristocracy, highlighting how constant negotiation with noble lineages shaped the distribution of authority. The chapter shows that the military aristocracy was a decisive actor whose cooperation was essential to the Ilkhanid project, and addresses the ways in which the Ilkhanid political trajectory was shaped by the prominent roles acquired by the military aristocracy. Chapter two turns to the administrators, tracing the emergence of the Ilkhanid bureaucratic system. It demonstrates how ministers, drawing on their

connections with the territories they governed, used patronage to embed themselves at court, and how the Ilkhans' reliance on them gradually reoriented the polity towards a Persianate Muslim identity. Together, these chapters argue that Ilkhanid governance was sustained through compromise with both military and administrative elites, who acted as agents of their constituencies as well as servants of the ilkhan.

The second part analyses outward-facing diplomacy, understood not in opposition to internal politics but as an extension of the same processes of brokerage. Chapter three considers the Nestorian Christians of the Ilkhanate, who cultivated ties with Latin Christendom while negotiating their survival within a predominantly Muslim society. Figures such as Rabban Sawma exemplify how religious identity could serve as a resource for diplomacy, enabling individuals to represent both their community and their Mongol patrons on a transcontinental stage. Chapter four examines the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, where the Het'umid dynasty played an important role in mediating between Ilkhanid and Latin interests. Armenian rulers used their unique position to influence Latin perceptions of the Mongols, while also securing military and political support for their own kingdom. Chapter five turns to Italian merchants, whose presence in Tabriz and other centres of trade increased during Mongol rule. Their activities demonstrate how commercial interests could overlap with diplomacy, and how Mongol rulers strategically employed merchants as envoys and brokers in pursuit of their own objectives.

Across these chapters, the dissertation shows how diplomacy in the Ilkhanid world was enacted by a variety of figures whose authority derived from their ability to navigate multiple affiliations. Whether military nobles, Persian administrators, Nestorian clerics, Armenian kings, or Italian merchants, these figures occupied strategic positions within networks that spanned local, regional, and global scales.

The conclusion synthesises these findings to argue that diplomacy in the Mongol world must be reconceived as a mode of governance, as it was the mechanism through which the Ilkhanate held

together a heterogeneous empire. By reconstructing the relational architecture of Ilkhanid politics, this dissertation contributes to both Mongol studies and the wider field of diplomatic history.

Ultimately, this research challenges dichotomies that have long structured interpretations of Mongol rule: conquerors versus conquered, centre versus periphery, continuity versus change. By focusing on agents and their networks, it reveals a polity sustained through compromise, brokerage, and negotiation. In Persia, these processes produced a distinctive form of political stability in which the ilkhan's authority was continuously redefined by the interventions of his most influential subjects. More broadly, the dissertation suggests that Mongol rule should be understood as a system of interdependent relationships that linked communities and individuals across Eurasia.

## Short Abstract

This dissertation reinterprets Mongol diplomacy and governance by analysing the Ilkhanate, the Mongol polity ruling Persia from the mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century. It argues that diplomacy was not limited to external relations but was embedded in internal governance, functioning as a continuous process of negotiation between rulers and diverse elites.

The study introduces the category of the *agent* to describe individuals who mediated between the Ilkhans and their constituencies. These agents, whether nobles, Persian administrators, Nestorian clerics, Armenian kings, or Italian merchants, acted simultaneously as representatives of their communities and as servants of Mongol rulers. Their influence derived from their ability to occupy strategic positions within networks that linked otherwise disconnected groups. By applying concepts such as brokerage, the dissertation shows how agents exercised power through their capacity to extend their networks to bridge cultural, religious, and political divides.

Persia's religious diversity, contested frontiers, and central role in Eurasian geopolitics created conditions in which negotiation and compromise were indispensable. By examining the interactions of different groups at the *ordu*, the study defines "internal diplomacy" as the balancing of power within the empire, and demonstrates how these processes shaped external relations as well.

The thesis is organised in two parts: the first analyses relations between the ilkhan, the military aristocracy, and the Persian administrative elite; the second explores outward diplomacy through Eastern Christians, Armenians, and Italian merchants. The conclusion reframes diplomacy in the Mongol world as a mode of governance sustained through compromise, brokerage, and negotiation.

## Acknowledgements

The journey of composing this dissertation has often felt nearly insurmountable. Pursuing a doctoral degree is inherently challenging, and beginning my time at Oxford during a pandemic only added to the difficulties. Throughout the past four years, however, I have been fortunate to receive the love and support of many exceptional individuals who have shaped my experience at Oxford.

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# Introduction

## ◆ Author's note

This dissertation contains several toponyms, names and designations employed as conventions to facilitate the reader's experience. For instance, for the sake of clarity, I use names that indicate nationalities, like Iranian and Italian. It is important to note that these terms, in the context of this dissertation, primarily denote geographical rather than ethnic affiliation and do not represent countries or national identities in the period discussed. Likewise, other terms might be outdated or inadequate in describing certain realities. For instance, "Nestorian" is used to designate the Church of the East, as it is standard in other contemporary studies on the Mongol Empire. This easily allows us to distinguish between different branches of Eastern Christianity under Mongol domination. Terms indicating institutions (state, diplomacy, etc.) might also seem out of place, as they designate governmental bodies and practices which fully developed during the late early modern period. Again, these have been used for convenience, as retaining established usage seemed preferable to creating neologisms or trying to find different synonyms. The dates in this work are those according to the common era (Gregorian Calendar). Where dates are cited from Muslim sources, the date according to the Hijrī calendar is not reported. This is to avoid confusion for the reader, as the argument of this dissertation rests on different contemporary events happening both in the Islamic world and elsewhere.

Given the multiplicity of source languages, transliteration is a complex task when studying the Mongols. I have adhered to the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* system for Arabic and Persian.<sup>1</sup> Mongol names, however, have been spelt in their more 'Mongol' form rather than the Persian: for instance, Öljeitü and not Ūljāyṭū. Similarly, for Turco-Mongol terms appearing in Persian, I have used Gerhard Doerfer's *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*

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<sup>1</sup> *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, (Cambridge University Press).

transliteration in the English text.<sup>2</sup> I have used Igor de Rachewiltz's translation of the *Secret History of the Mongols* for other Mongolian terms.<sup>3</sup> For the transliteration of Armenian names, I have used the work of Robert Bedrosian, with some adaptations to the English conventional form when the names are widely reported in other sources, or when the original Armenian form could cause confusion between different individuals (i.e. Het'um and Hayton). For some of the names indicating titles, offices, institutions (*qa'an*, *ortāq yarghu*) I have endeavoured to retain a form similar to the original. These names are italicised in the text. I have adapted to conventional usage for specific terms (i.e. khan instead of qan). I use the forms without diacritics for well-known dynasties and place names, thus the Mamluks, not the Mamlūks, and Khurasan, not Khūrasan. I have adapted all quoted translations to this style but kept the original writing forms in titles and secondary works in quotation.

Concerning the translation of the sources reported, I adopted various criteria depending on the source's importance, length, and relevance for each chapter's argument. Generally speaking, I have endeavoured to include text in the original language for the sources I reported in languages I was able to translate. Some of the sources I have encountered were accompanied by an English translation in the same volume. In these cases, I have tried to report both the original and the translation as was done by the author. In some cases, I have consulted both a translated edition and one in the original language. In those instances, the English translation has been reported for the in-text citation, but it is mostly accompanied by the original text in the footnotes. Some of the works only cited once or twice in the text, like those of Mustawfī, Pian Del Carpine and Rubruck, have been consulted and cited in their English versions.

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<sup>2</sup> Doerfer, G. *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen: unter besonderer Berücksichtigung älterer Neupersischen Geschichtsquellen, vor allem der Mongolen- und Timuridenzeit*, 2 Vols. (Wiesbaden, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian epic chronicle of the thirteenth century Translated with a historical and philological commentary*, transl. De Rachewiltz, I. 2 Vols. (Leiden, 2006).

## ◆ The Conquest

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1258, the city of Baghdad, a bastion of Islamic civilisation, witnessed the surrender of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph Al-Musta‘īm to Hülegü, the brother of Möngke, *qa’an* (great khan) of the Mongol Empire. While it was not the first time Baghdad had surrendered to invaders from Persia or Inner Asia, the tragedy that unfolded over the next three days set apart the Mongol conquest of the city. The Caliph, his kin, and a sizable portion of Baghdad’s populace were massacred by the invaders, formally ending the long rule of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty.

The violence and swiftness of Mongol campaigns and the new conquerors’ brutality shocked Middle Eastern societies. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, were displaced, killed, or starved. Massive military hosts caused mayhem in major cities all over Central Asia, Iran, Iraq, Anatolia and Syria. European and Middle Eastern chroniclers often described the Mongols as a plague or a divine punishment. This apocalyptic view of the “Tartars” influenced literary works, art and religion, with prominent Muslim and Christian figures invoking the end of the world and blaming the scourge on the sins of their followers.<sup>4</sup> Contemporary accounts, including the ones written by Mongol subjects at a later time, confirm the terrible devastation inflicted by nomadic hosts on the lands and people they conquered. Following these accounts, until recently, the focus of historiography leaned towards highlighting the catastrophic aftermath of the invasions, coining terms like *Tatar Yoke* to underscore the oppressive nature of Mongol rule. A 1933 piece for the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* by Joseph De Somogyi lamented that “Islam has rarely survived a more disastrous and sadder event than the destruction of Baghdad.”<sup>5</sup> This critical stance

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<sup>4</sup> On this, see May, T. “The Mongols as the Scourge of God in The Islamic World,” in Gleave, R. and Kristó-Nagy, I.T. eds. *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Mongols to European Imperialism* (Edinburgh, 2018): 32-57.

<sup>5</sup> De Somogyi, J. “A Qaṣīda on the Destruction of Baghdād by the Mongols.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London*, 7, 1 (1933): 41-48.

extended to the aftermath of Mongol conquests, as the tyrannical rule of Persian ministers and their cooperative behaviour with the conquerors were emphasised.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the dreadful accounts of Mongol military campaigns, influential academics like Bernard Lewis and David Morgan challenged the tout-court negative perception of the Mongols during the last fifty years.<sup>7</sup> More recently, Charles Melville hypothesised that the sources often overstated the devastation and brutality of the Mongol invasions, and that the Mongols embraced and profited from their terrifying reputation. He suggested that much of the destruction occurred in the realm of perception rather than on the physical landscape.<sup>8</sup> Historiography has also shown a growing openness to reevaluate Činggis Khan's legacy over the last few decades. In his *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, Thomas Allsen remarked that, despite the notable contributions made to world culture by the nomads of Inner Asia, nomadic influence on sedentary societies has often received little attention.<sup>9</sup> Michal Biran emphasised how Činggis Khan's successors catalysed a lasting cultural rebirth, fostered artistic and scientific progress, and actively encouraged cultural and commercial exchanges. They established new and enduring forms and theories of legitimacy, jurisprudence, and imperial culture and instigated numerous religious, ethnic, and political transformations. With this, the Mongols achieved an unprecedented integration of Eurasia, effectively "globalising" the Old World.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Browne, E.G. *A Literary History of Persia: From Firdawsi to Sa'di* (London, 1906), p.426-27; Browne, E.G. *A History of Persian Literature under Tartar Domination* (Cambridge, 1920), p.14-15. It must be noted that most writers in the early twentieth century based their accounts of the Mongols primarily on D'Ohsson, A. *Histoire des Mongols*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (The Hague and Amsterdam, 1834).

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, B. "The Mongols, the Turks and the Muslim Polity." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 18 (1968): 49-68; Morgan, D. *The Mongols*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 2007); Morgan, D. "The Mongols in Iran: A Reappraisal." *Iran*, 42, 1 (2004): 131-136.

<sup>8</sup> Melville, C. "The Impact of the Mongol invasions on Iran, Iraq and Central Asia: A Revaluation." *The Indo-Mongolian Society Lecture at New York University*, March 12th, 1997. For various approaches to Mongol rule in Iran, see De Nicola, B. and Melville, C. eds. *The Mongols' Middle East: Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran* (Leiden-Boston, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> McGovern, W.M. *The Early Empires of Central Asia* (Chapel Hill, 1939), p.1-6; Allsen, T.T. *Culture and conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge, 2004), p.4.

<sup>10</sup> Biran, M. "The Mongol Empire and inter-civilizational exchange," in Kedar, B.Z. Wiesner-Hanks, M.E. eds. *The Cambridge World History* (Cambridge, 2015): 534-558, p.535-536.

Contemporary historiography reflects these new interpretations, shifting its focus to the aftermath and the beneficial consequences of Mongol rule, with works like Jack Weatherford's *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* or George Lane's *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth Century Iran: A Persian Renaissance*.<sup>11</sup>

Opposing terminology, such as the expressions *Tatar Yoke* and *Pax Mongolica*, emerged as a reflection of the incompatibilities of these new approaches with the more "traditional" view of Mongol domination. These terms have often fuelled discussions with strong nationalistic undertones.<sup>12</sup> This dissertation contends that many of these analyses are incomplete, as they either focus on rehabilitating the Mongols or emphasise the consequences of their invasions on local populations, often overlooking the complex political interactions between the conquerors and the conquered. By doing so, they fail to assess how Mongol rule, especially in the Persianate world, unfolded and was negotiated cooperatively. As with earlier instances during Seljuk and Qara Khitai rule, Mongol domination was met with a notable degree of receptivity, particularly from administrative and intellectual elites. Traces of these dynamics are abundant in contemporary literary production. A different approach to Mongol domination encourages a more nuanced interpretation,

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<sup>11</sup> Weatherford, J. *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (London, 2005); Jackson, P. *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (New Haven and London, 2017); Lane, G. *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth Century Iran: A Persian Renaissance* (London, 2003). During the last decades, works approaching Mongol domination in Persia with a new perspective have flourished in many areas and academic communities. Particularly notable are the works of scholars like Amitai-Preiss and Biran in Israel, De Nicola and Fiaschetti in Austria, and, finally, the contributions by Denise Aigle and Marie Favereau in France. For instance: Favereau, M. *The Horde: How the Mongols Changed the World* (Boston, 2021); Aigle, D. *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History* (Leiden, 2014); Amitai-Preiss, R. and Biran, M. eds. *Mongols, Turks, and others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden, 2004); Amitai-Preiss, R. Biran, M. and Yang A. eds. *Nomads as agents of cultural change: The Mongols and their Eurasian predecessors* (Honolulu, 2015); Biran, M. Brack, J. and Fiaschetti, F. eds. *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals* (Oakland, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Both Kim and Allsen attempt to reconcile these two different views in their work. See Allsen, T.T. *Commodity and exchange in the Mongol empire: A cultural history of Islamic textiles* (Cambridge, 1997), p.4-5; Kim, H. "The Unity of the Mongol Empire and Continental Exchange over Eurasia." *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies*, 1 (2009): 15-42, p.15. For a comprehensive theoretical delineation of these two concepts, see: Tabak, F. "Ars Longa, Vita Brevis? A Geohistorical Perspective on Pax Mongolica." *Review, Fernand Braudel Centre*, 19,1 (1996): 23-48; Halperin, C.J. *The Tatar Yoke: The Image of the Mongols in Medieval Russia* (Bloomington, 2009).

emphasising cooperation and assimilation in the interactions between Mongol rulers and Persian elites during this period, seeking to understand how these relations worked in practice. In other words, a greater emphasis is placed on how Mongol domination played a role in shaping Iran's historical evolution despite the undeniable hardships. Persia had to suffer the brutality of Mongol invasions. Still, after the destruction of Baghdad and the establishment of the Ilkhanate, the region solidly remained the centre of a new empire. While western Iran had also experienced a resurgence under Seljuk rule, the restoration of an empire entirely based in Persia became achievable only after the fall of Caliphal authority and the end of Arab cultural and political dominance in the region. Hülegü's legitimation as a ruler by the Persianate elite and his great-grandson Ghazan's conversion to Islam effectively marked an irreversible transformation, something that was acknowledged and, at times, celebrated by local elites.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the revival of the Persian language in literature, historiography, and administrative culture, and its consequent extension to adjacent regions like Iraq and Anatolia strengthened, in Lane's words, the Persian "cultural, political and spiritual links with Turkic lands." This linguistic revitalisation foreshadowed the eventual rise to power of dynasties like the Timurids and the Safavids, who would tap into these critical resources.<sup>14</sup>

The present study approaches the Ilkhanate's formation and development as a regional power through the networks of agents that sustained its governance. It argues that these actors, and the connections they maintained, formed the essential infrastructure of Ilkhanid political and economic power and played a decisive role in shaping its policies. To present a comprehensive analysis of these

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<sup>13</sup> The purpose of this work is not an analysis of propaganda and imperial rhetoric in Persian historiography. This thesis is mostly interested in the existence of mutual relations and their development, less in what the Persianate elite privately thought about their Mongol overlord. For an overview on the topic, especially on the works of Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn, see: Amitai-Preiss, R. "Political Legitimation in the Ilkhanate: More Thoughts on the Mongol Imperial Ideology, the Introduction of Muslim Justifications, and the Revival of Iranian Ideals," in Atwood, C. Dashdondog B. and May, T. eds. *New Approaches to Ilkhanid History* (Leiden, 2020): 209-248; Kamola, S. *Making Mongol History: Rashid al-Dīn and the Jami' al-Tawarikh* (Edinburgh, 2019); Melville, C. "Persian Sources," in Biran, M. Kim, H. eds. *The Cambridge History of the Mongol Empire* (Cambridge, 2023): 879-919; Jackson, P. "Mongol Khans and Religious Allegiance: The Problems Confronting a Minister-Historian in Ilkhanid Iran." *Iran*, 47,1 (2009): 109-122.

<sup>14</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.236; Hope, M. *Power, Politics, and Tradition in the Mongol Empire and the Ilkhānate of Iran* (Oxford, 2016), preface, p.16.

connections, this study evaluates the diplomatic and political dimensions of Mongol rule by treating both ruler-subject dynamics and the wider networks of relations as networked diplomatic interactions. It does so by focusing on aspects like compromise, mutual trust, and competition to trace a more accurate and coherent depiction of what have often been generically defined as “Eurasian encounters” or “Eurasian exchanges.”<sup>15</sup>

## ◆ The Agents

From the early days of their conquests, the Mongols primarily employed “foreign” merchants, religious leaders, and administrators to help supply their armies, fuel their economy and consolidate their control over conquered regions. This cooperation increased during the rule of the descendants of Činggis Khan, especially those hailing from the Toluid royal line. These monarchs, in fact, forged economic, cultural, and political alliances that brought about radical changes in Iran and China. Rulers such as Qubilai and Hülegü garnered commendation for their governance, which was marked by attributes such as commitment to the rule of law, foresight, and political astuteness. Even if these commendations were often panegyric in nature, they nonetheless signal an important alliance between these rulers and their subjects. This alliance extended to their economic, cultural, and political endeavours, which engendered transformative effects on the regions under their domination, establishing a dichotomy between their nomadic origins and the refined courts that took root in their imperial capitals.<sup>16</sup>

The heterogeneous skill sets of religious figures, merchants, and aristocrats from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds made them ideal candidates for the highest representative roles within the empire. For this reason, Mongol rulers engaged with Eurasian elites by utilising them as

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<sup>15</sup> See Biran, “Inter-civilizational exchange.” p.534-558. A strong encouragement to turn this work into a more coherent view of Mongol networks came from my supervisor, Dr. Amanda Power, author of “Encounters in the Ruins: Latin Captives, Franciscan Friars and the Dangers of Religious Plurality in the Early Mongol Empire.” *Studies in Church History*, 51 (2015): 115-136.

<sup>16</sup> Allsen, *Culture and conquest*, p.430.

envoys and negotiators, recognising their significance in managing diplomatic relations with various cultural spheres.

Notably, exchanges between the Muslim and Chinese worlds continued on an unprecedented scale even after the empire's division. Mutual interaction was further catalysed by Ilkhanid alignment with China in a period of conflicts between different branches of the Činggisids, and marked a significant juncture in Eurasian geopolitics. Using Persia and China as bases, Toluid rulers enlisted the cooperation of two of the most advanced sedentary societies in the world. They invigorated and extended existing trade routes between the Middle East and East Asia and provided excellent infrastructure to accomplish long-distance travel in a comparatively short time. The extension and functionality of these so-called "Silk Roads" significantly advanced Eurasian integration and allowed a massive growth in the volume of exchanges.<sup>17</sup> Mongol rulers also actively participated in trade, investing large sums of money and encouraging the exchange of goods and services of their liking. Thus, they determined the success or failure of products and scientific and technical progress across different parts of the Eurasian landmass.<sup>18</sup> The courts in China and Persia gathered experts in medicine, languages, astrology, history, and administration. This fostered a quasi-symbiotic relationship, with the most prominent subjects of the *qa'ans* and the ilkhans actively engaging in their rulers' affairs. Conversely, the Mongol ruling class displayed a readiness to incorporate elements of their subjects' practices and religions (Confucianism in China and Islam in other Mongol

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<sup>17</sup> The term Silk Road or, to be more precise, Silk Roads, has always been quite controversial, and it refers to trade routes linking East Asia with the Islamic world and Europe. Von Richthofen, F. "Über die zentralasiatischen Seidenstrassen bis zum 2. Jh. N. Chr." *Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde Zu Berlin*, 4 (1877): 96-122. The term derives from the German *Seidenstraße*, and it was coined to describe the various commercial pathways traversing Eurasia that had been in use since the Bronze Age. The Mongol period marked a new phase in the history of the Silk Roads, characterised by a surge in transcontinental trade. Some of the most significant works on the Silk Roads pertinent to this dissertation are Hansen, V. *The Silk Road: A New History* (New York, 2012); Whitfield, S. ed. *Silk Roads: Peoples, Cultures, Landscapes* (London, 2019); Withfield, S. *Silk, Slaves and Stupas: Material Culture of the Silk Road* (Oakland, 2018); Whitfield, S. *Life Along the Silk Road* (Oakland, 2015); Frankopan, P. *The silk roads: a new history of the world* (London, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Biran, M. "Mobility, Empire and Cross-Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia." *Medieval Worlds*, 8 (2018): 135-154, p.137; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.107; Biran, Brack, Fiaschetti, *Silk Roads*, preface, p.18.

polities) while also adopting sedentary modes of governance, particularly in China and Persia.<sup>19</sup> However, this did not imply a loss of pluralism, as legitimising motives from various religious or cultural traditions could coexist and benefit Mongol rule, which was also solidly anchored to Činggis Khan's imperial ideology.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, the Mongols' acceptance of different cultures and religious views and their patronage of different communities were often coupled with privileges and tax exemptions. This allowed historically marginalised minorities to thrive and contribute to the Mongol administration. In short, a realm of opportunities opened up for the elites willing to politically align with the Mongols. Especially in China and Persia, this allowed for the establishment of a cooperative multiracial and multifaith elite, which formed the backbone of Mongol administration, with a position at the apex of imperial bureaucracy that was just below that of the new conquerors.<sup>21</sup>

Allsen's work has greatly emphasised the Mongols' patronage of the arts and sciences and their active support of intellectual and artistic endeavours, and proved instrumental in framing the Empire as a coherent zone of exchange of technical knowledge and cultural transmission.<sup>22</sup> More recent scholarship has extended this approach by turning attention to the political and administrative dimensions of Mongol rule. Among the most important contributions in this regard are the essays

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<sup>19</sup> For the integration of Confucian rituals into Mongol court practices, see Sloane, J. "Confucianism in the Mongol Empire," in May, T. and Hope, M. eds. *The Mongol World* (London, 2022): 671-680, p.674-676.

<sup>20</sup> Biran, Brack, Fiaschetti eds. *Silk Roads*, preface, p.12. Concerning the production of legitimising literature, see Khanbaghi, A. "Champions of the Persian Language: The Mongols or the Turks?" in De Nicola B. and Melville, C. eds. *The Mongols' Middle East. Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran* (Leiden-Boston, 2016): 195-215, p.207-208; Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.328-334.

<sup>21</sup> On Mongol tolerance and relationship with other religions in general, see Lane, G. "Intellectual jousting and the Činggisid wisdom bazaars." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 26,1-2 (2016): 235-247; Brack, J. "Disenchanted Heaven: Interfaith Debate, Sacral Kingship and Conversion to Islam in the Mongol Empire, 1260-1335." *Past and Present*, 250 (2021): 11-53; Atwood, C. "A Secular Empire? Estates, Nom, and Religions in the Mongol Empire." *Modern Asian Studies*, 56, 3 (2022): 796-814; Biran, M. "In the Service of the Khans: Elites in Transition in Mongol Eurasia." *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques*, 71, 4 (2017): 1051-1245.

<sup>22</sup> Allsen, *Culture and conquest*, p.430. See also Park, H. *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds: Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-Modern Asia* (Cambridge, 2012).

collected by Dashdondog, Atwood and Amitai-Preiss in their *New Approaches to Ilkhanid History*, which examines how imperial agents enabled cross-cultural mediation at the local level.<sup>23</sup>

This dissertation explores these themes further: it contends that the mediating role of such figures should not be understood solely as a conduit for Mongol norms and priorities, but as part of a more complex, two-way process. Individuals who served the Ilkhanid court often acted as “cultural filters,” to borrow Allsen’s formulation. Yet their mediation worked in both directions. They not only translated imperial expectations downward, but also shaped policy and practice in ways that reflected the interests of particular groups, whether defined by class, religious affiliation, or ethnic identity.<sup>24</sup>

This dynamic is particularly visible when Allsen’s analytical lens is applied to the diplomatic and administrative apparatus of the Ilkhanate. Here, the emphasis shifts from commerce and material exchange to questions of authority, allegiance, and negotiation. Groups connected to the court were not merely instruments of imperial will; they also sought to secure privileges, protections, and influence by leveraging their position within the administrative hierarchy. Their actions contributed to the formation of a political field in which local and imperial interests intersected. Within this framework, interactions emerge as politically charged competitions over resources, recognition, and legitimacy. As such, they must be understood as arenas of negotiation, shaped by the ambitions of those who sought influence and by the structures that enabled or limited their access to power. In sum, in this study, Mongol cultural priorities, political interests and social norms are considered alongside the aspirations of their most influential subjects, figures whose agency, though often exercised through imperial structures, was neither marginal nor subordinate. Their interventions formed part of the very logic by which Mongol rule was articulated and sustained.

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<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Peacock, A.C.S. “Nizām al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, ‘Chief Qadi of China and the East’: An Ilkhanid Man of Letters at the Court of the Juwaynīs,” in Atwood, C. Dashdondog, B. and May, T. eds. *New Approaches to Ilkhanid History* (Leiden, 2020): 13-38; Arom, N.O. “Arrowheads of Hülegü Khan: Envoys and Diplomacy in His Invasion of the Middle East, 1255-1262,” in Atwood, C. Dashdondog B. and May, T. eds. *New Approaches to Ilkhanid History* (Leiden, 2020): 249-271.

<sup>24</sup> Biran, “Cross-Cultural Contacts.” p.138.

## ◆ The Diplomacy

To develop a more precise idea of what this meant, as I delved into Ilkhanid politics, I found it crucial to complement these theories with an approach that encompassed not only Mongol interactions with other polities but also what I term the Ilkhanate's "internal diplomacy." In my view, this concept is necessary to describe the substantial portion of Ilkhanid diplomatic efforts that were inward-focused, dedicated to preserving a delicate balance of power within a highly diverse empire. At this juncture, it is crucial to define what talking about diplomacy entails in the context of this dissertation. Traditional approaches to diplomatic practices have proven insufficient for the study of medieval diplomacy, as premodern times defy the imposition of the concept of state, so dear to nineteenth-century historiography. Medieval polities such as the Ilkhanate do not easily conform to the diplomatic principles of nineteenth-century statesmen, diplomats, and historians.<sup>25</sup> Recent advancements in diplomatic history, particularly those highlighted in the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*' issue entitled "Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe," align more closely with the approach of this dissertation. In his introduction to the issue, John Watkins advocates for the development of a "new diplomatic history," which, in many respects, involves a partial rejection of older models and definitions.<sup>26</sup>

This new interpretation of diplomacy refuses to acknowledge "states" as a primary agent in diplomatic interaction, instead adopting an "actor-centred" approach around individual influential figures. Diplomacy, especially in the medieval period, was conducted by individuals rather than impersonal entities like collectives and institutions. This implies that decision-making was ultimately determined by different factors that could transcend a particular polity's or kingdom's overall political or diplomatic strategy. This was possible because people's personalities, experiences, agendas, and political and cultural contexts influenced the decision-making process. For this reason,

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<sup>25</sup> "The New Diplomatic History and the Middle Ages." *The Historian's Sketchpad*, June 16, 2022, (Author unspecified).

<sup>26</sup> Watkins, J. "Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38 (2008): 1-14.

Watkins highlights the inconsistency of concepts such as “foreign relations” or “diplomacy” when applied to this period, as no social group or estate ever exclusively claimed or assumed diplomatic functions within a medieval polity.<sup>27</sup> Instead, internal factional balance and diplomacy were intimately connected. Both in Europe and in the Middle East, diplomacy with other kingdoms often hinged on the rulers and their relationships with their peers or on the diplomatic, commercial and military networks established by a certain estate. Additionally, the independence enjoyed by medieval estates was often reflected in foreign relations: aristocrats could, and usually did, act not only as intermediaries between their overlords, but also as independent agents who pursued foreign relations in their own right and established personal connections to their advantage. For instance, recent studies on the early modern period have emphasised the significance retained by community leaders, administrators and aristocrats in communicating with representatives of foreign powers.<sup>28</sup>

Notably, several contemporary diplomatic trends, such as a renewed emphasis on “regional diplomacy,” resemble medieval diplomatic practices, aligning with the focus of this research.<sup>29</sup> For instance, the term “networked diplomacy” was introduced to address the participation of non-governmental actors in diplomatic activities and their role in establishing informal networks. These networks, much like the ones characterising the medieval and early modern periods, consist of individuals who occupy similar positions within institutional or social frameworks. In his piece on networked diplomacy, Metzl defines the role of these networks: “By engaging in flexible forms of interaction with similar actors operating in different countries or regions, these networks create new community relationships that build upon, democratise, and amplify existing social frameworks.”<sup>30</sup> While these methods and framework might not apply to more “centralised” bureaucratic polities,

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<sup>27</sup> Watkins, “Toward a New Diplomatic History.” p.5.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Malcolm, N. *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (Oxford, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Duran, M. “Regional diplomacy: a piece in the neo-medieval puzzle?” *Belgeo. Revue belge de géographie*, 2 (2019): 1-14.

<sup>30</sup> Metzl, J. “Network diplomacy.” *Carnegie*, [Georgetown] April 1, 2001.

lacking a strong clergy or regional aristocracy, they are certainly applicable to the political structure underpinning Mongol rule in Persia, as it will be demonstrated in this dissertation.

This work thus approaches Ilkhanid diplomacy by examining it through the lens of individual actors and their interactions. It begins with specific figures and traces their relationships, using these connections to highlight how local dynamics contributed to broader regional developments. At the same time, it raises questions about how global or regional developments influenced local events. This implies, in practice, a study of regional connections to determine how agents used global occurrences to reinforce their position in a local context, allowing for an analysis of the global grounded in human exchanges across Eurasia. This approach is already being utilised in studies covering the early modern period, where scholars like Biedermann stress the importance of diplomacy for local power-building, suggesting that global connections often originated from local communities.<sup>31</sup> Much like with some polities during the early modern period, the Mongols' approach to Eurasian diplomatic exchanges became closely intertwined with local power dynamics. Although conceived on a "Eurasian" scale by the Mongols themselves, Mongol imperialism was built on a myriad of interactions with dispersed hierarchical systems through tributary diplomacy, which left local institutional arrangements mostly intact.<sup>32</sup> Using Biedermann's words, this approach facilitated connections between polities and individuals operating at different scales and offered perceived advantages to "those paying tribute to globally operating overlords."<sup>33</sup> This concept encourages us to delve into the "local," examining narratives of diplomatic encounters, exchanges of gifts or treaties: only then can we uncover how global connections manifested and what transformations they caused at a local level. This "microhistorical" approach could help us understand how Eurasian

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<sup>31</sup> Biedermann, Z. "Three Ways of Locating the Global: Microhistorical Challenges in the Study of Early Transcontinental Diplomacy." *Past and Present*, 242 (2019): 110-141. Conrad, S. *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, 2016), p.130-132.

<sup>32</sup> Buell, P.D. Kolbas, J. "The Ethos of State and Society in the Early Mongol Empire: Činggis Khan to Güyük." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 26, 1/2 (2016): 43-64.

<sup>33</sup> Like the Portuguese and Spanish featured in Biedermann's paper, the Mongol Empire, especially during the thirteenth century, was a collage of different polities over which Mongol overlords exercised various degrees of control. Biedermann, "Locating the Global." p.119.

elites understood and steered through an age of “globalised connections ” and how they negotiated their positions within the Mongol Empire.

This methodological approach opens up many avenues for an innovative study of late medieval connections, especially concerning the Mongol Middle East. For instance, it allows us to investigate how diplomatic interactions between Ilkhanid rulers and distant powers, like the *qa'ans* in China or European monarchs, impacted local power and religious dynamics within the Ilkhanate. It could also help us determine to what extent Ilkhanid attempts to establish tributary relationships with Christian polities affected their authority and legitimacy in Persia or, again, how Ilkhanid rulers' interaction with their Muslim subject influenced their diplomacy with Europe and China on a global scale.

### ◆ The Networks

To approach Ilkhanid politics as a field of interconnected actors, whose access to power depended as much on relational structures as on office, poses a problem. At the centre of Ilkhanid courtly life stood a dense and often opaque web of personal ties and factional alignments, which resist categorisation. This study refers to these formations as networks, understood as configurations of actors linked by kinship, loyalty, collaboration, faith and at times, shared purpose.

To speak of networks is to invoke a concept that has, in recent decades, gained increasing currency among historians of the medieval world. Yet, the adoption of this terminology is not without methodological complication. Networks are inferred from patterns of behaviour, flows of resources, or the repetition of relational cues in documentary and narrative sources.<sup>34</sup> This study draws on a working definition of a network as a set of actors linked within a bounded sphere of social interaction, who engage in recurrent relations oriented toward an overlapping set of interests. While such a definition is drawn in part from the analytical toolkit of Social Network Analysis (SNA), particularly

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<sup>34</sup> Conrad, *What Is Global History?* p.124-127.

as outlined by Wasserman and Faust, it has been adapted to suit the evidentiary limitations of this dissertation and, in general, those of the historiography of the Ilkhanid period.<sup>35</sup>

It is also necessary to specify that, in this dissertation, the adoption of a network framework does not negate the relevance of hierarchy. On the contrary, this study insists on their coexistence. Hierarchical systems such as those found in Mongol political culture are not flattened by the existence of networks; rather, they are intersected, complemented, and sometimes subverted by them: as Forsé et Degenne argued in their *Introducing Social Networks (Les Réseaux Sociaux)*, networks must be seen as the products of both structural constraints and agentive choices, marked by feedback loops between individuals and the institutional contexts they inhabit.<sup>36</sup>

Mongol rule over Eurasia was rooted in mutual benefit, as its flat decision-making hierarchy was a legacy of the kinship alliances characteristic of steppe societies. Mongol political structures, for instance, even when they became strongly hierarchical, continued to depend on kinship and affiliation networks for their operational effectiveness. The affiliations that long preceded Činggis Khan's "state-building" project did not vanish with the creation of a new political order. Rather, they were transformed and partially reoriented, allowing older tribal affiliations to persist beneath and alongside newly imposed modalities of command. As Sneath has observed in his book *The Headless State*, kinship groups did not simply dissolve under imperial structures, but continued to function as

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<sup>35</sup> For a definition of network in the framework of SNA, see the foundational work of Wasserman, S. Faust, K. *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. p.20.

Some of the studies that have been consulted to refine the theoretical framework of this work include: Allport, B. Orning, H.J. and Bonté, R. eds. *Networks in the Medieval North: Studies in Honour of Jón Viðar Sigurðsson* (Turnhout, 2023); Friedrich, P. *The Princes of Naranja: An Essay in Anthrohistorical Method* (Austin, 1968); Laumann, E.O. and Pappi, F.U. *Networks of Collective Action: A Perspective on Community Influence Systems* (Oxford, 1976); Weingrod, A. "Patrons, Patronage, and Political Parties." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 10, 4 (1968): 377-400; Laumann, E.O. Marsden P.V. and Galaskiewicz, J. "Community Structure as Interorganizational Linkages." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1 (1975): 39-66; For a study of medieval networks following, at least in part, a similar approach to this one, see Schenk, J. *Templar Families: Landowning Families and the Order of the Temple in France, c.1120-1307* (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Forsé, M. Degenne, A. *Introducing social Networks*. (English edition, London, 1999), p.128. (while talking about an individual's autonomy within a network) "They return us to the fundamental concept of social network analysis, that the structure of relations (hierarchy) constrains individual behaviour while simultaneously offering opportunities that vary with individual network position."

“aristocratic orders,” elite formations who engaged in persistent competition for status and influence.<sup>37</sup> Such transformations are particularly visible in the Ilkhanate, where kinship networks within the *Altan Uruq* ( the “Golden Lineage” of Činggis Khan), among the military aristocracy and in the administrative class continued to mediate access to decision-making, despite the formal authority of the ilkhan.

Administering the Mongol Empire and its successor states inevitably implied the extension of these collective decision-making processes to cater to the interests of various local power groups. This type of “collective rule” also extended to lower levels of the hierarchical structure, where local administrators, religious figures, and military leaders operated in accord with their superiors in pursuit of their group’s objectives. Influential individuals, therefore, could often act as representatives of the interests of different social, ethnic and religious groups at the Mongol *ordu* (court). It is important to note that while this system might conceivably be construed as centred on self-interest and disregard towards the well-being of the state, it was, in fact, profoundly ingrained in Mongol governance. A capable ruler shared his rule with his most influential subjects, considering their priorities and their communities’ interests. Conversely, dutiful subjects empowered the ruler with their influence and wealth, confident that their interests were being considered. While this might appear as an assertion of basic principles of governance, the significance of these exchanges dramatically increases in multicultural empires like the Ilkhanate, where many ethnic and religious groups vied for power and influence.

It is thus important to reject the dichotomy that would set network and hierarchy in mutual opposition. Rather, the two represent relational logics that operate simultaneously, often in tension but also with mutual dependence. For example, Persian bureaucrats serving under Mongol rulers were often integrated into networks that extended both upward (to their Mongol patrons at court) and laterally, to colleagues, clients, or allies in the provinces. These configurations were not always

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<sup>37</sup> On the “stratification” of aristocratic orders, see: Sneath, D. *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York, 2007), p.196-197.

congruent with hierarchical structures, and in many cases, individuals with limited official authority exercised disproportionate influence through their connections. For instance, clerics and envoys attached to Eastern Christian churches functioned as both institutional representatives and intermediaries, whose importance often came from their strong ties to Christian communities across different regions.

The role of intermediaries draws attention to a second conceptual pillar of this study: that of brokerage. As defined by authors like Marsden, Gould and Fernandez, brokerage refers to the capacity of an actor to facilitate interactions between others who otherwise lack access or trust to one another.<sup>38</sup> Brokers are situated at the intersection of disconnected network segments, often functioning as interpreters or facilitators of information and resource flow. In the Ilkhanate, where competing factions, ethnic and religious groups operated with uneven access to power, brokers became indispensable. Their authority did not necessarily derive from hierarchical standing, but from positional advantage.

The idea of structural holes, introduced by Ronald Burt, is particularly important when talking about brokerage.<sup>39</sup> Structural holes create when there is an absence of connections between parts of a network. While in Burt's work structural holes are mainly analysed in economic terms, we can certainly borrow his theoretical framework for an analysis of relations in Mongol Persia. In the Ilkhanate, structural holes emerged from cultural, linguistic, and political disjunctions between Mongol and Persian spheres, between Christian and Muslim communities, or between different branches of the Činggisid family. Actors who could move across these boundaries, or who belonged simultaneously to multiple social worlds, found themselves occupying positions of considerable

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<sup>38</sup> Gould, R.V. "Power and Social Structure in Community Elites." *Social Forces*, 68,2 (1989): 531-552, p.533-536; Gould, R.V. Fernandez, R.M. "Structures of Mediation: A Formal Approach to Brokerage in Transaction Networks." *Sociological Methodology*, 19 (1989): 89-126, p.91-92; Marsden, P.V. "Brokerage Behaviour in Restricted Exchange Networks," in Marsden, P.V. and Lin, N. eds. *Social Structure and Network Analysis* (Beverly Hills, 1982), p.202.

<sup>39</sup> Burt, R.S. *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p.18-20.

latent power. Their ability to negotiate across differences made them indispensable in moments of crisis and routine governance alike.<sup>40</sup>

Brokers are at the centre of this dissertation. Some were merchants, others were princely or ecclesiastical figures. One example is Rabban Şawma, whose embassy to Europe on behalf of Arghun shows how religious actors could hold central positions in cross-cultural diplomatic networks.<sup>41</sup> These actors were effective not because they held command but because they were structurally central, and because they connected otherwise unbridgeable gaps between courts, cultures and spheres of legitimacy. To better conceptualise the power of such figures, this study turns to the idea of betweenness centrality. This concept, developed within SNA, captures the extent to which a given actor lies on the shortest path between other actors in a network.<sup>42</sup> In practical terms, high betweenness indicates an ability to mediate flows of information, favours or resources and to exert influence through that mediation. Unlike degree centrality, which counts the number of direct connections an actor has, betweenness centrality captures a more subtle form of power: the power to coordinate, alter, or block exchanges between others. Betweenness centrality allows us to identify the political significance of those actors who, though not always prominently visible in official hierarchies, exercised influence through their strategic positioning.

Yet brokerage was not a stable position. The power it conferred was often fragile and subject to reversals, as brokerage was often enabled by patronage relations. Occupying a broker position could easily attract suspicion from the negotiating parties, and brokers may be perceived as disloyal or opportunistic. The visibility of a broker's role could itself become a liability, and holding a formal office could also greatly complicate, and at times compromise, the position of a broker. In the

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<sup>40</sup> Burt, *Structural Holes*, see especially chapters 5 to 7, centred on the actors' strategies.

<sup>41</sup> Rabban Şawma's role as a broker is analysed in chapter 3 of this dissertation. See below, p.199-201.

<sup>42</sup> Freeman, L.C. "A Set of Measures of Centrality Based on Betweenness." *Sociometry*, 40,1 (1977): 35-41.

Ilkhanid case, this tension is visible in the long period of instability which follows the death of Abaqa, characterised by conflicts between the ilkhans and their nobility.<sup>43</sup>

Beyond brokerage and betweenness, this study also considers the implications of other centrality measures, albeit marginally. Closeness centrality (how near an actor is to all others in the network), for instance, has limited applicability in non-cohesive and not extremely well-documented historical networks. Similarly, eigenvector centrality, which weights the value of a node's connections based on the centrality of its neighbours, may illuminate the dense clustering of influence around the ilkhan and his immediate entourage. However, as Gould has warned, these measures often obscure more than they reveal when applied uncritically to elite settings marked by factional instability and continuously shifting affiliations. It is for this reason that this dissertation privileges a qualitative reading of positionality, grounded in historical interpretation, rather than relying on numerical modelling.<sup>44</sup>

The study of Ilkhanid networks thus demands attention not only to those who held office or title, but to those who mediated between domains, who navigated competing demands, and who could translate between political, cultural, and religious idioms. The relational architecture of the Ilkhanid state was never fixed. It shifted with every succession dispute, every diplomatic overture, every administrative reorganisation. To map its networks is not to trace a single system, but to reconstruct the connective tissue through which its politics were lived.

## ◆ The Structure

Over the course of my research, the goals and themes of this work have evolved significantly. Initially, this thesis set out to explore the political and diplomatic relationships between the Ilkhanid

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<sup>43</sup> On Arghun's conflicts with Ilkhanid nobility, see the first chapter of this dissertation and Hope, M. *Power, Politics and Tradition*, Ch.4. For the relationship between patronage and brokerage, see, for instance, Wolf, E.R. *Pathways of Power: Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* (Berkeley, 2001), p.181; Blok, A. *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860-1960: A Study of Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs* (New York, 1974), p.177.

<sup>44</sup> Gould, R.V. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago, 1995), introduction.

court and the Latin world. It delved into the presence of Italian merchants in Tabriz and their role as intermediaries and envoys in Mongol negotiations with European powers. The focus was on the joint Latin-Mongol efforts to counter the military challenge of their common rival, the Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo. As time passed, I became increasingly aware that Ilkhanid diplomatic contacts with Europe were far more wide-ranging and complicated than usually recognised, and only a part of a strikingly comprehensive strategy. Thus, as previously discussed, the idea for this dissertation developed gradually from an analysis of mechanisms of mutual benefit, negotiated trust, diplomatic exchanges and networks. By reframing “encounters” through these lenses, this dissertation aims to offer a more grounded and analytically useful way of approaching cross-cultural contacts. Too often, mobility and migration are framed in terms of spontaneity or chance, which obscures the extent to which, in the context of Mongol Eurasia, such movements were systematically organised, politically incentivised, and sustained through established channels of diplomacy, commerce, and administration.<sup>45</sup>

Once the objectives of this research were set and I embarked on this journey, I was met with significant challenges. The methodological and evidentiary complexities of this pursuit were not to be underestimated. Firstly, the scarcity of documentary sources represents a major hindrance when studying the mechanics of decision-making processes within the Ilkhanate. Following classical conventions, primary sources typically attribute paramount decisions to the ilkhan or his closest ministers. However, this dissertation contends that the scarcity of data can be partially remedied by exploring the experiences of those involved in diplomatic or political processes. This work presents instances where, though not immediately discernible, groups wielded power to influence different aspects of Ilkhanid policies, proceeding then to evaluate the effects of these processes on political and economic transformations within the Ilkhanate.

One of the major hurdles was the need to comprehend the influence of diverse cultural and religious groups on political decisions. This task, ideally, required a comprehensive grasp of the multitude of languages spoken at the Ilkhanid court. Furthermore, the completion of this project

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<sup>45</sup> Conrad, *What is Global History*, p.191-193.

required navigating different historiographical traditions and acquiring a foundational knowledge of the history, geography, and culture of many different areas outside my expertise. Five years into this project, developing these skills is still an ongoing endeavour, a testament to the continuous effort and dedication put into this research (and a reminder of its inevitable limitations). This is partially reflected by this work's composition, which might appear unbalanced to the reader. Roughly half of this dissertation is, in one way or another, dedicated to the study of Ilkhanid relations with the Latin world. This stems from the original aim of the work, but also from my lack of proficiency in Arabic. A comprehensive assessment of Ilkhanid diplomacy and governance would ideally present one or more chapters dedicated to Mongol interactions with the Arabic-speaking world. Many of the Ilkhanid elites considered themselves to be Arabs, and from what I could grasp from the secondary sources, there is a wealth of untapped primary source material that has the potential to complete and enrich the discourse initiated by this dissertation.<sup>46</sup> The initial section of this thesis compensates for the absence of Arabic sources by incorporating Persian material. I followed a year-long intensive Persian course, which partially allowed me to read crucial sources such as the writings of Rashīd al-Dīn and Juvaynī.

The thesis structure reflects what has been said so far and categorises individuals into groups, each harbouring distinct political aspirations, positioned alongside the ilkhan at the core of the decision-making processes. The first part of the dissertation scrutinises “internal diplomatic dynamics,” or how these groups influenced the Ilkhanid trajectory towards political reform and

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<sup>46</sup> Many of the works related to the Ilkhanate cited here make extensive use of Arabic sources. See, for instance, Amitai-Preiss, R. Biran, M. “Arabic Sources,” in: Biran, M. Kim, H. eds. *The Cambridge History of the Mongol Empire* (Cambridge, 2023): 1007-1045; Chen, E. *Southern Iranian Vassal States Under the Ilkhanate: 1220-1300* (PhD dissertation, University of Princeton, 2021); Kauz, R. “The Maritime Trade of Kish During the Mongol Period,” in Komaroff, L. ed. *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Leiden, 2006): 51-67; Amitai-Preiss, R. *The Mongols in the Islamic lands, Studies in the History of the Ilkhanate* (Farnham, 2007). Abouseif's work is instead centred on Mamluk diplomacy and includes important Arabic sources on Ilkhanid history. Behrens-Abouseif, D. *Practising diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: gifts and material culture in the medieval Islamic world* (London and New York, 2014).

internal reorganisation. The second part analyses the interplay between diplomacy and the local interests of religious and ethnic groups in Persia and in the wider Middle Eastern region.

The first chapter starts with an overview of the Mongol conquest of Persia and Central Asia, focusing on the establishment of the Mongol Empire in these regions. It discusses the internal conflicts in the Empire, analysing power distribution within the realm of Mongol governance in Persia. By addressing power dynamics between Ilkhanid rulers and their *noyat* (military aristocracy), the chapter discusses the profound influence these nobles wielded domestically and in the broader Mongol world. Starting from the first half of the thirteenth century, the second chapter discusses the mechanics of Mongol and Ilkhanid politics, focusing on the nascent administrative system, its formation, and how it influenced Ilkhanid internal power dynamics throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. It explores power networks and the ruler's engagement or lack thereof in internal politics, focusing on the relationship between Mongol rulers and their Persianate administrative class. This analysis defines the concepts of "internal diplomacy" and compromise as integral components of Ilkhanid governance.

The second part of this dissertation addresses Ilkhanid diplomatic relations with an outward focus, discussing, in chapters three and four, the influence of Eastern Christians on the diplomatic exchanges between the Ilkhanate and European powers. These chapters assess how religious and political leaders used their position as diplomatic brokers to advance the interests of their respective communities. They provide insights into these groups' agenda by analysing the involvement of Nestorian and Armenian religious leaders and rulers in Ilkhanid affairs. While chapter three predominantly focuses on the Nestorian Church, chapter four explores the role of Armenians in Ilkhanid diplomatic relations. The Het'umid Armenian dynasty of Cilicia, the main subject of this chapter, enjoyed political ties with Latin Europe and played an essential role as diplomatic and cultural mediators. Chapter five concludes the analysis by discussing the role of Italian merchants as preferred diplomatic intermediaries of Ilkhanid rulers at the turn of the fourteenth century. The chapter compares their role with well-documented examples of partnerships between Mongols and

Central Asian traders, discussing personal interests, Venetian and Genoese institutional control, and the agency of the popes and the ilkhans.

## ◆ **The Sources**

This dissertation makes use of sources produced between the first half of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century in many different geographical areas and by different cultures. This variety is mainly due to the scarcity of official documentation left by the Ilkhanate and the absence of source material directly written by the Mongols during the Ilkhanid period. One of the main challenges in composing this work revolved around coordinating this wide array of materials spanning several regions. This necessitated the exploration of historiographical works in several languages. Regrettably, my linguistic abilities do not extend to Armenian, Syriac, and Arabic sources, which I had to consult in translation or access through secondary literature. Some Persian sources were challenging due to their archaic and complex language, which exceeded the skills gained in a one-year intensive course. As a result, in this dissertation, I have prioritised widely available sources in areas where my language proficiency was limited. Researching lesser-known and unedited materials would have, in fact, taken several more years.

In this dissertation, my analysis is based on the close examination of historiographical works and, where possible, on their integration with other types of documentary evidence. I believe that historiography can still influence our understanding of historical processes, often surpassing the “dry comfort” of documentary evidence. In the field of Mongol studies, historiographical sources are predominantly authored by non-Mongol writers in languages such as Chinese, Persian, Armenian, and Arabic. The inherent biases present in these accounts pose significant challenges to historians willing to engage with these sources. Where possible, I integrated various accounts on each topic, if they exist. In the following pages, I list the primary sources I have employed, dividing them into several categories based on their cultural provenance. Each major source is accompanied by a

background description, with information on its author, and my remarks on the extent to which I have engaged with it.

Very little material survives in Mongolian from the period of the Mongol Empire. The most important work written about the early phases of the expansion of the Empire by the Mongols themselves is *The Secret History of the Mongols*. The composition of this epic commenced around 1228, with several sections covering Ögödei's reign (1229-1241) being added after 1252.<sup>47</sup> Although the authors of *The Secret History* remain anonymous, they probably belonged to the intimate circle of Činggis Khan (r.1206-1227) and his family, and witnessed the *qa'an* rise to power. The original copy of the work, likely composed in Mongolian and written in Uyghur script, has not survived. The Ming Translators' Bureau printed the existing edition during the Yongle era (1402-1424), titled *Secret History of the Yuan Dynasty*.

The *Secret History* discusses events marginal to the theme of this dissertation, but is still an important source for historical events preceding the formation of the Ilkhanate. Despite its classification as a "genuinely Mongol" source, *The Secret History* requires careful analysis, as even during its writing process, it was probably subjected to alterations that reflected the political changes in the Empire.<sup>48</sup> Caution, for instance, is essential in matters related to the interactions among various Činggisid lineages, as the epic was and likely significantly modified during Möngke's reign after the rise of the Toluid dynasty. Scholarly attention to the *Secret History* dates back to the nineteenth century, and historians have succeeded in reconstructing the original text and translating it into

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<sup>47</sup> Atwood, C. "The Date of the Secret History of the Mongols Reconsidered." *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 37 (2007): 1-48; De Rachewiltz, I. "Some Remarks on the Dating of the Secret History of the Mongols." *Monumenta Serica*, 24 (1965): 185-206.

<sup>48</sup> Atwood, C. "Informants and Sources for the Secret History of the Mongols." *Mongolian Studies*, 29 (2007): 27-39; Moses, L. "Epic Themes in the Secret History of the Mongols." *Folklore*, 99, 2 (1988): 170-173.

various languages. In this dissertation, I have consulted and cited Igor de Rachewiltz's English translation.<sup>49</sup>

Being centred on the Ilkhanate, this dissertation extensively uses Persian sources. Unfortunately, little documentation is left for the Ilkhanid period, forcing historians to rely on literary sources. It is assumed that the Ilkhanid administrative class produced substantial documentary evidence. However, the fate of the majority of these sources remains unknown. A few documents related to tax collection have endured, as they were replicated and preserved as templates in later accounting manuals.<sup>50</sup> Fortunately, literary and historiographical traditions flourished in Persia during the Ilkhanid period. Persian ministers like Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn, who held significant roles in Ilkhanid governance, authored extensive histories of the Mongol era. These works provide most of the available information on Mongol rule in Iran and are sometimes our sole source on internal political developments and other minor events in Persia. They offer a unique perspective on Mongol and Ilkhanid political developments and policy-making, as seen from the privileged position of Ilkhanid ministers and viziers. This work makes extensive use of the contributions of these “minister historians,” recognising their valuable input while also acknowledging the inherent limitations in their perspectives. These authors' backgrounds and political aims shaped their narratives, as their comprehensive collection of histories also aimed to construct a particular image of themselves, their rulers, and the administrative class.<sup>51</sup> Given the limited linguistic skills acquired during my doctorate, I consulted these texts using both original and translated versions to confront

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<sup>49</sup> *The secret history of the Mongols: The life and times of Genghis Khan*, transl. Onon, U. (London, 2005), p.23; *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian epic chronicle of the thirteenth century. Translated with a historical and philological commentary*, transl. De Rachewiltz, I. (Leiden, 2006). From this point onward, *Secret History/Rachewiltz*.

<sup>50</sup> Persian accounting manuals sampled various accounts books from the Ilkhanid era related to state and court finance. Watabe has provided a translation with comments on one of these documents in his Watabe, R. “Census-Taking and the Qubchūr Taxation System in Ilkhanid Iran: An Analysis of the Census Book from the Late 13th Century Persian Accounting Manual al-Murshid fī al-Ḥisāb.” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, 73 (2015): 27-63.

<sup>51</sup> For a comparison of two of the main works analysed in this dissertation, those of Rashīd al-Dīn and Juvaynī (particularly their approach to religious matters) see Jackson, P. “Mongol khans and religious allegiance,”: 109-122. See also Kamola, S. *Rashīd al-Dīn and the making of history in Mongol Iran* (PhD Dissertation, University of Washington, 2013).

the Persian text more efficiently. I compared different editions and ensured that my interpretation of different passages was not too farfetched.

The *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushāy* (The History of the World Conqueror) by ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Aṭā-Malik Juvaynī (1226-83) is probably the most widely utilised source on the Mongol Empire and its early expansion. Juvaynī, belonging to a family with prominent positions in Khurasan, personally witnessed or actively participated in the events he narrates. In 1233, Juvaynī’s father, Bahā’ al-Dīn, a former bureaucrat under the Khwārazmshāh, joined Mongol service. Subsequently, Juvaynī served under Arghun Aqa, the Mongol governor of Khurasan, and accompanied him to Karakorum. During his stay in Mongolia, Juvaynī commenced the composition of his work, which starts with Činggis Khan’s ascent to power and concludes with the fall of Baghdad in 1258. Juvaynī’s history was probably originally divided into three volumes. The first volume covers the rise of the Mongol Empire and the political developments under Činggis Khan, Ögödei and Güyük (r.1246-1248). The second volume narrates the history of the Khwārazmshāh, the Mongol invasion and the initial administrative organisation in Khurasan, and the third book concerns Möngke’s election as *qa’an* and Hülegü’s rise in Iran. Juvaynī’s work is essential for this dissertation, and his and his brother’s life experiences as Mongol ministers will be thoroughly examined in the following pages. The first complete edition of Juvaynī’s history was published with the title *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushāy*, edited by Mirza Muhammad Qazwīnī. John Andrew Boyle published an English translation of the work in 1958 titled *The History of the World-Conqueror*. In this dissertation, I have consulted both the original edition and its English translation.<sup>52</sup>

The *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh* (Compendium of Chronicles), the other main Persian source consulted in this dissertation, is a monumental historical compilation authored by Rashīd al-Dīn al-Hamdānī

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<sup>52</sup> Juvaynī, *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushāy*, *Gibb Memorial Series*. ed. Qazwīnī, M. (Leiden and London, 1912-1937); Juvaynī, *Genghis Khan: the history of the world conqueror*. transl. Boyle, J.A. (Manchester, 1997). From this point onward, *JT/Qazwīnī*, *JT/Boyle*. An analysis of Juvaynī’s work by Boyle revealed significant elements that point to the incompleteness of the work, including missing chapters in Volume II and the disincorporation of Volume III (originally an extension to the second volume). Qazwīnī’s publication of Volume III in 1937 made the entirety of Juvaynī’s work more accessible to scholars.

(1247-1318), physician and later vizier at the Ilkhanid, court. Commissioned by Ghazan (r.1295-1304), Rashīd al-Dīn's work can be considered a sort of official history of the Ilkhanate. Rashīd al-Dīn, a Persian of Jewish descent, pursued medical training from a young age and, after having converted to Islam in 1277, served the ilkhans under Abaqa (r.1265-1282). His rise through the ranks of administration culminated in being appointed vizier by Ghazan, and he continued in this role under Öljeitü (r.1304-16). During Öljeitü's reign, Rashīd al-Dīn further extended his historiographical work. However, during the reign of Abū Sa'īd (r.1317-1335), he became embroiled in court intrigues, ultimately leading to his execution in 1318. The *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* was extensively used in the composition of this dissertation due to Rashīd al-Dīn's unparalleled access to a wide array of source material and witnesses during its compilation, especially for the events occurring in the second half of the thirteenth century. While writing his work, Rashīd al-Dīn used now-lost records such as the Mongolian *Altan Debter* (Golden Book), a repository documenting the genealogy of Činggis Khan's descendants and their territorial allocations. Furthermore, he drew extensively from oral testimonies from influential figures from diverse backgrounds at the Ilkhanid court. Among these figures, the Yuan official Bolad *Chīngsāng*, who served as Qubilai's ambassador in the Ilkhanate, played an essential role in shaping the content and depth of Rashīd al-Dīn's historical work.<sup>53</sup>

Its author originally structured the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* in three volumes. The first volume is divided into two parts, and dedicated to the history of the Turkic and the Mongol people until the reigns of Öljeitü and the *qa'an* Temür (r.1294-1307). This volume represents our primary source for the history of the Ilkhanate. It was first published in Persian by Bahman Karīmī and in a complete English translation by Wheeler M. Thackston in 1998. Both editions have been consulted in this

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<sup>53</sup> For the role of Bolad in the Ilkhanate see below, p.153-159. For his relation with Rashīd al-Dīn, p.197.

work, in addition to a partial translation by Boyle.<sup>54</sup> The second volume of the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh* is also divided into two parts. The first part consists of a summary of the history of the world, including all the successions of monarchs known to Rashīd al-Dīn. This section also includes a history of Islam and dedicated histories to other parts of the globe, such as Europe, India and China. The second part, instead, was conceived by Rashīd al-Dīn as the history of Öljeitü’s reign, probably after the latter commissioned it from the historian. This part was never completed.<sup>55</sup> The third part of the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh* was probably never written or, if it ever existed, its content was subsumed in the rest of the work. This section was conceived as a geographical treatise and was probably a description of what Rashīd al-Dīn had seen or heard while he travelled on account of Ilkhanid rulers.

The Ilkhanid official Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Faḍl Allāh Shīrāzī (1265-1329), better known as *Waṣṣāf-e Hazrat* or “Court Panegyrist,” started the composition of another important source for this dissertation in 1297. Waṣṣāf’s work, titled *Tajziyat al-Amṣār wa-Tazjiyat al-A‘ṣār* (The Allocation of Cities and the Propulsion of Epochs), mainly relies on Juvaynī’s history, but covers the events from the death of Möngke and continues after 1258 until Abū Sa‘īd’s reign. Waṣṣāf’s history offers information not found in other sources on topics related to internal strife in the Ilkhanate and conflict between Mongol polities. Unfortunately, Waṣṣāf’s writing is famous for

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<sup>54</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn, *Tārīkh-e pādshāhān-e Moḡol az Ukētāy Qā‘ān tā Teymur Qā‘ān*, ed. Karīmī, B. (Tehran, 1934); Rashīd al-Dīn, *Rashīd al-Dīn, Rashiduddin Fazlullah's Jami‘u’t-tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles: A History of the Mongols*, transl. Thackston, W. (Cambridge, MA, 1998); Rashīd al-Dīn, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, transl. Boyle, J.A. (New York, 1971). From this point onward, RJT/Karīmī, RJT/Thackston, RJT/Boyle. Numerous manuscripts of the Compendium of Chronicles have survived, partly due to Rashīd al-Dīn's efforts to distribute the work widely. Following Öljeitü's revisions, Rashīd al-Dīn was tasked to expand the chronicle, creating the final version of the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh* in 1314-15. Blair, S.S. “Illustrating History: Rashīd al-Dīn and his Compendium of Chronicles.” *Iranian Studies*, 50,6 (2017): 819-842.

<sup>55</sup> Concerning the second volume, only the history of the Franks has been consulted, which has been edited by Jahn. K. Rashīd al-Dīn, *Die Frankengeschichte des Rasid al-Dīn*, transl. by Jahn, K. (Vienna, 1977); Rashīd al-Dīn, *Tārīkh-i Afranj, pāpān, wa qayāshira*. ed. Rushan, M. (Tehran, 2005). From this point onward, RJT/Rushan.

its complexity and wordiness, making the *Tārīkh-i Waṣṣāf* a challenging source to approach. For this reason, I was forced to rely mainly on the German translation by Von Hammer Purgstall.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to these major historiographical works, this dissertation also sometimes draws on other material, even if to a limited extent. One example is the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī* (Nāṣirī Epochs) by Minhāj Sirāj Jūzjānī (1193-1266), composed in Persian in 1259-60 in the Delhi Sultanate. The *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī* is a comprehensive history of the Persianate world in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as it covers events from Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent to the Middle East, including a history of the Mongol invasions. During my research, I have consulted Raverty's translation of Jūzjānī's work.<sup>57</sup> Another example is the work of Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī (1281-1339). Mustawfī was an Ilkhanid official, geographer, and poet who maintained close relations with Rashīd al-Dīn. He was probably encouraged by the latter in the composition of one of his major works, the *Nuzhat al-Qulub* (Hearts' Bliss), the only geographical and ethnographical treaty from Ilkhanid Persia, which I have accessed in its translated version.<sup>58</sup>

This dissertation also includes a substantial number of sources originating from Middle Eastern Christian communities during the Ilkhanid period. While Armenian sources are used throughout a sizeable portion of this work, I have consulted only two non-Armenian main chronicles: Bar Hebraeus' *Chronicon* and the anonymous *History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Ṣawma*. As I lack proficiency in Armenian or Syriac, I could access these works mainly through translations. For the Armenian sources, these are those of Dulaurier and Kohler in 1906 in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades (RHC), Documents arméniens & Documents latins et français relatif à L'Arménie*, and those by Robert Bedrosian from 1986 to 2015.

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<sup>56</sup> Waṣṣāf, *Geschichte Wassaf's Deutsch Übersetzt von Hammer-Purgstall Herausgegeben von Sybille Wentker Nach Vorarbeiten von Elisabeth Und Klaus Wundsam*, ed. Fragner, B. and Sadowski, V. Vol 1-4, (Wien, 2016). From this point onward, *Waṣṣāf/Purgstall*.

<sup>57</sup> Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, transl. Raverty, H. (London, 1888). From this point onward, *Jūzjānī/Raverty*.

<sup>58</sup> Mustawfī, *The geographical part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulub*, transl. Le Strange, G. (Leiden, 1919). From this point onward, *Mustawfī/Le Strange*.

Regarding Armenian sources, the Het'umid dynasty of Cilician Armenia generated many prolific writers during the Ilkhanid period, as several members of the royal family produced historiographical works. For instance, *Smbat Sparapet's Chronicle*, possibly authored by the brother of King Het'um I (r.1226-1270), focuses on Cilician history and early Mongol-Armenian interactions, as the submission of the small kingdom to the Mongols in 1249 was offered by Smbat himself with a visit to Karakorum.<sup>59</sup>

An important chronography is also attributed to King Het'um II, who reigned over Cilicia from 1289 to 1307.<sup>60</sup> Contemporary to this work is the remarkable contribution of Hayton of Corycus (c.1240-c.1320), a skilled diplomat and cleric. Hayton's *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient* is a unique geographical and ethnographic work, maintaining the characteristics of a crusading treatise. The analysis of Hayton's work in this dissertation necessitated consulting multiple copies, including manuscripts from the French National Archives. In citing *La Flor*, this work mainly references the Old French and Latin versions edited in *RHC*, which combine texts from different families of manuscripts.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Smbat Sparapet, *Smbat Sparapet's chronicle*, transl. Bedrosian, R. (Long Branch, 2005). From this point onward, *Smbat/Bedrosian*. Smbat's trip to Karakorum in 1249 is not covered in the text, which terminates in mid-sentence while describing the events of 1272. According to Bedrosian, two 19th-century publications of the classical Armenian text of the Chronicle are based on two late manuscripts in Yerevan. In the late 1870s, another longer manuscript of the Chronicle was discovered in Venice and published in 1956. Bedrosian's text is based on the latter. Smbat's Chronicle's original portion, devoted to the period from 1163 to 1272, is a major source for the history of Cilician Armenia.

<sup>60</sup> Het'um II, *Chronicle attributed to Het'um II*, transl. Bedrosian, R. (Long Branch, 2005). From this point onward, *Het'um/Bedrosian*. Awgerean, who believed Hayton was the author of the chronicle, published a less complete variant of the classical Armenian text of the Chronicle as an appendix to his translation of Hayton's work. The critical edition of an expanded text was published by V. A. Hakobyan in 1951. This text represents the base for Bedrosian's translation.

<sup>61</sup> Hayton, *La Flor*, in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades: Documents arméniens et Documents latins et français relatif à L'Arménie*, Vol 2, ed. Dulaurier E. and Kohler, C. (Paris 1906): 136-252; 261-363. From this point onward, *Flor*. Bedrosian has also produced an English translation, which has been only partly consulted. Bedrosian's work mainly refers to Awgerean's text from 1842, which is, in turn, a translation of the Old French original text. Awgerean's edition has numerous shortcomings and, despite Bedrosian's best efforts to integrate the text with a 16th-century collation of two different translations by Burger, there are still some faults compared to the edition in the *RHC*.

Beyond the production of the Cilician royal family, Armenian history writing during this period was predominantly the domain of clerical figures. The *RHC* contains several editions of Armenian works, including a twelfth-century *Chronography* by Samuel Anetsi and his continuators, and the fourteenth century *Chronicle of the Realm of Lesser Armenia*, authored by Nerses Palients, some parts of which were merged with Smbat's *Chronicle* by Dulaurier in the edition of the *RHC* to fill gaps in the Constable's narration.<sup>62</sup> Other important Armenian works have been consulted from the translations produced by Robert Bedrosian, most notably Step'annos Orbelean's (c.1250-1320) *History of The Province of Siwnik*, which offers invaluable insight into Mongol rule administration of Greater Armenia.<sup>63</sup> The *History of the Armenians* by Kirakos Gandzaketsi (1200-1271) and Grigor Aknertsi's (1250-1335) *History of the Nation of Archers* contain, instead, accounts of the Mongol conquests of Armenia and Georgia.<sup>64</sup>

Concerning other Christian Middle Eastern sources, I mainly focused on the two most renowned and extensively translated accounts from the Ilkhanid period. Together, these sources help integrate Persian sources and fill gaps in their narration. They mainly discuss the history of Christian communities but sometimes help interpret contentious passages concerning times of political turmoil in the Ilkhanate.

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<sup>62</sup> For Nerses Palients' and Samuel Anetsi's Chronicles see *Recueil des historiens des Croisades: Documents arméniens et Documents latins et français relatif à L'Arménie*, Vol.1, ed. Dulaurier, E. and Kohler, C. (Paris, 1869). From this point onward, all the other Armenian authors in *Recueil* will be cited as follows: *name of the author/RHC arm.* Nerses Chronicle has been partially combined with Smbat's work in the *RHC*.

<sup>63</sup> Step'annos Orbelean, *Step'annos Orbelean's History of the State of Sisakan*. transl. Bedrosian, R. (Long Branch, 2012-2015). From this point onward, *Orbelean/Bedrosian*. Another translation of Orbelean's History exists in French and was published in two volumes in 1864-66 by Marie-Felicite Brosset. Step'annos Orbelean, *Histoire de la Siounie, 2 Vols.* transl. Brosset, M. F. (Saint-Petersburg, 1864-1866).

<sup>64</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi, *History of the Armenians*, transl. Bedrosian R. (New York, 1986); Grigor Aknertsi, *History of the Nation of Archers*, transl. Bedrosian, R. (Long Branch, 2003). From this point onward, respectively, *Kirakos/Bedrosian* and *Grigor/Bedrosian*. The *HNA* survived in several manuscripts. According to Bedrosian, the oldest is Ms.32, which is housed at the Library of the Monastery of St. James in Jerusalem and is dated 1271. The first publications of the *HNA* text date back to 1851 and 1870, but the most famous one is certainly Blake and Fry's translation for the Harvard Journal of Asian Studies: *Grigor of Akanc` History of the Nation of Archers*, (Reprinted from the Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 1949) transl. Blake, R.P. and Frye, R. (Cambridge, MA, 1954).

The author of one of the sources, Gregory Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286), also known by his Syriac name Barebraya or Barebroyo, and in Arabic sources by his *kunya* Abu'l-Faraj, was a renowned philosopher, scientist and theologian. He served the as Maphrian (primate) of the East of the Syrian Orthodox Church from 1264 to 1286, with jurisdiction over much of today's Iraq and Iran.<sup>65</sup> During this time, he mainly resided in Maragheh and Tabriz, close to the Ilkhanid court. Bar Hebraeus authored numerous treatises in which he compiled contemporary knowledge in various fields in Classical Syriac language and Arabic. Around 1276, he started writing a substantial history titled *Makhtbhanuth Zabhnē* or *Chronicon*, which spans from the Creation to his era, and was continued after his death. The work is divided into two parts, with the *Chronicon Syriacum* covering political history and the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, focusing on the religious history of Eastern Christianity. The English translation of *Chronicon Syriacum* by Wallis Budge (1932) was used in this dissertation.<sup>66</sup> As an intellectual closely associated with the Ilkhanid court, Bar Hebraeus acknowledges Juvaynī's *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushāy* as his primary source for Mongol history.<sup>67</sup> His work, however, provides valuable insights into the internal political affairs of the ilkhans from a Christian perspective and occasionally offers additional information on Ilkhanid governance and power plays spanning a period much longer (up to 1286, then continued up until 1296 after his death) than Juvaynī's work.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> For a distinction between the Nestorian, Jacobite and other Eastern rites, see Akopian, A. *Introduction to Aramean and Syriac Studies: A manual* (Piscataway, 2017), esp. chapter 10: "The split of Syriac Christianity: Nestorians and Jacobites," p.199-216.

<sup>66</sup> Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, transl. Budge, E. (Oxford, 1932). From this point onward, *Bar Hebraeus/Budge*.

<sup>67</sup> See: Aigle, *Myth and Reality*, p.67-71; Hockey, T.A. Trimble, V. Williams, T.R. Bracher, K. eds. *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers, Springer Reference* (New York, 2007), p.94-95. The passage reads: "Bar Hebraeus' interest in astronomy and related sciences is likely to have been prompted by his acquaintance with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and other scholars gathered around the newly founded observatory and library in Marāgha. Evidence for this is provided by a manuscript of a collection of mathematical texts revised by Ṭūsī, which was once in Bar Hebraeus' possession and bears his signature (today in Istanbul-üsküdar, Selim Ağa MS 743). We are also told by Ḥājjī Khalifa that Ibn Abī al-Shukr al-Maghribī, one of Ṭūsī's collaborators, composed an epitome of Ptolemy's *Almagest* at Bar Hebraeus' behest (*Kashf al-zunūn*, Vol. 5, p.387, 389)."

<sup>68</sup> Juvaynī's work terminates in 1258.

The other source, the *History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Şawma*, is a Syriac anonymous narrative likely composed before 1319.<sup>69</sup> A sizeable part of the chronicle contains a biography of Mar Yahballaha III (1235-1317), the Catholicos of the Nestorian church, and his mentor, the monk Rabban Bar Şawma (1220-1294), as it narrates their journey from northern China to the Ilkhanate. The rest of the work is probably the result of the incorporation of Rabban Şawma's travel journal (originally in Persian) detailing the monk's journey to Europe as an ambassador of Arghun in 1287-88.<sup>70</sup> Of the many translations that exist today, I have consulted the most recent edition by Pier Giorgio Borbone, which is available in English.<sup>71</sup>

European sources are referred to as "Latin" in this dissertation and comprise diverse materials. The designation as "Latin", as in the rest of this work, indicates that these sources have been produced within the cultural context of "Latin Christendom" rather than indicating the language of their composition. These sources were composed, in fact, in several different languages. Leveraging my proficiency in Italian and French and Latin, I translated various documents, including commercial records, contracts, testaments, letters, and chronicles. This latter group comprises many sources, which, although much shorter than those in the other categories, would be collectively too lengthy to enumerate here. I will highlight a critical few to offer readers insight into the types of documentation analysed and my methodological approach.

Official correspondence emerges as the most important within this corpus. This is especially notable given the scarcity of material on the subject in Ilkhanid sources. Official missives, especially the letters exchanged between the popes, the *qa'ans* and the ilkhans, serve as a base for at least two chapters of this dissertation. These letters are drawn from various editions, as accessing the originals,

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<sup>69</sup> Borbone, P.G. "The History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sauma as a Source for Ilkhanid History," in May, T. Dashdondog, B. and Atwood, C.P. eds. *New Approaches to Ilkhanid History* (Leiden, 2020): 349-372, p.350

<sup>70</sup> See Borbone, P.G. "A 13<sup>th</sup> Century Journey from China to Europe. The Story of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sauma." *Egitto e Vicino Oriente*, 31 (2008): 221-242.

<sup>71</sup> *History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sauma*, transl. Borbone, P.G. (Hamburg, 2021). From this point onward, *Rabban Şawma/Borbone*.

often stored in the Vatican Archives, is impractical. Additionally, there are instances of letters with mixed provenance, where their context and origin have been cited alongside their inclusion.

The bulk of the official missives cited in this study originates from the compilation by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (1693-1755), who edited these correspondences in his work, *Historia Tartarorum Ecclesiastica*, published in 1741. In compiling his work, Mosheim gathered all available Latin versions of these letters and included them as an appendix to his book.<sup>72</sup> In 1923, Paul Pelliot reported several new letters, both from the Mongols and the Church of the East, in his study *Les Mongols et la papauté*, published in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*.<sup>73</sup> In the 1950s, Antoine Mostaert and Francis Woodman Cleaves uncovered and edited additional documents, notably including other letters in Mongolian.<sup>74</sup> Lastly, Karl-Ernst Lupprian produced, in 1981, a collection of letters comprising much of the correspondence between the popes and the ilkhans at the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>75</sup> In addition to the cited sources, several edited letters from subsequent publications have also been consulted; however, these are dispersed across various works and will be referenced in the relevant sections.

The other pieces of correspondence and official documents analysed in this work belong to a very different context: they are mainly letters and instructions exchanged between officials from the Italian Republics, or they belong collectively to the category of official treaties and diplomatic agreements in and outside the Ilkhanate. They are edited in collections published by the *Deputazione*

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<sup>72</sup> *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica: Adiecta est Tartariae asiaticae secundum recentiores geographos in mappa delineatio*, ed. Von Mosheim, J. (Weygand, 1741). From this point onward, *Mosheim*.

<sup>73</sup> Pelliot, P. "Les Mongols et la papauté." *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, 3,23 (1922-1923): 1-30; Pelliot, P. "Les Mongols et la papauté." *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, 4,24 (1924): 224-335; Pelliot, P. "Les Mongols et la papauté." *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, 8,28 (1932): 3-84.

<sup>74</sup> Mostaert, A. Cleaves, F.W. "Trois documents mongols des Archives secrètes vaticanes." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (1952): 419-506.

<sup>75</sup> Lupprian, K.E. *Die Beziehungen der Päpste zu islamischen und mongolischen Herrschern im 13. Jahrhundert anhand ihres Briefwechsels* (Città del Vaticano, 1981), from this point onward, *Lupprian*.

di Storia Patria, such as the *Monumenta Historiae Patriae* or the *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levantinum*.<sup>76</sup>

Commercial documentation, particularly valuable for the concerns of the last chapter, has been only marginally utilised. Unless otherwise indicated, commercial documents have been taken from edited collections or transcriptions in previous works, which will all be referenced in the text.<sup>77</sup> One of the most important sources concerning trade is the commercial manual *La Pratica della Mercatura*. The treatise was compiled in the second half of the fourteenth century by the Italian merchant Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, a clerk of the Bardi banking company. This manual endeavours to provide a complete guide to trade to fellow merchants operating in the Mediterranean and beyond. While this guide is particularly useful to economic historians, it also refers to Italian presence in the Persian region and other parts of the Mongol Empire.<sup>78</sup>

The other large category of Latin material comprises historiographical, geographical, and ethnographic works. As with the other sources, many of these works have been consulted, so it is opportune to enumerate the few important ones that contributed decisively to this dissertation. Most of these works come from a mercantile or ecclesiastical environment, as merchants, monks, and friars were among the first western Europeans to venture within the borders of the Mongol Empire.

The most famous source in this section is Marco Polo's account of his journey in Asia and his period as "minister" of Qubilai. This dissertation only uses the Venetian's work sparingly. Therefore, this introduction does not delve into an extensive analysis of the authenticity or reliability of Marco Polo's account, nor does it explore the various translations of his work in different languages. It is sufficient to say that contemporary historiography has amply demonstrated the authenticity of Polo's

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<sup>76</sup> *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levantinum sive acta et diplomata res Venetas, Graecas atque Levantis illustrantia a 1300-1350*, ed. Thomas, G. (Venezia, 1881); *Monumenta Historiae Patriae edita iussu regi Caroli Alberti, Leges Municipales*, ed. Regia Deputazione di Storia Patria. (Torino, 1838). From this point onward, respectively, *Monumenta* and *Diplomatarium*.

<sup>77</sup> An example of this is the testament of the Venetian merchant Pietro Viglioni: *Testamento di Pietro Vioni Veneziano fatto a Tauris (1264)*, *Archivio Veneto*, Vol. 1, ed. Cecchetti, B. (Venezia, 1883). From this point onward, *Archivio Veneto*.

<sup>78</sup> Francesco Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura (1335-1343)*, ed. Evans, A. (Cambridge, MA, 1936). From this point onward, *Pegolotti/Evans*.

work despite its inaccuracies and exaggeration.<sup>79</sup> The parts cited in this dissertation are not linked to Polo's most controversial passages, and they often consist of simple observations made by the Venetian during his travels. This dissertation uses different translated editions of Polo's account, both in Italian and in English.<sup>80</sup>

Other sources that have been touched upon include those produced within the context of the first Latin expeditions in the Mongol Empire. Sometimes before 1247, after his long journey to Mongolia, the Franciscan John of Pian del Carpine (1185-1252) completed his *Ystoria Mongalorum*. Primarily conceived as an "intelligence report," the text represents the earliest significant medieval Latin description of previously unknown regions within the Mongol dominions.<sup>81</sup> The *Ystoria Mongalorum* stood for centuries as a foundational text in European understanding of the Mongols.<sup>82</sup>

Contemporary to John's report is the *History of the Tartars*, written by Simon of Saint Quentin (c.1226-1275), a travel companion to Ascelin of Lombardy, another Papal envoy to the Mongols. Simon's history is possibly more relevant for this dissertation than the *Ystoria Mongalorum*, as Simon and Ascelin travelled to Persia and interacted with Mongol officials in the region. Unfortunately, Simon's history has not survived in its entirety. A section of this work is preserved in

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<sup>79</sup> Frances Wood has debated the veracity of Polo as a primary source on Yuan China, arguing that the merchant probably never moved further away than the Black Sea, and that his story is the result of a collation of accounts from fellow merchants. Wood, F. *Did Marco Polo Go To China?* (New York, 1997). Wood's work has been widely criticised by historians like de Rachewiltz, Rossabi and Haw, and it contains a number of imprecisions and historical inaccuracies. De Rachewiltz, I. F. *Wood's Did Marco Polo Go To China? A Critical Appraisal by I. de Rachewiltz* (Australian National University, 2002); De Rachewiltz, I. "Marco Polo Went to China." *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 27 (1997): 34-92; Morris, R. *Did Marco Polo Really Go To China? An essay by Professor Morris Rossabi, Columbia University, in response to the book Did Marco Polo Go To China? by Frances Wood* (Columbia University, Asia for Educators); Haw, S.G. *Marco Polo's China: a Venetian in the Realm of Kublai Khan* (London and New York, 2006).

<sup>80</sup> Marco Polo, *The book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East, translated and edited with notes, maps and illustrations*, transl. Yule, H. and Cordier, H. (London, 1903); Marco Polo, *Il Milione secondo il testo della "Crusca," reintegrato con gli altri codici italiani*, ed. Olivieri, D. (Bari, 1912). From this point onward, *Marco Polo/Olivieri*, *Marco Polo/Yule-Cordier*.

<sup>81</sup> On the date of composition of the *Ystoria*, see Ostrowski, D. "Second-Redaction Additions in Carpini's *Ystoria Mongalorum*." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 14, 3/4 (1990): 522-550.

<sup>82</sup> John of Pian del Carpine, *Ystoria Mongalorum qui Tartaros appellamus (The story of the Mongols whom we call the Tartars)*, ed. Hildinger, E. (Boston, 1996); John of Pian del Carpine, *Storia dei Mongoli*, transl. Daffinà, P. Leonardi, C. Lungarotti, M.C. Menestò, E. and Petech, L. (Spoleto, 1989). From this point forward, *Pian del Carpine/Menestò*.

Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*, and it has been consulted from a digital edition and translation of one of the manuscripts.<sup>83</sup> A few years after the completion of these works, William of Rubruck (c1210-1270) wrote his own report on the Mongols titled *Itinerarium Fratris Willielmi de Rubruquis*; the text describes William's encounters and experiences through meticulous observations and provides invaluable insights into the Mongol Empire's customs, geography, and societal dynamics. Two English translations of the work have been consulted, both produced by the Hakluyt Society. Peter Jackson and David Morgan authored the most recent one.<sup>84</sup>

Other ecclesiastical works constitute very important material because they were produced by Latin clergy operating within the borders of the Ilkhanate at a later date. To my knowledge, there are only two such works. Much like the previously mentioned *La Flor*, the first falls within the category of crusading treatises and was authored by William Adam (d. 1341), a Dominican missionary and bishop active in Ilkhanate. Adam was promoted bishop of Soltanieh in 1322, where he presumably remained until 1324. He likely wrote his treatise on the recovery of the Holy Land, *Tractatus quomodo Sarraceni sunt expugnandi*, in this period.<sup>85</sup> Adam's work is a valuable source of information on the geography and politics of Asia, of which the friar demonstrates remarkable knowledge. It also addresses Ilkhanid politics and the conditions of Christians in Persia and the Middle East. In all, it represents a valuable source that serves as a contrast to the cordial relationship in the official correspondence between Ilkhanid and Latin rulers, as it is a testimony of someone on

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<sup>83</sup> Simon of Saint-Quentin, *Simon of Saint-Quentin's History of the Tartars in Vincent De Beauvais, Speculum Historiale* (Ch.31-32), transl. Pow, S. Kiss, T. Romsics, A. and Ghazaryan, F. (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2019). From this point onward, *Saint-Quentin/Ghazaryan*.

<sup>84</sup> William of Rubruck, *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253-55: As Narrated by Himself. With Two Accounts of the Earlier Journey of John of Pian de Carpine*, transl. Rockhill, W.W. (London, 1900); William of Rubruck, *The mission of Friar William of Rubruck: his journey to the court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253-1255*, transl. Jackson, P. and Morgan, D. (London, 1990). From this point onward, *Rubruck/Jackson*.

<sup>85</sup> See Kohler, C. "Documents relatifs à Guillaume Adam, archevêque de Soltanieh." *Mélanges pour servir à l'histoire de l'Orient latin*, 2 (1906): 476-515.

the field. A copy of William's work has been edited in the *RHC* and consulted alongside the modern translation provided by Giles Constable.<sup>86</sup>

The second important work is the *Liber Peregrinationis*, composed by the missionary Riccoldo Da Monte di Croce (c.1242- 1320). A Dominican, Riccoldo studied in various major European schools, becoming a master. In 1288, he undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and travelled throughout the Middle East. His travels took him through most of the Levant, to Cilicia and Tabriz, where he preached before proceeding to Baghdad via Mosul and Tikrit. He stayed in Iraq until 1295, where he learned Arabic to study the Qur'ān and other important Islamic religious texts. In his *Liber Peregrinationis*, the Dominican describes the countries he visited. As a traveller and observer, Riccoldo showed remarkable knowledge and understanding of cultural systems different from his own. I consulted a manuscript of his work found in Berlin, which Emilio Panella has digitalised and edited.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, as concerns the relationship between the Levantine Crusader states and the Mongols, I have mainly consulted the *Gestes des Chipriots* (Deeds of the Cypriots). The *Gestes* is divided into three books and was likely compiled during the second decade of the fourteenth century in Cyprus. It contains a history of the Crusader states, the Kingdoms of Cyprus and Cilician Armenia from 1132 to 1304, with an account of the trials of the Templars. The last volume is the most important, as it reports eyewitness accounts of the last years of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the fall of Acre in

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<sup>86</sup> William Adam, *How to defeat the Saracens*, transl. Constable, G. (Washington, 2012). From this point onward, *Adam/Constable*; Guillelmus Adae (William Adam), *Tractatus quomodo Sarraceni sunt expugnandi (1316-1317)*, in Dulaurier, E. and Kohler, C. eds. *Recueil des historiens des Croisades: Documents Latins et Français Relatifs à L'Arménie*, Vol.2. (Paris, 1906): 519-549. Adam's text has been found in three different manuscripts in Basel and Rome. The texts were approximately composed in the fifteenth century and appear to have been written independently.

<sup>87</sup> Riccoldo Di Montecroce, *Liber Peregrinationis* (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek lat. 4°466, ff. 1r-24r), ed. Panella E. (Firenze, 2005). The translations from the original Latin are mine; however, a French translation of the text was published in 1997. Riccoldo Di Montecroce, *Riccold de Monte Croce Pérégrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche-Orient, Texte latin et traduction, Lettres sur la chute de Saint Jean Acre*, transl. Kappler, R. (Paris, 1997). From this point onward, *Riccoldo*.

1291. It is this volume that has been consulted in the present study, chiefly because it offers a valuable overview of Crusader-Mongol relations before the abrupt end of the chronicle in 1309.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Gestes des Chipriotes. Recueil de Chroniques Françaises écrites en Orient aux XIII et XIVe siècle*, ed. Raynaud, G. (Genève, 1887). From this point onward, *Gestes*. The chronicle is also reported in Dulaurier, E. and Kohler, C. eds. *Recueil des historiens des Croisades: Documents Latins et Français Relatifs à L'Arménie*, Vol.2. (Paris, 1906): 653-737. An amateur historian found the manuscript of the text known as *Gestes* at the end of the nineteenth century in the Piedmontese archives in Saluzzo. Raynaud then copied the text. The work is divided into three parts, each covering a different period. This dissertation only analyses the third part, "*The Chronicle of the Templar of Tyre*." An English translation of the text exists: *Part Three of the 'Deeds of the Cypriotes*, trans. Crawford P. (Aldershot, 2003) but it has not been consulted for this work.

## First part

The first part of this work examines the internal mechanics of Ilkhanid governance, focusing on the relationships between Mongol rulers, the *noyat* and administrators. In the Ilkhanate governance operated through overlapping horizontal and vertical configurations of kinship, patronage, and service, which determined access to resources and political power. These ties were maintained through kinship, proximity to the *ordu*, landholding, and political alignment.

The first chapter of this section is dedicated to the role of the military aristocracy, comprising appanages-holding Činggisid princes and *noyat*. Their authority derived from service, proximity to the ruling house, and access to the revenue of their domains. While formally subordinate, many established autonomous regional power bases, sustaining influence through patronage, marriage alliances, and shared military loyalties extending across the Činggisid world. In Persia, they played an increasingly important role in shaping Ilkhanid politics.

The second chapter analyses the role of the administrative elite, particularly Persian officials, whose control over fiscal management and information flows conferred them considerable political leverage. By cultivating ties with local elites and controlling revenue flows, they could influence appointments and policy, adjust fiscal demands and temper royal directives. Their capacity to operate across cultural and institutional boundaries made them indispensable to Ilkhanid governance. In both the administrative and the military sphere, authority was inseparable from positionality within governance networks, which remained fluid, contested, and sustained through constant negotiation.

# I. Khans And Kingmakers: Kingship And Political Compromise in Ilkhanid Persia

In the spring of 1206, Temüjin was formally recognised as the supreme ruler of the Mongols at a *quriltai* (assembly) near the Onon River, with the title Činggis Khan.<sup>89</sup> His rise to power marked the end of an era of tribal disputes, which had long been defining features of the steppe society in which Činggis Khan was raised. During his ascent to power, Temüjin had made use of tribal alliances to his advantage, but their limitations had become an obstacle to his designs. Consequently, once in power, he implemented sweeping reforms to foster loyalty to the new *qa'an* and his kin.<sup>90</sup> Traditional kindred groups were reorganised into new military units (the *arban*, *jaghun*, and *tümen*), and subordinated to a new imperial system, at the apex of which Temüjin's family stood revered as the *Altan Uruq*, or "Golden Kin."<sup>91</sup> Kinship remained important in Mongol society but, in the new order, it was subordinated to service through a system of prestige and reward. Činggis Khan's generals and *nököt* (comrades, companions), like Muqali, Jebe, Sübedei and others, had risen through demonstrated loyalty, not through aristocratic standing, as their power came from their success and their control over men, information, and the means of conquest.<sup>92</sup> As this chapter examines the

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<sup>89</sup> *Secret History/Rachewiltz*, p.133.

<sup>90</sup> Jones, T. "The Objects of Loyalty in the Early Mongol Empire (Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries)." *Iran*, 61, 2 (2021): 196-220; Togan, I. *Flexibility and Limitations in Steppe Formations: The Kerait Khanate and Činggis Khan* (Leiden, 1998), p.138-139.

<sup>91</sup> For the structure and organisation of the Mongol army, see Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.78. On the division of the army into decimal units, including the *tumen* (*hazāra* in Persian), see *Secret History/Rachewiltz*, p.133-135, with particular attention to the passage on p.135. For Činggis Khan's military reforms and their relationship to earlier tribal structures, see Wing, P. "Tribes and the Činggisid Empire," in idem, *The Jalāyirids: Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Middle East* (Edinburgh, 2016), p.29-47.

<sup>92</sup> *Secret History/Rachewiltz*, p.156-159. The *Secret History of the Mongols* reveals the centrality of loyalty and hierarchical discipline in the organisation of Mongol society. Particularly notable is the account of the royal guard (*kešik*), established by Činggis Khan, which exemplifies the formalisation of elite service and personal allegiance at the heart of early imperial governance. Equally significant is the emphasis placed on delegated command, with Činggis entrusting military and administrative responsibilities to his senior commanders, referred to in the *Secret History* as his "war hounds." Muqali, in particular, is singled out for exceptional honour at p.138, while four other generals are celebrated collectively under this designation at p.142.

evolution of the role of the *noyat* in the formation and governance of the Ilkhanate, it must necessarily begin with the *quriltai* of 1206. The political order established by Činggis Khan did not create fixed institutions or a stable administrative hierarchy. Instead, the early Mongol campaigns, first against the Western Xia in 1209 and then against the Jin dynasty in northern China between 1211 and 1215, established a model of delegated expansion. Military command was entrusted to princes and senior retainers, whose authority in the field reflected the *qa'an*'s mandate but simultaneously became a source of personal power.<sup>93</sup> Following these campaigns, there was no attempt to impose uniform governance on the conquered lands. Rather, commanders established garrisons, collected tribute, and created zones of military occupation, where they exercised exclusive control.<sup>94</sup>

Another important feature of Mongol expansion in this period was the patrimonial allocation of land into holdings falling into two main categories: *qubi*, or shares of conquered land granted to members of the *Altan Uruq*, and *injü* (estates or revenue assignments drawn from the Činggisid

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<sup>93</sup> Allsen, T.T. "Guard and Government in the Reign of the Grand Qan Möngke." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 30, 3 (1987): 495-521, esp. p.517-519. About Möngke's companions, Allsen emphasises that these officials, as retainers of the *qa'an*, performed service in rotational rounds before returning to their "parent" organisations, and that ties of loyalty and personal friendship continued to shape the structure of Mongol governance well into the reign of Möngke.

<sup>94</sup> Schurmann, H.F. "Mongolian Tributary Practices of the Thirteenth Century." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 19, 3/4 (1956): 304-389, esp. p.305,309. The article calls for a more careful analysis of what has often been described as raiding, but which constituted exaction by local Mongol armies, and thus by local generals. It further notes that tribute obligations were generally owed to locally superior commanders rather than to a central authority. For two well-documented cases of Činggisid autonomy not involving the *noyat*, see Jackson, P. "The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire." *Central Asiatic Journal*, 22, 3/4 (1978): 186-244, p.208-212. The case Jackson makes for Jočid autonomy will be addressed in the following pages. For the case of Temüge, see Jackson, P. "From Ulus to Khanate: The Making of the Mongol States c. 1220c.-1290," in Amitai-Preiss, R. and Morgan, D. eds. *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy* (Leiden, 2000): 12-38, p.32-35.

domains), allocated to the *noyat* or Mongol subjects.<sup>95</sup> In this way, Mongol aristocracy transformed military service into access to office, land, and income, and derived power from their ability to sustain personal ties both within the *ordu* (imperial court) and across the empire's vast and fragmented domains, a system this study terms negotiated rule: a political order in which *noyat* authority was contingent and relational at the imperial centre, but effective and nearly uncontested in the peripheries.

At this stage, it is worth addressing the historiographical tradition, which has often largely interpreted governance in the early Mongol Empire through a binary framework. David Morgan's work identified in Činggisid rule a precarious balance between tribal cohesion and emerging central authority. This reading interprets the early stages of Mongol expansion through a hierarchical model in which power flowed downward and outward from the *qa'an* through princes and appointed commanders, in an empire collectively ruled by the Činggisids, at least up until 1260.<sup>96</sup> Paul Buell later extended this framework by tracing the development of fiscal and administrative mechanisms under Ögödei, especially the appointment of senior administrators and the standardisation of tribute

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<sup>95</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.101,102. Jackson distinguishes between *qubi*, appanages granted to Mongol princes, and the *ulus*, the *qa'an*'s central seat of power. Allsen, T.T. "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire and Mongolian Rule in North China," in Franke, H. and Twitchett, D. eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol.6 (Cambridge, 1994): 321-413, p.389, defines *qubi* as a princely share usually measured in households. On the apportionment of Iran, see Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.48. On the term *injü*, see Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente*, Vol.2, p.220-225, which links it etymologically to the Mongol word *emchü*, meaning "private property." Kim, "The Unity of the Mongol Empire," p.24, defines *injü* as a princely demesne. Schurmann, "Mongolian Tributary Practices," p.187, distinguishes between *dalay* (the land of the *qa'an*) and *injü* (lands granted to relatives), and notes at p.190 that *noyat* could also possess *injü*. Hope, *Power, Politics, and Tradition*, p.100, p.173, offers a more nuanced view, treating *injü* as private hereditary Činggisid property and *dalay* as Ilkhanid "public" land. For Lambton, *injü* is widely used throughout the Ilkhanid period, but it did not necessarily always mean the same thing at all times and in all places, and it came to be used loosely as a general term for crown lands. Lambton, A.K.S. *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia. Aspects of administrative, economic and social history, 11th-14th century* (London, 1988), p.119. Rashīd al-Dīn always refers to the hereditary land of the *noyat* as the "personal *injü* of the commanders."

<sup>96</sup> Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.35. Discussing Lattimore's comparison with a feudal state, Morgan argues that Mongol society was not wholly structured by descent. p.36. "Not only was the extent of a khan's power limited, but that power was seen rather as a family than as a personal possession." See also Morgan, D. "Who Ran the Mongol Empire?" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1 (1982): 124-136, p.124-126.

and census collection. These measures are seen by Buell as early efforts toward institutional coherence.<sup>97</sup>

More broadly, these interpretations align with the concept of the “military patronage state,” originally formulated by Marshall Hodgson. In this model, the ruler exercises authority by distributing land and fiscal entitlements to military retainers in exchange for loyalty and service. The state is sustained by a structured relationship of reciprocity between a central sovereign and a dependent and militarily organised elite.<sup>98</sup>

Elements of the military patronage state model are undeniably present in the redistributive practices of Činggisid rule, and this work recognises the allocation of territory and income as key instruments for rewarding service. Allsen’s work on Činggisid political culture, for instance, has shown how court ritual, imperial gift exchange, and the endorsement by the *qa’an* through the redistribution of plunder, captives, titles and fiscal rights were material expressions of governance.<sup>99</sup> In his analysis of steppe societies and their governing practices, David Sneath argued that this ritual redistribution was the defining structure of nomadic rule, which was formed by the vertical and kinship relations of aristocratic power.<sup>100</sup> This study adopts this reading but shifts its emphasis from structure to function. While symbolic acts did codify elite interaction, such arrangements in the Mongol Empire were not routinised as described by Hodgson. While framed as rewards, such allocations frequently reflected the realities of power on the ground: they could be extracted by virtue

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<sup>97</sup> Buell, P.D. “Chinqai (ca. 1169-1252), Architect of the Mongolian Empire,” in Kaplan, E.H. and Whisenhunt, D.W. eds. *Opuscula Altaica: Essays Presented in Honour of Henry Schwartz* (Washington, 1994): 168-186, p.174-176.

<sup>98</sup> Hodgson, M.G.S. *The Venture of Islam*, Vol. 2, (Chicago and London, 1974), p.405, 407-408. Hodgson argues that the Mongol states introduced key features of the “military patronage state,” in which privileges and responsibilities were apportioned among an essentially military elite by the ruling family, with landholding reoriented around court service and dynastic loyalty. While Hodgson views this structure as a unifying institutional legacy across post-Mongol polities, the present dissertation stresses the fragmented and negotiated nature of Ilkhanid authority.

<sup>99</sup> Allsen, *Culture and conquest*, p.199-200.

<sup>100</sup> Sneath, *The Headless State*, p.118. Sneath argues that, as with the decimal administrative system, Mongol political structures were constituted primarily through vertical relations of aristocratic patronage. The social foundations of the polity were, in his view, descent groups constructed by elites, maintained through practices such as genealogy-keeping, and embedded within hierarchies of aristocratic power.

of influence or military force, ratified after the fact, or simply granted because no alternative existed. They were, therefore, as much the product of aristocratic pressure as of sovereign favour. This meant that rule could not be maintained only through central arrangements, but depended on those who could make such arrangements effective. For this reason, this study focuses on individuals whose authority derived from their capacity to link the *ordu* with the territory it governed. These figures acted as brokers who maintained political coherence across fragmented spaces. Without them, imperial rule could not be sustained. The *qa'an* could define objectives and confirm appointments, but was forced to compromise, as the success of expansion and governance relied on agents whose authority derived from their control of territory and military resources. Network theory offers a language to describe this configuration. In such a structure, power does not reside in centrality or density alone, but in the capacity to occupy structural holes, spaces between different groups where no other links exist. The Mongol *noyat*, much like other groups discussed in this dissertation, were often positioned at such points.

This was especially evident during the Empire's western expansion, when this authority was largely delegated to Činggis Khan's *nököt* and relatives. From 1215 onwards, semi-nomadic polities such as the Kipchaks, the Qara-Khitai, and the Khwārazmshāhiyān engaged Mongol forces in repeated frontier skirmishes.<sup>101</sup> After initial confrontations, diplomatic contacts between the Khwārazmshāhiyān and the Mongols were established in 1215, when Shāh 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad (r.1200-1220), then planning an expedition to China, dispatched envoys to assess Mongol strength.<sup>102</sup> Despite an initial treaty, in 1218 a caravan of Mongol merchants was arrested and executed in Üträr on suspicion of espionage. When Činggis Khan's envoys demanding the city governor's punishment

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<sup>101</sup> Jūzjānī/Raverty, p.269.

<sup>102</sup> Jūzjānī/Raverty, p.270.

were also killed, a full-scale invasion followed.<sup>103</sup> In 1219, Mongol armies crossed the Syr Darya and initiated hostilities. Within a year, Bukhara, Samarkand, and Üträr had fallen. The Khwārazmshāh ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad died in flight during the winter of 1220-21, while Činggis Khan’s sons Joči, Ögödei and Chaghadai besieged the Khwārazmian capital Gurganj, which capitulated in spring 1221.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, Mongol generals Jebe and Sübedei pursued the remaining Khwārazmian forces through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Greater Armenia, reaching the Rus’ principalities in 1223.<sup>105</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn (r. 1220-1231), who had assumed leadership of the Khwārazmshāhiyān after his father’s death, continued to resist Mongol advances but was defeated at the Indus in November 1221 and forced to flee to India.<sup>106</sup> In that same year, Tolui, another of Činggis Khan’s sons, led a devastating campaign in Khurasan, in which cities that resisted were subject to massacres and looting. The Mongols destroyed Nishapur, Merv, and Herat, among Persia’s most prominent and wealthiest cities.<sup>107</sup> The Mongol campaigns of 1219-23 shattered the Khwārazmian Empire and extended Mongol control across Transoxiana, Khurasan, the Caucasus, and parts of western Iran.<sup>108</sup> Yet, what emerged in this period was not a coherent territorial regime, but a loosely connected space maintained through mobility, intimidation and negotiation. In institutional terms, Mongol campaigns produced chaos and instability, and governance was often left to the occupying general or *tammachi*, and garrison troops or *tamma*, with no civilian administration

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<sup>103</sup> Jūzjānī/Raverty, p.268-271; JTJ/Boyle, p.368; JTJ/Qazwīnī, II, p.99-100; Allsen, T.T. “Mongolian princes and their merchant partners, 1200-1260.” *Asia Major* 2, 2 (1989): 83-126, p.89-92; JTJ/Boyle, p.78; JTJ/Qazwīnī, I, p.60. Central Asian merchants headed the caravan: Rashīd al-Dīn refers to those killed at Üträr as “Muslim merchants.” *RJT/Karīmī*, p.221. For the beginning of the invasion, see JTJ/Boyle, p.98-99; JTJ/Qazwīnī, I, p.75-76. Allsen reports that Juvaynī’s version of Genghis Khan’s negotiations with ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad is confirmed in its relevant point by that of Nasawī, the personal secretary of Jalāl al-Dīn. Allsen, “Mongolian princes.” p.89.

<sup>104</sup> JTJ/Boyle, p.124, 125; JTJ/Qazwīnī, I, p.98-99.

<sup>105</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.18; for this campaign see Allsen, T.T. “Prelude to the Western Campaigns: Mongol Military Operations in the Volga-Ural Region in 1217-1237.” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 3 (1983): 5-24.

<sup>106</sup> JTJ/Boyle, p.134-135; JTJ/Qazwīnī, I, p.107-108.

<sup>107</sup> JTJ/Boyle, p.150-177; JTJ/Qazwīnī, I, p.117-140.

<sup>108</sup> One consequence of the massive displacement of Khwārazmian soldiers was that they offered their service as mercenaries to the Ayyubid Sultan al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb, who used them in his victory at La Forbie (al-Harbiyya) in 1244 against his Syrian relatives and their Frankish allies. Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.74.

to speak of.<sup>109</sup> By Činggis Khan's death in 1227, the Mongol Empire had become the most expansive polity in Eurasia, yet its governance remained fragmented. The *qa'an* had prefigured a distribution of his domains among his sons during his lifetime, a division confirmed at the *quriltai* convened at Ködö'e Aral in 1228-1229.<sup>110</sup> The *quriltai* confirmed Ögödei (r.1229-1241), Činggis' third son, as *qa'an*, assigning to his household territories in inner Asia and nominal oversight over the imperial capital.<sup>111</sup> The heirs of the recently deceased Joči received the western steppes and a mandate over the Caucasus; Chaghadai and his household the core of Central Asia; Tolui some of the family patrimony in Mongolia.<sup>112</sup> Jackson has shown that the allocation of these *uluses* (countries), like that of *qubis* and *injüs*, did not follow a fixed territorial logic but was determined by effective control or influence over these regions. The division of 1227, in practice, marked the culmination of the formation of political zones granted in recognition of service, lineage, or political necessity, all nominally placed under the sovereignty of the *qa'an*.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the precarious nature of such arrangements, the reign of Ögödei saw little internal discord. The title of *qa'an* granted Ögödei formal precedence over his brothers, but his authority

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<sup>109</sup> May, T. "Mongol Conquest Strategy in the Middle East," in De Nicola, B. and Melville, C. eds. *The Mongols' Middle East: Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran* (Leiden, 2016): 11-37, p.16,19-20. May discusses how the *tamma* could function both as an offensive force and a garrison unit, and examines its composition. Ostrowski, D. "The Tamma and the Dual-Administrative Structure of the Mongol Empire." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 61, 2 (1998): 262-277, p.276-277. Ostrowski argues that in certain regions the role of *basqaq* (governor) was frequently assumed by the *tammachi*, drawing a sharp distinction between this office and that of *darughachi*, whereas May treats *basqaq* and *darughachi* as largely interchangeable.

<sup>110</sup> Bechtel, M.J. *From Collective Sovereignty to Autocracy: The Evolution of the Mongol Empire, 1227-1251* (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2021), p.82-84. See also *Secret History/Rachewiltz* (Supplement), p.225. Juvayni narrates the events of the *quriltai* held on the banks of the Kerulen River; see *JTJ/Boyle*, p.183-186; *JTJ/Qazwini*, I, p.144-147.

<sup>111</sup> Karakorum was still a temporary camp; it would be established as a permanent settlement by Ögödei around 1230. See Bemann, J. Linzen, S. Reichert, S. Munkhbayar, L.K.H. "Mapping Karakorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire." *Antiquity* 96, 385 (2022): 159-178.

<sup>112</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.42-43; *JTJ/Qazwini*, I, p.31-32; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.18; Jackson, "The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire." p.209-210.

<sup>113</sup> Jackson, "From Ulus to Khanate." p.15-16, p.35-36, discusses the relationship between *ulus* and rulership during this period, noting that the sources do not allow us to determine which *ulus* holder, if any, was meant to hold pre-eminence. He further observes that the number of appanages granted likely exceeded those traceable in surviving records, and that only historical developments retrospectively elevated the domains of the four senior sons of Činggis Khan to the status of khanates.

remained conditional, as his election was not determined solely by Činggis Khan's preference, but by his mediation between the rival lineages of his brothers Joči and Chaghadai.<sup>114</sup> In Juvaynī's account Ögödei is depicted as a generous monarch, distributing treasure and livestock "without counting," and giving away so much that the officials had to remind him not to empty the treasury.<sup>115</sup> By redistributing the spoils of conquest, Ögödei observed Mongol customary practice, using wealth and land as political instruments to ensure that no faction felt excluded from imperial favour.<sup>116</sup> Yet, while Ögödei's rule could appear as a regime based on redistributive governance, he did not simply accommodate aristocratic ambition, but also sought to place limits on the authority of princes and *noyat*. To Ögödei's reign, in fact, are credited the first efforts aimed at imposing greater regularity on the collection of taxes and reducing the arbitrary exactions carried out by local commanders.<sup>117</sup> Michal Biran has shown that many of the tensions which later destabilised the empire emerged under Ögödei, as the *noyat* who benefited from his distributions often resisted efforts to curtail their autonomy.<sup>118</sup> In regions distant from the imperial centre, the authority of the *qa'an*'s advisors, which relied on personal proximity to the *qa'an* and his trust, carried little weight. Power lay with the *noyat* and princes, whose direct control over the land the *qa'an* was forced to recognise. The jurisdictional conflict in Central Asia between Chaghadai and one of Ögödei's chief advisors, Maḥmūd Yalavāch, examined in detail in the following chapter, clearly exemplifies these dynamics. After his brother's complaints, Ögödei exempted Chaghadai's appanages from taxation and transferred Yalavāch to northern China.<sup>119</sup> To address some of the contradictions of Ögödei's policies, Michael Hope has characterised his reign as a period of collegial rule, in which imperial governance was shaped by the

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<sup>114</sup> Tensions between their lineages were already apparent. Rashīd al-Dīn and the *Secret History* record that Jochi's legitimacy remained contested within the family, a suspicion fuelled by his birth soon after Börte's captivity. See *Secret History/Rachewiltz*, p.184-188; *RJT/Thackston*, p.348; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.505. For an overview of this topic, see Agatay, O. "An Analysis of Joči's Debated Paternity and His Role in the Altan Uruḡ Royal Lineage of Činggis Khan." *Golden Horde Review*, 9,4 (2021): 684-714.

<sup>115</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.201-202, 212; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.159-160, 169.

<sup>116</sup> Bechtel, *From Collective Sovereignty to Autocracy*, p.87; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.60.

<sup>117</sup> See below, p.117-120.

<sup>118</sup> Biran, M. *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State in Central Asia* (Richmond, 1997), introduction, esp. p.10.

<sup>119</sup> See below, p.119-120.

consensus of the elite, arguing that major decisions in this period were influenced by princely or aristocratic blocs.<sup>120</sup> Yet, this interpretation risks overstating the coherence of aristocratic coordination. The framework adopted in this study does not dismiss the existence of collegial rule at various points in the history of the Mongol Empire and the Ilkhanate. Rather, it reframes it not as the overarching mode of governance, but as one of the contexts within which individual agency was exercised. If collegial rule operated during this period, it had dissipated by the final years of Ögödei's reign, as the fragile balance between the imperial centre and the periphery began to erode, as suggested by the increase in the allotment of appanages in north China and Persia to Činggisid princes.<sup>121</sup> These developments were, rather than the failure of collegial rule, simply a reflection of the underlying structure of Mongol rule: authority was always relational, and as Ögödei's capacity to manage those relations diminished because of his prolonged illness, the cohesion of the Empire began to unravel.

The situation in Persia offers a clear example of what this entailed in practice. To consolidate Mongol authority in southwest Asia, Ögödei dispatched in the region an army led by Chormaghun Noyan, a member of the *kešik*, in 1230. Chormaghun's military campaigns in the region were largely successful, bringing Jalāl al-Dīn's rule to an end and establishing Mongol control over Azerbaijan, Georgia and Greater Armenia.<sup>122</sup> These conquests extended further in 1243, after Ögödei's death, when Baiju, Chormaghun's successor, defeated the Anatolian Seljuks of Rûm at Köse Dağ and extended Mongol control to northern Syria by 1247.<sup>123</sup> Initially assigned to command by Ögödei,

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<sup>120</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.61. "Ögödei's death was a cause for sorrow amongst the Mongol elites who would view his rule as the epitome of collegial principles."

<sup>121</sup> Ögödei enlarged the system of appanages in 1236 against the advice of one of his chief ministers, Yēlù Chǔcái, bypassing regular tax collection and establishing tax farming. Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.379-380. See below, p.124.

<sup>122</sup> Boyle, J.A. "Dynastic and Political History of the Īl-Khāns," in Boyle J.A. Fisher, W.B. eds. *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol.5, (Cambridge, 1968): 303-421, p.335-336.

<sup>123</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.84.

Baiju had come, after the *qa'an*'s illness, to fall under the effective authority of Joči's son Batu, now quasi-autonomous ruler of the western steppes.<sup>124</sup>

The regency of Töregene Khatun (1241-1246), Ögödei's widow, was a further step in the acknowledgement of regional autonomies, as the regent was motivated by the urgent need to secure resources to maintain her position and to bolster her son Güyük's claim to the title of *qa'an*.<sup>125</sup> This could only be done by cultivating loyalty with the *noyat* and binding other branches of the Činggisid family to her political project with gifts and concessions. In her bid to secure the throne for her son, Töregene engaged in acts of generosity on a grand scale, breaking the equilibrium between central power and periphery. She distributed lands, recognised the autonomy of provincial governors, and cultivated the support of the other Činggisid princes by granting them fiscal independence and free rein over their appanages.<sup>126</sup> Töregene's efforts ultimately secured Güyük's election in 1246, but the cost was a further dispersion of power in the *Uruq*. The brief reign of Güyük (r.1246-1248) deepened these contradictions. Güyük's attempts to reassert central authority were often met with resistance. The reappointment of his father's ministers and his aggressive tone towards Batu reflect a desire to reverse his mother's approach.<sup>127</sup> Yet, his court never secured the cohesion Ögödei had achieved. In fact, it reproduced its fragilities. Despite his overall positive assessment of Güyük's rule, Hodong Kim has shown that the *ordu* was politically brittle and factionally divided, with rival kinship groups and disgruntled *noyat* resisting his initiatives.<sup>128</sup> According to Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn, Güyük

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<sup>124</sup> Jackson, "The Dissolution." p.217-219. Jackson discusses Baiju's appointment and argues that Güyük's decision to dispatch Eljigidei in 1247 to replace him indicates Baiju's affiliation with Batu, who had increasingly brought him under his control.

<sup>125</sup> Broadbridge, *Women*, p.176-177.

<sup>126</sup> Broadbridge, *Women*, p.176; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.62.

<sup>127</sup> Kim, H. "A Reappraisal of Güyüg Khan," in Amitai-Preiss, R. and Biran, M. eds. *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden, 2004): 309-338, p.326-327. Kim interprets Güyük's reign as an attempt to reverse the decentralising tendencies that had characterised his mother's regency. By contrast, Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.70-71, argues for continuity with Ögödei's collegial model, stating that "Güyük never held plans to unite the Mongol Empire under a centralised patrimonial state." Allsen discusses how Güyük's leadership lacked vigour and describes his reign as characterised by tax farming, usury, speculation and extortion. Allsen, "The rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.388.

<sup>128</sup> Kim, "A Reappraisal." p.326-328.

appointed Eljigidei to command in the Caucasus and Anatolia, where Batu had strong influence. Eljigidei was instructed to challenge Batu's subordinates directly, and Güyük himself began a westward advance in 1248.<sup>129</sup> Both Rubruck's *Itinerarium* and Rashīd al-Dīn claim that a military confrontation between the *qa'an* and Batu was imminent when Güyük died unexpectedly.<sup>130</sup> According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Sorqaqtani Beki, Tolui's widow, sent warnings to Batu, while Rubruck later confirmed that Batu had anticipated an attack and was prepared for conflict.<sup>131</sup> Güyük's death in 1248 brought the tensions between Činggisid factions to a head, as a new period of regency followed. As Broadbridge notes, the authority of the queen regent Oghul Qaimish, Güyük's widow, was largely nominal.<sup>132</sup> Lacking either the political acumen or the support base that had allowed Töregene to dominate court affairs, Oghul Qaimish found herself increasingly isolated.

The political fragility of the Empire during the regency could be interpreted as a dynastic failure, yet Mongol rule over Eurasia had never been characterised by dynastic cohesion in the first place. As David Morgan and Michael Hope observe, the Mongol Empire possessed few institutional traditions beyond the *quriltai* and the *yarghu*, the latter serving as a mechanism for investigating misconduct. Even so, the composition and location of these bodies remained contingent and arbitrary.<sup>133</sup> In the absence of procedural rules, legitimacy had to be enacted through networks of allegiance, territorial control and pre-emptive mobilisation. Eventually, it was Sorqaqtani Beki, the influential widow of Tolui, who, through her substantial inheritance, secured sufficient influence to

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<sup>129</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.394; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.569-570; *JTJ/Boyle*, p.512; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.248. Juvaynī specifies that Eljigidei's arrival in Iran coincided with Güyük's death.

<sup>130</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.395; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.571; *Rubruck/Jackson*, p.167. Rubruck says he was unable to learn more about Güyük's death but reports his rivalry with Batu.

<sup>131</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.395; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.571.

<sup>132</sup> Broadbridge, *Women*, p.206-208. Broadbridge emphasises that Oghul Qaimish not only faced financial difficulties but was also undermined by divisions within her own family, which she was ultimately unable to overcome.

<sup>133</sup> Morgan, D. "The 'Great Yasa of Chinggis Khan' and Mongol Law in the Ilkhanate." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 49,1 (1986): 163-176, p.173-174. Morgan discusses legal cases from the later Ilkhanid period and examines the composition and function of the *yarghu*. For the institution of the *quriltai*, its composition, and associated rituals, see Hope, M. "The Transmission of Authority through the Quriltais of the Early Mongol Empire and the Ilkhanate of Iran." *Mongolian Studies*, 34 (2012): 87-115.

advance her son's claim to the throne. She forged an alliance with Batu, whom she had warned earlier of Güyük's threat, which laid the groundwork for the orchestration of Möngke's candidacy and his eventual elevation as *qa'an*.<sup>134</sup>

Batu, acting in his capacity as *aqa* (senior) among the princes, convened a *quriltai* in 1250 in the Jočid territories. Although many Ögödeid and Chaghadaid princes refused to attend, citing irregularities, Tolui's son Möngke was proclaimed *qa'an* with Batu, who allegedly declared: "Set him on the throne. Whoever turns against the *Yasa*, let him lose his head."<sup>135</sup> Möngke's enthronement was confirmed in 1251 during a second *quriltai* on the Kerulen River, where he was escorted by the Jočid army. The purges that followed were systematic. The Ögödeids attempted in vain to resist as the Toluid-Jočid alliance overwhelmed them, and Oghul Qaimish and her supporters were executed at Sorqaqtani's *ordu*. Leading Ögödeid-aligned figures like Ögödei's grandson Shiremün, the Chaghadaid Yesü Möngke and the general Eljigidei were also eliminated.<sup>136</sup>

The regency period of 1248-1250 illustrates how authority rested on the contingent ability of individuals to negotiate alignment with both kin and subordinates. Oghul Qaimish failed not because she lacked formal authority, but because she was unable to convert personal proximity into lasting allegiance. The Toluids advanced a more explicit settlement than their predecessors by offering alignment in exchange for the formal recognition of Batu's autonomy that, in practice, already existed. The Toluid-Jočid alliance *de facto* formalised a division of power, granting Batu independence in his western domains in return for his support. Although Möngke bore the title of *qa'an* and maintained the language of universal sovereignty, the empire was now shared in practice, and the fragmentation that had been developing since 1227 became crystallised.<sup>137</sup> For instance,

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<sup>134</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.465; *JTJ/Boyle*, p.249, 254-255, 262; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.204,209,217; *RJT/Thackston*, p.282; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.414-415. Both Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn praise the figure of Sorqaqtani, emphasising that she maintained a discreet political presence, cultivated goodwill among the nobility, and regularly provided counsel to Ögödei.

<sup>135</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.264-265; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.220-221; *RJT/Thackston*, p.403; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.584.

<sup>136</sup> Kim, "A Reappraisal." p.332; *RJT/Boyle*, p.212-215. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, the purges that followed Möngke's enthronement resulted in the execution of seventy-seven princes from the houses of Ögödei and Chaghadaid.

<sup>137</sup> Jackson, "From Ulus to Khanate." p.28.

Rubruck's account, for instance, suggests that Möngke's authority in the western steppe remained contingent on Batu's allegiance, and that the *qa'an*'s communications with the west passed through Batu's court.<sup>138</sup> Möngke's approach to imperial control differed markedly from that of his predecessors, as he sought to strengthen the position of his own lineage.<sup>139</sup> His reign was marked by renewed expansionism, with major campaigns launched in Mesopotamia, Syria, and south China. Significantly, the command of these expeditionary forces was entrusted to his brothers Hülegü and Qubilai, in a deliberate effort to consolidate Toluid authority in these regions.<sup>140</sup>

### ◆ Hülegü's Iran

Hülegü crossed the Oxus, headed to his command in Persia, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1256.<sup>141</sup> After a short campaign in north-western Iran, his troops secured the submission of the Ismā'īlī strongholds and the capture of Khūrshāh, the movement's leader, who was executed after attempting to submit to Möngke in late 1256.<sup>142</sup> Once he had consolidated his rule in Persia, Hülegü turned his attention to Baghdad. In January 1258, after a short siege, the city capitulated and suffered a disastrous plunder, during which Hülegü killed the Caliph and his family. In 1259, Hülegü moved against the Ayyubid rulers of Syria.<sup>143</sup> Aleppo fell after a brief siege that same year, and almost all the important cities in the region surrendered voluntarily. Hülegü's general Kitbuqa entered the city of Damascus in April 1260. Most of the Ayyubid rulers either submitted or fled to Egypt, seeking

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<sup>138</sup> Rubruck/Jackson, p.270-271; Jackson, "The Dissolution." p.220.

<sup>139</sup> Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.19-20.

<sup>140</sup> Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.53; Allsen, "Mongolian princes." p.105; Jackson, "The Dissolution." p.220. Jackson specifies that in Iran, power remained equally shared between the Jočid and Toluid lines.

<sup>141</sup> Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.125.

<sup>142</sup> Khūrshāh, the movement's leader, attempted to negotiate and gain time, but the Mongols remained inflexible and ultimately secured the surrender of the fortress of Alamut. Within a year, all the major Nizārī strongholds had been subdued. For further detail on the campaign, see Dashdondog, B. "Mongol Diplomacy of the Alamut Period." *Eurasian Studies*, 17,2 (2020): 310-326.

<sup>143</sup> See Amitai-Preiss, R. "The Impact of the Mongols on the History of Syria: Politics, Society, and Culture," in Amitai-Preiss, R., Biran, M. and Yang, A. eds. *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change: The Mongols and Their Eurasian Predecessors* (Honolulu, 2015): 228-251, p.228-242.

asylum in the newly established Mamluk regime.<sup>144</sup> In early 1260, soon after the Mongol conquest of Aleppo and Damascus, Hülegü abruptly withdrew eastwards with the bulk of his forces. News had reached him of Möngke's death in August 1259.<sup>145</sup> Before departing, Hülegü had sent an ultimatum to the Mamluk regime in Cairo, and Sultan Qutuz (r. 1259-1260) had responded by executing the envoys.<sup>146</sup> In September 1260, the Mamluk army confronted the diminished Mongol contingent led by Kitbuqa at 'Ayn Jālūt, delivering a decisive and strategically significant defeat to the Mongols.

That same year, Hülegü's brothers Qubilai and Ariq Böke each declared themselves *qa'an*, marking the final breakdown of imperial unity. Ariq Böke, based in Karakorum, secured the allegiance of Central Asia, the western steppes and Mongolia. Qubilai, then in northern China, held his own *quriltai* in Shangdu in spring 1260. The ensuing civil war (1260-1264), though concluded by Qubilai's seizure of Karakorum and Ariq Böke's surrender, came at the cost of permanent imperial fragmentation.<sup>147</sup> By 1264, Qubilai, Hülegü, the Ögödeid Qaidu, the Chaghadaids, and the Golden Horde each upheld Činggisid legitimacy, but none was able to assert it over the others. The earlier practices of empire-wide governance, tribute redistribution, and arbitration had effectively dissolved.

This section turns to Hülegü's reign as an autonomous ruler (1260-1265) and his succession, examining how his authority was contested, consolidated, and negotiated. It argues that what emerged in Persia in the wake of Hülegü's conquests was a localised articulation of the previously discussed model of Činggisid negotiated sovereignty. Hülegü's arrival in Iran marked a decisive intervention by the Toluid line into an area contested with other branches of the Činggisids. Despite its ambitious objectives, Hülegü's mission was presented by Möngke as temporary. Yet the scale of the campaign and its implications suggest otherwise. Möngke's mandate, as Jackson stresses,

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<sup>144</sup> Jackson, P. *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410* (London, 2014), p.116; Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.130-133.

<sup>145</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.131; *RJT/Thackston*, p.506; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.725.

<sup>146</sup> Favereau M. "The Golden Horde and the Mamluks: The Birth of a Diplomatic Set-Up (660-5/1261-7)," in Bauden, F. and Dekkiche, M. eds. *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies. Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Leiden, 2019): 302-326, p.322.

<sup>147</sup> For Ariq Böke's insurrection, see *RJT/Thackston*, p.426-434; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.618-631.

represented in practice an infringement against Činggis Khan's previous dispensations in 1227.<sup>148</sup> According to him and Aubin, Möngke employed a strategic deception regarding Hülegü's dispatch to Iran, portraying it as a temporary measure while concealing his true intention of bringing Iran under exclusive Toluid control.<sup>149</sup> This analysis is largely based on one account provided by Rashīd al-Dīn:

Although it was pictured and determined in Möngke Khan's mind that Hülegü Khan would always remain in the realm of Iran as a mighty monarch with the soldiers he had given him and that this kingdom would be his and his celebrated descendants' according to what is established and indisputable, nonetheless he apparently said, "When you have accomplished these tasks, return to your original campsite."<sup>150</sup>

Rashīd al-Dīn's interpretation is likely retrospective, intended to justify Hülegü's later establishment of the Ilkhanate. Ultimately, whether Möngke intended his brother to found a subordinate khanate loosely connected to Karakorum as a counterbalance to Batu, or whether he aimed for a more unified imperial strategy, remains unclear. Whatever the case, it is evident that Möngke's objective was to place the western territories, or at least part of them, under some degree of Toluid control. This strategic manoeuvre was intended to enable, in Allsen's words, "the monopolisation of the vast economic and cultural resources of the Middle East by the Toluids, rather than sharing them with other branches of the Činggisids."<sup>151</sup>

Thus, the limited mandate given to Hülegü was likely a calculated gesture, intended to avoid provoking Batu, whose earlier support had been instrumental in Möngke's election. Batu's influence came from his actions as kingmaker, but also from the fact that he enjoyed support and respect among the Mongol nobility, and that he already considered himself an independent ruler.<sup>152</sup> According to

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<sup>148</sup> Jackson, "The Dissolution." p.209.

<sup>149</sup> Aubin, J. *Émirs mongols et vizirs persans dans les remous de la culture* (Paris, 1995), p.17; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.20.

<sup>150</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.479; *RJT/ Karīmī*, p.687; Rashīd al-Dīn, of course, had all the interest in legitimising Hülegü's rule, as his legitimacy directly reflected on his masters'.

" و هر چند منکوکو قآن رادر خاطر مصور و مقرر بود که هولاکو خان بالشکرهای که بود داده همیشه درممالک ایران زمین پادشاه و متمکن باشد و این ممالک بروی و اوروغ نامدار وی بوجهی که هست مقرر و مسلم بود ، ایکن ظاهراً فرمود که چون این مهمات ساخته باشی، با مقیم اصلی معاودت نمای."

<sup>151</sup> Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.20; Jackson, "The Dissolution." p.221-222.

<sup>152</sup> Jackson, "From Ulus to Khanate." p.28; Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.104.

Jūzjānī, in fact, Batu had declined the title of Great Khan in favour of Möngke, citing concerns that the territories under his control were already vast enough.<sup>153</sup> Given the substantial military contribution from Batu's lineage to Hülegü's campaign, Lane and Jackson suggest that it is reasonable to assume that Batu agreed to the expedition as a means of extending imperial frontiers towards Egypt via Syria.<sup>154</sup> However, this cooperation does not necessarily indicate full endorsement. The substantial involvement of Jočid forces may also reflect Batu's caution: by sending a considerable force, he could monitor the campaign's direction and outcome, and safeguard his interests in the region. This logic was rooted in established precedent: conquered territories were traditionally regarded as joint possessions of the Činggisid house, and this was reflected in the composition of occupying *tammas*, which typically included representatives from each lineage.<sup>155</sup> Hülegü's expedition thus included contingents drawn not only from Toluid and Jočid retinues, but also Chaghadaid troops.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, as soon as the prince reached Iran, his army was also reinforced by troops already present in the region. These came mainly from the *tamma* commanded by Baiju in the Caucasus and from that of Sali Noyan, a Mongol general stationed at the border with the Delhi Sultanate.<sup>157</sup>

As long as Möngke lived, command of the expedition remained firmly in Hülegü's hands. Yet the loyalty of the troops and their commanders was also tied to their affiliation to different branches of the Činggisids. Control over Persia ultimately required the backing of these military contingents, which could be secured either by winning over the loyalty of their commanders or by replacing them with trusted allies. In particular, the presence of Baiju Noyan and the prestige he had acquired during his campaigns in Anatolia and Syria before Hülegü's arrival further complicated the matter. Baiju

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<sup>153</sup> Jūzjānī/Raverty, p.1177.

<sup>154</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.69; Jackson, "The Dissolution." p.220.

<sup>155</sup> Ostrowski, "The Tamma." p.266-267.

<sup>156</sup> Jackson, "The Dissolution." p.221. Jackson remarks that no Ögödeid prince was part of Hülegü's expedition, although his troops were then reinforced by Ögödeid-affiliated generals once in Persia.

<sup>157</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.256. To support his brother, Möngke decreed that the soldiers in Baiju's and Sali Bahadur's *tammas* in Iran and India were all under Hülegü's command. *JTJ/Boyle*, p.607; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, III, p.90-91; *RJT/Thackston*, p.478; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.685.

and his *tamma* troops controlled much of the Caucasus and proved to be quite difficult to sway. Despite Baiju's prestige and authority, his fall from grace coincided with Hülegü's ambition. Baiju's ambivalent position in the new regime, rather than direct loyalty to Hülegü, contributed to his eventual demise.<sup>158</sup> Despite his cooperation in the conquest of Baghdad, Hülegü was looking for a pretext to get rid of the troublesome commander. Rashīd al-Dīn reports that he was executed in 1260 on account of his pride and that Hülegü took half of his possessions.<sup>159</sup>

After Batu's death in 1255 and Baiju's removal, Hülegü's assertion of control over the Caucasus and northern Iran became a central point of contention with Berke, Batu's brother and successor. Berke, viewed these territories as part of the 1227 Jočid inheritance and accused Hülegü of violating Činggis Khan's *Yasa* (disposition).<sup>160</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn reports, perhaps quite partially, that Berke treated Hülegü as a subordinate, issuing commands and proclamations that directly challenged his authority.<sup>161</sup> While this depiction likely served to justify Hülegü's later military response, it remains plausible that Berke was genuinely outraged by what he perceived as an encroachment on Jočid territory. The death of Möngke in 1259 brought the tense situation to a breaking point. While Hülegü nominally backed his brother Qubilai in the ensuing succession struggle, his main concern was to consolidate his rule in the southwest.<sup>162</sup> Soon after hostilities broke out in the eastern part of the Empire, Hülegü moved to purge Jočid personnel from his army and court across Iran, Azerbaijan,

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<sup>158</sup> According to Jackson and Lane, Baiju was removed due to his loyalty to Batu and Berke. See Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.40; Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.143; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.95-97, offers a different view, suggesting that Baiju had in fact opposed several Jočid policies in the Caucasus. For a detailed account of Baiju's relationship with Hülegü, see Yıldız, S.N. "Baiju: The Mongol Conqueror at the Crossfire of Dynastic Struggle," in Biran, M. Brack, J. and Fiaschetti, F. eds. *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals* (Oakland, 2022): 44-64, especially p.56-57.

<sup>159</sup> Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.147; *RJT/Thackston*, p.111; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.159.

<sup>160</sup> As Lane notes, another relevant factor in this conflict was the earlier Kipchak influence in the Caucasus. Although Kipchaks largely remained part of the lower military ranks within the Golden Horde, they constituted its largest ethnic component and would have been particularly affected by Hülegü's intervention in the region. Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.40. In the Caucasus, indigenous princes and local notables who had already submitted to the Mongols continued to appeal to Batu to resolve their disputes. Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.62-64.

<sup>161</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.511; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.731.

<sup>162</sup> Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.146.

Armenia, Georgia, and Khurasan.<sup>163</sup> In response, Berke launched an invasion of the Caucasus. Muslim sources often framed his campaign as a reaction to Hülegü's execution of the 'Abbāsīd Caliph, citing Berke's Islamic piety.<sup>164</sup> However, the origins of the conflict lay in disputes over territorial claims. As Rashīd al-Dīn clearly states, it was the execution of Berke's relatives, rather than the conquest of Baghdad, that served as the *casus belli*:

When his (Berke's) kinsmen, Tutar, Balagha, and Quli, met their deaths, enmity and hatred arose between them, which increased day by day.<sup>165</sup>

Despite the protracted hostilities between 1260 and 1265, the conflict between Berke and Hülegü remained inconclusive, and resulted in a stalemate that would continue under their successors and define Mongol relations in the region for decades.<sup>166</sup>

Parallel to his efforts to counter Jočid influence in Iran, Hülegü sought formal recognition for his position by adopting the title *Ilkhan*, a designation that served as a post facto acknowledgement of his nominal subordination to his brother.<sup>167</sup> Though the term had been used earlier by the Seljuks, Allsen argues that during the Mongol period *Īl* transitioned from indicating 'country' to signify "subordinate" or "submissive."<sup>168</sup> Amitai-Preiss notes that numismatic evidence attests the use of the title as early as 1259, which supports the hypothesis that it was an ad hoc creation by Hülegü to

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<sup>163</sup> Jackson, "The Dissolution." p.231-233; Jackson, "From Ulus to Khanate." p.30. For the purge of Jočid princes, see also Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch.12.

<sup>164</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.142; Jackson, "The Dissolution." p.225-226.

<sup>165</sup> RJT/Thackston, p.511; RJT/ Karīmī, p.731-732.

" و چون خویشان توتار بلغه قیلی را واقعه رسید (و) کینه میان ایشان گشت و روز به روز زیاده میشد."

The execution of the Jočid prince Balagha on the grounds that he had conspired against Hülegü was shortly followed by that of two other Jočid princes, Tutar and Quli. RJT/Thackston, p.361; RJT/Karīmī, p.526; Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.65. Grigor Aknertsi reports that the princes were executed because they questioned Hülegü's authority. Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch.12. See Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.143; Hope, *Politics, and Tradition*, p.105.

<sup>166</sup> Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.356.

<sup>167</sup> RJT/Thackston, p.429; RJT/Karīmī, p.623. Rashīd al-Dīn emphasises how Hülegü was assigned Persia by his brother Qubilai soon after the latter's enthronement.

<sup>168</sup> Allsen, *Culture and conquest*, p.21-22.

reinforce his position in the wake of Möngke's death.<sup>169</sup> Despite the ongoing debate surrounding the etymology and usage of the term 'Ilkhan,' it is undeniable that such a title characterised Hülegü as an independent ruler, albeit under the nominal authority of Qubilai. Hülegü's successors continued to adopt this fictional submission by keeping the title of Ilkhan, and relied on their alliance with the *qa'an* in China to reinforce their claim. For instance, Hülegü's son Abaqa indicated his nominal dependency on Qubilai in his correspondence with Clement IV (r. 1256-1265) and Sultan Baybars (r. 1260-1277) in 1269.<sup>170</sup>

Publicly affirming his dependence on the *qa'an* in China was a deliberate strategy to legitimise Hülegü's authority and to appeal to the various Činggisid components within his forces, reassuring commanders and contingents loyal to different branches of the imperial family.<sup>171</sup> But political positioning alone was insufficient. As in earlier phases of the empire, the granting of land and fiscal privileges was less a matter of imperial largesse than the formal recognition of power already held on the ground. Hülegü's task was to balance the interests of established power holders in Persia with those of the *noyat* and princes who had accompanied him from the east. Concessions had to be sufficiently generous to deter interference from other branches of the *Altan Uruq*, whose kinship ties to many of Hülegü's followers afforded them potential leverage within the Ilkhanate. Therefore, much as earlier Mongol rulers, Hülegü confirmed existing offices and fiscal rights to those willing to support him, while in the newly conquered regions of Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, he distributed fiscal and land rights to those who followed him from Mongolia.<sup>172</sup> According to Rashīd al-Dīn:

The entire realm of Persia (Iraq in the Persian text), Khurasan, and Mazandaran, as far as the Oxus he turned over to Abaqa, his eldest and best son. Harran and Azerbaijan to the limits

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<sup>169</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.139. Jackson attests the title from 1260. Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.94. For the title of ilkhan, see Amitai-Preiss, R. "An Exchange of Letters in Arabic Between Abagha Īl-Khān and Sultan Baybars (A.H. 667/A. D. 1268-9)." *Central Asiatic Journal*, 38 (1994): 11-33, p.24-6; Amitai-Preiss, R. "Evidence for the Early Use of the Title Ilkhan among the Mongols." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1 (1991): 353- 361.

<sup>170</sup> Aigle, D. "The letters of Eljigidei, Hülegü, and Abaqa: Mongol overtures or Christian ventriloquism?" *Inner Asia*, 7,2 (2005): 143-162, p.148.

<sup>171</sup> This is a point also illustrated by Hope, although this work does not share his considerations on the collegial coordination of these princes Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.92.

<sup>172</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.250. Jackson equates the position of many of these administrators and local rulers to that of "governors."

of the siba (a Mongolian word meaning narrow passage) he entrusted to Yoshmut, and Dyabakyr and Diyar Rabi'a to the banks of the Euphrates he gave to Amir Töda'ün. The land of Rûm was given to Mu'inuddin Parvana; Tabriz went to Malik Sadruddin; Kirman to Tarkan Qatun; and Fars to Amir (V)angianu. When Sayfuddin Bitikchi was martyred, Şāhib Shams al-Dīn Muhammad Juvaynī was elevated and promoted to the office of chief of administration with full discretionary powers. Baghdad, he gave to Şāhib Shams al-Dīn Muhammad's brother Şāhib Ala'uddin Ata-Malik.<sup>173</sup>

Rashīd al-Dīn's account of Hülegü's appointments indicates that Ilkhanid concessions extended beyond the Mongol aristocracy to include a broad range of local power holders, like military commanders, administrators, and regional elites from Persia, Iraq and Anatolia. In fact, Rashīd al-Dīn records only two Mongol names in this context: Vangianu (or Angyanu) and Töda'ün, who were appointed governors of Fars and northern Mesopotamia.<sup>174</sup> Töda'ün is reported to have been the brother of Su'unchaq Noyan, one of Hülegü's leading generals, and a member of the influential Suldus tribe, which maintained close ties to the Toluid dynasty. Su'unchaq had accompanied Hülegü on his western campaign, serving as *yarghuchi* (judge) and commander of the right wing.<sup>175</sup> Lambton reports that Su'unchaq Noyan was chosen to substitute Vangianu in 1271 as governor of Fars, but we do not have information about the title he held before that date; given his prominence, however, it is unlikely that Su'unchaq was not granted an appointment in 1264 as well.<sup>176</sup>

The absence of Hülegü's generals from Rashīd al-Dīn's account may suggest that their positions were so well established as to require no comment. Their names, in fact reappear in the same source in connection with Abaqa's enthronement in 1265, where they are identified as *aqas* (senior amirs) from Hülegü's retinue. Rashīd al-Dīn's narrative offers important insights into the

<sup>173</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.513; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.734.

” بر جمله مملکت عراق و خراسان و مازندران تا فرضه جیحون، بشهزاده آباقا خان، که فرزند مهین و بهین بود، مفوض فرمود؛ و اران و آذربایجان با کنار سینه یشموت حواله کرد؛ و دیاربکر و دیار ربیعہ را تا کنار فرات بامیر تودان سپرد؛ و ممالک روم بمعین الدین پروانه، بملکیت تبریز صدرالدین؛ و کرمان بترکان خاتون؛ و فارس بامیر ایکنانو (؟ انجانو) . چون امیر سعدالدین بیٹیگیچی را، که صاحب دیوان بود، شهید کرد، صاحب شمس الدین محمد جوینی را برکشید و صاحب دیوانی ممالک بوی مفوض فرمود، و دست او در حل و عقد و ترتیب و ضبط امور مملکت قوی و مطلق گردانید؛ و ملکیت بغداد ببردادرش، علاء الدین عطاملک، سپرد.“

<sup>174</sup> Lambton, A.K.S. “Mongol Fiscal Administration in Persia.” Part II, *Studia Islamica*, 65 (1987): 97-124, p.104-105. Lambton refers to the Mongol *amir* as Angyanu and remarks that he was regarded as a good and vigorous governor.

<sup>175</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.95; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.135-136; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.118.

<sup>176</sup> Lambton, “Mongol Fiscal Administration.” Part II, p.105.

composition of Hülegü's senior military and political entourage. It is therefore worth briefly considering some of these figures and their roles within the Ilkhanate. Apart from Su'unchaq Noyan and his brother, Rashīd al-Dīn mentions Elgäi Noyan, Shiktür Noyan, Sönitāi Noyan and Abatay Noyan.<sup>177</sup>

Elgäi Noyan and his son Shiktür Noyan and were members of the Jalāyir tribe, a group that had played a prominent role in Hülegü's campaign and continued to exert significant influence over Ilkhanid court politics, maintaining its prominent position well beyond the dissolution of the Ilkhanate. It is reasonable to assume that these commanders laid the foundations for Jalāyirid influence in the region by receiving substantial endowments in Iraq.<sup>178</sup> Elgäi Noyan, in particular, was tasked with overseeing reconstruction efforts in Baghdad following the city's conquest.<sup>179</sup> Following his military exploits in Baghdad, Kurdistan, and Syria, Elgäi was appointed Hülegü's *amīr-i ordu* (commander in chief).<sup>180</sup> Little information has survived about Sönitāi Noyan, apart from Rashīd al-Dīn's note that he was a relative of Chormaghun, as both belonged to the Sönit tribe.<sup>181</sup>

As previously discussed, members of the Jočid and Ögödeid-affiliated aristocracy were also prominently represented in Hülegü's army and had to be accommodated through senior positions within the Ilkhanate. The negotiated foundations of Ilkhanid rule are particularly evident in the case of the Oirat and Qonggirat tribes, whose support was secured through a combination of land grants and marital ties to Hülegü's household. As noted by Hope, these tribes are largely absent from the Toluid household and must therefore have been among the groups that entered Iran with earlier Ögödeid appointments.<sup>182</sup> Abatay Noyan, a member of the Qonggirat tribe, was entrusted by Hülegü

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<sup>177</sup> RJT/Thackston, p.517; RJT/Karīmī, p.742.

<sup>178</sup> For more on the establishment of the Jalāyirids in Iraq, see Wing, P. *The Jalāyirids: Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Middle East* (Edinburgh, 2016).

<sup>179</sup> Wing, *The Jalāyirids*, p.46-47. Shiktür Noyan had not accompanied Hülegü's army on its conquest of Iran, but he had been responsible for conveying the news of Möngke's death to Hülegü in 1260.

<sup>180</sup> RJT/Thackston, p.517; RJT/Karīmī, p.742; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.115.

<sup>181</sup> RJT/Thackston, p.41; RJT/Karīmī, p.53. Rashīd al-Dīn records that Sönitāi was originally named Chaghadai, but following the death of Činggis Khan's son, it was changed, as the name could no longer be used. The new name derived from his affiliation with the Sönit tribe.

<sup>182</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.99.

with escorting his family from Mongolia to Iran, likely due to his affiliation with Qutui Khatun, one of Hülegü's wives and mother of the future Ilkhan Aḥmad Tegüder, who also belonged to the Qonggirat. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Qutui's family was granted revenue from territories in the region of Jazira.<sup>183</sup> Upon his return, Abatay was appointed commander of the central army by Abaqa and likely received territorial or fiscal benefits in the region in accordance to his rank.<sup>184</sup> Oirats families also received territory and benefits, mostly in Arab Iraq, which remained an Oirat stronghold until well after the death of Abū Sa'īd in 1335, and which provided an incentive to support Hülegü's takeover.<sup>185</sup> Chief among Oirat nobles was, however, Arghun Aqa, the former governor of Iran, who had cultivated an extensive administrative and patronage network with the Persianate elites in over two decades of service to the empire, and stood as one of Hülegü's most valuable assets.<sup>186</sup> In recognition of his influence and support, Arghun Aqa was appointed viceroy of Khurasan and given the title of *muqāt-i mamālik* (secretary of the kingdom), a position which gave him influence over the currency and spending of the Ilkhanate.<sup>187</sup> Abaqa, Hülegü's son and successor, was sent to Khurasan under the stewardship of Arghun Aqa's family.<sup>188</sup> The province, distinguished by its special fiscal status and independent treasury within the Ilkhanid domains, served as a strategic asset to

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<sup>183</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.520; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.746.

<sup>184</sup> For Abatay's command see *RJT/Thackston*, p.527-530; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.756-757; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.108; *Bar Hebraeus/Budge*, p.454.

<sup>185</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.107.

<sup>186</sup> On Arghun Aqa, see below, p.130-135.

<sup>187</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.518; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.743-744. Rashīd al-Dīn mentions Arghun Aqa "retaining" his post under Hülegü's successor Abaqa.

<sup>188</sup> Lane, G. "Arghun Aqa: Mongol Bureaucrat." *Iranian Studies*, 32,4 (1999): 459-482, p.478. The province of Khurasan was possibly the largest and most important in the Ilkhanate, partly because of its impervious terrain and the difficulty of asserting control over it. On this see Azad, A. "Ecology, Economy, and the Conquest of Khurasan," in Marsham, A. ed. *The Umayyad World* (London, 2020): 332-354.

support Abaqa's succession.<sup>189</sup> Finally, Arghun Aqa solidified ties with the Činggisid family through a marriage alliance, wedding his son, Lakzi, to one of Hülegü's daughters, thus granting him the title of *güregen*.<sup>190</sup> Lastly, another prominent general from outside the Toluid household was Shiremün Noyan, son of the former commander Chormaghun. As one of Hülegü's key objectives was to strengthen his position vis-à-vis the Golden Horde, it was crucial to secure the pasturelands of Azerbaijan, previously controlled by Baiju and his *tamma*. Following Baiju's execution, Hülegü gave his command to Shiremün and complemented the appointment with territorial grants, knowing that the *tamma* would act as the first line of defence against the Jočids to protect their own lands.<sup>191</sup>

Hülegü's alliances and appointments were underpinned by land and fiscal concessions, but the nature of these, and their continuity or departure from earlier Persianate practices, varied considerably and was often shaped by the recipient's institutional expectations. In conquered areas, as Lambton remarks, there was a significant increase in abandoned lands. This land was put to use by Hülegü, who allotted districts to his supporters as *injüs*.<sup>192</sup> This practice was not new as, since Seljuk times, there was in Persia the practice of granting *iqṭā'* in the form of revenue or land grants to soldiers, officials or amirs. The nature of Hülegü's grants is not clear, but according to Lambton, it could vary from simply having the right to collect fodder and grain to rights of settlement and

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<sup>189</sup> "The land from the Oxus to the borders of Mazanderān, and Kūhistān and Qūmis from end to end, he gave to his eldest son, Abaqa, with the ring and tiara of that kingdom. The proud Arghun Aqa became adviser to that prince." Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī, *Zāfarnāmah*, cited in Hope, M. "The Atābaks in the Mongol Empire and the Ilkhanate of Iran (602-736/1206-1335)," in Atwood, C., Dashdondog, B. and May, T. eds. *New Approaches to Ilkhanid History* (Leiden, 2023): 321-345, p.333. Khurasan also had a special fiscal status under the Ilkhanate, as it had its own treasury and revenues were collected separately by the viceroy; see Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.210; *Mustawfī/Le Strange* p.146; Hope, "The Atābaks." p.339-340.

<sup>190</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.476; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.684.

<sup>191</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.108, 110; Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.148. According to Jackson, there was only one major exclusively non-Toluid contingent in Iran, headed by the Chaghadaid prince Tegüdar, who would cooperate until his revolt, which will be thoroughly discussed in the following pages.

<sup>192</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.118; Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.516; De Nicola, B. "The Economic role of Mongol women: continuity and transformation from Mongolia to Iran" in De Nicola B. and Melville C. eds. *The Mongols' Middle East. Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran* (Leiden-Boston, 2016): 79-105, p.93.

jurisdiction.<sup>193</sup> Lambton also remarks how, in practice, there might have been some overlapping between previous institutions of land grants and Mongol practices, particularly concerning grants to the military class, which had absorbed many Turkic elements.<sup>194</sup> For instance, we know that new allocations were complemented by the renewal of the concession to the Khwārazmian troops and nobles who had surrendered and retained their *iqṭāʿ*.<sup>195</sup> This was also true of local semi-independent rulers who supported the ilkhan. According to Chen, in the vassal princedoms certain lands and revenues were assigned as appanages from which the holder could collect taxes, while most remained under the control of the local ruler, who independently managed fiscal revenues but had to maintain Mongol troops and fiscal agents.<sup>196</sup> This is the case, for instance of Tarkan Khatun, the Qara Khitan ruler of Kirman, who had her rule confirmed by Hülegü with a *yarligh* after 1257 and married her daughter to Abaqa in 1272.<sup>197</sup>

Generally speaking, it seems that *injüs* granted to princes, vassals, and other members of the *noyat* were also to be managed by independent offices consisting of the members of their households, although irregularities often required the direct intervention of governors dispatched directly by the Ilkhan.<sup>198</sup> Overall, *injü* grants under the Ilkhanate appear to have retained a hereditary character, though formal confirmation by the ilkhan remained necessary.<sup>199</sup>

Mongol encroachments on cultivated land in the newly conquered areas disturbed the agricultural activities of the settled population, mainly because the Mongols were primarily concerned with grazing rights. Over time, Mongol extortions and appropriations led to more land

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<sup>193</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.115.

<sup>194</sup> See Amitai-Preiss, R. "Turko-Mongolian Nomads and the Iqṭāʿ System in the Islamic Middle East (ca. 1000-1400 AD)." in Khazanov, A. and Wink, A. eds. *Nomads in the Sedentary World* (London, 2001): 152-171, p.154-156.

<sup>195</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.116.

<sup>196</sup> Chen, E. *Southern Iranian Vassal States Under the Ilkhanate: 1220-1300* (PhD dissertation, University of Princeton, 2021), p.135; Lambton, A.K.S. "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part I, *Studia Islamica*, 64 (1986):79-99, p.80; Lambton, "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part II, p.100-101.

<sup>197</sup> Lambton, "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part II, p.98.

<sup>198</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.119; Chen, *Vassal States*, p.135; Lambton, "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part II, p.105-107.

<sup>199</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.100-111. Hope also specifies that both the *injü* grants and the post in the royal guard were hereditary.

being abandoned, and to a widening of the divide between the Mongols and sedentary people.<sup>200</sup>

Despite the economic cost to the realm the *noyat*, largely indifferent to the condition of Persian and Arabic peasants, viewed these grants as assurances that Hülegü would acknowledge their role in the governance of the Ilkhanate.

Hülegü died shortly after completing the reorganisation of the realm. Succession in Mongol domains, as established by Činggis Khan's decisions, was not determined by primogeniture. Yet, Abaqa's accession was secured by Hülegü's ability to align the *noyat* behind his son's claim through distribution of offices, and to bind their interests to the continuity of his line. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, following Hülegü's death, Abaqa received the news privately from Elgäi Noyan.

Since Elgäi Noyan was the commander of the ordu and had long been a loyal supporter of the Ilkhan, he gave Abaqa food and drink and then reported his father's death to him in private.<sup>201</sup>

Elgäi then convened the senior commanders of the Ilkhanate and members of the royal family, who collectively supported the transition of power. During the *quriltai* for Abaqa's enthronement, Elgäi stood out as the most prominent member of the *noyat*, with Rashīd al-Dīn emphasising his precedence due to his longstanding support and service to the Toluids. Rashīd al-Dīn reports the *noyat's* pledges to Abaqa after he initially ceremonially refused to ascend to the throne:

You are here, you are the eldest of all the sons, you know well the customs and ancient yosun (custom) and yasa, and Hülegü Khan made you the heir designate during his lifetime. How can anyone else accede to the throne?<sup>202</sup>

After his coronation, Abaqa confirmed and extended land and office grants to consolidate the support of those who had secured his succession.<sup>203</sup> These concessions reflected the creation of an aristocratic

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<sup>200</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.118.

<sup>201</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.517; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.742.

“امتقبال کردند و چون ایلکی نویان امیر اردوها بود خدمت ایجان مدتها طریو هواداری و خدمتکاری سپرده آغاخان را آش و شراب داد و در خلوت صورت و احوال وقت و کیفیت و اقعہ پدر با وی تقریر کرد.”

<sup>202</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.517; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.742.

“شہزادگان و امرا گفتند باو جود تو کہ آقای تمامت پسرانی و رسوم و یوسون یاسای قدیم و حدیث نیکو میدانی و ایجان در حال حیوة ترا ولی عہدہ کردہ. چگونہ دیگری و نشیند.”

<sup>203</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.517-518; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.742-744.

network built around Hülegü's *aqas*, who were either newly rewarded or confirmed in their previous roles. Rashīd al-Dīn records several appointments that directly benefitted these senior amirs and their relatives:

Elgäi Noyan's son Tughu Bitigchi and Su'unchaq Noyan's brother Töda'ün he sent to Anatolia. [...] the injūs (crown lands) were turned over to Altachu Aqa, and Baghdad and Fars were given to Su'unchaq Aqa.<sup>204</sup>

Once again, we find Su'unchaq Noyan confirmed as governor of Fars and receiving Baghdad, and the confirmation of Elgäi Noyan as *amīr-i ordu*, a position he held until his death around 1268.<sup>205</sup> Shiremün, the son of Chormaghun, maintained control over Georgia and, together with one of Abaqa's brothers, Yoshmut, was tasked with defending the Caucasus.<sup>206</sup> Arghun Aqa was confirmed in control of Khurasan and with the prestigious title of *muqāt-i mamālik*. He was also given the supervision of another of Abaqa's brothers, Tübshin. Arghun Aqa died in 1275, but his sons Lakzi and Nawrūz both remained prominent figures at the Ilkhanid court. Lakzi would subsequently become a supporter of Abaqa's brother, Aḥmad Tegüder. Abaqa also renewed the former marriage ties that linked Hülegü with the güregen families of the Qonggirat and Oirat, and generously distributed wealth and land to Hülegü's widows and remaining sons.<sup>207</sup> While Hülegü had brought Abaqa, Yoshmut, and Tübshin with him to Iran, the rest of his family had remained in Mongolia. Despite Abatay Noyan's earlier mission to escort them, the other princes and *khatuns* only reached Persia and joined Abaqa's court in 1268.<sup>208</sup> After the arrival of the royal household, previous assignments were complemented with further land and revenue grants designed to appease the rest

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<sup>204</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.518; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.743-744.

“و طوغو بیتکچی را پسر ایلکا نویان و تودان برادر سو نجاق نویان [...] بروم ففرسند [...] و اینجوهارا باتاجو آغا حوالت فرمود و ممالک بغداد و فارس بسونجاق آغا داد.”

<sup>205</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.117.

<sup>206</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.518; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.744.

<sup>207</sup> Broadbridge, A. “Marriage, Family and Politics: The Ilkhanid-Oirat Connection.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26,1/2 (2016): 121-135, p.128-130; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.108; see also Landa, I. “Oirats in the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk Sultanate in the Thirteenth to the Early Fifteenth Centuries: Two Cases of Assimilation into the Muslim Environment.” *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 19 (2016): 149-191.

<sup>208</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.519-520; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.746.

of the family.<sup>209</sup> These gestures were carefully calculated to secure the allegiance of potentially destabilising figures, such as pretenders to the throne, and to gain support from Hülegü's consorts, whose political weight would play a decisive role in the enthronement of more than one candidate to the Ilkhanid throne.<sup>210</sup>

While Hülegü's and Abaqa's policies have recently been reframed by Michael Hope as expressions of a collegial political order, this study partially departs from his model. Hope interprets the Ilkhanate as governed through aristocratic consensus, sustained by deliberative councils and elite cooperation. Yet the moments of agreement he identifies were not the product of institutionalised power-sharing, but of contingent alignments. The *quriltai* and similar advisory gatherings held great significance, but in them authority was not exercised with a collective agenda in mind. Under Hülegü and Abaqa, personalised arrangements produced a temporary convergence of interests among senior amirs, but this falls far short of a shared enterprise in governance or decision-making among the aristocracy. The structure of rule remained one of negotiated sovereignty, because these arrangements reproduced the fragilities of earlier imperial practice. A powerful cohort of *noyat* de facto controlled several provinces, and their support for Abaqa's accession was a calculated investment in the preservation of their own positions.<sup>211</sup>

During Abaqa's reign, the arrangements inherited from his father ensured a period of outward stability.<sup>212</sup> Yet for all their short-term efficacy, they proved difficult to sustain across generations. Unlike Hülegü, Abaqa failed to construct a coherent succession strategy, delegating the guardianship of his heir, Arghun, to the lesser amirs Jumaghan and Jūghān rather than reinforcing the coalition that had secured his own accession.<sup>213</sup> At the same time, some segments of the aristocracy remained dissatisfied with the territorial settlements. Not all those who had participated in the western campaigns received lavish compensation, and generational change was imminent. Many of Hülegü's

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<sup>209</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.126.

<sup>210</sup> See De Nicola, B. *Women in Mongol Iran: The Khatuns, 1206-1335* (Edinburgh, 2017), Chapter III.

<sup>211</sup> Hope, "The Atābaks." p.332.

<sup>212</sup> Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.356.

<sup>213</sup> Hope, "The Atābaks." p.335.

senior commanders were advanced in age: Rashīd al-Dīn, for instance, notes that Sönitāi Noyan was over ninety in 1270.<sup>214</sup> It was in this context that a new cohort of amirs emerged, rising from within Abaqa's personal retinue. Their ascent signalled a shift in Ilkhanid politics away from the equilibrium of negotiated sovereignty toward a court increasingly shaped by factionalism, unstable successions, and the erosion of the alignments that had sustained the first generation of Ilkhanid rule. The rise and fall of these amirs be the object of the final parts of this chapter.

### ◆ Unstable Borders

Despite the internal stability promoted by the *noyat*, Abaqa was regularly compelled to wage military campaigns along the Ilkhanate's frontiers. Raids from other Mongol polities on the northern and eastern borders intensified throughout his reign, as rival khanates sought to exploit disaffections of commanders garrisoned in these areas. This exposed the limits of Ilkhanid control over these regions, premised on brokerage rather than institutionalised and centralised mechanisms. The inability of the ilkhans to successfully establish lasting mutual arrangements with the warlords along Ilkhanid borders was not caused by a lack of resources or connections. It was rather the result of overlapping kinship ties and of rival khanates' attempts to co-opt these figures, whether through promises of loot or the distribution of land revenue or military commands.

One of the earliest threats to the Ilkhanid borders the was the rise of Qaidu, grandson of Ögödei. Although Qaidu initially presented himself as a restorer of Ögödeid holdings in central Asia rather than a contender for imperial supremacy, his rivalry with the Toluids became evident by 1252, when he directly challenged Möngke's authority.<sup>215</sup> Following Möngke's death, Qaidu's refusal to

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<sup>214</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.530; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.758.

<sup>215</sup> For more information on Chaghadaid politics in this period see Biran M. "The Mongols in Central Asia from Chinggis Khan's invasion to the rise of Temür: the Ögödeid and Chaghadaid realms," in Di Cosmo, N. Frank, A.J. Golden, P.B. eds. *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age* (Cambridge, 2009): 46-66; Biran, *Qaidu*, p.19-23.

recognise Qubilai sparked open conflict over the control of Chaghadaid holdings in Central Asia.<sup>216</sup> In 1252, following the death of the Činggisid prince Qara-Hülegü, who had been appointed by Ögödei to govern the Chaghadaid *ulus*, his son Mubārakshāh succeeded him. When civil war broke out in 1260, Mubārakshāh was overthrown by his uncle Alghu, who acted with the backing of Ariq-Bökö. By 1262, as the balance of the conflict shifted, Alghu turned against Ariq-Bökö, a move that contributed decisively to Qubilai's victory. After Alghu's death, Mubārakshāh returned to power but was soon displaced again by Baraq, another Chaghadaid prince.<sup>217</sup> Baraq's actions, much like those of his predecessors, perfectly exemplify the opportunistic nature of Mongol princely behaviour in this period. Though initially affiliated with Qubilai, having spent part of his early life at the Toluid court, Baraq quickly repositioned himself once the opportunity emerged. In 1266, he seized control of the Chaghadaid *ulus* by deposing Qubilai's nominee Mubārakshāh.<sup>218</sup> Initially in conflict with Qubilai, Baraq was convinced by the latter to join forces and confront Qaidu's rising influence in exchange for Qubilai's formal recognition as ruler of the Chaghadaid lands. In 1268, when Qaidu expanded westward towards Samarqand, Baraq, spurred by Qubilai, mobilised his forces to defend his territories.<sup>219</sup>

The inconclusive conflict that followed tired both Baraq and Qaidu, leading to peace negotiations, which culminated in an agreement to convene a *quriltai* to reconcile past grievances in 1269. The two princes convened alongside representatives from the Jočids of the Golden Horde to establish their respective spheres of influence. Baraq asserted parity with Qaidu and criticised the extension of Qubilai's portion of the Empire, advocating for equitable distribution and preparing for military action against Toluid holdings in China and the Ilkhanate.<sup>220</sup> Baraq's territorial ambitions towards

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<sup>216</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.370; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.537-538.

<sup>217</sup> According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Alghu turned against Ariq-Böke in 1263. *RJT/Thackston*, p.376; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.545; Kim, "The Unity of the Mongol Empire." p.22-23; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.104.

<sup>218</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.520; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.746.

<sup>219</sup> Biran, M. "The Battle of Herat (1270): A Case of Inter-Mongol Warfare." in Di Cosmo, N. ed. *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)* (Leiden, 2002): 175-219, p.182-184.

<sup>220</sup> For these events, see *RJT/Thackston*, p.370, 377, 521; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.537-538, 547-548, 748-749; Biran "The Battle of Herat." p.184-185.

Abaqa's northeastern domain, tacitly sanctioned by Qaidu, spurred the Chaghadaid prince to an invasion of Persia in 1270. Leading an army, Baraq traversed the Oxus into the Ilkhanate, pillaging Khurasan. Abaqa's younger brother Tübshin, at the head of the Ilkhanid army in the region, did not confront Chaghadaid forces and withdrew to Mazandaran, awaiting reinforcements. In the meantime, Baraq's army rampaged in Khurasan, causing widespread devastation.<sup>221</sup>

The alignment at the *quriltai* of 1269 and Baraq's subsequent invasion of the Ilkhanate were determined by shared grievances, lineage proximity, and the brokerage of the Jočids, who sought to manipulate dynastic claims and destabilise the Toluid order. Within the Ilkhanate, such dynamics were mirrored in the actions of a certain Tegüdar, prince of Chaghadaid stock and relative of Baraq, who had been granted appanages in Georgia. Tegüdar's clandestine collusion with Baraq marked one of the first serious attempts by a Činggisid prince in the Ilkhanate to mobilise cross-*ulus* connections and take up arms against his ruler despite his favoured position at court. Rashīd al-Dīn reports:

Baraq sent a group of envoys to Abaqa Khan, and with them he also sent gifts for Tegüdar. Among the gifts was an arrow, [...] he split it open in private, and in the middle of the arrow he found a letter containing the following message: "Let Tegüdar Aga know that I have assembled a huge army and am going to attack Abaqa's territory. It is expected that when he mounts to repel us, you will not go with him. Make it so that he will not be able to face us and so that we can get hold of his land in any way possible."<sup>222</sup>

Tegüdar's revolt, also reported by Grigor Aknertsi, proved short-lived as, following a clash with Shiremün Noyan and King David of Georgia, he was swiftly captured.<sup>223</sup> Despite Tegüdar admitting his complicity with Baraq, he received a pardon and was exiled.<sup>224</sup> After dealing with Tegüdar, Abaqa launched a military campaign across Iran to quell Baraq's threat, and his army joined with Tübshin's and Arghun Aqa's forces in Khurasan in 1270. The combined force then advanced towards Herat,

<sup>221</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.86; *RJT/Thackston*, p.526; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.754-755.

<sup>222</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.522; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.750. The prince is referenced as Negüdar in Thackston but is also referred to as Tegüdar in other instances.

“و براق طایعۀ ایلیچیانرا ببندگی آباغا خان فرستاده بردست ایشان نیکودار اغول نیز بیلکی فریتاد، از آنجمله تیری که مغولاناً نرا طوغانه گویند [...] در خلوت آنرا بشلکفت، درمیان آن مکتوبی یافت مشتمل بر آنکه نیکودار آقا بدانند که من لشکری تمام جمع کرده ام و قصد ولایت آباغا دارم. توقع چنانست کچون او بقصد دفع ما بر نشیند، با او بهم بر نیایی و چنان سازی که او را مجال مقاتله و مواجهه ما نباشد تا بهر طریق که میسر گردد، در مالک او را بگیریم.”

<sup>223</sup> *Grigor/Bedrosian*, Ch.16; *RJT/Thackston*, p.522-523; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.750-751.

<sup>224</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn does not specify where the prince was sent to exile.

where the Abaqa decisively defeated Baraq, who retreated to Bukhara.<sup>225</sup> Afflicted by illness and facing internal discord, Baraq sought help from Qaidu. However, the Ögödeid prince saw the opportunity to get rid of his old rival and, after allegedly poisoning Baraq, won over most of his army by promising a more favourable treatment and a greater share of the plunder.<sup>226</sup>

Following Baraq's defeat, Abaqa resorted to employing warlords to counter further incursions. Rashīd al-Dīn reports Abaqa's collaboration with the Mongol commander Aq Beg, a former lieutenant of Baraq. Aq Beg proposed a punitive expedition against Bukhara to the Ilkhan, requesting command of the army and a share of the spoils. Abaqa consented and sent a raiding party to cross the Oxus, where his forces caused widespread devastation, massacring Bukhara's population and pillaging the city.<sup>227</sup> Despite Abaqa's initial instructions to spare refugees willing to relocate to Khurasan, Rashīd al-Dīn reports how two Chaghadaid princes deployed by Qaidu to counter the Ilkhanid incursion escalated the violence, worsening the plight of the civilian populace.<sup>228</sup> The following years witnessed persistent instability in the region, with sporadic attacks and plundering by various factions. It was not until the intervention of Qaidu in 1276 and the return of the Ögödeid administrator Mas'ūd Beg to Samarqand in 1281 that efforts to rebuild and restore stability began.<sup>229</sup> Aq Beg's attempts to retain most of the plunder from his raids on Bukhara, without offering a share to Abaqa, ultimately drove him to seek refuge with Qaidu. However, betrayal by one of his brothers resulted in his capture by Ilkhanid troops. After having confessed his misappropriations, Aq Beg was then executed on the shores of Lake Urumiyeh.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> For the dynamics of the battle and Baraq's raid, see *RJT/Thackston*, p.530-535; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.759-765.

<sup>226</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.91. Lane reports Waṣṣāf's claim that most of Baraq's commanders had defected to Qaidu and were received graciously and granted lands. Baraq was also forced to go to seek protection at Qaidu's camp, where he was administered poison.

<sup>227</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.536-537; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.766-768.

<sup>228</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.536; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.766; Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.199.

<sup>229</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.207. Coins associated with his monetary reforms in the region are attested from 1281. Biran, M. "Culture and cross-cultural contacts in the Chaghadaid Realm (1220-1370): some preliminary notes." *Chronica* (2007): 26-43, p.35.

<sup>230</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.537; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.768.

Tegüdar's involvement with Baraq shows the extent to which Mongol elites continued to operate within a non-institutionalised concept of empire. The Ilkhanate, in this view, was not a closed political unit, and princes like Tegüdar did not see loyalty to one khanate as incompatible with ties to others. The episode illustrates the limits of Hülegü's redistributive settlement: while land and privilege could secure short-term allegiance, they could not erase the possibility of cross-*ulus* brokerage among the *noyat*. This extended beyond the Činggisid aristocracy. Figures such as Aq Beg, whose authority rested solely on military command, reveal a different form of instability: one in which allegiance was not determined by kinship alignment, but by the calculus of reward and survival. Unlike Tegüdar, Aq Beg did not claim autonomous rule, yet his defection shows how non-dynastic actors could also disrupt Ilkhanid plans, complicating the establishment of relations based on reciprocity across militarised frontiers.

Yet, despite the risk associated with the negotiation with these turbulent elements, Abaqa was forced to replicate these arrangements on the south-eastern border of the Ilkhanate, as he sought to bind these figures to the Ilkhanate rather than have them pledge allegiance to someone else. In the region roughly corresponding to today's southeastern Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, raids and disruptions had significantly affected the local population and the economy. These problems were partly caused by the considerable military presence accumulated by Möngke and his predecessors along the border with the Sultanate of Delhi before the division of the empire.<sup>231</sup> In fact, ever since the occupation of Persia, Mongol rulers had been devising plans for an invasion of the Indian subcontinent. As the most important power in that region, the Sultanate of Delhi had always adopted a very cautious policy towards the Mongols, mostly delegating its defence against small raids and incursions to marcher lords.<sup>232</sup> Even during the Mongol pursuit of Jalāl al-Dīn in 1221, the situation remained stable, with no significant engagements in the area, as the Delhi sultanate had turned down

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<sup>231</sup> Möngke had planned an invasion of India, sending his general Sali Noyan with fresh troops to the border regions soon after his election. Jackson, P. *The Delhi Sultanate: a political and military history* (Cambridge, 2003), p.108. See also Boyle, J.A. "The Mongol commanders in Afghanistan and India According to the Ṭabaqāt-i Nāširi of Jūzjānī." *Islamic Studies*, 2,2 (1963): 235-247.

<sup>232</sup> Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p.104- 107.

the fugitive's request for asylum.<sup>233</sup> In 1248, Möngke became involved in the Sultanate's dynastic disputes and sent the general Sali Noyan to install the pretender Jalāl al-Dīn Masud on the throne of Delhi.<sup>234</sup> However, with the arrival of Hülegü in Persia, the campaign halted after reaching as far as Lahore. Sali Noyan was ordered not to cross the border with Delhi, as Hülegü was marching westward against the Caliph and Syria, and could not spare troops to support an expedition in India.<sup>235</sup>

After the establishment of the Ilkhanate, most of Khurasan and western Afghanistan transitioned from military to civil administration, and Hülegü assigned garrisons to various princes and local rulers. Some of the military contingents present before the Ilkhanid period were also disbanded or integrated. According to Timothy May, this was the case of Sali Noyan's *tamma*, which occupied frontier areas in Eastern Afghanistan, such as the provinces of Kunduz, Badakhshan and Ghor.<sup>236</sup> In the area roughly corresponding to eastern Afghanistan, Ilkhanid control was even more feeble. When Hülegü purged the Jočid contingents from his army in 1260, many of the men who made up the Mongol *tamma* in Kashmir and Afghanistan deserted under the command of the Jočid general Negüder and occupied a mountainous area that could be defined as a "buffer zone" between the Ilkhanate and the Sultanate of Delhi, situated in modern-day Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. The presence of an independent Mongol military contingent destabilised the region and forced the Ilkhanate to keep a constant military presence on the border region of Khurasan to counter raids and incursions. These Mongol soldiers, also called Negüderis after their early commander Negüder, or Qara'unas (lit. black Mongols), absorbed Turkic and local elements, consolidating into a mixed

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<sup>233</sup> Mazumder, D. "Rethinking the Mongol-Sultanate frontier (1241-1327)." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 76 (2015): 207-213, p.208.

<sup>234</sup> Mazumder, "Sultanate frontier." p.209.

<sup>235</sup> According to Jackson, during the Years 1257/1260, Sali Noyan subjugated much of the buffer zone between the Mongol Empire and Delhi, which the Sultanate indirectly controlled through subjects. Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p.111-114.

<sup>236</sup> May, T. "The Ilkhanate and Afghanistan," in Atwood, C. Dashdondog B. and May, T. eds. *New Approaches to Ilkhanid History* (Leiden, 2020): 272-320, p.303.

military force. Their presence was soon recognised by Chaghadaid rulers as an opportunity to expand their influence in the region.<sup>237</sup>

The Qara'unas would also participate in Abaqa's arrangements with warlords along the Ilkhanid borders. Abaqa sought to assert indirect control over this military force by enlisting the support of exiled Chaghadaids like the former ruler Mubārakshāh, using them as puppets to assert authority over Qara'unas armies.<sup>238</sup> However, this policy proved ineffective, as Mubārakshāh revolted against him and died during an assault on Kirman in 1276. About two years later, 'Abd-Allāh, the chief of the Qara'unas in Afghanistan, also attacked Kirman and Fars, instigated by Qaidu and the Chaghadaids.<sup>239</sup> This attack caused Abaqa to launch a retaliatory expedition to Sistan in the following year:

Abaqa dispatched Prince Arghun with a division to deal with the Negüderis. He went to Sīstān, laid siege, and returned, bringing Mubārakshāh's eldest son, Öljai, and other members of his family.<sup>240</sup>

Apart from taking hostages, Abaqa did not abandon his design to control this military force. He drafted Qara'unas bands into Ilkhanid service, relocating them to Persia and the Caucasus. Here,

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<sup>237</sup> Peter Jackson notes that the sources often interchange Negüderis and Qara'unas. However, he too largely equates these two groups in his work stating that "the term Qara'unas was widely current in Muslim India and that the term Negüderis was used only by the Mongols themselves and by authors writing in Mongol Persia." Timothy May stresses a difference between the two. He proves that Negüderis refers specifically to those who followed Negüder and maintained an independent status, while the Qara'unas were the *tamma* troops and their offspring. In this dissertation there is no reason to make a specific distinction between the two groups, as this thesis mainly deals with the offsprings of Negüder's troops, utilising thus the term Qara'unas. Jackson, P. "The Mongols of Central Asia and the Qara'unas." *Iran*, 56, 1 (2018): 91-103, p.94; Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p.115, 328; May, "Afghanistan." p.287.

<sup>238</sup> Arom, N.O. "In-Ger" and "Outer" Diplomacy- Ilkhanid Contacts with the Mongols and the Outside World, 1260-1282." *Eurasian Studies*, 17,2 (2020): 286-309, p.301. Arom stresses how Abaqa appointed several commanders nominally loyal to him as leaders of the Negüderis and how his move proved ineffective, as both leaders were Chaghadaids. These were Moči, son of the Chaghadaid prince Baiju, and 'Abd- Allāh, who raided the territories of the Delhi Sultanate in 1292 but also attacked Persia. *RJT/Thackston*, p.372,540; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.540,773; Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p.121,334. For the Qara'unas fighting on Abaqa's and Baraq's side, see Biran, "The Battle of Herat." p.207.

<sup>239</sup> Jackson, "The Mongols of Central Asia." p.93.

<sup>240</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.541; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.773.

"سپهزاده ارغون را با اشگری بدفع نکودریان روانه فرمود و او تا سیستان رفت و محاصره کرد و بار گشت و او اجای بوقا را پسر بزرگتر مبارکشاه و دیگر اوروغ او را باخود آورد."

they played a role in creating instability during the succession wars that plagued the Ilkhanate in the second half of the thirteenth century, and were frequently mobilised against the ilkhan by the *noyat*.<sup>241</sup> The Qara'unas' ruthlessness and unpredictability made them a very difficult entity to control. Abaqa's son Arghun experienced their betrayal firsthand during his struggle with for the throne with his uncle Aḥmad Tegüder in 1284:

But when he (Arghun) reached Damghan, he found no trace of the Qara'unas, for they had heard along the way that Arghun's army had been defeated and therefore turned back, attacking and plundering as they went."<sup>242</sup>

The decision to transfer several contingents of Qara'unas to Iran and involve them in dynastic struggles would also contribute to damaging internal political relations, as the Qara'unas showed no respect to the *noyat* or even to members of the royal family. An example of this is their attack on Aḥmad Tegüder's *ordu* in late 1284:

All of a sudden, the Qara'unas' army arrived and plundered those *ordus* so thoroughly that, aside from ashes in the fireplaces, not a trace remained. They left Qutui Khatun, Todai Khatun, and Armini Khatun naked, and two thousands of them took up guard over Aḥmad.<sup>243</sup>

Furthermore, the southeastern territories of the Ilkhanate remained vulnerable to raids by other bands of Qara'unas, who frequently targeted regions like Kirman and even ventured as far as Fars.<sup>244</sup> Matters became more complicated when Qaidu strategically stationed his son Sarban in the area aiming to exert control over the Qara'unas during Amir Nawrūz's rebellion to Arghun and his son Ghazan (1289-1294).<sup>245</sup> The majority of the Qara'unas eventually aligned themselves with Qaidu and the Chaghadaids when, in the late 1290s, Qaidu's son Du'a summoned the Qara'unas' leader

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<sup>241</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.558,609; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.798. These events will be covered in details in the following pages.

<sup>242</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.554; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.793.

”چون بدامغان رسید از قراونه اثر نیافت چه ، در راه شنیده بودند که اشکر ارغون شکسته ، بدان سبب باز گردیدند، و در راه تاختن و تاراج کردند.”

<sup>243</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.559; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.800.

”و ناگاه اشکر قراونا در رسیدند و آن اردوها را تاراج کردند، چنانکه در بورتها بغیر از خاکستر دیگداناها هیچ اثری نماند. و قوتوی خاتون و تودای خاتون و ارمنی خاتون را برهنه بگذاشتند . و دوهزار مرد از پشان، موکل احمد شدند.”

<sup>244</sup> May, “Afghanistan.” p.292.

<sup>245</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.600; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.858; Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p.217.

‘Abd-Allāh and dismissed him, appointing his own son, Qutlugh Qocha, as their new commander.<sup>246</sup> Abaqa’s successors had no better luck in their dealing with the Qara’unas. During Ghazan’s absence on campaign in Syria in 1301, marauding bands of Qara’unas ravaged Kirman and Fars, probably prompting Marco Polo’s observation about Balkh being repeatedly ravaged by “the Tartars and other peoples.”<sup>247</sup> Ghazan attempted to control bands of Qara’unas by granting them lands in the form of *injüs*. Lambton reports that, in 1298, a Qara’una amir called Buqa was settled near Herat on the condition that he and his men did not engage in highway robberies or raids. However, fearing being unjustly accused of the crimes happening in the region because of their reputation as raiders, the Negüderis decided to move to another area without the consent of the ilkhan.<sup>248</sup>

While stability was hardly achieved at the beginning of the fourteenth century, what Abaqa had conceived as profitable relationship with the warlords, was fraught with challenges and contradictions. The excessive reliance on military proxies proved extremely damaging for the Ilkhanate, as it caused both the involvement of other Činggisid powers and the suffering of the local population, hampering economic growth in Khurasan and increasing the political divide within the kingdom. Furthermore, the volatility of the warlords’ loyalty often forced further intervention by the ilkhans to remove military leaders or renegotiate agreements. Lastly, the excessive reliance on mercenary bands complicated the relationship between the ilkhan and the nobility, who were often humiliated by the ruthless behaviour of these troops. It must be acknowledged, however, that the ilkhans had limited alternatives. The fragmented nature of Toluid rule in Persia and the persistence of external threats left the ilkhans with little choice but to rely on military proxies as the only viable means of securing frontier zones.

The difficulties experienced with military proxies along the Ilkhanid borders were a result of the challenges inherent in maintaining a delicate balance between central authority and decentralised

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<sup>246</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.197. Qutlugh Qocha was killed during an invasion of India in 1299-1300, and his command remained in Chaghadaid hands.

<sup>247</sup> Marco Polo/Yule-Cordier, p.92.

<sup>248</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.177.

military power. The power exercised by warlords was embedded in the logic of Mongol rule itself, which relied on balancing dynastic legitimacy with the practical demands of governing a militarised, multiethnic polity. This holds significant implications for this study, especially because these conflict dynamics would later be partially replicated in the ilkhans' relationship with their *noyat*, whose cooperation had to be continuously negotiated. These dynamics would come to define Ilkhanid rule and increasingly strain its capacity to project authority, producing a form of elite competition that proved difficult to stabilise. The strategic flexibility that had initially enabled the ilkhans to integrate diverse actors under their rule began to reveal the limits of their ability to coordinate power across fragmented constituencies.

### ◆ The kingmakers

The challenging relationships that Ilkhanid rulers maintained with the Mongol aristocracy on their borders soon began to infiltrate the core of Ilkhanid governance. From the beginning of Hülegü's reign, as we have observed, the non-royal *noyat* had played an important role in supporting Ilkhanid rule. Hope rightly points out that the participation of the nobility in the early consolidation process was more significant than in any of the other Mongol khanates.<sup>249</sup> According to him, under Abaqa's and Hülegü's rule, these *qaraju* (non-royal) commanders, commonly referred to as *qaraju* amirs or *'umārā* in the Persianate sources, consolidated their possessions. This process transformed the Ilkhanate into what Hope has defined a "quasi-feudal state dominated by a powerful military aristocracy," who had strengthened its grip on the land with the hereditary transmission of soldiers, property and offices, which reduced their dependence on Činggisid rulers.<sup>250</sup>

Hope, however, does not distinguish between the senior amirs who formed the original coalition around Hülegü and a separate group of individuals whose names appear consistently in Rashīd al-Dīn's account of the political upheavals that marked the final decades of the thirteenth

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<sup>249</sup> Hope, M. "The Pillars of State: Some Notes on the 'Qarachu Begs' and the 'Keşikten' in the Īl-Khānate (1256-1335)." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27, 2 (2017): 181-199, p.186-189.

<sup>250</sup> Hope, "The Pillars of State." p.181.

century. This distinction is, in my view, crucial for understanding the political transformation of the Ilkhanate. The following pages examine this shift, tracing the emergence of these *qarāju* amirs and demonstrating how, once they had established their own loyalty networks within the *ordu*, they were able to assert independent authority and, at times, directly threaten Ilkhanid rule.

According to Rashīd al-Dīn, following Abaqa's death in 1282, the Ilkhanid aristocracy convened a *quriltai* and chose Hülegü's seventh and eldest surviving son Aḥmad Tegüder (r.1282-1284) as the new ilkhan, persuading Arghun to step aside in favour of Aḥmad. The latter was crowned on May 6, 1282, assuming the title of Sultan, as he had previously converted to Islam.<sup>251</sup> Aḥmad had garnered support from his brothers Qonqurtai, Hulachu and Jushkab, and from the senior amirs of the kingdom, including Arghun Aqa's son Lakzi Güregen, Shiktür Aqa, and Su'unchaq Aqa. He could also count on the support of his influential mother, Qutui Khatun, and her clan, the Qonggirats. This widespread political backing discouraged Arghun from moving to claim the throne.<sup>252</sup> Notably, Aḥmad was among the members of Hülegü's family who journeyed from Mongolia in 1268 and had few connections in Ilkhanid territories prior to this moment. These factors have led many to believe that the nobility chose Aḥmad because he was a more malleable candidate, less inclined to infringe on their privileges. Hope, for example, emphasises the unanimity of the decision and seems to suggest that Aḥmad was chosen specifically because he was weak and less inclined to oppose a collegial view of government and land distribution.<sup>253</sup>

These pages offer an alternative reading of Aḥmad's accession, suggesting that it was facilitated by a shared interest in preserving continuity. Many of his supporters belonged to the cohort of *noyat* who had accompanied Hülegü to Persia and retained considerable authority. Like in Abaqa's case Aḥmad's election indicates that much of the Ilkhanid *noyat* preferred a stable transition that preserved their own influence, as they understood that any alteration of the status quo would have had repercussions on their own interests and the assets they had acquired under previous rulers. One

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<sup>251</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.549; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.785.

<sup>252</sup> *Waṣṣāf/Purgstall*, II, p.330-331.

<sup>253</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*. p.126-129.

example of this is the case of Shiktür Aqa: having offered his support to the new ilkhan, the amir retained his influential status at Aḥmad's court and carried out the duties of his father, Elgäi Noyan, as the *amīr-i ordu*.<sup>254</sup>

Moreover, several elements call into question Rashīd al-Dīn's assertion that Abaqa had unequivocally designated Arghun as his successor. The appointment of two relatively minor amirs as *atābaks*, despite the presence of more senior and influential nobles, suggests that Arghun's position as heir was far from firmly established.<sup>255</sup> Additionally, Rashīd al-Dīn never states that Abaqa explicitly designated Arghun as his successor. On the contrary, he reports that the *noyat* were divided on the matter and that, when one amir claimed to have heard such a declaration, he was accused of falsehood.<sup>256</sup> Finally a staunch supporter of Arghun's claim, Rashīd al-Dīn does not refrain from writing that Abaqa liked his grandson Ghazan better than his own sons. He also acknowledges that, while Abaqa had little interest in Arghun's education, he played a significant role in the upbringing of Ghazan, whom he removed from his father's custody at a young age, suggesting that, had the ilkhan lived longer, he was willing to bypass his sons in the succession line.<sup>257</sup>

Two notable features of Aḥmad's reign were his conversion to Islam and his decision not to seek recognition from China. As Thomas Allsen has stressed, his name does not appear in the official records kept by the Yuan dynasty.<sup>258</sup> These stances, including his contested diplomatic exchanges with the Mamluk Sultanate, diverged greatly from his predecessors' policies and strained relations between the Sultan and the *qa'an*.<sup>259</sup> These features were also, most likely, not disclosed by Aḥmad until after his election, as they later encountered opposition from the majority of the *noyat*.

Aḥmad Tegüder's conversion to Islam, while potentially marking a moment of ideological consolidation for the Ilkhanate, in practice revealed the limits of religious legitimacy in a polity still

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<sup>254</sup> Hope, "The Atābaks." p.335

<sup>255</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.548; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.784. Rashīd al-Dīn emphasizes that the most powerful *noyat* opposed Arghun's election.

<sup>256</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.558; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.799.

<sup>257</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.590-593; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.843-847.

<sup>258</sup> Allsen, *Culture and conquest*, p.26.

<sup>259</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.565; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.811-812.

governed with negotiated authority. His attempt to rule according to Islamic *sharī'a* introduced an ideological rupture that alienated segments of the *noyat*, who still remained religiously diverse and resistant to the cultural realignments associated with Islamisation. The conversion thus disrupted the equilibrium that underpinned Ilkhanid rule. Arghun's later critique of Aḥmad "Aḥmad turned aside from the laws of our fathers, and trod the path of Islam," should be understood not as a rejection of Islam per se, but a reassertion of a pluralistic imperial model as the authentic idiom of Mongol sovereignty.<sup>260</sup> At any rate, despite Arghun's opposition, the sources clearly show that, in the immediate aftermath of Aḥmad's enthronement, the prince lacked political and military support to even attempt a military action against his uncle.

After Aḥmad's coronation, Arghun, possibly frustrated by the lack of support for his claim, showed up at his uncle's camp with a little army. There, despite receiving substantial gifts, he chastised Aḥmad for choosing his brothers to participate in the official coronation ceremony instead of Arghun.<sup>261</sup> Over time, however, the rift between Aḥmad and Arghun grew, with the latter's behaviour becoming increasingly belligerent, as he began harassing Aḥmad's administrators and seizing lands arbitrarily.<sup>262</sup> In these efforts, Arghun relied on the support of a group whom Rashīd al-Dīn refers to as his *gāzgāntz*, or bodyguards. These amirs are conspicuously absent from Rashīd al-Dīn's enumerations of prominent Mongol figures in different tribes, and many are introduced without reference to parentage or status, an omission which, given the author's usual precision, likely indicates their modest origins. The group is described more clearly in connection with Arghun's plundering expedition to Baghdad, during which he reportedly sought to recruit Qara'unas formerly attached to his father's service, presumably to challenge to Aḥmad's rule. Among those mentioned, the most prominent are Taghachar, Doladai Īdāchī, Joshi, Ordu Qaya and Qunchuqbal, all described as "attendants of Abaqa."<sup>263</sup> The political insignificance of this group of *noyat* is, at this point,

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<sup>260</sup> *Bar Hebraeus/Budge*, p.474.

<sup>261</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.549; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.786.

<sup>262</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.551; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.789-790.

<sup>263</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.551; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.789.

confirmed by Aḥmad's attitude towards Arghun's disobedience. The Ilkhan, at this point, perceived Arghun as a nuisance, and was more concerned about rumours of sedition from his brother Qonqurtai. The execution of Qonqurtai and the subsequent six-day purge of the *noyat* inaugurated Aḥmad's iron-fisted rule.<sup>264</sup>

Rashīd al-Dīn's somewhat negative description of Aḥmad's rule, crafted for Arghun's son Öljeitü, is one of the elements that have contributed to a negative overall assessment of Aḥmad's period in power. The Persian historian emphasises Aḥmad's divisive policies, the role of his mother in governance, and his lack of support from the Mongol aristocracy. All these elements, however cleverly presented, are somewhat contested by the facts reported by Rashīd al-Dīn himself.

What transpires from Rashīd al-Dīn's description of Aḥmad is, despite the historian's best efforts, a figure of strength rather than a weak-willed ruler. Aḥmad appears as a strong ilkhan, supported by a significant portion of the army, which he effectively employed to suppress internal opposition.<sup>265</sup> According to Rashīd al-Dīn, while on the surface Aḥmad's oppressive rule enjoyed support within the kingdom, it clandestinely alienated much of the nobility. Despite outward displays of loyalty, many individuals who had initially backed him harboured secret apprehensions and would have readily withdrawn their support in favour of a pretender (Arghun).<sup>266</sup>

It is difficult to determine the level of bias and political propaganda in Rashīd al-Dīn's and Waṣṣāf's narratives. The continued backing of Aḥmad by respected *noyat* such as Su'unchaq Aqa and Shiremün's

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<sup>264</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.552-553; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.790-792

This passage, referring to an encounter a few months after Arghun's disturbances in Baghdad, is particularly telling of the lack of support for Arghun from the elder *noyat* "He (Arghun) summoned Hindu Noyan, who had two divisions guarding the banks of the Oxus, and said: While my father was still alive, he summoned me. As ordered, I set forth without soldiers. When I arrived there, he had already died, and things were in turmoil. Since I had no soldiers, there was nothing I could do but consent. Now, if you amirs help me, I will get my father's crown and throne out of the usurper's hands. Your efforts will be rewarded, and our good name will be preserved. Hindu Noyan replied: Although the situation is as the prince says, Aḥmad is the aga, and if he has become khan in that land, you, thank' God, are commander and padishah in this region. Listen to the words of this old man, and do not quarrel with him."

<sup>265</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn mentions that a portion of the nobility was sick of Aḥmad's "overbearing ways". *RJT/Thackston*, p.552; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.791.

<sup>266</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.552-554; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.790-793.

son Äbügän Noyan suggests that the depiction of the opposition to the ilkhan may have been exaggerated in these accounts.<sup>267</sup> Furthermore, when a faction opposing Aḥmad effectively formed, Arghun still did not emerge as the favoured successor, as the *noyat* had rallied behind Qonqurtai.

Arghun's provocations, coupled with the absence of broader support, eventually led to his arrest by Aḥmad Tegüder's son-in-law, the Georgian general Alinaq. It was only following the death of Qonqurtai and during Arghun's captivity that opposition to Aḥmad began to coalesce around the prince. Initial backing came from Arghun's closest companions enumerated earlier, who were arrested by Aḥmad in Tabriz.<sup>268</sup> One figure, however, escaped this purge: Buqa, an early supporter of Arghun during the *quriltai*, who apparently maintained a façade of loyalty to Aḥmad. Together with his brother Aruq, Buqa was the son of Ögölai Qorchi of the Oirat tribe, a commander fallen during Hülegü's campaigns. The brothers had also accompanied Hülegü to Iran and, after their father's death, served as attendants to Abaqa. Buqa initially held the position of *tamghachi* (tax collector), overseeing tribute in the form of pelts.<sup>269</sup> Like many amirs associated with Abaqa, Buqa likely saw few prospects for advancement under Aḥmad's regime. Motivated by personal interest, he ultimately positioned himself in support of Arghun's claim to the throne. Rashīd al-Dīn recounts how Buqa was persuaded to act against the ilkhan by the public humiliation he received from Aḥmad during Arghun's uprising attempt.<sup>270</sup> Having initially feigned allegiance to Aḥmad, Buqa seized the opportunity of Aḥmad's temporary absence from the *ordu* and the now widespread dissatisfaction for his rule to eliminate the Georgian general Alinaq and liberate Arghun. After the coup, Aḥmad, who was at his wife's *ordu*, comprehending that it was too late to act, tried to flee to the Golden Horde. Arghun chased him down using Qara'unas troops, and captured him before he could cross the border. Arghun's coronation took place in August 1284, and was shortly followed by the

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<sup>267</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.563; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.808.

<sup>268</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.552; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.791.

<sup>269</sup> Lane, "Persian Notables." p.201; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.119-120.

<sup>270</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.555; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.796.

execution of Aḥmad and his supporters.<sup>271</sup> These events signalled the beginning of a dark period for the Ilkhanate.

Aḥmad Tegüder' death in the summer of 1284 marked the end of one of the most consequential succession crises in the Ilkhanate. The crisis had led not just to the deposition and execution of a reigning ilkhan but to the reorganisation of factional power within the *ordu*. At the centre of the crisis stood Buqa, an amir whose influence under Abaqa had been curtailed following the rise of Aḥmad. The eventual decision to back Arghun's claim to power must be understood against this background of exclusion and humiliation. The seizure of power, however, did not unfold just as a military takeover: immediately after Arghun's liberation, Buqa convened an assembly of amirs to settle the dispute over the Ilkhanate's leadership. During the gathering, tensions escalated between former supporters of Aḥmad and partisans of other possible candidates for the Ilkhanid throne. Buqa, despite Arghun's reticence to be put forward as a candidate, defended the prince's claim with a mix of threats and persuasion, obtaining support for his cause. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, support for Arghun swelled when, in a carefully crafted speech, Buqa referred to the *qa'an* as the original source of legitimacy.

The Khan, who was the emperor of the inhabited quarter of the globe and the *aqā* of all the *uruq* of Činggis Khan, awarded the rule of the realms of Iran after his brother, Hülegü Khan, to his eldest son, Abaqa Khan. After him, it should go by inheritance to his true son, Arghun.<sup>272</sup>

Again, from Rashīd al-Dīn's accounts, Arghun emerges as a rather passive figure. It is probable that Arghun, at that point, feared the power accumulated by the *noyat* and did not want to be in debt to Buqa and his supporters. The historian attributes Arghun's reserve over assuming the throne to his desire for peace, in what could be considered a recurrent literary motif. However, the presentation of the prince as indecisive could also be an artifice to avoid associating his figure with a coup that

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<sup>271</sup> For an exact chronology of these events see *RJT/Thackston*, p.556-559; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.796-801.

<sup>272</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.558; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.799.

“بوقا گفت قاآن که پادشاه ربع مسکونست و آقا جمله اوروغ چنگیز خان، پادشاهی ممالک ایران زمین بعد از برادر خود هولاکو خان بفرزند خلف صدق ارغون می رسد.”

would culminate with the inaugural regicide of a Činggisid ruler.<sup>273</sup> At any rate, the appeal to the dynastic legitimacy of Abaqa's line served to position Arghun as the rightful heir and to frame Buqa's intervention within the broader logic of Činggisid succession. As the first instance of Ilkhanid regicide, the deposition of Aḥmad needed to be cast as a restoration rather than a rupture. In this context, Buqa's language framed his actions as a defence of the Činggisid order against, not as an opportunistic seizure of control.

Following Arghun's accession in August 1284, Buqa received extensive authority during the subsequent trials and reorganisation of responsibilities, including the prestigious title of vizier. The bestowal of special privileges further strengthened his power. Notably, he could only be judged by the ilkhan himself, and even then, only after committing nine major crimes. Furthermore, Buqa's decrees held validity even if they did not bear the Ilkhan's seal. Conversely, official documents carrying his red seal were necessary for the validation of any order, including those directly emanating from Arghun.<sup>274</sup> That Buqa acquired such power in the space of months, despite his relatively modest lineage and recent marginalisation, points to the question of external recognition.

Shortly after Arghun's coronation, a diplomatic delegation from the Yuan court arrived in Persia in the winter of 1284-85.<sup>275</sup> The mission included Amirs Qadan, Bolad Chīngsāng (chancellor), and the Syriac cleric and Yuan official 'Īsa Kelemechi. Considering the logistics of transcontinental travel, the delegation must have been dispatched while the succession crisis was still unfolding. This timing significantly contradicts the view that Yuan involvement was merely retrospective: while the mission does not confirm direct orchestration, it suggests that Qubilai was either informed of the instability or was actively monitoring developments in the western *ulus*.

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<sup>273</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.558-559; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.800-801.

<sup>274</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.136-137.

<sup>275</sup> For more information on Qubilai's embassy, see Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, Chapter 10,11; Kim, H. " 'Īsa Kelemechi: A Translator Turned Envoy between Asia and Europe," in Biran, M. Brack, J. and Fiaschetti, F. eds. *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals* (Oakland, 2022): 255-269, p.255, 260.

Furthermore, the commitment of Bolad, one of Qubilai's most important advisors, to the Ilkhanate, casts doubts on the fact that Qubilai's embassy was just routine.<sup>276</sup>

The succession of events presented by Rashīd al-Dīn is further reinforced by Armenian sources such as *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient*. In this work, Hayton of Corycus recounts that Arghun and Buqa, before acting against Aḥmad, had informed Qubilai that the ilkhan had converted to Islam, and endangered the legacy of the Mongols.<sup>277</sup> Hayton then claims that Qubilai issued a command for Aḥmad to desist from such "wickedness," under threat of imperial retribution. Although clearly idealised to attack Islam, this account provides an important window into how Qubilai's role in the matter was imagined by contemporaries. Furthermore, Rashīd al-Dīn offers a suggestive indication of Arghun's correspondence with the *qa'an*, noting that Ordu Qaya, one of Arghun's close associates, returned from China at the head of a delegation only a few months after Arghun's enthronement. While it remains uncertain whether the mission had been dispatched before or after the coup, its timing offers important corroboration of Hayton's account.<sup>278</sup>

As for the Persian sources, at no point do Rashīd al-Dīn or Waṣṣāf explicitly suggest that Buqa had a mandate from Qubilai. In their work, the *qa'an*'s name is invoked as a source of symbolic authority. However, Rashīd al-Dīn claims that the arrival of the second delegation in 1286 led by Ordu Qaya (this one certainly departed from China after the coup) led to a second enthronement of Arghun. Most importantly, however, Ordu Qaya announced that Qubilai, recognising Buqa's significance, had conferred upon him the prestigious title of *Ch'eng hsiang* or *Chīngsāng*. At that time, besides Buqa, only Bolad held the same rank in Činggisid domains. Buqa's appointment as *Chīngsāng* elevated his status significantly, making him not only Arghun's vizier but also an official of the Yuan Empire and the *qa'an*.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> On Bolad's standing in China under Qubilai See Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.63-72.

<sup>277</sup> *Flor*, p.313

<sup>278</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.565-566; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.812.

<sup>279</sup> Allsen also suggests that Qubilai was aware of the plan to overthrow Aḥmad and supported it. Allsen, T.T. "Biography of a Cultural Broker: Bolad Ch'eng-Hsiang in Chin and Iran," in Raby J. and Fitzherbert T. eds. *The Court of the Ilkhans, 1290-1340* (London, 1994): 7-22, p.10; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.28.

Mustafa Uyar has argued that the extraordinary privileges granted to Buqa including both the title of vizier and that of *Chīngsāng*, did not originate with Arghun but were instead conferred directly by Qubilai in 1285 or 1286. He bases this claim on two observations: the discrepancies between Rashīd al-Dīn and Waṣṣāf regarding the source of Buqa’s authority and the use of a specific formula when discussing Buqa’s appointment as *Chīngsāng*. Waṣṣāf, in fact, describes the new vizier’s jurisdiction using the formula “from the Oxus to the Egyptian border.” Interestingly, this formula was used in the appointment of imperial officials to Persia during the earliest stages of the Mongol Empire, and it was also used by Möngke when he sent his brother Hülegü to Iran, defining Hülegü’s area of authority.<sup>280</sup> While Uyar’s interpretation may overstate the extent of direct coordination, it nonetheless draws attention to the imperial idioms through which Buqa’s position was articulated. While this does not constitute documentary proof of Yuan involvement, it lends weight to the argument that Buqa’s invocation of imperial authority was more than decorative.

This episode thus reinforces a pattern already visible in earlier phases of Mongol history. The structural unreliability of the *noyat* and their tendency to assert personal agendas now emerges at the centre of the Ilkhanid *ordu*, not only at its peripheries. The enduring importance of connections that transcended the Ilkhanate remains a more powerful legitimating horizon than any other religious or political identity (Aḥmad’s conversion). Yet this moment also marked a significant shift: the *noyat* no longer merely negotiated the distribution of power, they had begun to seize it directly. In Buqa’s hands, the symbolic resources of Činggisid sovereignty were mobilised not in service of dynastic stability, but to establish his own centrality within a fragmented and individualistic *ordu*. This courtly environment created a period of extreme factionalism within the Ilkhanate. The same group of *qaraju* amirs that had sanctioned the rise to power of Arghun together with Buqa was now plotting the downfall of the new *Chīngsāng*. Buqa’s power had grown too much, overshadowed Arghun, and

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<sup>280</sup> Waṣṣāf/Purgstall, II, p.187; Uyar, M. “Buqa Chīngsāng: Protagonist of Qubilai Khan’s Unsuccessful Coup Attempt against the Hülegüid Dynasty.” *Belleten*, 81,291 (2017): 373-386, p.379-380. Uyar reports the formula “az āb-i Āmūyya tā ḥudūd-i Miṣr.” *RJT/Thackston*, p.563; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.808. This formula is also reported above, p.74, note n.189.

diminished the possibility for other members of the *noyat* to gain influence at court. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, one of Buqa's critics articulated the situation thus:

(Buqa) does whatever he wants without the emperor's order or consultation with the amirs; he disburses the tax monies however he wishes, and Arghun Khan is considered less of an emperor than Buqa is.<sup>281</sup>

During the initial years of Arghun's reign, Buqa wielded complete control over the administration. As discontent among the Mongol military aristocracy grew towards Buqa, Arghun was persuaded to take decisive measures by other turbulent elements who held grudges against the vizier. These included Buqa's former associates and fellow conspirators, many of whom had been imprisoned during Arghun's initial rebellion and had actively opposed Ahmad Tegüder's regime. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, the most prominent among them were again Taghachar, Qunchuqbal, Doladai Īdāchī and Joshi, belonging to the core group of Arghun's companions.<sup>282</sup> As a result of these attacks, Arghun was persuaded to seize all of Buqa's income sources and transfer them to Taghachar Noyan, while appointing Toghan as commander of the army in Buqa's place, effectively sidelining him. Buqa, exposed to the same factional dynamics he had once manipulated to his advantage, saw no recourse but to orchestrate a military coup to reclaim the powers, privileges and control of the administration through force. Buqa rallied support from various amirs, including Qubilai's envoy Qadan, and plotted another coup to place on the throne another of Hülegü's sons, Jushkab. However, the latter, worried by potential repercussions, refused to back the coup and warned Arghun. Consequently, Buqa was apprehended and executed in January 1289.<sup>283</sup> Buqa's death triggered a broader purge within the Ilkhanid nobility. His entire family suffered the same fate, along with many of the amirs and administrators who had supported him. Despite his efforts to prevent the coup, Prince Jushkab was also seized and executed. However, Qadan, one of Qubilai's envoys, was spared,

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<sup>281</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.568; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.815. More on Buqa's position below, p.152-155.

“بوقا پادشاهی جهت خویش مهیا گردانیده، چه بی فرمان پدشاه کتگاج امرأ هر چه خواهد میکند و اموال بر وفق ارادت خرج میکند و هیچ آفریده ارغون خان را پادشاه نمی داند.”

<sup>282</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.568; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.814.

<sup>283</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.570; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.815-816.

according to Rashīd al-Dīn, because “he was the *qa’an*’s ambassador.”<sup>284</sup> Nawrūz, Arghun Aqa’s eldest son and a longtime supporter of Buqa, revolted against Arghun.<sup>285</sup>

Yet, Buqa’s demise did not mean a concentration of power in Arghun’s hands, but rather in those of the *dīvān* (chancery) and of another powerful vizier, Sa’d al-Dawla, an event that will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapter. It suffices to say, for now, that Sa’d al-Dawla increased his power by limiting the *noyat*’s access to audiences with the Ilkhan, and sought the support of two of the amirs belonging to Taghachar’s cohort, Joshi and Ordu Qaya. He then stripped the rest of the turbulent *noyat* of their influence at court by assigning Taghachar and others to military and administrative posts far from the capital. Towards the end of Arghun’s life, with the ilkhan incapacitated and unable to speak, the vizier, Joshi and Ordu Qaya were executed by Taghachar, who would play kingmaker on three different occasions during the next few years. Hope has suggested that the timing of Arghun’s death, coinciding with the rebellion of Taghachar and his allies against Sa’d al-Dawla, points to the Mongol *noyat* as likely instigators of an assassination plot.<sup>286</sup> From mere members of the royal retinue, Taghachar and other amirs had risen to a position where they could openly challenge the authority of the ilkhan, an unprecedented development within the Mongol Empire and other Činggisid khanates.

Upon Arghun’s death, his brother Gaykhātū (r.1291-1295) succeeded him at a time when royal authority was visibly collapsing. Initially reluctant to leave his post in Anatolia for the *quriltai*, Gaykhātū’s accession was met with some reluctance. Baidu, another grandson of Hülegü, had expressed even less willingness to assume the throne, leading to the rapid collapse of the faction supporting him. Upon his accession, Gaykhātū ordered an inquiry into the events and purges

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<sup>284</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.570; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.818. In the case of Qubilai’s involvement, it is likely that Bolad Čhingsāng’s neutral behaviour during the second coup attempt served as a strategic move to preserve relations between the Īl-Khānate and the Yuan Empire. By remaining in the background and awaiting the outcome, Bolad ensured that he could act as a mediator or guarantor of stability once the situation was resolved.

<sup>285</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.571; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.819.

<sup>286</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.147. Hope specifies that Mamluk sources mainly accuse Sa’d al-Dawla, but Orbelean instead accuses one of Arghun’s concubines. *Orbelean/Bedrosian*, p.237

surrounding Arghun's death, which resulted in the execution of Toghan, the brother of Shiktür Noyan, at the instigation of Joshi and Ordu Qaya's relatives. It is noteworthy that, for much of his own reign, Gaykhātū was overshadowed by Shiktür Aqa who, as Rashīd al-Dīn records, was himself prosecuted for having supported the plot to assassinate Sa'd al-Dawla, though he excused his inaction on the grounds that he was merely "a weak old man" and unable to restrain the conjurers.<sup>287</sup>

With the control over the kingdom was largely delegated to Shiktür, Gaykhātū did not dedicate particular attention to state affairs. Several contemporary sources, both Muslim and Christian, make pointed reference to his sexual conduct, including accusations that young members of the aristocracy were among his victims.<sup>288</sup> Gaykhātū's reign was beset by challenges from the outset. Nawrūz, still in control of Khurasan, remained in open revolt, yet the ilkhan initially withheld support from Arghun's son Ghazan, who was engaged in suppressing the rebellion, to deliberately keep a potential rival occupied in the conflict with his former guardian.<sup>289</sup> At the same time, another revolt erupted in Anatolia and, when Gaykhātū went to the region to quell the unrest, Taghachar conspired with his deputy, the Persian official Sadr al-Dīn Zanjānī, to enthrone one of Gaykhātū's uncles, Prince Anbarji Oghul.<sup>290</sup> Gaykhātū, entirely unaware of the conspiracy, failed to intervene directly and was only saved by Shiktür Noyan, who at the time appears to have prevailed over Taghachar by virtue of his standing and had him arrested. Nevertheless, as soon as he was back from Anatolia, the ilkhan pardoned both Taghachar and Anbarji, and even appointed Sadr al-Dīn Zanjānī in the post of vizier.<sup>291</sup> Even in the face of personal affronts, such as when his cousin Baidu's drunkenly insulted him, Gaykhātū's sought peaceful accommodation, a telling sign of his position vis-à-vis the influential

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<sup>287</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.581; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.831 "Had I spoken in opposition to their plan, not only would I not have been given free reign, but the same thing that happened to Joshi and Ordu Qaya would have happened to me."

<sup>288</sup> *Hope, Politics and Tradition*, p.151; *Waṣṣāf/Purgstall*, III, p.23; *Bar Hebraeus/Budge*, p.494; *Orbelean/Bedrosian*, p.260; Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.374.

<sup>289</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.603-604; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.862-865. Rashīd al-Dīn specifies that Gaykhātū did send reinforcements, but also that he was "too busy to pay attention" and that he did not pay the soldiers.

<sup>290</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.581; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.832.

<sup>291</sup> Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.375; *Bar Hebraeus/Budge*, p.495.

figures of the *ordu*.<sup>292</sup> Eventually, Gaykhātū's reign came to an end when Taghachar, Qunchuqbal and Doladai Īdāchī, conspiring this time with Baidu, orchestrated a coup, leading to the latter's enthronement and Gaykhātū's execution.<sup>293</sup>

Thus, despite the support of some elder *noyat*, Gaykhātū proved unable to resist the faction that had consolidated power in the court during Arghun's illness. The failure of royal authority during his reign and reflected a deeper transformation in the Ilkhanid political order. What had once been a model of negotiated sovereignty rooted in mutual recognition among provincial elites was now displaced by a court-centred contest for influence. The rise of a strong military aristocracy was not a novel occurrence in the Middle East and was a common feature of nomadic empires like those established by the Seljuks and the Khwārazmshāh. The Mongol Empire, as we have seen, was no exception, and Činggisid rulers were frequently compelled to acknowledge the authority of powerful *noyat* and princes. However, since the time of Činggis Khan, the *noyat*, despite holding significant bargaining power, had always remained subordinate to the *Altan Uruq*, whose members alone possessed a legitimate claim to sovereign authority. This dynamic persisted across the Mongol world, yet in Persia it assumed a distinct form. Here, the nobility gradually expanded its influence to the point of becoming kingmakers. This was both a consequence of the fragmentation of power that had characterised the Ilkhanate from its beginning, but also of the rise of new ambitious individuals with little interest in stability. Part of the responsibility for the instability that increasingly featured the last two decades of the thirteenth century rests with Arghun and his immediate successors. Arghun's violent seizure of power profoundly destabilised the realm. It was, in effect, a regicide, carried out with the support of less prominent amirs against Aḥmad's supporters, many of whom had, thus far, contributed to the realm's stability. Arghun's reign and those of his immediate successors were further characterised by a lack of sustained interest in governance and a reliance on violence, which exacerbated tensions within the *ordu*. Finally, the ilkhans' failure to cultivate cooperation among the

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<sup>292</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.583; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.834.

<sup>293</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.585; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.836-837.

nobles, whether through passive dependence or deliberate attempts to play factions against each other, undermined the unity of the realm. The coalition that had originally backed Arghun's ascent, consisting of figures such as Buqa, Taghachar, Joshi, Qunchuqbal, and Doladai Īdāchī, quickly fragmented under the pressures of his divisive policies concerning the distribution of wealth, land, and power. Rather than acting in concert to uphold the authority of the ilkhan, these nobles became a destabilising force, further accelerating the disintegration of the covenant between the *noyat* and the ilkhans.<sup>294</sup>

This study argues that this phase of Ilkhanid history should not be merely treated as a temporary setback of collegial or royal authority, but as a different configuration of a relational system in which authority was no longer negotiated. The power of the new aristocracy, represented by figures such as Buqa and Taghachar, was rooted in courtly dominance and was exercised through intrigue and betrayal, in a cutthroat struggle for dominance where influence and personal networks were weaponised against rivals. The increased assertiveness and opportunism of this emergent elite could help explain the reluctance of Mongol princes to assume the throne under such conditions. The hesitations of, Jushkab, Gaykhātū, Baidu and perhaps even Arghun, repeated and conspicuous, suggest more than ritualised modesty; they point to a deeper awareness of the dangers inherent in a political order shaped by factional coercion.

### ◆ Ghazan and Nawrūz: Conversion and Reconfiguration

The most enduring consequence of the Ilkhanate's late thirteenth-century crisis was, without doubt, the revolt led by Amir Nawrūz. Lasting from 1289 to 1294, it marked the most prolonged internal conflict in Ilkhanid history. For nearly five years, the ilkhans were effectively cut off from Khurasan, the Ilkhanate's wealthiest and most strategically vital province.<sup>295</sup> Nawrūz's ability to mount such an

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<sup>294</sup> Melville, C. "The End of the Ilkhanate and After: Observations on the Collapse of the Mongol World Empire," in De Nicola, B. and Melville, C. eds. *The Mongols' Middle East. Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran*, (Leiden-Boston, 2016): 309-337, p.328-329.

<sup>295</sup> On Khurasan, see above, p.73.

extensive and resilient challenge to Ilkhanid authority did not only stem from tribal solidarity within the Oirat confederation, but from a durable foundation of territorial control, administrative influence, and political legitimacy inherited from his father, Arghun Aqa.<sup>296</sup> Originally appointed governor of Khurasan by Töregene Khatun in the early 1240s, Arghun Aqa remained at the head of regional administration for over three decades. As seen above, his authority endured under the rule of successive *qa'ans* and ilkhans, from Ögödei to Abaqa. Arghun Aqa did not only exercise fiscal and judicial responsibilities, like the oversight of the *yarghu* and the collection of taxes in Khurasan, but also patronised elite networks among Persian officials, urban notables, and clerical figures.<sup>297</sup> According to Rashīd al-Dīn, his son Nawrūz:

Lived for thirty years in the centre of the realm [...] in luxury, wealth, and splendour under the Mongol Khans, and in the Third and Fourth Climes, his father Arghun Aqa's word was law, and he possessed untold lands, property, cash, herds, and flocks.<sup>298</sup>

Furthermore, Arghun Aqa's patronage of Islamic institutions, like his sponsorship of the *khanqah* of Pīr Ḥusayn mausoleum in Azerbaijan, and his sustained relationships with Sufī communities and urban elites provided the infrastructure for Nawrūz's own political position.<sup>299</sup>

Both Nawrūz and his father appear among the prominent commanders of Abaqa in the sources. Nawrūz himself was married to Toghan Khatun, the fourth daughter of Abaqa, and his brother Lakzi married Baba, daughter of Hülegü.<sup>300</sup> Arghun Aqa's authority was further entrenched through marital alliances with local Persianate dynasties. Nawrūz married the daughter of the *atābak*

<sup>296</sup> Biran, *Qaidu*, p.57; Landa, "Oirats." p.155. Nawrūz inherited Arghun Aqa's status as an administrator of Khurasan.

<sup>297</sup> More on Arghun Aqa's patronage below, p.130-133.

<sup>298</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.600; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.857-858.

<sup>299</sup> "سبب آنکه نوروز سی سال تمام در وسط ممالک ایران... و طی و نشر و بسط و حل و عقد اقلیم ثالث و رابع در قبضه اقتدار پدرش ارغون آقا موجود بوده و اسباب و مالک و عقود و نقود و حواشی و مواشی نامحدود موجود گذاشته."

<sup>299</sup> Landa, I. "New Light on Early Mongol Islamisation: The Case of Arghun Aqa's Family." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 28, 1 (2018): 77-100, p.85,97. Landa connects Nawrūz's family to an inscription found on the Pīr Ḥusayn complex and dated from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Hope, M. "The 'Nawrūz King': the rebellion of Amir Nawrūz in Khurasan (688-694/1289-94) and its implications for the Ilkhan polity at the end of the thirteenth century." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 78, 3 (2015): 451-473, p.452, 457.

<sup>300</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.476; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.684.

of Yazd, and their son Sultān Shāh was later appointed ruler of Yazd under Baidu in 1295.<sup>301</sup> Arghun Aqa's niece was married to Fakhr al-Dīn Kart of Herat, while his daughter Begi Khatun had earlier been given in marriage to Hājāj Sultan, a prince of the Qutlugh-Khanid dynasty in Kirman.<sup>302</sup> Finally, Arghun Aqa's other daughters and granddaughters married into the Ilkhanid royal line: one became the wife of Ghazan, while Bulughan Khatun and Hajji Khatun both wed Öljeitü, with Hajji Khatun becoming the mother of Abū Sa'īd.<sup>303</sup>

Matrimonial ties were just one the means through which Arghun Aqa's lineage reinforced its authority among Islamic and Mongol elites alike. Nawrūz inherited both title and authority in Khurasan following his father's death in 1275. He also inherited many of his father's alliances, and his relationships with the urban elites in the province, which consisted of political support in exchange for their allegiance and tribute payments. He was also respected throughout the Ilkhanate and wielded significant control over a considerable army.<sup>304</sup> The Islamisation of the family appears to have begun earlier than is often assumed, possibly within the first decades of Arghun Aqa's tenure in Khurasan.<sup>305</sup> By the time of Nawrūz's rebellion, Islam had become central to his political posture. Nawrūz himself was known to be a fluent Persian speaker and a committed Muslim. He minted coins bearing the *kalima* and invoked the names of the Rashidun Caliphs, while chroniclers such as Waṣṣāf referred to him as the "second Abū Muslim," invoking the imagery of Islamic revival.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Lambton, "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part II, p.101; Landa, "New Light." p.91.

<sup>302</sup> On Kirman Lane, *Early Mongol Rule*, p.108,-109; Lambton, "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part II, p.97-98; Landa, "New Light." p.91-93. On the Kartids see Lane "Arghun Aqa." p.471; *Waṣṣāf/Purgstall*, III, p.204-205; Lane, *Early Mongol Rule*, p.153-156 Arghun Aqa was connected not only to the Muslim ruling clans. Landa remarks that one of his sons was married to Tamara, daughter of David VII of Georgia.

<sup>303</sup> Landa, "New Light." p.81

<sup>304</sup> Michael Hope demonstrated how Nawrūz was able to create loyalty networks in Khurasan and establish himself as "local ruler" capable of challenging Ilkhanid authority. See Hope, "The Nawrūz King." p.451-473.

<sup>305</sup> Landa, "New Light." p.94-96

<sup>306</sup> Landa, "New Light." p.97. Regarding some coins issued during Nawrūz's rebellion Landa notes: "It seems that in the way these coins combine both Chinggisid and Islamic symbolism they clearly represent the transitional phase in which Nawrūz found himself in the early 1290s. On the one hand, the coins use the *tamghas* of the ruling Chinggisid houses, on the other the Chinggisid message is strongly intermingled with Islamic paraphernalia."

Nawrūz's rebellion had begun in 1289, soon after Buqa's downfall, and quickly attracted Qara'unas contingents and local military support. Ghazan, then still prince, was dispatched by Arghun to suppress the revolt, but failed to secure the support of Khurasani towns.<sup>307</sup> Nawrūz's position, rooted in regional alliances and religious legitimacy, proved resilient, and Ghazan was repeatedly forced to retreat.<sup>308</sup> Later that year, with the reinforcement of troops from his father, Ghazan forced Nawrūz to flee beyond the Oxus into Chaghadaid territory. By 1291, Nawrūz had secured the backing of Qaidu, who sent military support with the dual aim of undermining Ilkhanid control and securing eastern Iran as a staging ground for further campaigns.<sup>309</sup> Following Baraq's unsuccessful incursion into the Ilkhanate decades earlier, Qaidu and the Chaghadaids awaited an opportune moment to intervene in the Ilkhanate's internal affairs again, and Nawrūz presented an excellent opportunity. In 1291, Nawrūz secured the support of Qaidu, who sent several thousand men with the aim of supporting the revolt, establishing authority over eastern Iran, and acquiring control of Afghanistan's border regions.<sup>310</sup> These areas became an important springboard for any future Chaghadaid invasion of the Delhi sultanate and a base to exert control over the Qara'unas.<sup>311</sup> However, relations between Nawrūz and Qaidu deteriorated, particularly over governance of the borderlands and the amir's refusal to act as Qaidu's vassal.<sup>312</sup> In 1294, with tensions mounting between Ghazan and his uncle Gaykhātū, the two former adversaries reached a political accommodation.

While Rashīd al-Dīn portrays Ghazan's reconciliation with Nawrūz as the unconditional surrender of the latter, it is more likely that the two, mutually fatigued by incessant conflict and in need of political support, opted for a rapprochement.<sup>313</sup> As Hope suggests, this rapprochement should be viewed primarily as a political alliance rather than an outright capitulation, and only occurred

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<sup>307</sup> May, "Afghanistan." p.295; Hope, "The Nawrūz King." p.459-463.

<sup>308</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.594-599; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.851-858.

<sup>309</sup> Biran, *Qaidu*, p.57-58.

<sup>310</sup> Biran, *Qaidu*, p.58; *RJT/Thackston*, p.599-600; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.857-858.

<sup>311</sup> May, "Afghanistan." p.298.

<sup>312</sup> Biran, *Qaidu*, p.58; *RJT/Thackston*, p.602; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.860; Landa, "New Light." p.95-96.

<sup>313</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.611-612; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.873-875.

after an initial military confrontation in March 1295 between Ghazan and his uncle Baidu, who had succeeded Gaykhātū on the throne that same year.<sup>314</sup> During this first brief campaign, Ghazan came to recognise that without Nawrūz’s military backing, his chances of securing the throne were negligible.<sup>315</sup> His alignment with Nawrūz must be thus understood within the framework of negotiated sovereignty that underpins this chapter: Ghazan lacked the military resources to assert his claim independently and was compelled to acknowledge Nawrūz’s authority as a regional broker whose control over Khurasan and local alliances made him indispensable. Ghazan’s conversion to Islam, urged by Nawrūz, should be interpreted in the same light. According to Waṣṣāf, it was Nawrūz’s influence over the army and the *noyat* that persuaded Ghazan to embrace Islam.<sup>316</sup>

Ghazan’s formal conversion to Islam occurred in a public ceremony in the presence of his troops and the *noyat*. By this point, a significant proportion of the Mongol elite in Persia had already embraced Islam, and his adoption of the faith appears in part to have been directed towards consolidating the loyalty of the military.<sup>317</sup> Ghazan’s conversion caused Islamic legitimacy to assume a more prominent role, functioning alongside, rather than replacing, the imperial ideology inherited from the Činggisid tradition.<sup>318</sup> The ilkhan was now known as the *Pādshāh-i Islām* (“Emperor of Islam”), a title which held currency in both the Ilkhanate and in other Muslim lands. The Mongol ruler was presented as the “paragon of Islamic rule through deeds and titles.”<sup>319</sup> However, there is evidence that Ghazan continued to adhere to the *Yasa* of Činggis Khan and other Mongol practices. Therefore, according to Allsen, it would be a mistake to describe the transition between Mongol and

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<sup>314</sup> Hope, “The Nawrūz King.” p.463; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.156.

<sup>315</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.613-615; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.883-890.

<sup>316</sup> Melville, “Pādshāh-i Islam,” p.159,177; Hope, “The Nawrūz King.” p.464; *RJT/Thackston*, p.618; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.899; Jackson, “Religious allegiance.” p.116.

<sup>317</sup> On this, see Pfeiffer, J. “Reflections on a ‘Double Rapprochement’: Conversion to Islam Among the Mongol Elite During the Early Ilkhanate,” in Komaroff, L. ed. *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Leiden, 2006): 369-389.

<sup>318</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.622; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.906. The endorsement of the Sufi Shayk Mahmud to Ghazan reported by Rashīd al-Dīn is emblematic in this sense: “Baidu is not worthy of the crown or suitable for the office of khan, for he possesses neither the aura of divine assistance nor good judgment.”

<sup>319</sup> Amitai-Preiss, “Political Legitimation.” p.210.

Muslim Persianate sources of legitimacy in absolute terms as the transformation was slow and incomplete.<sup>320</sup>

After Ghazan's conversion, Nawrūz mobilised support to the ilkhan, and Ghazan obtained the backing of Taghachar, already tired of Baidu's leadership.<sup>321</sup> Baidu was subsequently abandoned by much of his army, captured and executed on October 5, 1295, after only having ruled for six months.<sup>322</sup> In Rashīd al-Dīn's account we find, among Baidu's supporters, some of the same names that had supported Arghun and caused the downfall of Buqa. Apart from Taghachar, whose allegiance has shifted last minute to Ghazan, Rashīd al-Dīn mentions that Qunchuqbal and Doladai Īdāchī were "in trepidation on account of their mistakes and errors" during Ghazan's takeover.<sup>323</sup>

By the time Ghazan seized the throne, the permanence of these elements at the *ordu* constituted a serious menace to the internal stability of the Ilkhanate, and Ghazan sought to avoid the fate that had undone his predecessors. This was achieved by dismantling the faction that had dominated Ilkhanid politics since the death of his uncle Aḥmad. Ghazan's actions thus became directed at attacking the power base of the remnants of this group of troublesome individuals. An example of this was his reshuffling of appanages and appointments, aimed at distancing the amirs from the *ordu*. Particularly significant are the cases of Qunchuqbal and Doladai Īdāchī.<sup>324</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn records that Qunchuqbal was executed, while Doladai Īdāchī, together with other amirs, was beaten and dispatched to Khurasan, where they were to "find expiation for their crimes in the field of battle against the enemy."<sup>325</sup> Unsurprisingly, the amirs targeted by Ghazan resisted his attempt to weaken them. Doladai participated in the rebellion of the Khurasani army led by Amirs Sögä and

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<sup>320</sup> Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.77; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.54.

<sup>321</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.624; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.911.

<sup>322</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.625-626; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.912.

<sup>323</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.622; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.906.

<sup>324</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.164-165.

<sup>325</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.629; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.918.

Barula, but their army was crushed by Ghazan, whose victory resulted in the execution of thirty-nine amirs.<sup>326</sup>

Once he had dealt with weaker *noyat*, however, Ghazan had to confront the power accumulated by Nawrūz and Taghachar. As Buqa, whose intervention had secured Arghun's accession in 1284, Nawrūz was now a kingmaker. He reached Tabriz ahead of the ilkhan with his army, consolidating control and presenting himself as the indispensable broker of the succession. He was then nominated vizier by Ghazan, and given control over most of the realm.<sup>327</sup> Ghazan's acceptance of the new arrangement was less a matter of choice than of acknowledging the dominance Nawrūz had already established. However, Ghazan, differently from Arghun, did not take a step back from governance and was eager to curb the influence of the *noyat*. Rashīd al-Dīn stresses Ghazan's words of contempt for the *noyat*'s repeated acts of treason against his relatives:

It was never in the *yasa* of Činggis Khan that the qaraju 'umārā (common *noyat*) could harm his uruq (family). But now a group of qaraju have killed Gaykhātū!<sup>328</sup>

In a bid to weaken Nawrūz's influence, Ghazan appointed him as the commander of an army and sent him to guard the Khurasan border, to keep him away from the *ordu*. However, after spending a few months in the region, the vizier came back to the capital with an excuse. In his army, a significant portion of the *noyat*, infuriated with both Nawrūz and Ghazan, left their posts, and Nawrūz shouldered the blame for the desertion. Taghachar was also tasked with the command of a peripheral region:

He (Ghazan) sent Amir Taghachar as commander and guardian of Anatolia because he was a man who was mercurial, and it was best to have him as far from court as possible.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.631-632; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.920-921; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.169. Rashīd al-Dīn does not report the fate of Doladai Īdāchī. He was presumably either killed in battle or executed.

<sup>327</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.629; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.918. "Realizing how much he owed Nawrūz for the favours and deeds he had performed, [...] (Ghazan) issued a decree awarding Nawrūz the unconditional emirate and vizierate of all lands and peoples from the Oxus to Syria, and from the banks of the eastern sea to the farthest end of the western sea."

<sup>328</sup> *RJT/Karīmī*, p.885; the passage is also reported in Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.163.

"از یاسای قدیم چنگیز خان معهود و معتاد نبود که امرأ قراجو بدل خود اروق را تعرضی رسانند. اکنون جماعه امرا که گیخاتو راشربت هلاک چشانیده اند."

<sup>329</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.630; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.918.

"امیر طغاچار را بامامت و محافظت روم فرستاد، بنابر آنکه او مردی سریع الانقلاب بود و صلاح در آن که از حضرت دور باشد."

Hope has observed that these manoeuvres were accompanied by what he terms “one-way” marriage alliances between the ilkhan and the *noyat*. Ghazan took wives from the Jalayir, the Onggirat, and the Oirat but he offered no daughters in return, and no *atābaks* are recorded as having been appointed over his sons.<sup>330</sup> These actions point to a deliberate avoidance of reciprocal obligations and a general distrust of the commanders. From the outset, Ghazan sought to curtail the influence of military brokers and to re-centre governance on the person of the ilkhan. Control over troops, provinces and resources had allowed the amirs to challenge royal authority and disrupt the political order. Ghazan’s aim was to strip them of this capacity for independent action. Rashīd al-Dīn presents Ghazan’s campaign against the privileges and influence of the *noyat* as an act undertaken in the interest of the state, portraying the severity of the purges as justified by the demands of stability and order. In practice, Ghazan’s primary aim was to reassert the primacy of the Činggisid dynasty and to bring the military elite firmly under his personal authority, reducing the risk of further insurrection or usurpation. While such measures may indeed have contributed to preventing renewed civil conflict, they were mainly aimed at dismantling the alliances through which senior commanders exercised influence at court and in the provinces. Ghazan’s conception of stability was thus that of a ruler seeking to monopolise the relational architecture of power, not necessarily that of his Persian administrators, whose priorities reflected a different vision of governance. This contrast clearly emerges in a tale allegedly narrated by Ghazan to Rashīd al-Dīn during his purges:

In those times, there were two kings at war with each other in Cathay. One of them was beaten, and his army was scattered. [...]An officer who discovered the defeated king had compassion on him and wanted to save him [...]. He came across a well in that region and said, “Get into this well so that our soldiers will not see you.” [...]When they had gone, the king came out of the well and went to his own land, where, little by little, he gathered an army and then came out again to fight. This time, he defeated and killed the king who had been victorious the time before and took over his kingdom. He covered the officer to whom he owed his life with special favours and took him into his closest confidence, assigning him to the highest office and making him his absolute deputy. One day, one of the officers said to the king, ‘This person did not recognise his obligations to his king. Not only was he unfaithful to him, but he also caused his death. It will not be long before he contemplates the same treachery with you.’ The king, [...] motioned for the officer’s execution. The officer

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<sup>330</sup> Hope, “The Atābaks.” p.338.

cried out, “You owe me your life!” The king wept and said, “You are right, and I am in no way pleased to put you to death. However, in the best interests of the state and throne, there is no alternative: it is imperative that you be killed.”<sup>331</sup>

Although Rashīd al-Dīn frames the tale as a lesson in safeguarding the “best interests of the state,” its logic is relational rather than institutional. The true danger lay in the presence of a broker whose loyalties had already shifted and could do so again. In Ghazan’s telling, the officer’s removal is presented as prudent management of personal rule rather than as the defence of the order and stability of the kingdom.

Taghachar and Nawrūz, much like the officer in Ghazan’s tale, proved unable to adapt to the new order. Taghachar, having betrayed too many masters, was killed en route to his new appointment in Anatolia.<sup>332</sup> Meanwhile, Nawrūz, already the object of Ghazan’s growing suspicion, was driven to insubordination by fabricated charges levelled against him, a sequence of events examined in the following chapter.<sup>333</sup> Seizing this opportunity, Ghazan utilised it as a pretext to get rid of his benefactor. He ordered the extermination of Nawrūz’s entire family and dispatched advance parties throughout the realm to capture and execute all the officials appointed by the *noyan*. Despite attempting to flee to the east, Nawrūz was ultimately handed over to Ghazan’s general Qutlughshāh for execution by the malik of Herat.<sup>334</sup>

While Ghazan’s reforms of Ilkhanid administration will be further discussed in the following pages, his treatment of the *noyat* marked the onset of the significant changes he would implement in the Ilkhanate. Ghazan’s reign still saw the rise of influential individuals within the nobility, but power remained concentrated in the sovereign’s hands, and individuals that could harm this “centralisation” were eliminated. Under Ghazan’s rule, figures like Buqa or Nawrūz did not emerge

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<sup>331</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.632; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.922.

<sup>332</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.636; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.925-926; Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.295.

<sup>333</sup> See below, p.160-161

<sup>334</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.638-640; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.930-934.

again with the same level of influence. In a sense, we can now come full circle and realign Ghazan's reign, in many of its aspects, with the model of a "military patronage state" proposed by Hodgson.<sup>335</sup>

As demonstrated, however, this transformation cannot be understood in isolation from the collapse of earlier governance models. The Ilkhanate had long operated through negotiated rule, a system that depended on personal alliances, reciprocal concessions, and the maintenance of factional equilibrium. Yet this arrangement proved unsustainable. Ghazan's centralisation of power was not simply a personal project but a response to accumulated dysfunction. Hülegü's early concessions to his commanders had encouraged the emergence of a noble class capable of operating independently from the ilkhans. The conditions for aristocratic autonomy, material wealth, regional entrenchment, and administrative access, had been present from the outset of Mongol rule over Persia. Aḥmad's decision to adopt a framework grounded in Islamic law can be seen as a first tentative attempt to legitimise his authority outside the model of negotiated sovereignty. This intention is most clearly reflected in his autocratic conduct, in his reliance on the army, and in the use of his loyal general Alinaq to suppress dissent. Rashīd al-Dīn depicts his overbearing manner as a decisive flaw, which damaged his relations with both internal and external actors, including the *qa'an* in China. The ilkhan iron-fisted suppression of opposition only deepened this alienation, clearing the way for his removal at the hands of Buqa.

Aḥmad Tegüder's regicide in 1284 marked a turning point: legitimacy could no longer be anchored in negotiation. The failures of this negotiated model echoed earlier crises in the unified Mongol Empire, where succession disputes and princely rivalries had already begun to unravel the fabric of Činggisid governance. This shift finds an earlier precedent in the final years of a united Mongol Empire, in Batu's imposition of Möngke at the *quriltai* of 1251, against the wishes of rival branches of the Činggisid lineage, as both episodes marked the end of systems built on negotiated

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<sup>335</sup> With the subordination to the sovereign of What Hodgson calls a "jealous nobility." Hodgson, *The venture of Islam*, Vol.2, p.407. In this page, Hodgson argues that Mongol politics present some of the traits of the military patronage state, with a noble elite subordinated to the ruling family. This work argues that such a model is only partly applicable to the earlier period of Mongol rule, but it does apply to Ghazan's rule and his actions against the *noyat*.

legitimacy, and the beginning of regimes forged through unilateral assertion. Yet, in the Ilkhanate, this decisive shift did not merely occur because the nobility was strong, but because successive ilkhans failed to impose discipline. The conduct of rulers like Arghun and Gaykhātū, their neglect of statecraft and indulgence in factional preferences, dismantled the delicate balance established under Hülegü and Abaqa. Power came to be wielded through court intrigue, as figures like Buqa and Taghachar accumulated influence far beyond their formal station. The consequences were severe, as these men turned the court into a theatre of factional strife. The challenges Ghazan inherited in 1295 illustrate the extent to which the ilkhan's authority had been compromised.

The practice of the *quriltai*, where leadership was in theory determined based on merit and consensus, had become an instrument for influential individuals like Taghachar and Buqa to force their own agenda on the rest of the aristocracy.<sup>336</sup> This does not mean that *quriltais* were an instrument of “democratic rule” before Arghun, but that they were important in creating a ground for non-military confrontation and negotiation, embodying what this chapter has termed “negotiated rule.” A parallel here must be traced with the earlier history of the Empire, as the last *quriltai* of the united Mongol Empire was dominated by Batu, who played kingmaker disregarding the aspirations of other groups within the Mongol nobility. Möngke, the *qa'an* he enthroned, would also be the last ruler of a unified Empire.

Nawrūz's rebellion must be understood as part of the same factional landscape that elevated Taghachar and Buqa to the role of kingmakers. These men reveal how the noyat could accumulate authority through their networked connections, though their methods diverged. Taghachar's and Buqa's power rested on his control of a shifting cohort of amirs and court allies, a form of influence exercised at the ordu itself. Nawrūz, by contrast, embodied a provincial model of negotiated rule: he inherited his father Arghun Aqa's networks in Khurasan and cultivated alliances with urban and aristocratic elites, embracing Islamic legitimacy. His command of local armies and his reputation as

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<sup>336</sup> See, for instance, Hope, “The Transmission of Authority.” p.98. This aligns with Michael Hope's argument on the collegiality of Mongol aristocratic rule, but also shows how such collegiality was increasingly undermined by powerful actors in the Ilkhanid political field.

a committed Muslim allowed him to operate as a broker between regional constituencies and the central court.

Yet Nawrūz also belonged to the same generation of amirs who destabilised the Ilkhanate. He had long-standing ties to Buqa's circle and participated in the factional struggles that hollowed out Ilkhanid authority after Abaqa's death. His rebellion in 1289 was reinforced by connections to wider Mongol world, including temporary alignments Qaidu and with Taghachar's faction. For Ghazan, reconciliation with Nawrūz was not optional: it was the price of securing a broker whose control of Khurasan and Islamic legitimacy made him indispensable.

In Nawrūz, we see the duality of the Ilkhanate's nature, torn between its nomadic heritage and practices and its slow transformation into a Muslim "Persian empire." These ideas, however, would never fully prevail over one another, even after the dissolution of the Ilkhanate.<sup>337</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn captures this ambiguity by narrating how Nawrūz proposed altering the Ilkhanid seal: once a square marked with Mongol emblems, it should now be circular and bear the names of God and the Prophet, "to reflect the fact that we have changed and altered."<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.54. According to Amitai-Preiss, Numismatic and epigraphic evidence also suggest that, after their conversion, the Mongols mainly appealed to Islamic identity rather than to the concept of a "Persianate" empire. Amitai-Preiss, "Political Legitimation." p.210-217.

<sup>338</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.630;*RJT/Karīmī*, p.918.

## II. The Sword and the Pen

This chapter examines the evolution of Mongol administrative structures in Greater Persia throughout the thirteenth century, tracing their trajectory from their beginnings within the unified Mongol Empire to the accession of Ghazan in 1294. The chapter is organised into four parts, each addressing a distinct stage in the evolution of the administration and its relationship with the *qa'an* or the ilkhan.

Numerous interpretations have been advanced concerning the early administrative arrangements of the Mongols. Although past studies primarily address institutional structures, an aspect that lies outside the central scope of this chapter, it is appropriate to outline the most influential contributions and their relevance for the arguments developed here. Early scholarship on the Mongol Empire and the Ilkhanate often depicted the Mongols as administratively disengaged and reliant on a Persian bureaucratic class that preserved the institutional legacy of the Seljuks and 'Abbāsids. This view is most clearly articulated in the works of Ann Lambton, who broadly presented Ilkhanid fiscal administration as a continuation of earlier Persianate norms, adapted to function under Mongol patronage.<sup>339</sup> A slightly different but similar interpretation is found in the writings of Jean Aubin. While his work is characterised by a greater Mongol involvement, he placed emphasis on the agency of Persian officials, portraying their careers as the outcome of courtly intrigue and personal

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<sup>339</sup> Lambton, "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part I, p.79-99; Lambton, "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part II, p.97-124; Lambton, A.K.S. "Personal Service and the Element of Concession in the Theory of the Vizierate in Medieval Persia," in Bosworth, C.E. Issawi, C. Savory, R. Udovitch A.L. eds. *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis* (Princeton, 1989): 175-191, p.186-187; Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.53-54. In "Personal Service," Lambton notes a shift around Ghazan's time but argues that Mongol officials remained limited to fiscal roles and continued to "supervise" Persian administrators, whom they largely distrusted (p.186-187). In *Continuity and Change*, she discusses the emergence of dual administration, emphasising the divide between the Mongol military elite and Persianate bureaucrats (p.54), and argues that Mongol fiscal practices were gradually assimilated to local norms through Persian influence (p.53).

opportunism. For Aubin, the administration of Persia under Mongol rule was not so much a question of institutional continuity as it was of political survival within an unstable courtly environment.<sup>340</sup>

Contemporary to Aubin, David Morgan has challenged narratives that centred Persianate elites and practices as the sole basis of governance in Iran by emphasising the role played by Mongol and Central Asian figures in shaping the early Mongol administration.<sup>341</sup> More recently, the works of Peter Jackson and Denise Aigle have also emphasised the composite character of governance under the ilkhans. In Jackson's analysis, Persian officials appear as important to the functioning of government, yet ultimately dependent on the fluctuating favour of their Mongol superiors.<sup>342</sup> Their authority was not institutional but contingent, shaped by factional alignments. Aigle similarly presents Ilkhanid administration as operating through a near-symmetrical structure, in which each influential Persian official was matched by a more powerful Mongol patron. This model reinforces the view of Ilkhanid governance as an inherently fragile system, lacking institutional autonomy and perpetually exposed to the volatility of what she defines as "tent politics."<sup>343</sup> The culmination of this corrective approach is found in the work of Michael Hope. His collegial interpretation of Mongol rule, as we have seen, presents the *noyat* as a self-regulating aristocratic body, whose collective oversight curtailed the possibility of enduring ministerial dominance, a reading that stands in sharp contrast to earlier depictions of Mongol detachment from the mechanics of rule.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Aubin, *Émirs mongols*, p.9. In his brief introduction, Aubin states that his primary concern lies in exploring the "rapports entre hommes," the relationships between individuals at the heart of political and cultural interaction.

<sup>341</sup> Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.96-97,112, describes the empire as administered in a "ramshackle" and pragmatic fashion, noting that "there was therefore a tendency to confer office on those who would undertake to extort the largest possible sums from the taxpayers." See also Morgan, D. *Aspects of Mongol Rule in Persia* (PhD dissertation, SOAS University of London, 1977), p.157.

<sup>342</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.291 "Life for the highest-ranking Muslims under the pagan ilkhans was therefore far from easy (nor, for that matter, would it be any more comfortable under their Muslim successors)."

<sup>343</sup> Aigle, "Mongol Domination." p.74.

<sup>344</sup> Hope, *Power, Politics, and Tradition*, p.124,142-143, describes the conflict between military and civil administrators, particularly in the cases of the Juvaynī family and Sa'd al-Dawla, as a collegial response by Mongol *noyat* to the concentration of political authority in the hands of individual viziers.

Although very different in nature, most of the approaches described bring Mongol and Ilkhanid administration in line with administrative models typical of Hodgson's "military patronage state," in which office-holding, much like military posts, formed part of the ruler's household and was allocated as a form of patronage.<sup>345</sup> In such a system, bureaucratic functions were exercised by individuals whose authority was revocable at will, and who held power only through personal loyalty and access to the ruler. While this framework may be applied to the study of certain phases of Mongol administration, this chapter contends that Ilkhanid governance cannot be characterised either as in continuity with earlier Persianate institutions, nor as a purely patrimonial or clientelist system. Administrators, whether Persian or Mongol, did not operate as passive subordinates. Like the *noyat*, they functioned as intermediaries whose authority rested on their ability to mediate between the expectations of the imperial centre and the demands of local constituencies.

However, this dissertation does not suggest that administrative elites (particularly Persian bureaucrats) held secure positions; on the contrary, they operated in a volatile environment where their prominence as brokers could place them at considerable personal risk. Rather, it argues that portraying these officials either as calculating collaborators or as passive victims of the arbitrariness of their superiors misrepresents the nature of their authority. Given that much of the surviving evidence was produced by administrators themselves, whose self-representations cannot be taken at face value, there has been, in modern historiography, a tendency to overcorrect. This has led to depictions of bureaucrats as largely powerless in the face of their Mongol patrons, or at best as actors seeking to mitigate the consequences of conquest.<sup>346</sup> Such interpretations underestimate the political

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<sup>345</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, p.407-408, characterises the "military patronage state" as a structure in which a military elite monopolised all privileges and responsibilities, subordinating the rest of society to a status of taxable dependence, mere "herds" guarded and exploited by their rulers. The royal household and military specialists, typically Mongols or Turks, were fully integrated into this system, while fiscal administrators (*Tajiks*) were treated as auxiliary members of the army. Even officials, poets, and painters could be incorporated into this honorary military class and thereby exempted from taxation. These arrangements, Hodgson argues, supported a strong central authority capable of intervening in and dominating the otherwise decentralised Islamicate institutional landscape (p.408).

<sup>346</sup> See, for instance, Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.283-288.

leverage these officials exercised and obscure the extent to which they shaped, rather than merely served, Mongol and Ilkhanid rule. This chapter offers an alternative interpretation, tracing the evolution of Mongol administration through four distinct phases and centring its analysis on the brokerage role exercised by administrators. The first part of this chapter examines the formative phase of Mongol rule, when administrative authority remained personalistic and contingent upon direct access to the *qa'an*'s household. Figures such as Kōrgūz and Yēlū Chǔcái exemplify this early configuration, in which power was exercised through proximity rather than formal office. The second part turns to the emergence of Persian intermediaries such as the Juvaynīs, who built expansive networks of fiscal and political influence. Yet their authority remained conditional, shaped by the favour they enjoyed at the Mongol court. A third section reassesses the so-called “absolute vizierate,” a term introduced by Aubin to describe the brief ascendancy of ministers such as Buqa and Sa'd al-Dawla. Building on what has been said in the previous chapter, this work argues that these episodes marked the rise of a form of administrative authority rooted in factional capture and exclusive access to the person of the ilkhan, an unstable configuration that collapsed violently once rival factions gained control. The final section addresses the reign of Ghazan. His reforms sought to assert the political primacy of the ilkhan while introducing elements of fiscal and judicial codification. These measures are once again analysed within the framework of the military patronage state.

### ◆ Ögödei's administration

Imperial administration under the Mongols did not emerge from coherent institutional design, but from the dynamics of delegation and personal allegiance that accompanied their expansion. In this early period, which we can define as a first phase of Mongol administration, the exercise of power mainly rested on the accumulation of influence through patronage.

The earliest articulation of administrative reform in the Mongol Empire occurred in northern China under Ögödei. In 1230, Yēlū Chǔcái (1190-1244), a Khitan official who had served the Jin dynasty, proposed replacing the irregular levies raised by the Mongols on sedentary populations with

a fixed household tax.<sup>347</sup> Until then, imperial taxation had primarily consisted of requisitions for the support of Mongol armies, leading to widespread misappropriations by local commanders.<sup>348</sup> This issue was exacerbated by the apportionment of lands and revenue to princes and nobles as *injū* or *qubi*.<sup>349</sup> Drawing on Khitan and Chinese administrative models, Yēlù Chǔcái framed his proposal for a coherent taxation as a means to increase revenue, a goal that aligned with Ögödei's immediate fiscal needs.<sup>350</sup> Yet, the reform was accepted not simply on technical grounds, but on the anticipated revenue it promised and the political capital Yēlù had accrued through his long-standing position and trusted status at Činggis Khan's court.<sup>351</sup> Similar reforms were initiated in Central Asia by Maḥmūd Yalavāch (d. 1254), a Khwārazmian merchant with a background as a governor under the Qara-Khitai dynasty.<sup>352</sup> Yalavāch, then working with his son Mas'ūd Beg (d. 1289), had reportedly advised Činggis Khan in the 1220s, and his reappointment under Ögödei drew on established credibility.<sup>353</sup> In Khurasan, Chin Temür (d. 1236), another administrator formerly in Qara-Khitai service, led similar efforts alongside his Uyghur deputy Kōrgüz (d. 1242).<sup>354</sup> The result of these initiatives was the emergence of a loosely connected administrative network, supervised by a Central Secretariat headed by Chinqai, an Öngüt or Kerait official who held custody of the *qa'an's* seal,

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<sup>347</sup> Allsen, "The rise of the Mongolian empire." p.375-376; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.59. For the reforms implemented by Yēlù Chǔcái see De Rachewiltz, I. *Sino-Mongol culture contacts in the XIII century: a study on Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai* (PhD dissertation, University of Western Australia, 1960). p.39-41.

<sup>348</sup> Schurmann, "Mongolian Tributary Practices." p.305.

<sup>349</sup> See above, p.54.

<sup>350</sup> Hope, *Power, Politics, and Tradition*, p.59; Abel-Rémusat, J.P. "Vie de Yeliu-Thsou-Thsaï, ministre tartare," in idem, ed. *Nouveaux mélanges asiatiques*, Vol. 2 (Paris, 1829), p.64; Morgan, "Who Ran the Mongol Empire?" p.126.

<sup>351</sup> For Yēlù Chǔcái's career, see De Rachewiltz, I. "Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai (1189-1243): Buddhist Idealist and Confucian Statesman," in Wright, A.F. and Twitchett, D.C. eds. *Confucian Personalities* (Stanford, 1962): 189-201; Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.375-376; Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.89, notes that Yēlù Chǔcái's arguments persuaded the Mongols not on humanitarian grounds, but because his proposals promised greater revenue.

<sup>352</sup> Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.374; Buell, P.D. "Sino-Khitai Administration in Mongol Bukhara." *Journal of Asian History*, 13,2 (1979): 121-151, p.140; Buell, "Chinqai." p.178.

<sup>353</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and change*, p.51; Buell, "Sino-Khitai Administration." p.142, note n.101.

<sup>354</sup> Broadbridge, A. *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire* (Cambridge, 2018), p.173; Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.336-337.

alongside Shigi Qutuqu, Činggis Khan's adopted son and legal adviser.<sup>355</sup> Despite the apparent coherence of the secretarial structure, these ministers operated with large margins of autonomy, and their authority was largely dependent on imperial endorsement.<sup>356</sup>

Beginning in 1231, Ögödei decreed that only representatives of the secretariat would have the right to collect all taxes and channel them to the central treasury before distribution among *qubi* holders, stripping the *noyat* of their authority to extract revenue from their lands directly. Thus, the ministers coordinated efforts to stabilise revenue extraction, promote agricultural recovery, and curtail the demands of Mongol commanders.<sup>357</sup> The completion of the first census in 1236 marked the pinnacle of secretarial power under Ögödei.<sup>358</sup> While the implementation of these reforms was successful, it also stirred considerable opposition from other Činggisid princes and the *noyat*, who felt sidelined by the *qa'an* bureaucrats.<sup>359</sup> Furthermore, the absence of a legal framework and institutionalised bureaucracy severely limited the authority of Ögödei's ministers. The system functioned only so long as personal endorsement from the *qa'an* could shield administrators from local or dynastic resistance. This fragility became apparent in the case of Maḥmūd Yalavāch's removal following a conflict with Chaghadai, Ögödei's brother. Although Yalavāch had been instrumental in shaping the fiscal order, his attempt to extend taxation into Chaghadai's appanage

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<sup>355</sup> Buell, "Chinqai." p.168, identifies Chinqai as a Nestorian Christian; p.171 notes his role as a Mongol general and member of the *kešik*; and p.173 records his appointment in 1212 as chamberlain and *yarghuchi*, along with the assignment of a retinue. See also Buell, "Chinqai." p.169-172, where he proposes various origins for Chinqai (as a Kerait, a *Huihui* from Turkistan) while noting that Juvaynī and Rashid al-Din identify him as Uyghur. Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.373, also discusses Chinqai; p.378 notes Shigi Qutuqu's role as keeper of the Blue Register and a key figure in the census initiative.

<sup>356</sup> Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.117-118; Buell, "Sino-Khitani Administration." p.147, was the first to highlight the collegial structure of the Branch Secretariats, which he describes as "joint satellite administrations," and to trace their institutional evolution. However, both Buell and Allsen have noted the irregularity and limitations of the early Mongol taxation system. The Branch Secretariats operated with a high degree of autonomy, and tax exaction was often inconsistent. See Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.377-378; Buell, "Sino-Khitani Administration." p.143.

<sup>357</sup> Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.378; Buell, "Chinqai." p.179.

<sup>358</sup> Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.52; Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.378; see also Hope, *Power, Politics, and Tradition*, p.59; Allsen, T.T. "Mongol Census Taking in Rus' 1245-1275." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 5,1 (1981): 32-53, p.35.

<sup>359</sup> Buell, "Sino-Khitani Administration." p.143; Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.375, 379.

territories provoked retaliation. Despite Ögödei's support, Yalavāch was removed and reassigned to northern China, where he replaced Yēlù Chǔcái. His son Mas'ūd Beg assumed his former position in Turkestan.<sup>360</sup>

Yalavāch's dismissal reflects the limits of a system based on personal power, and highlights a recurring pattern in this first phase of development of Mongol administration: ministers exercised extensive delegated power, but such power remained revocable whenever it clashed with princely or factional rights.<sup>361</sup> What emerged under Ögödei was thus not a coherent imperial bureaucracy but a patchwork of intermediary networks. While the reform programme has often been described in modern historiography as a step towards rationalisation, such a view risks overstating its coherence. Ögödei's vision was not technocratic.<sup>362</sup> Instead, the strength of his administrative system lay in its capacity to embed personal authority into fiscal extraction, through trusted figures whose authority stemmed from prior local influence and direct access to the ear of the sovereign.<sup>363</sup> Thus, the implementation of Ögödei's reforms depended on negotiation, and did not signify the establishment of rigid governance structures. This is testified by the fact that, as was often the case in the early history of the Mongol Empire, in many areas the distinction between military and civil jurisdictions was blurred at best.<sup>364</sup>

Persia offers an especially instructive case. Here, attempts to extend administrative control met with entrenched resistance from military governors and princely agents, producing a political

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<sup>360</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.110; Allsen, T.T. "Mahmud Yalavac, Mas'ud Beg, 'Ali Beg, Safaliq, Bujir," in de Rachewiltz, I. ed. *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period (1200-1300)* (Wiesbaden, 1993), p.124; Biran, "The Mongols in Central Asia." p.48.

<sup>361</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.380; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.550.

<sup>362</sup> Buell, "Chinqai," p.174-176, discusses the emergence of a "systematised" and "centralised" administrative framework. However, this interpretation at times risks underestimating the significant challenges faced by administrators on the ground, particularly in the Persian context.

<sup>363</sup> Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire." p.378, despite his support for Buell's model of administrative centralisation, Allsen concedes that after 1236 Yēlù Chǔcái appears to have "lost Ögödei's ear," as princely interests began to override efforts at central control.

<sup>364</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.109-110; Ostrowski, "The tamma." p.270,272. Ostrowski points out the influence of the dual Chinese system in Mongol local administration, with a military and a "civilian" governor.

arena in which any form of oversight was continually contested.<sup>365</sup> After the fall of the Khwārazmshāh, Chormaghun Noyan acted as military governor in the region, accompanied by representatives from all the major branches of the *Altan Uruq*.<sup>366</sup> Soon after his arrival, however, Chormaghun found himself sidelined by Ögödei's administrative appointments. Since 1232, when the region was still partially under Mongol control, governance had been entrusted to Chin Temür, who served as a *darughachi* (imperial official).<sup>367</sup> His functions, however, were severely limited by a myriad of deputies who enjoyed the patronage of the princes and military commanders. The situation was so bad that when Chin Temür set out to support Mongol military campaigns in the Caucasus, Chormaghun had military deputies representing every Činggisid prince attached to the official's expedition to keep his power in check. Rashīd al-Dīn reports:

When Chormaghun was sent to Iran, the Khan ordered the leaders and *basqaqs* (governors) of provinces to go on campaigns themselves and assist Chormaghun. Chin Temür set out from Khwārazm [...] From every direction came an amir on behalf of a prince, and Chormaghun assigned an amir on behalf of every prince to Chin Temür, as follows: on behalf of the Khan was Kilbolad, Nosal on behalf of Batu, Qizil Buqa on behalf of Chaghadai, and Yega on behalf of Sorqaqtani Beki and the princes.<sup>368</sup>

Chin Temür's position was also challenged by Tayir Bahadur, a military commander dispatched by Chormaghun to suppress unrest in Sistan in 1231-1232. After the defeat of the rebels, Tayir Bahadur claimed authority over the province as military governor and prevented tax collection. Chin Temür

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<sup>365</sup> Several studies have addressed the role of Mongol officials in administering conquered territories. Biran, "Inter-civilizational exchange." p.540; Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.95, 128; Morgan, "Who Ran the Mongol Empire?" p.129, tends to conflate the terms *basqaq*, *darughachi*, and *shahna*, describing them as "all-purpose officials" and highlighting the limited administrative presence in the Middle East. Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.108-109, appears to support this view, noting that *darughachi* were often drawn from the *qa'an's* guard (*kešik*). Ostrowski broadly follows Morgan but distinguishes between *darughachi*, understood as civilian governors akin to the *shahna*, and *basqaq*, who often held military authority as *tammachi*, or commanders of garrison forces. He further argues that these roles frequently overlapped by design, with their relative authority determined by the level of pacification in the region. Ostrowski, "The tamma." p.272-277.

<sup>366</sup> See above, p.60.

<sup>367</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.486; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.222; *RJT/Thackston*, p.322; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.470. Rashīd al-Dīn's narrative closely follows that of Juvaynī.

<sup>368</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.322; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.470.

"چورماغون را بايران ميفرستاد فرمود كه سرو ران و با شقاقان ولايت، بنفس خویش بچر ياكی روند و معاون چورماغون باشند. چينتيمور از خوارزم بر وفق فرمان روان شد [...] و از جوانب ديگر از قبل هر شهزاده، اميری آمد و چورماغون نیز از قبل هر شهزاده اميری را با چينتيمور نصب كرد. از قبل قان، كبلات و نوسال از قبل باتو و قزل بوقا از جانب چغتای و بيكه از قبل سيور قوقتيبی بيگی و سهزادگان."

resisted, arguing that his own appointment remained valid and appealed to the *qa'an*.<sup>369</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn recounts how Chin Temūr's struggle for authority with Chormaghun escalated to such an extent that the administrator was compelled to travel personally to Karakorum, where he secured the approval of Ögödei, who reportedly viewed his initiative with great satisfaction:

In all this time during which Chormaghun has been gone and conquered such vast territories, he has not sent one lord to us. Now Chin Temūr, despite the paucity of his numbers and lack of assistance, has performed such a service, and we appreciate it.<sup>370</sup>

Despite having secured the *qa'an*'s support, Chin Temūr struggled to impose his authority, and his conflict with Tayir Bahadur persisted until imperial envoys formally confirmed his position shortly before his death in 1236.<sup>371</sup> After Chin Temūr's death, representatives from the secretariat and various princely factions fiercely competed over the appointment of his successor. Ultimately, Chin Temūr was succeeded by his Uyghur deputy Kōrgūz, who had hurried to the *qa'an*'s court and was given by Ögödei *paizas* granting him responsibility for all the territories west of the Oxus River.<sup>372</sup> Upon his return, Kōrgūz sent agents to 'Iraq-e Ajam, Arran and Azerbaijan to substitute the military administration.<sup>373</sup> Juvaynī's hyperbolic description emphasises the important role played by Kōrgūz in restoring public order:

An amir who had previously cut off heads with impunity would not now venture to decapitate a chicken [...] if a great army of Mongols encamped in a field, they might not even ask a peasant to hold a horse's head, let alone demanding provisions.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.322-323; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.469-470.

<sup>370</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.323; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.471.

”در این مدت که چرماغون رفته است و چندین ولایت معظم مستخلص کردانیده، هیچ ملک را پیش ما نفرستاد و چینتیمور با قلت عدد و مدد، مثل این بند گر بتقدیم رسانید، آنرا پسندیده داشتیم.“

<sup>371</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.323; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.471; Buell, "Chinqai." p.178-179. Buell discusses the resistance of Mongol generals to Chin Temūr and Kōrgūz.

<sup>372</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.333; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.485.

<sup>373</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.333; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.485. "He sent his son to Persia, Arran, and Azerbaijan, where, after much debate with Chormaqan, he took control of those territories in accordance with the decree and fixed the amount of tribute."

<sup>374</sup> This passage is also reported in Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.337; *JTJ/Boyle*, p.501-502; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.237-239.

”هیچ امیری که پیشتر از آن سرها می انداخت و هیچ آفرید را مخال ذبود سر مرغ غ توانست برید [...] که اگر اشکری بزرگی از مغول بزرعه نزل می کرد با برز یگری سخن غ توانست گفت با سر اسبی نگاه دارد تا با لتاس (؟) علوفه و نزل.“

Körgüz sought not only to curtail the power of military commanders but to rebuild taxation and order in territories subjected to prolonged warfare. By 1239, Chormaghun's prerogatives remained confined to military affairs, while Juvaynī describes Körgüz's jurisdiction as extending from Transoxiana to Anatolia. While Juvaynī's favourable account is shaped by familial loyalty, it nonetheless reflects the favourable view that Persianate elites held of secretarial rule in Iran.<sup>375</sup>

These developments suggest that, although Ögödei's authority was at this point weakened by his illness, it was still capable of selectively empowering and supporting administrators against local power holders. Towards the end of Ögödei's reign, the personalistic character of the administrative system revealed its inherent fragility. As the *qa'an* became increasingly incapacitated by alcohol, his wife, Töregene Khatun, assumed responsibility for most appointments. In 1238, Ögödei auctioned off tax collection rights in northern China to appanage holders and Central Asian merchants.<sup>376</sup> Tax farming became popular among appanage holders, who significantly increased their income in collaboration with corrupt tax officials. Additionally, Ögödei (or Töregene) sanctioned an increase in the number of households held as *qubi* by imperial relatives and nobles.<sup>377</sup> Whether this decree reflected his own decision remains uncertain, and the subsequent appointment of the Khwārazmian official 'Abd al-Raḥmān, a close associate of Töregene, to the administration of the region in 1239 strongly suggests her direct involvement.<sup>378</sup> During this period, despite formal restrictions on taxation, Mongol *noyat* and princes resumed levying taxes on their appanages alongside the annual imperial levy, substantially increasing their revenues.<sup>379</sup>

Following Ögödei's death in 1241, Töregene assumed the regency for five years (1241-1246). Her consolidation of authority marked a significant shift in the balance between the secretariat and princely interests. As discussed in the previous chapter, Töregene's power rested on her capacity to

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<sup>375</sup> Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.117; *JTJ/Boyle*, p.499; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.235-236.

<sup>376</sup> Allsen, "Mongolian Princes." p.101.

<sup>377</sup> Biran, "Inter-civilizational exchange." p.540.

<sup>378</sup> Allsen, "Mongolian Princes." p.101, 103. Allsen explains how 'Abd al-Raḥmān initially found a powerful ally in the person of Chinqai.

<sup>379</sup> Kim, "A reappraisal." p.326; Buell "Chinqai." p.179-180; *JTJ/Boyle*, p.245; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.200.

redistribute fiscal resources and to cultivate support among the aristocracy.<sup>380</sup> Juvaynī remarks that thanks to Töregene's concessions, the *noyat* and Činggisid princes had come to imagine themselves as independent sovereigns and began to issue *yarlighs* upon the territories they ruled.<sup>381</sup>

Juvaynī's hostile accounts of Töregene's regency stem from her attempts to consolidate power by dismissing her husband's chief administrators and placing her household members in key positions. In Persia, this entailed the dismissal and execution of Kōrgüz.<sup>382</sup> In his stead, Töregene appointed Arghun Aqa, a Mongol Oirat official associated with the Ögödeid faction but sufficiently removed from her husband's principal advisers.<sup>383</sup> Following Kōrgüz's execution, Juvaynī recounts that Chinqai and Maḥmūd Yalavāch sought refuge at the ordu of Töregene's son Kōten, asking for his protection.<sup>384</sup> The exile of Ögödeid ministers, despite their technical competence, seniority and prestige at court, reveals the faults of a system in which no institutional safeguards existed. In the absence of binding norms, survival depended on proximity to the ruler and their household. Juvaynī's narrative conveys the administrators' awareness of this vulnerability, as they recognised that their authority could not endure without direct access to the sovereign.<sup>385</sup>

At the apex of Mongol administration Töregene installed loyalists, most controversially a Persian Muslim slave named Fātīmah, whom she made her chancellor. Juvaynī presents Fātīmah's appointment as emblematic of administrative chaos, claiming she staffed key positions with

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<sup>380</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.61-62; Broadbridge, *Women*, p.174; Allsen, "Mongolian princes." p.108. See above, p.61.

<sup>381</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.242-244; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.197-200.

<sup>382</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.537; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.273.

<sup>383</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.57; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.80. "There have been and are many commanders from the Oirat clans in Iran and Turan, [...] Among them is Amir Arghun Aqa, although he was not originally given much importance. They say that during Ögödei Qa'an's time, in a year of famine and want (Amir Arghun's) father sold him for a flank of beef [...] in Ögödei Qa'an's state he gradually rose to prominence until he attained the rank of governor and basqaq of the land of Iran."

<sup>384</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.241-242; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.197-198. Their escape was premeditated: Chinqai "perceived" the regent's plan and fled, while Yalavāch put Töregene's messengers sent to apprehend him "to sleep" and departed with a few horsemen.

<sup>385</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.242-244; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.197. Kōten's words, reported by Juvaynī, are quite telling of how administrators like him perceived Mongol protection as necessary. "The kite that takes refuge in a thicket from the talons of the falcon is safe from its fury. These too have sought refuge with us and touched the skirt of our authority."

incompetent co-religionaries.<sup>386</sup> To replace Maḥmūd Yalavāch, Töregene and Fāṭimah confirmed the Khwārazmian ‘Abd al-Raḥmān to administrative and fiscal control over northern China.<sup>387</sup> Allsen points out how the taxation system implemented by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was unsustainable and self-destructive as tax farmers, mainly merchants, bid up their revenue quota, exacting exorbitant sums from the population. People were then forced to borrow money from the merchants, who lent them the revenue they made from extracting those same taxes.<sup>388</sup>

While Juvaynī’s critique of Töregene and Fāṭimah undoubtedly reflects factionalism and misogyny, it also reveals a broader anxiety about the breakdown of previous administrative arrangements. It is unsurprising that administrators like Juvaynī saw the shift towards a more exploitative taxation in such a negative light, as it broke the mutually beneficial arrangement that existed between the central government and the secretariat in favour of another economic system, based on the personal power of the princes and that of their *ortāq* (merchant partners).<sup>389</sup>

Güyük’s enthronement in 1246 marked a symbolic reversal of his mother’s programme. Fāṭimah was executed on charges of sorcery; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was also put to death. Chinḡai was restored to his former position as head of the central secretariat, now wielding even greater authority than under Ögödei. Yalavāch returned to northern China; Mas‘ūd Beg resumed his post in Turkestan. As Kim has pointed out, these reappointments were not simply a return to Ögödei’s order. Güyük sought to strengthen the institutional coherence of his rule. He nullified *paizas* and *yarlighs* issued during the regency, issued a new *tamgha* (seal), reinstated his father’s decrees, and elevated his

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<sup>386</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.245; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.200-201. Broadbridge, *Women*, p.177. Broadbridge notes that among Fāṭimah’s favourites was Sharaf al-Dīn Khwārazmī, harshly criticised by Juvaynī in his work, which might be one of the reason of Juvaynī’s hostility towards the Persian woman. See below, p.132.

<sup>387</sup> Allsen “The rise of the Mongolian Empire.” p.380-381; Buell “Chinḡai.” p.179.

<sup>388</sup> Allsen, “Mongolian princes.” p.102. Allsen cites accounts of the ruinous tax system taken from the *Yuan Shih*.

<sup>389</sup> See Allsen, “Mongolian princes.” Allsen explains how these two systems can be considered concurrent but not entirely antagonistic. Töregene’s policies, as previously discussed, should rather be understood as an alternative strategy of imperial management. By privileging exchanges over taxation, favouring merchants, and distributing *qubi* and tax collection rights, she appeased rival constituencies at a moment when central control was fragile. This redistribution may have temporarily stabilised elite alignments, even if it antagonised the bureaucratic class.

restored officials by making them the only provincial administrators admitted to his presence.<sup>390</sup> Yet even these measures remained highly personalistic in nature and failed to constrain the pull for autonomy of appanage politics. As we have seen, Güyük's efforts to reassert imperial primacy brought him into direct conflict with Batu, a struggle that would outlive him.<sup>391</sup>

### ◆ Mongols and Tājiks (1248-1258)

In Persia, after the turbulence of Töregene's regency, the secretariat saw continuity under the long stewardship of Arghun Aqa. Although originally appointed by Töregene, Arghun Aqa not only survived Güyük's purges but expanded his jurisdiction, eventually presiding over civil administrations in Khurasan, western Iran, and the Caucasus. Rather than pointing to the consolidation of a stable bureaucratic order, his exceptionally long service under four successive regimes exemplifies how administrative authority remained personalistic in nature, and was reproduced through configurations of loyalty and patronage.<sup>392</sup> This configuration was certainly not a novelty in Persia, where patronage and clientelism had long defined the practice of governance. While little concrete information survives concerning the internal workings of the Khwārazmian bureaucracy, it was staffed by Persian officials and likely modelled on Seljuk administrative structures which were, in turn, shaped by earlier 'Abbāsīd models.<sup>393</sup> As Anne Lambton has noted, although the Seljuks were foreign to the Perso-Arab population of the 'Abbāsīd Empire, their swift adoption of Islam helped them absorb the institutions of the Muslim world.<sup>394</sup> Thus, despite the

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<sup>390</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.257-258; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.212-213; Kim, "A reappraisal." p.327.

<sup>391</sup> See above, p.62.

<sup>392</sup> Lane, "Arghun Aqa." p.461-462. For instance, Arghun Aqa could count on an extensive network of administrators who helped him impose and modify tax reforms. Dashdondog, B. "Darughachi in Armenia." in De Nicola, B. and Melville, C. eds. *The Mongols' Middle East. Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran* (Leiden-Boston, 2016): 216-236, p.222-224; Allsen, T.T. *Mongol imperialism: the policies of the Grand Qan Mongke in China, Russia, and the Islamic lands, 1251-9* (Berkeley, 1988), p.166-168; Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.113.

<sup>393</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.28-30.

<sup>394</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.223,224; Boyle, J.A. "Internal structure of the Saljuq empire," in Boyle, J.A. and Fisher, W.B. eds. *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol.5, (Cambridge, 1968): 203-282, p.218-219.

emergence of some distinctive features, core ‘Abbāsīd governmental institutions persisted under both Seljuk and Khwārazmian rule. For instance, just below the Sultan, the vizier, a traditional Persian office, held most of the executive power and controlled all the various branches of the administrative apparatus. The system of taxation and administration was handled by the *dīvān*, which was, in turn, divided into different sections. Under the ‘Abbāsīds and the Seljuks (and presumably under the Khwārazmshāh, too), the vizier and the *dīvān* had control over the diplomatic, economic and military branches of the administration. The *dīvān* was tasked with the organisation of taxation, the administration of crown lands, army wages and supplies, and also with the organisation of diplomatic missions. Finally, both under the Seljuks and the Khwārazmshāh, the provincial administration was often delegated to a governor, *shahna* or *malik*.<sup>395</sup> The distinction between a class of administrators and a military class (*‘umārā*) was not straightforward, as the function of the vizier and governors would often include leading troops on campaign.<sup>396</sup>

Under the ‘Abbāsīds, officials received fixed stipends, but after the Seljuk conquest, revenue from *iqṭā’* increasingly became the principal form of compensation. Office-holders could also appropriate funds recovered from corrupt subordinates, fostering a climate of unaccountable extraction.<sup>397</sup> Lambton argues that patrimonialism came to define the system: administrative roles became commodities to be exploited and transmitted through familial and clientelist ties.<sup>398</sup> The principal obstacle to reform lay in the absence of internal checks as, in these regimes, there was no effective mechanism to curb corruption within the administrative system. No vizier could rely on loyalty from colleagues or institutional support: survival required securing key posts for kin and clients, whose fortunes were temporarily bound to his own.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Boyle, “Saljuq empire.” p.223. For the office under the Khwārazmshāh see, for instance, Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.38, 134.

<sup>396</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.30.

<sup>397</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.32; Sevim, A. and Bosworth, C. “The Seljuqs and the Khwarazm Shahs.” *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: The age of achievement: AD 750 to the end of the fifteenth century*. UNESCO, 7 (1998): 151-181, p.165.

<sup>398</sup> On the role of the vizier and its evolution in Mongol Persia, see Lambton, “Personal Service.” p.187.

<sup>399</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.42; Boyle, “Saljuq empire.” p.260.

While it is necessary to acknowledge the persistence of titles such as vizier, *ṣāhib-dīvān*, and *shahna* in the Mongol era, as well as institutional forms inherited from Seljuk and ‘Abbāsīd practice, it would be erroneous to see Mongol rule in Persia exclusively as a continuation of Seljuk or Khwārazmian administrations, as it presented significant alterations inspired by Uyghur, Khitan and Chinese governmental practices.<sup>400</sup> The Persianate elites were not always particularly enthusiastic about Mongol early administrative practices and appointments in Persia, as testified by Juvaynī’s comments on the use of Uyghur language:

A knowledge of the Uyghur language and script is considered to be the height of knowledge and learning. Every bazaar merchant in the garb of iniquity has become an amir, every hireling a minister, every knave a vizier [...], every rogue a deputy of the dīvān, every fool a leading minister [...].<sup>401</sup>

Thus, the composite nature of Mongol administration, coupled with the confused nomenclature and inconsistent use of titles in the sources, makes reconstruction difficult and complicates the study of its workings. This dissertation proposes a shift in emphasis: rather than on titles, the analysis here centres on the continuity of individuals and the transmission of power through their connections.

In Persia, ministers appointed by the Mongols often hailed from families that had a longstanding service record under previous ruling dynasties. These individuals formed the backbone of the administration since the time of Chin Temūr. The career of Sharaf al-Dīn Khwārazmī, for instance, offers an important example in this regard. A former Khwārazmian official, he had joined Mongol service under Chin Temūr, who, according to Rashīd al-Dīn, appointed him vizier “on account of his long service and experience.”<sup>402</sup> After Chin Temūr’s death, Sharaf al-Dīn offered his services to Batu to safeguard the prince’s interests in the region.<sup>403</sup> Bahā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Juvaynī,

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<sup>400</sup> Aigle, D. “Iran under Mongol Domination: The Effectiveness and Failings of a Dual Administrative System.” *Bulletin d’études Orientales*, 57 (2006): 65-78, p.65-67 .

<sup>401</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.7-8; *JTJ/ Qazwīnī*, I, p.5. This passage is reported in Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.306.

<sup>402</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.532; *JTJ/ Qazwīnī*, II, p.268. Juvaynī narrates that Chin Temūr recruited Sharaf al-Dīn Khwārazmī because, when he asked the local population if someone was acquainted with administrative practices, Sharaf al-Dīn was put forward by the local governor.

<sup>403</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.534; *JTJ/ Qazwīnī*, II, p.270.

father of the historian ‘Aṭā Malik Juvaynī, also entered Mongol service thanks to Chin Temür’s patronage, as *ṣāhib dīvān*.<sup>404</sup> The Juvaynī family members had held positions during the Khwārazmian and Seljuks periods, and claimed descent from al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī‘, the vizier of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809).<sup>405</sup> Apart from ‘Aṭā Malik Juvaynī’s father, his grandfather and great-grandfather had also served as *ṣāhib dīvān*, while his brother would later rise to the same position during the early Ilkhanid period.<sup>406</sup> Similarly, various other ministers came from families with ties to earlier ruling houses. For instance, Majd al-Mulk Yazdī, who later became a "co-vizier" in 1279, descended from a family of viziers to the *atābaks* of Yazd.<sup>407</sup> We cannot possibly know the ethnicity or provenance of lower level officials like scribes or secretaries (*bitikchīs*). What transpires by Juvaynī’s and Rashīd al-Dīn’s accounts is a prevalence of Persian names, especially when lower-rank administrators are mentioned.<sup>408</sup>

These officials were part of the *dīvān*, but they were sometimes also affiliated to Mongol princes and generals. Rashīd al-Dīn explains how, a *bitikchī* was sent to Chin Temür’s *dīvān* on behalf of each prince and amir.<sup>409</sup> Appointing local officials was beneficial both for the *dīvān* and for aristocratic powerholders, and created a mutually beneficial arrangement that extended to the lower levels of the administrative hierarchy. Mongol princes and Uygur administrators like Kōrgüz equally lacked direct connections to the territories they oversaw. Their higher level aides (like the Juvaynīs) and their *bitikchīs*, drawn from local aristocracies or administrative families, managed day-to-day duties in regions where they had a vested interest in promoting prosperity.<sup>410</sup> Their appointments, however, did not originate directly from the *qa’an* but were issued by his chief

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<sup>404</sup> On Juvaynī’s father, Bahā’ al-Dīn, see Peacock, “Nizām al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī.” p.13-38.

<sup>405</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.3.

<sup>406</sup> See below, p.136.

<sup>407</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.541. This version is absent in Karīmī.

<sup>408</sup> Lane, “Arghun Aqa.” p.465; See, for instance, *RJT/Thackston*, p.453,493; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.656,707; *JTJ/Boyle*, p.512-514; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.248-251.

<sup>409</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.323; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.471.

<sup>410</sup> Lane, “Persian Notables.” p.182-183.

administrators, with confirmation from Karakorum reserved for only the most significant offices.<sup>411</sup> Such arrangements reinforced the personalised nature of administrative power and the reliance on patronage rather than formalised institutional procedures. They also reveal a deeper structural tension within Mongol governance: the dissonance between the horizontal dispersion of authority through the appanage system and the efforts of central administrators such as Chin Temür and Körgüz to consolidate the *dīvān*. These administrators deployed a form of vertical clientelism, cultivating dependent ties downward through appointments and favour, while simultaneously relying on upward access to the *qa'an* to legitimise their position.

Arghun Aqa's *dīvān*, much like those of his predecessors, was also composed primarily of Persian officials, chief among these the Juvaynī family.<sup>412</sup> Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad Juvaynī was confirmed as *ṣāhib-dīvān*, and acted as Arghun's deputy during the latter's absence at to attend *quriltai* that elected Güyük in 1246.<sup>413</sup> When Arghun had to return to Mongolia after Möngke's election in 1251, Bahā' al-Dīn accompanied him. During this journey, he was officially confirmed as *ṣāhib-dīvān* by the *qa'an* and tasked, along with the Mongol official Naimatai, with assuming fiscal and administrative control of 'Iraq-e Ajam and Yazd. He died, however, on the way back to Persia.<sup>414</sup>

Both Rashīd al-Dīn and Juvaynī provide evidence of the wider circle of Persian officials who staffed Arghun Aqa's *dīvān*. Juvaynī refers to Fakhr al-Dīn Bihishtī as Arghun's secretary and names Nizām al-Dīn Shā Malik, 'Izz-ad-Din Tahir, and Sadr al-Dīn as close collaborators.<sup>415</sup> He also records that Nāṣir al-Dīn 'Alī and Sirāj al-Dīn Shujā'ī were appointed to Arghun Aqa's administration to safeguard the interests of Sorqaqtani, while Najm al-Dīn 'Alī succeeded Sharaf al-Dīn as *ulugh-*

<sup>411</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.518-519; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.255-256. Juvaynī describes how the positions of his father and his close companions were confirmed by *paizas* by the *qa'an*, but mentions that Arghun Aqa had complete autonomy over other appointments. *JTJ/Boyle*, p.597-598; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, III, p.74-75.

<sup>412</sup> Arghun Aqa, therefore, acted as patron of the Juvaynīs and possibly had a strong personal relationship with the historian. Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.111-112; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.82. *JTJ/Boyle*, p.517-518; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.255.

<sup>413</sup> On Juvaynī's associates in the *dīvān* see Peacock, "Nizām al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī." p.25.

<sup>414</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.520; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.256-257.

<sup>415</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.507,519; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.244, 256.

*bitikchī* on behalf of Batu's *qoshūn* (army, in this case probably intended as *ordu*).<sup>416</sup> While the overstaffing of the *dīvān* certainly caused problems and inefficiency, as pointed out by Allsen and Lane, Arghun Aqa's Persianate entourage guaranteed administrative continuity.<sup>417</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Arghun Aqa collaborated with local dynasties such as the Salghūrīds of Fars, the Kartīds of Herat, and the rulers of Yazd and Luristan.<sup>418</sup> These elites retained partial control over their territories and Arghun Aqa relied on their local administrations to ensure continuity in revenue extraction.<sup>419</sup> In short, as mechanisms of control and taxation expanded, the functioning of the administration increasingly depended on Arghun Aqa's ability to mobilise bureaucratic elites, whose local and institutional knowledge made progressively indispensable.<sup>420</sup> It is emblematic that already during the period of his predecessor Kōrgūz, when the latter was accused of misconduct, he was spared not only through the intercession of Arghun Aqa, but also because the functioning of imperial taxation in the region depended on his continued presence.<sup>421</sup> Similarly, Arghun Aqa's ability to maintain his position after Gūyūk's death and through Mōngke's reign, despite the accusations moved against him, testifies to the resilience of his bureaucratic coalition.<sup>422</sup> His administrative reforms in Khurasan, particularly his revocation of previously granted concessions often at the expense of princely tax entitlements, reflected this increasingly assertive role. Juvaynī claims that:

After the death of the *qa'an*, (Gūyūk) the princes had each of them taken possession of a region or district, made assignments on the taxes by means of drafts and transfers and issued

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<sup>416</sup> JTJ/Boyle, p.507, 512-514; JTJ/Qazwīnī, II, p.244, 248, 250-251; De Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran*, p.137.

<sup>417</sup> Allsen, *Mongol imperialism*, p.112-113; Lane, "Arghun Aqa." p.466.

<sup>418</sup> See above, p.103-104.

<sup>419</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.100. Lambton for instance, remarks that there is no proof that the general census of the empire was also held in Fars and Kirman Lambton, "Mongol fiscal administration." Part I, p.90; Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.85-86 for Arghun Aqa's relationship with the rulers of Kirman; 120-123, for the case of tax collection in Fars.

<sup>420</sup> Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.96-97; Morgan, "Who Ran the Mongol Empire?" p.130.

<sup>421</sup> JTJ/Boyle, p.538; JTJ/Qazwīnī, II, p.274.

<sup>422</sup> JTJ/Boyle, p.507; JTJ/Qazwīnī, II, p.244. "In the year 1243, the Emir Arghun arrived in Khurasan, where he read the *yarlighs* and reduced the affairs of the country to order. He protected the revenue and caused these people to withdraw their hands therefrom: he recovered from the grasp of their control all the inhabitants, noble and base, both such as had resorted to the protection of these men, and such as had fled from their tyranny and oppression. He put the affairs of that region to rights, and in response to his fair and handsome treatment both small and great were minded to follow and attend on him."

*yarlighs* and *paizas*, which was contrary to the ordinances and *Yasas*. Accordingly, the Emir Arghun commanded the collection of every *paiza* and *yarligh* issued by the princes.<sup>423</sup>

However, the administrative authority enjoyed by Arghun Aqa was not unchallenged. Fiscal power remained contested, especially in relation to princely domains.<sup>424</sup> A revealing episode concerns his feud with Sharaf al-Dīn Khwārazmī, Batu's *ulugh-bitikchī*. According to Juvaynī, who devotes an entire chapter of his work to denouncing Sharaf al-Dīn's poor instruction, extortionate practices, and involvement in the downfall of his former protégé Körgüz, Arghun Aqa initially played a role in confirming the Khwārazmian bureaucrat in office following Körgüz's death.<sup>425</sup> However, relations between the two soon deteriorated. According to Lane, Juvaynī's account may be read, at least in part, as an oblique criticism of Arghun Aqa, who appears to have been complicit in at least some of the early fiscal abuses perpetrated by Sharaf al-Dīn.<sup>426</sup> Yet, Juvaynī also emphasises that Sharaf al-Dīn could act with such impunity only because he enjoyed the protection of Batu:

When Sharaf al-Dīn arrived in Tabriz from the ordu of Batu he made great exactions on the people there and elsewhere because of arrears in taxes. The Emir Arghun opposed this although Sharaf-ad-Dīn persisted.<sup>427</sup>

Unlike Körgüz, who had previously curtailed Sharaf al-Dīn's authority, Arghun Aqa found his authority undermined as Sharaf al-Dīn, protected by Batu, acted with increasing autonomy.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.508; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.245.

”چون بعد از حالت قان پادشاه زادگان هر کس در نواحی و والیات تصرف کرده بودند و اموال بیروان و حوالات اطلاق و پیرالیغها و پایزها داده و آن خلاف احکام و یاساهای ایشانست بدین سبب. امیر ارغون هر پیژه و یرلیغ که بود از قان پادشاه زادگان بهر کس داده بودند بفرمود تاجمع کردند.”

<sup>424</sup> De Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran*, p.137. Batu had an official to oversee his interests at the Khurasani *dīvān* the *bitikchīs* Nizam al-Dīn and Sharaf al-Dīn, as did Sorqaqtani with Siraj al-Dīn. Specifically, in *JTJ/Boyle*, p.513; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.250; Lane, “Arghun Aqa.” p.465.

<sup>425</sup> Juvaynī and Rāshid al-Dīn both suggest that Sharaf al-Dīn played an important role in the death of Körgüz at *RJT/Thackston*, p.391; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.565-566; *JTJ/Boyle*, p.535-536; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.271-272. Arghun had been initially appointed to supervise Körgüz's work in Iran, so he was aware of the accusations of Sharaf al-Dīn. Yet, according to Juvaynī, he decided to support him. *JTJ/Boyle*, p.538-539; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.274.

<sup>426</sup> Lane, “Arghun Aqa.” p.462.

<sup>427</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.508; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.246.

”و چون شرف الدین از اردوی باتو بقام تبریز رسید بعأت بقایا مال بسیار بر اهل تبریز و غیر آن حکم کرد و امیر ارغون بدان رضا نیداد و او مبالغت می نمود و هوی و ولای امیر ارغون در قابو زیادت راسخ می شد.”

<sup>428</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.539; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.276.

Juvaynī suggests that Arghun Aqa was unable to check these abuses, though he later repealed a number of Sharaf al-Dīn’s fiscal measures after the latter’s death.<sup>429</sup> In 1251-1252, Arghun Aqa was recalled to Karakorum to justify the chaotic fiscal situation in Persia before the newly enthroned *qa’an* Möngke. He travelled with a large entourage, including Bahā’ al-Dīn Juvaynī and his son ‘Aṭā Malik, and braved severe winter conditions to reach the Mongol court in May 1252.<sup>430</sup> In audience with Möngke, Arghun defended his record by attributing administrative disorder to a proliferation of conflicting and unlawful orders issued by princes and their agents, which had obstructed consistent tax collection.<sup>431</sup> Möngke accepted Arghun’s explanation and, citing his past service, reaffirmed his authority. Arghun was granted a *yarliḡh* and a tiger-headed *paiza*, confirming his position as head of the secretariat in Persia, and was instructed, if we believe Juvaynī, to implement reforms aimed at relieving the fiscal burden on the population.<sup>432</sup> Through Arghun’s intercession, *paizas* and *yarliḡhs* were also granted to members of his entourage. Among those confirmed in office were Bahā’ al-Dīn and ‘Aṭā Malik Juvaynī; Nāṣir al-Dīn ‘Alī, who was entrusted with Nishapur, Tus, Isfahan, Qum, and Kashan; Sadr al-Dīn, reconfirmed as governor of Arran and Azerbaijan; and Shams al-Dīn Kart, who received the governorship of Herat, Sistan, and Balkh. Sirāj al-Dīn Shujā’ī also received a *paiza* and was later appointed as *bitikchī* under Ariq Böke.<sup>433</sup> Finally, Möngke appointed Mongol *nököt* (companions or attendants) to represent the interests of each of his brothers Qubilai, Hülegü, Ariq Böke and Möge at Arghun Aqa’s *dīvān*. This act signalled his desire to ensure that Arghun acknowledged the dynastic interests of the Toluid lineage as, by that time, tension between military and secretarial governance had become particularly acute in Persia, where administrative consolidation coincided with the changes accompanying Möngke’s election.<sup>434</sup>

<sup>429</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.544; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.280.

<sup>430</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.514-515; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.251-252.

<sup>431</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.516; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.253. Juvaynī criticizes especially the demands of Eljigidei specifying how the administration could not keep up with the generals’ hunger for resources. Lane, “Arghun Aqa.” p.463.

<sup>432</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.604-605; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, III, p.86.

<sup>433</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.519; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.256.

<sup>434</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.517-519; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.255-256.

Throughout his account, Juvaynī's praise for Körgüz and Arghun Aqa must be read with caution. Both figures had served as patrons to his family, and his characterisations are far from impartial. Nevertheless, the details he provides allow a partial reconstruction of how brokerage functioned at the frontier between the imperial centre and regional governance. In Arghun Aqa's case, the resilience of his position across the reigns of Töregene, Güyük, and Möngke derived from its dual anchoring: within the politics of the court, and within networks of Persian officeholding elites. It was within this context that the alliance between the Persian secretariat and the Toluid camp took shape. In 1256, Arghun Aqa and the Juvaynī family formally declared their support for Hülegü's campaign in the west, with Arghun placing his protégé 'Aṭā Malik Juvaynī in the prince's service.<sup>435</sup> This gesture of loyalty was grounded in mutual interest, and Arghun aqa was generously compensated for his cooperation. The strength of his position extended to his subordinates, offering them protection through his authority. When Hülegü was petitioned to punish some of Arghun's ministers, he reportedly declined to intervene, stating that the matter was a concern of Amir Arghun and "must be dealt with as he sees fit."<sup>436</sup> The convergence between Möngke's regime and the Persian secretariat under Arghun Aqa was a matter of calculated interest on the part of administrators seeking to preserve and extend their influence. The institutional volatility of the 1240s had threatened the continuity of office and the viability of inherited administrative positions. Aligning with the Toluids offered formal recognition and enabled administrators to consolidate control over provincial taxation and secure career advancement and personal enrichment.

To the Toluids, their ministers' expertise offered instruments of fiscal extraction insulated from princely interference. Möngke's reforms targeted precisely this issue: consolidating the *qa'an*'s power over the dispersed wealth and autonomy of the princes. These reforms included a new empire-wide census, the systematisation of the traditional Mongol *qubchūr* tax into a poll tax scaled to wealth, the systematisation of the *qalan* (a production or corvée tax), as well as a new coinage to

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<sup>435</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.108; Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.464; *JTJ/Boyle*, p.522; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.259.

<sup>436</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.522; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.259.

regularise revenue.<sup>437</sup> Merchants were stripped of their privileges: *paizas* were rescinded, the use of the *yam* (postal system) which Juvaynī notes was “inequitable in the extreme,” was restricted, so that imperial resources could be exclusively reserved for officials.<sup>438</sup>

The Mongol aristocracy did not like the new tax system. Princes and appanage holders were prohibited from summoning their subjects to collect dues and from performing any collection of taxes without the permission of imperial officials.<sup>439</sup> They were also barred from entering the towns under their control, and their wealth was taxed through the *qubchūr* and *qalan*, which imperial agents often claimed with the use of force.<sup>440</sup> Wealth flowing to the nobility was now strictly monitored by the secretarial administration. While Juvaynī frames these policies as signs of Möngke’s clemency and administrative clarity, Jackson cautions against accepting such accounts at face value: “Those who praise reform programmes may well have an interest in exaggerating the sorry state of affairs that preceded them and their eulogies are a better indication of what was wrong than of what was in fact remedied.”<sup>441</sup> In Juvaynī’s case, the reforms are presented through a Toluid-aligned lens, shaped by a preference for bureaucratic, centralised models of governance. Yet even if the efficacy of these reforms was limited, their ideological thrust was clear. Möngke, like Hülegü after him, relied increasingly on Persian secretarial networks to reinforce Toluid rule. Arghun Aqa played a central role in implementing these changes in the west. By the time of Hülegü’s arrival, the regional Persian administration was ready to support Toluid goals.

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<sup>437</sup> Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.260; also noted in Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.78. On the *qubchūr* and *qalan*, see Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.202; Lambton, “Mongol Fiscal Administration,” Part I, p.84, 87, 92. Lambton explains that these levies were imposed in addition to pre-existing taxes. She identifies *qubchūr* as a traditional Mongol cattle tax, which after the establishment of the Ilkhanate was transformed into a poll tax. At p.93-94, she further clarifies that *qalan* could denote either labour or corvée service, or a monetary payment in lieu of such obligations. Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.87-89. Morgan also discusses the nature of Mongol taxes, largely agreeing with Lambton, but equating the *qalan* to an extraordinary exaction.

<sup>438</sup> JTJ/Boyle, p.606; JTJ/Qazwīnī, III, p.88.

<sup>439</sup> JTJ/Boyle, p.598-601; JTJ/Qazwīnī, III, p.75-82; Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.119.

<sup>440</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.78; Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism*, p.148.

<sup>441</sup> Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.119-120.

## ◆ The rise and fall of the Juvaynīs

Although Juvaynī offers no extended narrative of the personal relationship between Arghun Aqa and Hülegü, his account makes clear that Arghun played a foundational role in the administrative consolidation of the Ilkhanate. The amir implemented major fiscal reforms in support of Hülegü's campaigns, simplifying tax collection and expanding the reach of the *dīvān*.<sup>442</sup>

Although Arghun Aqa remained one of the most powerful figures in the Ilkhanate, after 1258 it was the Juvaynī family who assumed responsibility for Ilkhanid fiscal administration. Following Hülegü's conquest of Baghdad the same year, 'Aṭā Malik Juvaynī was appointed to oversee the governance of the city, and operated alongside Su'unchaq *noyan*, whom Hülegü had designated as the governor of Arab Iraq, Khuzestan, and Fars.<sup>443</sup> Concurrently, his brother Shams al-Dīn Juvaynī had been promoted to the role of *sāhib dīvān* under Hülegü's auspices in 1262.<sup>444</sup> Both 'Aṭā Malik and Shams al-Dīn actively cooperated with Mongol governors, with their rapport with Su'unchaq Aqa being particularly fruitful, as the powerful position held by the *noyan* provided them with protection at the *ordu*.<sup>445</sup> Using his position as *sāhib dīvān*, Shams al-Dīn extended significant responsibilities to his sons within the Ilkhanid domains. The eldest son, Bahā' al-Dīn, was appointed as the governor of 'Iraq-e Ajam, establishing his governorship in Isfahan. Another son named Hārun, notable for his intellectual pursuits, was entrusted with a role in the administration of Anatolia after 1277.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Hülegü had to purge the administration of disloyal individuals to consolidate his authority in these areas. This led to the expulsion of numerous Jočid agents from the *dīvān* and even the execution of some alleged sympathisers. See above, p.68-69. Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.201. "The order was given (by Hülegü) for the re-assessment of the *qubchūr* at 500 dinars for the wealthy descending proportionately to one dinar for the poor, in order that expenses might be met." This passage is cited in Lane, "Arghun Aqa." p.475.

<sup>443</sup> See above, p.71.

<sup>444</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.513; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.735.

<sup>445</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.518; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.743.

<sup>446</sup> Ravalde, E. "Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī, Vizier and Patron." in De Nicola B. and Melville C. eds. *The Mongols' Middle East. Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran*, (Leiden-Boston, 2016): 55-78, p.61; Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.292. Jackson specified that Hārun would later become governor of Baghdad.

Shams al-Dīn operated within what Denise Aigle has described as a “dual administrative system,” in which Hülegü placed each province under the joint oversight of a Mongol *basqaq* and a Persian *nā'ib*, typically supported by one or more *bitikchīs*. These local administrations were subordinated to the central *dīvān*, where the *ṣāhib-dīvān* resided and exercised overarching fiscal authority.<sup>447</sup> The *ulugh-bitikchīs* attached to Mongol governors in various Ilkhanid provinces were frequently drawn from Persian bureaucratic families. It remains unclear whether they were subordinated to the *ṣāhib-dīvān*, to a parallel office such as the vizierate, or whether these offices were institutionally distinct at all.<sup>448</sup> The office of *ṣāhib-dīvān* was, in fact, often rivalled or complemented by viziers or influential *inaqs* (the ilkhan's companions), further blurring our understanding of Ilkhanid institutions.<sup>449</sup> It also became common practice to place each Persian official under the nominal supervision of a Mongol *noyan*, an arrangement that, whether conceived as a mechanism of mutual oversight or as a means of curbing the authority of Persianate administrators, functioned unevenly in practice.<sup>450</sup>

Yet describing this system as “dual” may be misleading. The presence of figures such as Arghun Aqa at the heart of Ilkhanid fiscal governance, alongside Mongol amirs like Buqa and Anjanu, suggests a more amalgamated configuration.<sup>451</sup> According to Morgan, Mongol aristocrats were not external to the bureaucratic order and administrative authority was not cleanly divided along ethnic lines. As Jackson notes, conflicts over revenue and jurisdiction in the Ilkhanate arose as

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<sup>447</sup> Aigle, “Mongol Domination.” p.73; Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.50, 52-54.

<sup>448</sup> Ravalde, “Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī.” p.57; Lambton, “Personal Service.” p.186-187. Lambton notes the interchangeable use in the sources of the titles of *vizier* and *ṣāhib-dīvān*, emphasising that Persian officials were generally supervised by Mongol amirs and that their responsibilities were confined exclusively to financial administration.

<sup>449</sup> Aigle, “Mongol Domination.” p.72-73.

<sup>450</sup> Morgan, “Who Ran the Mongol Empire?” p.130-131, 133. Morgan, perhaps somewhat simplistically, attributes the structure of the administration to a deliberate curtailment of the authority of Persian ministers. A few pages later, he notes that there is an impression the Persian administration continued to function throughout, while also cautioning against overreliance on the limited and problematic nature of the surviving sources.

<sup>451</sup> See above, p.71,97.

much among Mongol *noyat* as between them and the Persianate bureaucracy.<sup>452</sup> We can thus argue that this system was an heterogeneous administrative formation shaped by the same patronage mechanisms that had characterised earlier phases of Mongol administration. In fact, as Aigle emphasises, “tent politics,” or the networks of power that radiated from the mobile court, remained central in this period.<sup>453</sup> With the severance of administrative ties to Karakorum, Ilkhanid governance required a reconfiguration of authority within Persia. This did not amount to a full transfer of power to Persianate elites: simply, administrators were no longer accountable to secretarial officials in Karakorum, but to local Mongol overlords. Patterns of patronage now were replicated on a smaller scale, as Persian administrators relied on powerful patrons at the *ordu*, and lower-ranking *bitikchīs* on the benevolence of their *Tājīk* superiors. The pyramidal nature of Ilkhanid bureaucracy, combined with limited access to the ilkhan, meant that advancement was determined by relational proximity. Patronage became essential and, from the lowest provincial scribe to the *ṣāhib-dīvān*, success hinged on securing a patron. Lambton’s distinction between Turco-Mongol elites and Persian administrators remains, in this case, useful: the former held the monopoly on coercion, the latter on administrative expertise.<sup>454</sup> Yet, crucially, Persian officials had become increasingly difficult to bypass, and the Juvaynī family was the symbol of this change.<sup>455</sup> They remained subordinate to Mongol rule, but their practical power increased as their role within the administration expanded.

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<sup>452</sup> Ravalde, “Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī.” p.58; Morgan, “Who Ran the Mongol Empire?” p.133-134. Morgan observes that in the wider Mongol Empire, Mongol participation in administration was more pronounced, with Mongol practices coexisting alongside Khitan and Chinese traditions. In Persia, by contrast, particularly in the Ilkhanid period, there was a higher degree of assimilation. Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.271. At p.294, Jackson notes how the Persianate bureaucrats and the Mongols alike lacked *esprit de corps*.

<sup>453</sup> Aigle, “Mongol Domination.” p.74.

<sup>454</sup> Lambton, “Mongol fiscal administration.” Part I, p.96.

<sup>455</sup> Aigle, “Mongol Domination.” p.78. Although offering a harsh assessment of Persian dependence on the Mongols and of the extortionate and corrupt practices associated with it, Aigle concedes that “in any case, the dual administrative system instituted by Möngke before the establishment of the Persian Ilkhanate, which allowed a vast territory to be controlled without any major difficulties, functioned poorly in Iran due to the number of different local authorities and the conflicting interests of the Persian officials,” thus recognising their influence in the system.

While Lane devotes an entire chapter of his study to the trajectory of the Juvaynīs' administration, and his generally apologetic tone has undoubtedly contributed to some of the ideas presented in the following pages, this is not the perspective adopted in this work.<sup>456</sup> The aim here is not to uphold the Juvaynīs as exemplars of bureaucratic virtue, nor to frame their role in terms of cultural continuity or contrast with Mongol rule, but rather to analyse how they functioned as intermediaries within a wider system of negotiated authority. Much like Arghun Aqa, the Juvaynīs exercised remarkable reach in their connections to the territories they administered. For instance, they fostered close ties with local dynasties under the suzerainty of the Ilkhanate. These included the Kartid rulers of Herat, the Qara Khanids of Kirman, the Salghūrīds of Fars, the Hazaraspids of Luristan, and even the Christian aristocracy of Greater Armenia.<sup>457</sup> As *sāhib dīvān*, Shams al-Dīn held the responsibility of appointing Ilkhanid officials to oversee tax collection in the territories of Ilkhanid subjects.<sup>458</sup>

Concerning their tenure, some specific details about the administration of the Juvaynī brothers survive in the sources, which generally praise them for promoting prosperity in the territories under their control. For instance, citing al-Dhahabī, Lane reports that 'Aṭā Malik Juvaynī was credited with easing the fiscal burden on the peasantry, improving rural conditions, and significantly increasing the revenues of Iraq. This prosperity was made possible in part by a major canal project running from the Euphrates near al-Anbar to the shrine of 'Alī in Najaf.<sup>459</sup> Mustawfī similarly credits the Juvaynīs with infrastructure projects, including the construction of bridges and dams.<sup>460</sup> Shams al-Dīn was also renowned for his philanthropic endeavours, which allegedly earned him admiration from both

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<sup>456</sup> See Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.177-212.

<sup>457</sup> For the connections with Armenian nobility, see below, p.219.

<sup>458</sup> Aubin, *Émirs mongols*, p.23; Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.135-137; Aigle, "Mongol Domination." p.74.

<sup>459</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.195-196.

<sup>460</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.197; *Mustawfī/Le Strange*, p.213,216. "But when the river (Gāvmasāb) reaches the neighbourhood of Avah and Savah it forms a Lake behind the dam which the late Khwaja Shams-ad-Dīn Muhammad, *sāhib dīvān* caused to be built, to hold back its waters."

"The Bridge of Miyaniḡ which has 32 arches crosses this stream : and it was built by the Khwaja Shams-ad- Dīn Muhammad, *sāhib dīvān*."

the elite and the general populace.<sup>461</sup> In Yazd, for instance, he directed his local representative, a powerful merchant, to establish a hospital in his name.<sup>462</sup> As described by Lane, the undertaking encompassed “elaborately adorned and tiled structures, including a madrassah, a facility for the mentally ill, a hospital, a pharmacy, facilities for water and ice storage, mosques, and a *khanqah*.”<sup>463</sup>

While these undertakings were often portrayed as philanthropic or civic-minded, they are better understood as instruments to extend the Juvaynīs’ administrative reach. Such projects served to consolidate their authority, facilitate the extraction of surplus, thereby reinforcing their standing within the administration and generating opportunities for personal enrichment. In the course of his tenure, Shams al-Dīn amassed substantial wealth (which Lane establishes as providing around 10,000 dinars of revenue per day), primarily in the form of land holdings, but also through commercial ventures in prominent trade hubs such as Hormuz and Kish.<sup>464</sup> The commercial network overseen by the *sāhib dīvān* was centred on southern Iraq and the Persian Gulf, with strategically positioned *ortāqs* operating along the trade routes with India and China.<sup>465</sup> By enlisting local merchants and collaborating with regional rulers, Shams al-Dīn established a dual advantage: while securing a reliable flow of revenues, he was also able to cultivate a pool of financial backers and loyal administrators, as these *ortāqs* could gradually assume roles within the *dīvān*.<sup>466</sup>

The most notable example of such practices is the case of Jamāl al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Ṭībī, a protégé of Shams al-Dīn and ruler of the island of Kish. Jamāl al-Dīn’s introduction to the *sāhib dīvān* was facilitated by one of Juvaynī’s *ortāqs*, Shams al-Dīn Tāzīku. Impressed by the quality of Jamāl al-Dīn’s pearls, Juvaynī established an enduring *ortāq* partnership with him. Jamāl al-Dīn’s extensive

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<sup>461</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.200-201.

<sup>462</sup> Ravalde, “Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī.” p.61-62.

<sup>463</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.137,196; Ravalde, “Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī.” p.63. points out that Shams al-Dīn took an active, if taking the initiative, overseeing plans, and converting private wealth into *waqf*.

<sup>464</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.542-44; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.775-77; Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.196.

<sup>465</sup> Yokkaichi, Y. “The Maritime and Continental Networks of Kish Merchants under Mongol Rule: The Role of the Indian Ocean, Fārs and Iraq.” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 62,2-3 (2019): 428-463, p.432.

<sup>466</sup> Gill, M. “Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ṭībī, The Iraqi Trader Who Traversed Asia,” in Biran, M. Brack, J. and Fiaschetti, F. eds. *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals* (Oakland, 2022): 175-193, p.179-180.

networks stretched as far as China, and the merchant managed a fleet of one hundred ships on trade routes linking Persia, India and the Yuan territories. According to Waṣṣāf, this trade network not only bolstered the prosperity of the Gulf region but also extended its economic benefits to other countries, including Iraq, Khurasan, Rûm, Syria, and even regions as distant as Europe.<sup>467</sup> Additionally, Jamāl al-Dīn's brother, Taqī' al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, then based in southern India, became the vizier of the king of Ma'bar in 1293. In this position, he worked to promote Jamāl al-Dīn's interests, regularly dispatching substantial quantities of goods to Kish, from which Jamāl al-Dīn's agents would make their selections. The brothers achieved significant profits by providing the king of Ma'bar with high-quality horses. This commodity was notably scarce in the Indian subcontinent and constituted one of the main exports from Kish and the Ilkhanate.<sup>468</sup>

In due course, the *sāhib dīvān* also sought Jamāl al-Dīn's services as an administrator, issuing for him a draft against Shiraz's annual income. This significant transaction was documented by Rashīd al-Dīn, who informs us that *ortāqs* and merchants ruled over Shiraz.<sup>469</sup> Following his master's death, Jamāl al-Dīn kept his role as a key merchant and administrator, securing the title of Malik al-Islam from Gaykhātū, who assigned him to collect revenues in Fars, Arab Iraq, and Khuzestan. A few years later, Ghazan again dispatched him to Shiraz and appointed him as governor to control the financial administration of Fars and Arab Iraq.<sup>470</sup>

Indeed, wealth and administrative prowess were not the sole attributes that elevated the Juvaynī brothers to such a prominent position in a cutthroat administrative milieu. Serving under Arghun Aqa, both 'Alā al-Dīn and Shams al-Dīn bore witness to the severity of Mongol governance. The ever-present spectre of purges likely played a significant role in shaping their strategies for

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<sup>467</sup> Yihao, Q. "Background and Aftermath of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭībī's Voyage: A Re-examination of the Interaction between the Ilkhanate and the Yuan at the Beginning of the Fourteenth Century," in Atwood, C. Dashdondog B. and May, T. eds. *New Approaches to Ilkhanid History*, (Leiden, 2020): 147-175, p.150-154; Gill, "Jamāl al-Dīn." p.180-182.

<sup>468</sup> Yokkaichi, "The Maritime and Continental Networks." p.453-54.

<sup>469</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.459; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.665.

<sup>470</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.335-336; Yokkaichi, "The Maritime and Continental Networks." p.448.

survival within the administration. The Juvaynīs cultivated a networks of clients, informants and patrons which, if the need arose, could be deployed against their adversaries to protect the family's fortunes against potential opponents at the *ordu*. Some of their early successes are certainly attributable to a degree of ruthlessness and political manoeuvring. According to Lane, 'Aṭā Malik himself resorted to using assassins on at least one occasion.<sup>471</sup> During Hülegü's reign, the same 'Alā' al-Dīn was jointly accused of embezzlement by his colleague 'Imād al-Dīn Qazwīnī and 'Alī Bahādūr Noyan. The two accusers lodged their complaint with the ilkhān, resulting in 'Aṭā Malik's arrest and a sentence of death. However, he was eventually pardoned at the behest of his brother. In the subsequent year, as a testimony to the *ṣāhib dīvān*'s ability to navigate intrigues involving both fellow administrators and the Mongol *noyat*, Shams al-Dīn orchestrated the execution of both accusers by using the same accusations they had made against his brother.<sup>472</sup>

Shams al-Dīn's connections and persuasive abilities could also be deployed to neutralise potential problems for the Ilkhanate. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, in 1276 Abaqa intended to execute Shams al-Dīn Kurt for his complicity in Baraq's invasion of Khurasan. Shams al-Dīn Juvaynī and his son Bahā' al-Dīn, drawing on their personal relationship with the ruler, allegedly deceived Kurt into travelling to Tabriz, where Abaqa apprehended him. In Rashīd al-Dīn's account, this stratagem formed part of the *ṣāhib dīvān*'s attempt to avert a renewed campaign in Khurasan and to spare Kurt's life despite his earlier betrayal. Shams al-Dīn is said to have persuaded Abaqa to allow him to bring Kurt to court voluntarily rather than dispatch an army. He then instructed Bahā' al-Dīn to prepare a lavish array of gifts to present to the ilkhān. However, the scheme failed, and Kurt poisoned himself while awaiting execution.<sup>473</sup> Whether these interventions were aimed at easing the hardship of populations affected by the continuous passage of Mongol armies remains uncertain. Still, Shams al-

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<sup>471</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.201-203; *JT/Qazwīnī*, preface, p.36-58. Lane notes how Juvaynī was saved from Hülegü's punishment by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī.

<sup>472</sup> Imād al-Dīn Qazwīnī's execution is referenced in *RJT/Thackston*, p.541; Aubin, *Émirs mongols*, p.21-22.

<sup>473</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.101; *RJT/Thackston*, p.539-540; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.771-772.

Dīn's value to the ilkhans lay in his ability to convert his authority into local compliance, brokering Ilkhanid rule throughout the realm.

This capacity was again tested in 1277, when Abaqa faced the treachery of Mu'īn al-Dīn Sulaymān Parvānah, vizier to the Seljuk sultan Kaykhusraw III, a vassal to the Ilkhanate. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Parvānah had invited Baybars to lead a Mamluk invasion of Anatolia, which culminated in the Mongol defeat at Abulustān.<sup>474</sup> Abaqa's response to the vizier's betrayal was severe. Shams al-Dīn sought to temper his retribution against the local population for their perceived support of the Mamluks, ransoming several Anatolian cities to save them from total destruction.<sup>475</sup> In late 1277, the *sāhib dīvān* assumed an even greater role in the region, as he was sent by Abaqa with an army to pacify the peasantry, quell resistance, and reestablish a functioning administration. Acting as both mediator and enforcer, he repopulated ruined towns, re-established order, and introduced the *tamgha* tax, which Rashīd al-Dīn notes "was not customary" before.<sup>476</sup>

In sum, while Hülegü and Abaqa were focused on extracting wealth from the territories they ruled, the Juvaynīs worked to "protect" these revenues and, if we believe the sources, to employ them for the benefit of the population, mainly through charitable acts (*waqf*) and public works. The exact balance between the Juvaynī brothers' concern for the welfare of their subjects and their pursuit of revenue generation remains ambiguous and is ultimately a matter of interpretation. However, both Rashīd al-Dīn and Waṣṣāf portrayed the two brothers in an exceptionally positive light, crediting them with fostering prosperity in the realm. The famous poet Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī described the *sāhib dīvān* as follows:

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<sup>474</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.277. The Battle of Abulustān took place in April 1277. For the details related to this event see, Hope, M. "Rumors, Sedition and Personal Relationships: The Parvānah's Conspiracy and Mongol Rule in Seljuk Anatolia (ad 1255-1277)." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 82, 2 (2023): 287-302.

<sup>475</sup> Ravalde stresses how Juvaynī's actions in Anatolia reveal that his patronage was not purely personal charity, but functioned to gain the loyalty of the community. Ravalde, "Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī." p.62.

<sup>476</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.538; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.770. The *tamgha* was a tax on trade, see Lambton, "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part I, p.84-87.

Lord and Master of time and place, leader of Islam, great s̄ahib, glory of the Arabs, great regulator of the Persians, Asaf of the Age, ruler of the world.<sup>477</sup>

Undoubtedly, propaganda proved to be a potent instrument wielded by the Juvaynīs. Their significant investment in the literary arts secured their enduring legacy amidst the tumultuous backdrop of history. Their reputation flourished thanks to their generous support of artists and poets, who lauded them in continuous praise. It has to be noted, however, that even a partisan historian such as Mustawfī, despite his family's longstanding rivalry with the Juvaynīs, refrains from criticising their administration, praising their good rule.<sup>478</sup> This cultural and literary investment also served a political function. Much as the *qa'ans* in China, Ilkhanid rulers required some degree of endorsement of their sedentary subjects to consolidate their authority in Persia. Lambton records that on Hülegü's conquest of Baghdad, he sought a *fatwā* asking whether the rule of a just infidel was preferable to that of an unjust Muslim, receiving an affirmative response from the '*ulamā*'.<sup>479</sup> The Juvaynīs similarly helped supply a degree of ideological support by deliberately framing Ilkhanid authority within terms intelligible to Persianate Muslim elites, to present their own collaboration as both legitimate and beneficial. This was no small task. As Ravalde observes, the Mongols, unlike the Seljuks, did not secure power through the Caliph's sanction.<sup>480</sup> The destruction of the 'Abbāsīd line removed a traditional source of recognition, leaving the ilkhans, most of whom were not even Muslim, without the symbolic endorsement the Caliphate could bestow.<sup>481</sup> Although they granted Islam parity with other religions, following Činggisid decrees, neither their descent nor the

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<sup>477</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.201. Lane specifies that Asaf was the vizier of king Solomon.

<sup>478</sup> Ḥamd- Allāh Mustawfī, being a partisan of his Qazwīnī kinsfolk, who rivalled the Juvaynīs, omits their political troubles under Abagha and Aḥmad Tegüder. The writer, however, acknowledges Shams al- Dīn's qualities as excellent administrator and patron. Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.279; Lane, "Persian Notables." p.190.

<sup>479</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and change*, p.72.

<sup>480</sup> Ravalde, "Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī." p.64; Lambton, *Continuity and change*, p.248-249.

<sup>481</sup> Brack, J. "Theologies of auspicious kingship: The Islamization of Chinggisid sacral kingship in the Islamic world." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 60,4 (2018): 1143-1171, p.1152.

universalist imperial rhetoric initially carried much weight among Persianate elites.<sup>482</sup> While descent from Činggis Khan later became central to the legitimation of nomadic rulers in Persia, notably the Timurids, the ilkhans were compelled to “broaden and diversify” the ideological bases of their rule.<sup>483</sup>

Reuven Amitai-Preiss is among the main critics of the proposal that the ilkhans addressed this challenge by adopting ancient Iranian concepts of sovereignty. He asserts that there is insufficient evidence to support the claim that the Mongols abandoned their universalistic claims to authority in favour of adopting legitimising motives they likely did not fully comprehend.<sup>484</sup> Thus, the presence of ancient Iranian elements in coinage, artworks and literature is to be considered primarily the work of Persian bureaucrats and authors like the Juvaynīs rather than a product of Mongol intentions.<sup>485</sup> Their narratives, in his view, functioned primarily to reconcile Iranian elites to Mongol rule, not to transform the ideological underpinnings of that rule.<sup>486</sup> The work of ‘Aṭā Malik Juvaynī warrants particular scrutiny in this regard. According to Jackson, it may seem that Juvaynī maintained a profoundly negative perception of the Mongols but, as a member of Hülegü’s administration, felt compelled to conceal his sentiments when composing the *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushāy*. Consequently, he derived the idea that the Ilkhanid rule had been divinely ordained. However, Juvaynī’s purpose likely extended beyond merely justifying his service to foreign rulers. In his writing, in fact, Jackson suggests that Juvaynī also employs terms and symbology that held significant associations with ancient Iranian kingship.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> On parity with other religions see Aigle, *Myth and Reality*, p.301. Despite his religious tolerance, from the onset of his campaigns in the Middle East, Hülegü had displayed a hostile attitude towards the universalistic claims of Islam, which sharply contrasted with the Mongol claim to world domination. This antagonism towards Islamic authority was epitomised by the treatment of the Caliph in Baghdad, culminating in his execution in 1258. For this see Amitai-Preiss, “The Impact of the Mongols.” p.230-32; Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.36.

<sup>483</sup> Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.327.

<sup>484</sup> Amitai-Preiss, “Political Legitimation.” p.209-210.

<sup>485</sup> Amitai-Preiss, “Political Legitimation.” p.210.

<sup>486</sup> Atwood, Dashdondog and May, eds. *New Approaches*, preface, p.7.

<sup>487</sup> Jackson, *Islamic world*, p.324-25. Jackson points out the use of the concept of *farr*, (فَرّ) or “royal splendour,” often associated with ancient Iranian kingship.

Shams al-Dīn Juvaynī also played an important role in advocating for a series of cultural projects which, in Jackson's words, "gradually endowed the Mongol dynasty with the markers of Perso-Islamic cultural and political legitimacy."<sup>488</sup> These included the construction of palaces in symbolic places, the inclusion of the Mongols into the histories of ruling dynasties in Persia, and what Kamola defines as "the creation of a Persianate political space."<sup>489</sup> The efforts of the Juvaynīs and other members of the Persianate elite to create new ideological foundations for the Ilkhanate may be viewed as a strategy to legitimise their service to the "true" rulers of Iran but, according to Jackson, it is not unlikely that ideas of this kind exerted an impact on the conquerors and facilitated their acceptance of Islam.<sup>490</sup>

Seen together, the efforts of the Juvaynīs were a form of brokerage: they translated an alien sovereignty into a locally intelligible and culturally resonant framework. For the ilkhans, this work provided the symbolic resources necessary to appear as rightful rulers in the eyes of Persianate elites. For the Juvaynīs, it reinforced their own indispensability within the administrative hierarchy. Whether or not this project transformed the ideological core of Mongol rule, it created a political language through which Ilkhanid authority could be ultimately normalised in Persia.

Despite their power and influence at court, the Juvaynīs were not immune to the envy and machinations of their peers. During the reign Abaqa that both 'Aṭā Malik and his brother came under repeated attacks. These were initially led by Majd al-Mulk Yazdī, a relative of Shams al-Dīn's old rival 'Imād al Dīn Qazwīnī. The *sāhib dīvān*, according to Rashīd al-Dīn, was positively impressed by Majd al-Mulk and assigned him to important tasks, including a census of Georgia.<sup>491</sup> In 1278, Majd al-Mulk claimed to have witnessed a conversation between Shams al-Dīn and his servant Majd

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<sup>488</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.327; Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.69, 70,77.

<sup>489</sup> Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.78. See, on this topic, Brack, J. *Mediating Sacred Kingship: Conversion and Sovereignty in Mongol Iran*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016); Brack, "Auspicious kingship." p.1150-1151. Brack insists on how the Mongols also progressively embraced "more messianic forms of legitimacy" within an Islamic framework.

<sup>490</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.327; Mirahmadi, S. "Legitimising the Khan: Rashīd al-Dīn's Ideological Project from a Literary Aspect." *Iran*, 2 (2021): 221-234, p.224-225.

<sup>491</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.542. This detail is absent in Karīmī's edition.

al-Dīn ibn al-Athir, where they allegedly praised the discipline and organisation of the Mamluk Sultan's army. Majd al-Mulk reported this information to his Mongol patron Yesu Buqa Güregen, asserting that the Juvaynīs were secretly colluding with the Egyptians and were prepared to hand over the entirety of Iraq to the Sultan in case of an invasion.<sup>492</sup> This rumour eventually reached Abaqa's ears. Ibn al-Athir was subjected to torture but maintained his loyalty to his master, denying all accusations against the Juvaynīs. As a result, Abaqa was unable to take any action against them.

After deflecting Majd al-Mulk's attacks, the *sāhib dīvān* tried to win him to his side by offering him the province of Sivas, along with a bar of gold, a ruby, and a hefty amount of money. However, this only served to improve Majd al-Mulk's determination to usurp the position of his master.<sup>493</sup> The deputy gained an audience with Arghun, where he explained how the *sāhib dīvān* had embezzled an enormous amount of royal revenues. Arghun reported the matter to his father, and Shams al-Dīn was summoned to defend himself at the *ordu*. Juvaynī required the protection of Abaqa's mother, Öljai Khatun, and managed to avoid judgment by pledging all of his properties to the ilkhan. However, Shams al-Dīn's resurgence did not lead to Majd al-Mulk's fall from grace.<sup>494</sup> Abaqa entrusted Majd al-Mulk to the protection of the Mongol amir Yesü Buqa Güregen. Rashīd al-Dīn recounts that this happened in response to Majd al-Mulk's plea, as he had valid grounds to be concerned for his safety, given that he had directed accusations against a highly influential figure.<sup>495</sup> At this point, Abaqa was rather unable to depose his *sāhib dīvān*, partly because of the amount of influence accumulated by the Juvaynīs within his family, and because of their control over revenue streams. Therefore, the only strategy he could pursue was to elevate someone from within the administration to limit Shams al-Dīn's power.

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<sup>492</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.543; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.775.

<sup>493</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.541-543; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.774-776. Majd al-Mulk was probably resentful towards Juvaynī for his execution of his former master Imād al-Dīn Qazwīnī, and he also insinuated that the vizier was involved in the Mamluk invasion of Anatolia.

<sup>494</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.543; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.776.

<sup>495</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.543; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.776-777.

Soon, the hostile attitude of Abaqa towards Shams al-Dīn manifested in full: Jackson, citing Waṣṣāf, tells us how the ilkhan tormented the *sāhib dīvān* by offering him on the point of his knife meat that was forbidden (*ḥarām*) and how Shams al-Dīn was obliged to eat it. Abaqa afterwards would tell his companions that, had Shams al-Dīn refused, he would have used the knife to put out one of the minister's eyes.<sup>496</sup> Majd al-Mulk was swiftly elevated to the position of vizier to jointly oversee governance with the *sāhib dīvān*. Emboldened by this new appointment, the Yazdī continued his relentless attacks, this time targeting the *sāhib*'s brother. Accused of corruption, 'Aṭā Malik decided to pay rather than contest the accusation.<sup>497</sup> However, after a failed campaign against the Mamluks in 1281, he was accused again and, desiring fresh revenue, Abaqa ordered 'Aṭā Malik's imprisonment and a perquisition of his estates. Shams al-Dīn's intercession and offer to pay his brother's debt did not dissuade Abaqa. The accusers went so far as violating the resting places of 'Aṭā Malik's children and ransacking his residence until the attacks were, once again, stopped by the Juvaynīs' connections at the ordu.<sup>498</sup>

There was no reconciliation between the Juvaynīs and Abaqa, as the latter died at the end of the same year, probably from the consequences of his excessive alcohol consumption. His brother Aḥmad Tegüder, once on the throne, restored Shams al-Dīn and his brother to their former positions. Aḥmad Tegüder was a Muslim and had presumably converted after he took over his appanages in western Iran, where he cultivated close relations with various Sufi groups.<sup>499</sup> The presence of Sufi *shaykhs* in the Mongol milieu was not unprecedented, as they were frequently mentioned in historical accounts as enjoying the protection of Mongol family members, both male and female.<sup>500</sup> According to Rashīd al-Dīn, the ilkhan held the Sufi mystic Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān in such high esteem that

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<sup>496</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.277; Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.202; Waṣṣāf/Purgstall, II, p.183,194-195.

<sup>497</sup> RJT/Thackston, p.544; RJT/Karīmī, p.776-777; JT/Qazwīnī, introduction, p.37; JT/Boyle, p.44; Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.204.

<sup>498</sup> RJT/Thackston, p.545; RJT/Karīmī, p.778.

<sup>499</sup> Amitai-Preiss, R. "Sufis and Shamans: Some Remarks on the Islamization of the Mongols in the Ilkhanate." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 42.1 (1999): 27-46, p.30.

<sup>500</sup> Amitai-Preiss states Aḥmad chose to align with some of the more questionable Sufi figures. Amitai-Preiss, "Sufis and Shamans." p.30-31,37.

he referred to him as ‘father,’ and he regarded Ishan Mangli, a disciple of Babi Ya’qub based in Arran, as his *qarindash* or (brother).<sup>501</sup> The historian further notes that Tegüder would often spend time in their company, engaging in *samā’* sessions to the neglect of state affairs. The Juvaynīs were also known patrons of Sufi *shaykhs* and shrines, despite their reputation as particularly strict Sunni Muslims.<sup>502</sup> Whether this patronage provided a direct religious connection between them and Aḥmad remains uncertain. What can be established is that, according to Waṣṣāf, the ilkhan was at least encouraged to open diplomatic exchanges with other Muslim powers, particularly the Mamluks, and that the Juvaynīs actively promoted such initiatives, which suggests that the accusations leveraged by Majd al-Mulk years prior might not have been completely baseless.<sup>503</sup> Aḥmad dispatched two separate embassies to Egypt, the first of which was headed by Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, a prominent scientist and scholar who, as Jackson notes, maintained close ties with Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī, a renowned intellectual and longstanding acquaintance of the Juvaynīs.<sup>504</sup>

As the Juvaynīs’ fortunes soared during Aḥmad’s short reign, Shams al-Dīn took decisive action against his rival Majd al-Mulk. Through his connections and the use of bribes, he orchestrated a campaign of accusations against his former deputy. Notably, members of Aḥmad’s inner circle seemed to have assisted in this endeavour. One of Aḥmad’s confidants, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, planted suspicious items in Majd al-Mulk’s possessions.<sup>505</sup> When these items were discovered during an ensuing inquiry, Majd al-Mulk was apprehended and charged with witchcraft. A brutal mob promptly took matters into their own hands, lynching him on the spot.<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.551; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.788.

<sup>502</sup> Ravalde, “Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī.” p.67.

<sup>503</sup> Waṣṣāf stresses the role of Juvaynī in convincing the Khan to send an embassy to Cairo. *Waṣṣāf/Purgstall*, II, p.331.

<sup>504</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.326; Boyle, “History of the Īl-Khāns.” p.675. For the successive failed embassy of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān to Egypt see Holt, P. “The Īlkhān Aḥmad’s Embassies to Qalāwūn: Two Contemporary Accounts.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 49, 1 (1986): 128-132. Broadbridge, A. “Careers in Diplomacy among Mamluks and Mongols.” in Bauden, F. and Dekkiche, M. eds. *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies. Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Leiden, 2019): 263-301, p.271; On the controversial nature of Aḥmad’s embassies see Allouche, A. “Teguder’s Ultimatum to Qalawun.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 22, 4 (1990): 437-446.

<sup>505</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.549; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.787.

<sup>506</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.550; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.787.

Majd al-Mulk's death, however, did not mark the end of the Juvaynīs' problems. Before his death, Yazdī had written a letter to Abaqa's son, Arghun, accusing Shams al-Dīn of having poisoned Abaqa and having favoured Aḥmad's "usurpation." Arghun, already at odds with his uncle, attacked the Juvaynīs by moving to Baghdad and killing all of their deputies in the city. Arghun's desecration of the body of a recently deceased friend was too much for 'Aṭā Malik, who, upon hearing the news, died of a stroke in Arran.<sup>507</sup> 'Aṭā Malik's death foreshadowed the end of Aḥmad's rule. Having lost the support of part of the *noyat*, the ilkhan was executed and succeeded by Arghun in 1284.<sup>508</sup>

Soon, the reckoning came for Shams al-Dīn too. Upon hearing of Aḥmad's death in Isfahan, Shams al-Dīn was advised by his attendants to flee to India to avoid Arghun's wrath. He refused, however, to abandon his family and decided to call on his connections at the *ordu* one last time. By appealing to his friendship with Buqa Noyan, he asked him to intercede with the ilkhan. Buqa initially agreed, and Shams al-Dīn was presented to Arghun, but had a rather cold reception. At this point, the advisors around Buqa, including Fakhr al-Dīn Mustawfī of the Qazwīnī family, suggested that whatever position the *noyan* was trying to achieve, he needed to get rid of Shams al-Dīn, for as long as the *sāhib dīvān* was in power, he could not achieve anything.<sup>509</sup> The network of connections built by the Juvaynīs was still in place; all he had to do was cut the head and inherit all the power. Buqa was eventually convinced and withdrew his protection, allowing Arghun's men to execute the *sāhib dīvān* on October 16, 1284.<sup>510</sup> The main charge against Shams al-Dīn was that he had poisoned the ilkhan's father, Abaqa, but the primary reason for the minister's fall from grace was his support for Aḥmad Tegüder, Arghun's rival in his quest for the throne. Shams al-Dīn's execution was shortly followed by that of his son, Sharaf al-Dīn Hārūn Juvaynī, who was first demoted to accountant in Baghdad and later executed on the charge of embezzlement in 1286.<sup>511</sup> Apart from Shams al-Dīn,

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<sup>507</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.551; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.789.

<sup>508</sup> See above, p.94.

<sup>509</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.564; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.809.

<sup>510</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.565; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.810.

<sup>511</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.293. Lane explain the Qazwīnī family was involved, although the material executor was Aruq. Lane, "Persian notables." p.190; *RJT/Thackston*, p.566; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.812.

Buqa did not unleash a purge against the Juvaynīs and their followers, presumably because he wanted to inherit the state in which Shams al-Dīn left the *dīvān*.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the Juvaynīs' tenure marked the completion of a transformation in the logic of Mongol administration, initiated under figures such as Arghun Aqa and Kōrgüz, in which the brokerage exercised by *Tājīk* officials became central to governance. The Juvaynīs' careers consolidated the position of Persian intermediaries as indispensable, linking the court to provincial administrations, trade networks, and, above all, the fiscal base of a Mongol-dominated political order. This meant managing the *dīvān*, directing provincial taxation, placing trusted men in key revenue-collection posts or governorship positions, and integrating commercial partnerships into the administrative system. These functions were the means by which imperial power reached the provinces and by which provincial resources sustained the court. Shams al-Dīn's ability to dictate fiscal appointments, to draw revenue by investing in infrastructural and agricultural projects, or to mobilise the resources of wealthy Gulf merchants was not incidental. These were acts of brokerage which bound provincial wealth to his person with connections that the *noyat* could not easily bypass, because they were grounded in cultural and religious proximity. This position gave the Juvaynīs leverage even over the ilkhans, still foreign rulers in a conquered land. Abaqa could not dismiss them without jeopardising the flows of revenue on which the court depended, and could only attempt an attack on them when he had secured the support of other Persianate administrators, who could guarantee some degree of continuity.

In fact, despite the Juvaynīs' standing, their authority remained conditional. They possessed no independent coercive power and were dependent on alignment with the ruling coalition at the *ordu*. Their position collapsed quickly when political alignments shifted, and the fall of Aḥmad Tegüder removed the political cover that sustained them. Within months, Arghun was able to destroy the family's position through targeted executions, despite their intact administrative machinery and provincial networks. The Juvaynīs' rise shows the degree to which embedded intermediaries could shape the functioning of Mongol rule; their fall shows the speed with which that authority could be

withdrawn when the political calculus at the court changed. Far from being a peripheral province at the margins of the largest contiguous land empire in history, Persia had become the centre of Ilkhanid rule. Although the ilkhan and the upper echelons of the *noyat* retained the monopoly on coercive force, and Persian officials were still considered private property, they were a form of property whose expertise sustained the regime. Their cooperation was not optional; it was a condition of the functioning of the state.<sup>512</sup>

### ◆ Reassessing the “absolute vizierate”

After being enthroned as the new ilkhan in 1284, Arghun appointed Buqa to the position of vizier and *ṣāhib-dīvān*, transferring the administration under his control. As *ṣāhib-dīvān*, Buqa promoted his Persian allies to prominent positions in the administration, enlisting the help of the Juvaynīs’ former rivals, mainly Fakhr al-Dīn Mustawfī and Jalāl al-Dīn Simnānī, who both served as his deputies.<sup>513</sup> Overall, however, Buqa did not make substantial changes to the administrative structure, even leaving members of the Juvaynī family to hold their former posts. For instance, when the *Chīngsāng* appointed his brother Aruq the *shahna* of Iraq, the latter promoted some of ‘Aṭā Malik Juvaynī’s former employees.<sup>514</sup> In short, in Kamola’s words, Buqa’s coup was “less a purge than a decapitation,” as it preserved the Juvaynīs’ networks and assumed control of their former associates.<sup>515</sup>

By inheriting parts of the Juvaynīs’ network, adding his own connections with the Mongol *noyat*, and obtaining recognition from Qubilai in the form of the title of *Chīngsāng*, Buqa could soon completely exclude Arghun and the rest of the *noyat* from the government. Rashīd al-Dīn reports that the *noyan* addressed his own *firman*s and that nothing without his seal was accepted anywhere.<sup>516</sup> Nawrūz, the son of Arghun Aqa and close friend with Buqa, was confirmed as the governor of

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<sup>512</sup> Aigle, “Mongol Domination.” p.75.

<sup>513</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.285; *RJT/Thackston*, p.568; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.814.

<sup>514</sup> Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.80-81.

<sup>515</sup> Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.81; *RJT/Thackston*, p.567; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.813.

<sup>516</sup> See above, p.98.

Khurasan. The elevated status of Buqa, Nawrūz and another influential figure, Bolad Chīngsāng, reflected a shift in the political landscape. To paraphrase Kamola's words, the new government, while still largely Persianate in its structure, now bore a distinct Mongol influence and was at least partly beholden to Chinese rather than Perso-Islamic institutions, being supervised by the two *Chīngsāngs* Buqa and Bolad.<sup>517</sup>

We do not know much about Buqa's fiscal or administrative organisation, but the available sources seem to suggest that it was characterised by widespread misappropriations by his associates, who now exerted control over most of the revenues of the Ilkhanate.<sup>518</sup> While the concentration of administrative functions in the hands of members of the Mongol elite has been interpreted by Kamola and Aubin as a partial return to earlier governance models, we can also make a parallel with governmental practices seen in states like the late 'Abbāsīd Caliphate and the Seljuk Empire, where the vizier wielded authority across all areas of administration.<sup>519</sup> The key distinction between these earlier systems and the Ilkhanid vizierate lay, so far, in the alienation of a large part of the executive and coercive power from the vizier's control, as well as the fluctuation of the duties performed by the vizier and *sāhib dīvān*.

The concentration of both political and fiscal authority in the hands of the *Chīngsāng* satisfied neither the *noyat* nor the administrative class, who found themselves marginalised by such arrangements. Aubin has noted that during this period, the opposition to the new vizier appears to have coincided with a wider reaction against the dominance of Persianate administrators.<sup>520</sup> While this interpretation has merit, it should also be recognised that a significant element in this hostility derived from the *noyat*'s opposition to Buqa and Aruq, who associated with Persianate administrators formerly employed by the Juvaynīs to consolidate their control of the state. The resulting campaign against them may therefore be seen less as an ideologically driven reaction to Islam than as part of

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<sup>517</sup> Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.81-82.

<sup>518</sup> Bar Hebraeus/*Budge*, p.478; *RJT/Thackston*, p.567; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.813-814.

<sup>519</sup> Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.81-83; Aubin, *Émirs Mongols*, p.38-39. See above, p.126-127.

<sup>520</sup> Aubin, *Émirs Mongols*, p.38-40.

the broader political offensive against the *Chīngsāng*. Although Buqa and his allies had initially hesitated to participate in the destruction of the Juvaynīs, their opponents were determined to uproot an administration that had come to serve the interests of the *Chīngsāng*.<sup>521</sup>

What emerges at this point is an alliance stemming from cooperation between administrators and members of the Mongol *noyat* dissatisfied with Buqa's rule. A notable example is that of a Jewish physician named Sa'd al-Dawlah al-Abhārī, then serving in the administration of Baghdad, who was appointed as deputy of Qutlughshāh, a former associate of the Juvaynīs. The first mention of the physician's name in Rashīd al-Dīn is marked by esteem:

(Sa'd al-Dawlah) was a wealthy and intelligent man who knew all about the fiscal situation of Baghdad.<sup>522</sup>

Sa'd al-Dawlah's fiscal expertise appears to have given him a measure of leverage over his superiors. In order to avoid potential difficulties with the physician in Baghdad, Aruq recommended that he be summoned to the court and appointed as a royal physician. At court, Ordu Qaya, seeking to weaken Buqa's control of the *ordu*, identified in Sa'd al-Dawlah a suitable instrument for this purpose. In 1287, he procured him an audience with Arghun, during which the physician asserted that he possessed evidence of large-scale embezzlement of royal funds during Aruq's tenure in Iraq.<sup>523</sup> Now with direct access to the ilkhan, Sa'd al-Dawlah could complain about Baghdad's terrible financial situation and about Aruq's misappropriations.<sup>524</sup> Arghun's first move was to appoint Sa'd al-Dawlah as auditor of Baghdad. After seeing an increase in revenue under the physician's tenure, Arghun decided it was time to move directly against Buqa and his brother Aruq. The ilkhan dispatched Sa'd al-Dawlah to Baghdad again in 1288, dismissing Aruq from his office and replacing him with Ordu Qaya. Sa'd al-Dawlah brought even more taxes, but complained about the local administrators: these were Rabib Avchi, Qutlughshāh, Majd al-Dīn ibn al-Kibtī and one of Alā' al-

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<sup>521</sup> Aubin, *Émirs mongols*, p.42.

<sup>522</sup> Presumably another piece of Juvaynī's network *RJT/Thackston*, p.567; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.813.

“که مردی کافی متمول بود و بر کلیات و جزییات امور ممالک بغداد واقف.”

<sup>523</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.567; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.814.

<sup>524</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.568; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.815.

Dīn Juvaynī's sons, all still belonging to the Juvaynīs' entourage.<sup>525</sup> Arghun ordered that they all be executed. Around the same time, the ilkhan transferred the control of the *injūs* of the southern provinces from Buqa to Taghachar and reversed Buqa's fiscal policies in Kirmān and Fars.<sup>526</sup> This was made possible through the manoeuvres of another influential bureaucrat, Sadr al-Dīn Zanjānī, who served as Taghachar's deputy at the *ordu*, and had influenced Arghun by circulating reports of Buqa's growing dominance.<sup>527</sup> At the end of 1288, taking advantage of Buqa's absence from the *ordu*, the ilkhan deprived him of all his *injūs* and the command of the army. He also ordered that the *dīvān*'s offices be moved from Buqa's quarters, where the latter had placed them. When the *noyan* attempted to retaliate, both he and his brother were apprehended and executed in January 1289.<sup>528</sup> However, Buqa's downfall could not be complete unless his network was eradicated. First was the turn of Fars, where Buqa had sent a member of the Qazwīnī family to represent his affairs. His deputy in the region was accused of a shortfall in revenue and executed, followed suit by the arrest of Sa'd al-Dawlah's former colleague in Baghdad, Sharaf al-Dīn Simnānī and the execution of his brother, Buqa's deputy Malik Jalāl al-Dīn Simnānī.<sup>529</sup>

Soon after Buqa's death, Sa'd al-Dawlah ordered the extermination of the remaining members of the Juvaynī family, who represented an obstacle to his growing power in the administration.<sup>530</sup> The purge was conducted on the grounds that, despite being in charge of the best *injūs* in central Iran, they did not supply the treasury with enough revenue.<sup>531</sup> Once he got rid of Buqa and the remaining Juvaynīs, Sa'd al-Dawlah was almost an autocrat in matters of state when he was appointed vizier by Arghun in June 1289. His brief tenure was characterised by hostility towards Muslim administrators. It is uncertain whether this attitude arose from his own experiences or

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<sup>525</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.567; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.813-814.

<sup>526</sup> See above, p.98.

<sup>527</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.568; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.815. "Sadruddin Zanjani, Taghachar's deputy, rose up to attack Buqa because Buqa had demanded from him the back taxes of Fars."

<sup>528</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.570; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.818.

<sup>529</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.572; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.819-820; Aubin, *Émirs mongols*, p.42.

<sup>530</sup> Aubin, *Émirs mongols*, p.42.

<sup>531</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.572; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.820.

reflected Arghun's disposition towards the Juvaynīs and their allies.<sup>532</sup> During this period, Sa'd al-Dawlah achieved a monopoly over access to the Ilkhan, something Buqa had never secured despite his authority. Although formal power still rested with the sovereign, control over all channels of approach allowed Sa'd al-Dawlah to appropriate the functions of royal authority and to act as the effective ruler. The Jewish vizier went so far as to forbid Muslims from approaching either himself or the ilkhan directly, surrounding himself with the amirs Joshi, Ordu Qaya, and Quchan, who served as his close attendants and afforded him protection from the rest of the *noyat*. The removal of administrators inherited from the Juvaynī brothers by Buqa and Aruq, along with Arghun's decree prohibiting Muslims from serving in the *dīvān*, created a staffing crisis within the administration. Sa'd al-Dawlah capitalised on this opportunity by leveraging his family connections within the Jewish community to fill the vacancies throughout the Ilkhanate.<sup>533</sup> The appointment of a Jewish figure to govern a predominantly Muslim populace led to widespread discontent, a sentiment particularly evident in Waṣṣāf's account of Sa'd al-Dawlah's vizierate.

Despite the harsh criticism of the vizier in the sources, even Waṣṣāf acknowledges that Sa'd al-Dawlah instituted reforms that ushered in an era of justice by quelling oppression, curbing theft, substantially enhancing the state treasury, and greatly benefiting commoners.<sup>534</sup> The vizier himself was reputedly affable and erudite, proficient in several languages, including Mongolian. Purgstall characterised Sa'd al-Dawlah's tenure as both "bloody and golden."<sup>535</sup> In due course, the vizier managed to secure the unwavering trust of the ilkhan, who had full confidence in the Jewish physician and chastised his own *noyat* if they opposed him.<sup>536</sup> It was from among the *noyat* that the opposition to Sa'd al-Dawlah began to emerge: Taghachar spearheaded a faction of disgruntled

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<sup>532</sup> Waṣṣāf/Purgstall, II, p.212-213. Waṣṣāf reports a conspiracy by the Jewish vizier, who persuaded imāms to acclaim Arghun as the Lord of Auspicious Conjunction (*ṣāhib qirān*) and proposed conquering Mecca and elevating pagan temples, while preparing for a naval invasion of India. This is also reported in Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.83. However, this is probably a fantasy element, as Hope and Boyle suggest. Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.154; Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.370.

<sup>533</sup> Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.83. RJT/Thackston, p.571-72; RJT/Karīmī, p.819-820.

<sup>534</sup> Waṣṣāf/Purgstall, II, p.207

<sup>535</sup> Purgstall, J. *Geschichte der Ilchane, das ist der Mongolen in Persien* (Darmstadt, 1842), p.384.

<sup>536</sup> Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.142-143; RJT/Thackston, p.567; RJT/Karīmī, p.814-815.

nobles intent on assassinating the Jewish vizier. When Arghun suddenly fell ill in 1291, both the physician and his Mongol entourage were attacked and eliminated, possibly under suspicion of poisoning Arghun, who died shortly after. Sources unanimously report that the death of Sa'd al-Dawlah was followed by a widespread persecution of his family and, in general, of Jewish people all over the Ilkhanate.<sup>537</sup>

The tenures of Buqa and Sa'd al-Dawlah marked an important phase of Ilkhanid history. Their careers illustrate a further stage in the evolution of Ilkhanid governance, in which attempts were made to concentrate both administrative and coercive authority in the office of the head of the *dīvān*. Both men sought to control the mechanisms by which the allocation of resources, court appointments, and access to the ilkhan were mediated. In effect, both sought to eliminate the pre-existing separation between court politics and fiscal administration, using their position to act as both the channel and the gatekeeper for all matters reaching the sovereign. In doing so, they attempted to move beyond the intermediary role characteristic of earlier administrations and to occupy a position of direct command at the centre of the political network, removing competing brokers. Their approaches to governance, however, diverged significantly. Buqa drew on Persianate administrative networks and the military backing of Nawrūz and other powerful Mongol *noyat*, while also serving as a commander in his own right, with control, according to Rashīd al-Dīn, over the Ilkhanid army, or at least parts of it.<sup>538</sup> In contrast, Sa'd al-Dawlah aimed to create a new system by monopolising access to the ilkhan and utilising loyal Mongol amirs as the military arm of his administrative apparatus. Jean Aubin highlighted the latter's efforts as attempts to establish an "absolute vizierate," where the head of the *dīvān* exerted undisputed influence over all the branches of government.<sup>539</sup> It could be argued that both Sa'd al-Dawlah and Buqa sought, in different ways, to construct an "absolute vizierate," using their connections with the Mongol *noyat* to reassert these functions and to secure a de facto monopoly over the use of force.

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<sup>537</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.575; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.824-825; Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.294.

<sup>538</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.568; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.815.

<sup>539</sup> Aubin, *Émirs mongols*, p.44.

Such a position promised enormous leverage, but it was also inherently unstable. By severing alternative lines of access to the ruler, both Buqa and Sa'd al-Dawlah made themselves indispensable, yet they also made their removal a priority for excluded actors. Once the coalition that sustained them fractured, there were few buffers between them and their enemies. Their authority collapsed rapidly, despite their control over key offices and clients.

The “absolute vizierate” was therefore an attempt to reconfigure the balance between court, army, and bureaucracy by concentrating brokerage in a single office. These efforts mark an important phase in Ilkhanid political development, especially if considered in parallel of what has been said about factionalism in the previous chapter.<sup>540</sup> The experiments of Buqa and Sa'd al-Dawlah confirmed that in the Ilkhanid polity, durable power could not be secured through office alone, but through a position of centrality within the network of relationships that connected the Ilkhanate's *ordu*.

### ◆ A Reformer King?

Following of Sa'd al-Dawlah and Arghun's deaths, the *noyat* could barely agree on the appointment of Gaykhātū, Arghun's brother. During this time, Shiktūr Aqa and his deputy Sharaf al-Dīn Simnānī led the administration until 1292, when Taghachar and his deputy Sadr al-Dīn Zanjānī, who had previously worked for of Majd al Mulk, orchestrated a coup while Gaykhātū was in Anatolia.<sup>541</sup> Upon his return, Gaykhātū found himself compelled not only to pardon the conspirators but also to endorse Zanjānī's appointment as vizier and *sāhib dīvān*.<sup>542</sup>

During his tenure, Sadr al-Dīn Zanjānī endeavoured to rebuild the Persianate administration after Sa'd al-Dawlah's purges: under his administration, the Persianate element regained prominence at court, becoming more independent from its Mongol counterpart.<sup>543</sup> Meanwhile, the Ilkhanate

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<sup>540</sup> See above, p.111-113.

<sup>541</sup> See above, p.100.

<sup>542</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.581; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.832.

<sup>543</sup> Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.86-87; Aubin, *Émirs mongols*, p.46-51.

confronted a grave economic crisis exacerbated by years of severe drought, trade and communication disruptions stemming from prolonged civil strife, and a devastating horse plague. With the royal treasury already depleted by the ilkhan's excessive expenditures, Zanjānī appointed new fiscal agents and tried to "refloat the state treasury by contracting out the revenue collection in Fars."<sup>544</sup> After consulting with Bolad Chīngsāng, he also sought to introduce the *Chau*, a form of paper currency which had proved viable for the Yuan dynasty in China.<sup>545</sup> However, the endeavour proved unsuccessful: when Zanjānī attempted to enforce the obligatory use of this currency, the capital's markets suddenly emptied.<sup>546</sup> Following the failure of the *Chau*, the situation rapidly deteriorated. In the end, Zanjānī's and Gaykhātū's downfalls were accelerated by economic problems that Sadr al-Dīn was unable to remedy, despite his tax drafting.<sup>547</sup>

Once he had seized the throne. Baidu's short rule was no more energetic than that of his predecessor. He appointed Jamal al-Dīn Dastjirdani, a former associate of Sa'd al-Dawlah and rival of Zanjānī as his vizier, getting rid of the latter by sending him to Anatolia with Taghachar.<sup>548</sup> According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Zanjānī had remarkable leverage on his patron Taghachar, convincing him to betray Baidu after having discussed with Ghazan the terms for his support.<sup>549</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn describes how the Persian minister reached Ghazan's army with a caravan of goods and supplies, presenting him the opportunity to win over the support of his Mongol patron, Taghachar. The price asked by Zanjānī was his appointment as *ṣāhib-dīvān* once Ghazan obtained power. Ghazan promptly accepted, and in the span of a few days, the entirety of Baidu's army deserted, the ilkhan

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<sup>544</sup> Lambton, "Mongol Fiscal Administration." Part II, p.107-109; Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.86.

<sup>545</sup> Concerning the introduction of paper money in the great Yuan, see Guan, H. Palma, N. and Wu, M. "The rise and fall of paper money in Yuan China, 1260-1368." *The Economic History Review* (2024): 1-29.

<sup>546</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.583-84; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.835; Kamola, *Rashīd al-Dīn*, p.87,95-96; Aigle, D. "Le Fārs sous la domination mongole (XIIIe-XIVe s.): Politique et fiscalité." *Studia Iranica*, 31, 247 (2005): 1-247, p.145; Hope, *Politics and Tradition*, p.149; *BHC/Budge*, p.496-97.

<sup>547</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.584; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.836; Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.336. Lambton stresses how Zanjānī had called in his *ortāqs* and issued drafts for tax collection in Fars to save the Īl-Khānate from economic collapse.

<sup>548</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.582; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.832. Jamal al-Dīn Dastjirdani helped him in the conspiracy to overthrow Gaykhātū.

<sup>549</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.276; *RJT/Thackston*, p.624; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.911.

was captured and executed.<sup>550</sup> After Ghazan's victory, Nawrūz swiftly proceeded to Tabriz, where he issued a series of *yarlighs* in the ilkhan's name, notably one that advocated the persecution of Christians, idol worshippers, and the demolition of temples and churches.<sup>551</sup>

Upon his arrival in Tabriz, Ghazan was received by Zanjānī. The latter, perhaps emboldened by his actions as kingmaker, refused to dismount his horse while greeting the ilkhan.<sup>552</sup> Nonetheless, Ghazan confirmed his appointment as *ṣāhib-dīvān*, under the supervision of Nawrūz, who received instead the position of vizier, granting him authority over both the military and civil administration of the entire Ilkhanate.<sup>553</sup> Nawrūz showed little tolerance for any potential challengers to his authority. When Zanjānī, sought to exert his influence over the bureaucratic staff, the Mongol amir prevailed over Ghazan and dismissed him from office due to a dispute regarding tax collection in Fars. Sharaf al-Dīn Simnānī was subsequently appointed in his stead.<sup>554</sup> Following a brief appointment as *ṣāhib-dīvān*, Simnānī was also replaced by one of Nawrūz's appointees, Jamal al-Dīn Dastjirdani. However, Dastjirdani's tenure was also short-lived, as he was put on trial based on charges brought by Sadr al-Dīn Zanjānī and subsequently executed in 1296. His position was then assumed again by Zanjānī.

During Dastjirdani's trial, Sadr al-Dīn Zanjānī schemed to bring about Nawrūz's downfall. During Ghazan's rebellion, Nawrūz had sought assistance from the Mamluk ruler Al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1293-1294, 1299-1309) to overthrow Baidu. The Sultan's successor response arrived when Ghazan had already won, and the circumstances had changed.<sup>555</sup> Nawrūz presented his new master with a substituted version of the letter he had sent to the Sultan, prepared by Jamal al-Dīn Dastjirdani. However, Zanjānī deviously replaced the letter with a number of fabricated missives, in which Nawrūz urged the Mamluks to seize Ghazan's throne.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.624-628; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.910-915.

<sup>551</sup> Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.378. *RJT/Thackston*, p.627; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.914.

<sup>552</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.626-627. This part is not reported in *Karīmī*, as *Thackston* follows another text.

<sup>553</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.636; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.926; Hope, "The Nawrūz king," p.470.

<sup>554</sup> Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.276.

<sup>555</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.636; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.926.

<sup>556</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.637; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.928; Boyle, "History of the Īl-Khāns." p.382-383.

Notably, Nawrūz's demise was accompanied by a broader purge of the that he had appointed. Ghazan, in fact, ordered the execution of all the *nā'ibs* and secretaries appointed by Nawrūz. To evade Ghazan's wrath, Nawrūz fled to Khurasan in an attempt to seek refuge with what remained of his network of alliances in the region. He found sanctuary in Herat, but was soon betrayed by the ruler of the city, his former protégé Malik Fakhr al-Dīn Kurt.<sup>557</sup> Qutlughshāh Noyan, entrusted with the command of Ghazan's army, captured and executed Nawrūz soon after, on the 13th of August 1297.

The death of Nawrūz marked the culmination of Ghazan's bid for power and an important turning point in Ilkhanid history, as the ilkhan was able to reform the administration. As a first step in this direction, he undertook the reorganisation of the *noyat's* appanages.<sup>558</sup> By reallocating lands and redistributing administrative and military posts among the *noyat*, Ghazan sought to detach them from their allies within the bureaucracy, who had previously managed their *injūs*, as seen in the cases of Taghachar and Sadr al-Dīn Zanjānī.<sup>559</sup> This strategic reallocation was a critical move aimed at asserting greater central control over the Ilkhanate's administrative system at the local level. It was, in fact, accompanied by the appointment of *bitikchīs* directly dependent to the central *dīvān* to the various provinces of the Ilkhanate.<sup>560</sup> In the central administration, the ilkhan established a circle of trusted confidants, whom he relied on for the implementation of his reforms. Zanjānī was certainly not among them: after plotting against Nawrūz, he turned against Ghazan's other ministers. After having attempted an intrigue against Qutlughshāh Noyan, he was put to death in 1297 and replaced by Sa'd al-Dīn Sāvajī, who enjoyed Ghazan's favour until the ilkhan died in 1305.<sup>561</sup> Another of

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<sup>557</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn records that Nawrūz agreed to act as tutor to Fakhr al-Dīn Kurt, even though Fakhr al-Dīn's father had warned that the Mongol amir would in time be betrayed by his pupil. *RJT/Thackston*, p.639; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.931.

<sup>558</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.631-634; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.920-923.

<sup>559</sup> See above, p.108-109.

<sup>560</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.212.

<sup>561</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.641-642; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.934-935. Zanjani allegedly accused Qutlughshāh of ransacking Georgia with his men to cover a shortfall in revenue from the region, but his plot was discovered.

Ghazan's men was the physician and historian Rashīd al-Dīn, who acted as minister jointly with Sāvajī.

While describing Ghazan's reforms Rashīd al-Dīn's specifies that they involved all fields of administration, but were particularly focused on the issues of land ownership and authority. In one of the physician's stories about the situation of the Ilkhanid administration prior to Ghazan, we can have a glimpse of the decentralisation and disorganisation of the administrative apparatus, possibly a consequence of the years of chaos and purges following Arghun's death:

*Idāchis* (officers) sent so many envoys into the provinces to collect funds for supplies, provisions, tribute, etc. that the *dīvāns* were filled with them. Officers of armaments, horse, hawks, etc. likewise. It got to the point that envoys used force requisitions on caravans and travellers. Even if there had been five thousand horses at every post station they wouldn't have sufficed for their transport.<sup>562</sup>

The fragmentation of power, which mostly remained in the hands of the aristocracy and their associates within the administration is also attested by the networks of patronage having formed during the years of civil strife, involving the majority of the population:

It had become customary for people of the provinces to give their sons as *injūs* or as *ortāqs* to Khatuns, princes, and amirs, and in return for them they would receive a little something. Such people (princes and amirs) had vast property and possessions as well as numerous lawsuits, for each of which they took an envoy to conduct their business, fairly or unfairly. Their adversaries were driven to desperation by so much harassment and expense that they had no choice but to get protection from others. They would hire an envoy to take retaliation on the others, who would bring still more envoys.<sup>563</sup>

While Rashīd al-Dīn may have had motives to exaggerate the disorder preceding his own tenure, Lambton notes that the disarray in tax collection and in the *dīvān* is likewise reported by Waṣṣāf, who had far less reason to portray the administration before Ghazan's reign in such a negative light.<sup>564</sup> To address this crisis, Ghazan issued a *yarligh* that explicitly stated that neither the *noyat* nor the military governors were authorised to issue draft bills on the regions under their

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<sup>562</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.715.

<sup>563</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.714. This text has been only consulted in translation, as Karīmī's edition does not cover the part concerning the anecdotes related to Ghazan's reign.

<sup>564</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.210.

jurisdiction.<sup>565</sup> Instead, *bitikchīs* from the *dīvān* were to oversee the revenue collection process and to prevent local governors and officials from appropriating the taxes.<sup>566</sup> Additionally, the appointments of Rashīd al-Dīn and Sāvajī resulted in the *dīvān* coming under the direct control of Ghazan's household, as both consistently kept him informed about developments within the Empire. Rashīd al-Dīn characterised the relationship between the throne and the *dīvān*, asserting that the vizier served as the sultan's most trusted and capable official, thus obviating the need for external involvement in the affairs of governance.<sup>567</sup> To attest to the mutated state of things after Ghazan's reforms, Lambton recounts a chronicler's lament during the reign of Ghazan's brother, Öljeitü:

Oh, for the days of Hülegü and Abaqa, when anyone wishing to address the ruler had to first consult with all the Mongol amirs. Now, matters have deteriorated to the point where a *Tajik* can approach the ruler in secret in the dead of night without consulting any amir, rendering the amirs' opinions irrelevant!<sup>568</sup>

The analysis of Ghazan's reforms must begin with an awareness of Rashīd al-Dīn's position within the administration and the interests that informed his narrative. It must also be tempered by the recognition that the Mongols' own conception of state and administration may have differed substantially from that articulated by Rashīd al-Dīn. The historian himself records a speech in which Ghazan reproached his subordinates for the excessive rigidity of his administration, of which I reported the masterful translation given by David Morgan:

I am not protecting the Persian peasantry. If it is expedient, then let me pillage them all - there is no one with more power to do so than I. Let us rob them together. But if you expect to collect provisions and food in the future...[...] I will be harsh with you. And you must consider: if you commit extortion against the peasants, take their oxen and seed, and cause their crops to be consumed, what will you do in the future? You must think, too, when you beat and torture their wives and children, that just as our wives and children are dear to our hearts, so are theirs to them. They are human beings, just as we are.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.712-713. See also, Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.210-212. Lambton discusses Ghazan's reforms at length, identifying his reign as a turning point, but cautions that the extent of the disorder preceding them may have been overstated by Ghazan's minister, Rashīd al-Dīn.

<sup>566</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.211.

<sup>567</sup> Brack, J. "Rashīd al-Dīn: Buddhism in Iran and the Mongol Silk Roads." in Biran, M. Brack, J. and Fiaschetti, F. eds. *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals* (Oakland, 2022): 215-237, p.219.

<sup>568</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.51-52.

<sup>569</sup> *RJT/Alizade*, vol. 3, p.478. This passage is directly cited from the translated version in Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.147.

Yet, even allowing for this, Ghazan's reforms profoundly reshaped administrative authority in the Ilkhanate. They curtailed the predatory autonomy of the *noyat*, centralised revenue, and regularised taxation. By appointing *bitikchīs* to oversee revenue, Ghazan severed the fiscal link between local power-holders and their bases of support. This reinforced the dependence of all administrative and military actors on the ilkhan's patronage, but did not simply replicate the measures attempted by Möngke and Ögödei decades earlier. The reforms targeted the mechanisms that had allowed military and administrative elites to access fiscal resources independently.<sup>570</sup> By Ghazan's reign, the administration no longer relied exclusively on the ilkhan's personal authority. That authority was encoded into an institutional framework which gave the ministers the capacity to work without requiring the ilkhan's continuous endorsement. Ghazan's reforms supplied this framework with defined norms and procedures, regulating fiscal flows, clarifying the relationship between central and provincial authority, and limiting the scope for arbitrary exactions. Brokerage was redirected to the figure of the sovereign, with the joint vizierate of Sa'd al-Dīn Sāvajī and Rashīd al-Dīn bringing the *dīvān* into the Ilkhan's household. Ministers ceased to be autonomous patrons and instead became controlled channels through which the ruler's authority was projected into the provinces. From this position, Ghazan could integrate the administration into the political economy of the realm, linking revenue and landholding to the service of a subordinate military aristocracy. Service was rewarded, but the mechanisms of allocation remained in the ruler's hands, ensuring that loyalty was reinforced by dependence on the central authority. In this way, the ilkhan became both the apex of the administrative hierarchy and the principal broker between resources, territory, and the military elite. The configuration examined here fits within Marshall Hodgson's model of the "military patronage

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<sup>570</sup> Morgan, *The Mongols*, p.147. Morgan sees in the steep increase of agricultural revenue (from 17 to 21 million dinars per year) as the outcome of Ghazan's reforms aimed at curbing the exploitation of land and population, as well as the independent extraction of wealth by the regional administration and the *noyat*.

state,” in which the ruler and his household stand at the centre of power, controlling the allocation of lands and revenues.

Ghazan’s capacity to sustain this arrangement rested on more than institutional control. His conversion to Islam and adoption of the title of *pādshāh* gave him a shared religious and cultural framework with the Persian bureaucratic elite, enabling him to present himself as both Chinggisid ruler and legitimate Muslim sovereign. For example, Allsen reports how an Armenian scribe refers to Ghazan as “*Pādshāh Khan*,” combining Persian and nomadic traditions.<sup>571</sup> An example of this is Rashīd al-Dīn’s invocation to God to protect Ghazan’s rule. There, he listed the various bases of legitimacy, mainly Muslim, but also referred to both ancient Iranian and Mongolian sources of political authority.

Padishah of the World, Shahanshah of Earth and Time, Sovereign Lord of the Kings of Iran and Turan, Manifestation of the Copious Grace of God, the Visible Sign of Islam and the Faith, a Jamshid, Dispenser of Justice, Animator of the Custom of World Domination, the Elevated Banner of Sovereignty, Bestower of the Carpet of Justice, an overflowing Sea of Compassion, King of the Domains of Monarchs, Heir to the Chinggisid Throne, Shadow of God, Defender of the Faith of Allah to the Ends of the Earth and Time.<sup>572</sup>

While the Īl-Khān still cultivated relations with China and the *qa’ans*, the more traditional Mongol motifs were already coexisting with a more pragmatic approach to Islamic political practices. According to Allsen, this is the reason why, in his work, Rashīd al-Dīn does not address his patron as ilkhan of a Mongol *ulus*, but instead as *Pādshāh* of the kingdom of Iran. This ideological alignment made it possible to bind administrators to the throne not only through patronage and coercion, but also through a sense of cultural proximity and shared norms of governance. The result was a military patronage state in which brokerage was channelled through the ruler’s household, combining Mongol traditions of personal authority with the Islamic and Persian bureaucratic idioms that underpinned the Ilkhan’s legitimacy.

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<sup>571</sup> Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.54.

<sup>572</sup> *RJT/Karīmī*, p.214. This formula is reported from Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.32.

Thus, as has been demonstrated, the evolution of administrative arrangements in the Mongol Empire and the Ilkhanate can be traced through the conceptual lens of brokerage and patronage and understood within the framework of network theory. The division of this chapter into distinct phases of administrative development is intended to counter the historiographical tendency to depict Persianate and other officials as uniformly subordinate to Mongol patrons, or to reduce their role to patronage and dependency. Such dynamics certainly formed part of the relationship, yet they alternated with moments in which administrators exercised substantial influence over the state. In this context, ethnic origin is of limited analytical value. What matters is that each configuration of administration rested on different forms of brokerage, and produced different forms of authority.

From Körgüz and Arghun Aqa to the Juvaynīs, power depended on the capacity to manage the relationships between the court, the provinces, and the fiscal apparatus. Early Mongol governance in Persia was defined by institutional experimentation and a reliance on personal connections. Those who succeeded politically did so by maintaining access to the *ordu* and navigating both imperial demands and the local struggle for control over revenues. Following Hülegü's takeover, local administrators entered the upper echelons of power not only as technical functionaries but as political actors. The *dīvān* functioned both as a site of collaboration and as a zone of contestation between Mongol rulers pressing for increased revenues and Persian officials seeking to consolidate their own influence. At the end of this period, the so-called "absolute vizierate" marked moments in which administrators appeared to monopolise access to the ilkhan, yet these episodes were ephemeral. No vizier could endure without the support of both the military aristocracy and the Persian elite.

Finally, with Ghazan's reign, the centralisation of authority, the codification of kingship, and the curtailment of informal brokerage networks emerged as a response to structural dysfunction. What enabled this reconfiguration was not necessity alone, but Ghazan's unique position: his cultural proximity to the Persian elite and his conversion to Islam allowed him to align state legitimacy with ideological consolidation in ways unavailable to his predecessors. These conditions made possible a temporary suppression of the brokerage logic that had sustained governance since the Mongol

conquest. Yet this suppression did not signal the resolution of structural tensions. The logic of negotiated authority remained latent within the system, and Ghazan's reforms should be read not as the maturation of Ilkhanid administration, but as its strategic narrowing, possible only under conditions that could not be reproduced.

## Second Part

The second part of this thesis builds on the preceding discussion of Ilkhanid agents by examining the connections through which Ilkhanid rulers sought to cultivate diplomatic relations with Latin Christendom. These initiatives reached their height in the final decades of the thirteenth century and drew on the mobilisation of religious figures, nobles, and merchants. As in earlier sections, the focus here is on the reciprocal nature of these exchanges, showing how Mongol-deployed agents used their brokerage roles not only to serve Ilkhanid objectives but also to secure advantages for their own communities or to advance political agendas within or in relation to the Ilkhanate.

This part is organised into three chapters, each devoted to a distinct group of intermediaries: Nestorian and Latin clergy, Armenian nobility, and Italian merchants. These groups have been selected because the surviving evidence for their interactions with the Mongols is richer than for other communities, allowing the reconstruction of sustained interactions. Although these external connections were less critical to the Ilkhanate's survival than the networks underpinning internal stability and territorial control, they are of considerable value for understanding the position of Christian minorities under Mongol rule. The analysis reveals how these minorities perceived their rulers and how their position evolved in response to broader political and religious change.

The diversity of these communities makes it possible to structure the second part of the thesis as both a counterpart to and a complement of the first. The development of ties between Mongol rulers and Christian elites was shaped by broader political shifts, notably the ilkhans' progressive adoption of Islam, especially under Öljeitü, and the collapse of the Latin presence in the Levant. These moments marked turning points in the nature of such connections, altering the influence intermediaries could wield locally and the leverage they held with their Mongol patrons.

### III. Faithful Ambassadors: Clerical Engagement in Ilkhanid diplomacy

By the time Hülegü's armies entered western Asia in 1256, the Mongols had already developed enduring contacts with Christianity. These connections were chiefly mediated through the Church of the East, commonly referred to in the sources as Nestorian, after Nestorius, the patriarch condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431.<sup>573</sup> The Nestorian Church played a significant role in the history of Christianity in Asia between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, reaching its maximum geographical extent and establishing patriarchal seats stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to India and China.<sup>574</sup> Coming from Persian and Mesopotamian communities, Nestorian missionaries had spread their version of Christianity to China under the Tang dynasty and subsequently to the northern steppes. By the time of Činggis Khan, Mongol tribes such as the Merkits, Naimans and Keraits had embraced Nestorian Christianity through these missionary networks.<sup>575</sup> During his rise to power, Činggis Khan had formed strategic alliances with various steppe leaders, most notably Jamuqa, his *anda* or "blood brother," and To'oril Khan, the Nestorian Christian chief of the Keraits and a former ally of Temüjin's father.<sup>576</sup> Although their alliance would later collapse, and To'oril would join the Nestorian Naimans in a failed bid to halt Temüjin's rise, these early ties left an enduring mark. Following To'oril's defeat in 1204, Temüjin captured Sorqaqtani Beki, the chief's niece, and married her to his son Tolui.

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<sup>573</sup> On the Church of the East and its expansion see Wilmshurst, D. *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913* (Louvain, 2000); Wilmshurst, D. *The Martyred Church: A History of the Church of the East* (London, 2011); Wilmshurst, D. *The Church of the East in the Abbasid Era* (London, 2019).

<sup>574</sup> For the presence of Christians in China from the Tang to the Yuan dynasties, see the specific works of Johnson, S.F. "Silk Road Christians and the Translation of Culture in Tang China." *Studies in Church History*, 53 (2017): 15-38; Tang, L. *East Syriac Christianity in Mongol-Yuan China* (Wiesbaden, 2011).

<sup>575</sup> Borbone, "A 13th Century Journey." p.223. See also Halbertsma, T.H.F. *Early Christian Remains of Inner Mongolia* (Leiden, 2008), p.31-70.

<sup>576</sup> Aigle, *Myth and Reality*, p.41-65; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.21.

Sorqaqtani thus became the first Christian consort within the Činggisid lineage, establishing a precedent for the presence of Nestorian figures at the highest levels of court.<sup>577</sup>

During the reigns of Ögödei, Güyük and Möngke, Nestorian Christianity gained a degree of prominence within the empire, largely through the personal conversions of Mongol *khatuns*.<sup>578</sup> Yet beyond individual affiliation, the broader appeal of the Church of the East lay in its longstanding engagement with steppe societies and its doctrinal flexibility. Accustomed to operating in multi-ethnic, non-Christian environments, the Church neither asserted political sovereignty nor demanded religious exclusivity, which made it particularly compatible with Mongol universalism and their pluralistic approach to rule.<sup>579</sup> For this reason, much of the modern historiography on Nestorian Christianity under Mongol rule has concentrated on the ideological and religious dimensions of their presence at court, or on their function as religious advisors of Mongol rulers.

For any scholar addressing the role of Nestorians in Mongol contacts with the Latin world, the contributions of Paul Pelliot stand out as a notable exception to this trend. In three seminal articles titled *Les Mongols et la Papauté* (1923, 1924 and 1932), Pelliot reconstructed, with philological precision, the involvement of Nestorian clergy in diplomatic exchanges between the Mongols and the Papacy, and argued that Nestorian clerics actively served the Mongols as interpreters and emissaries.<sup>580</sup> The topic, before Pelliot, had remained marginal in narratives of the Church of the East. Comprehensive works such as John Stewart's *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise* tend to depict the Mongols either as a disaster for Nestorian Christianity or, alternatively, as facilitators of its expansion. The latter interpretation is exemplified by Ian Gilman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit's *Christians in Asia before 1500*, which emphasises conversion but largely overlooks the political role

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<sup>577</sup> De Nicola, *Women in Iran*, p.91; Broadbridge, *Women*, p.25, 197.

<sup>578</sup> Broadbridge, *Women*, p.263; De Nicola, *Women in Iran*, p.190-192, 199, 213-14.

<sup>579</sup> Halbertsma, *Early Christian Remains*, Chapter 3 "Nestorian Christians in Central Asia and China in the Mongol Era," discusses the Mongols' views on the compatibility of their rule with other religious traditions at p.54-57.

<sup>580</sup> Pelliot, P. "Les Mongols et la papauté." *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, 3,23 (1923): 1-33; Pelliot, P. "Les Mongols et la papauté." *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, 4,24 (1924): 224-335; Pelliot, P. "Les Mongols et la papauté." *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, 8,28 (1932): 1-84.

of the Nestorian clergy, at times misrepresenting their function altogether.<sup>581</sup> More recently, Nestorian involvement in Mongol-Latin exchanges has been examined in the works of Denise Aigle and Robert Silverberg, especially in relation to the construction of the myth of Prester John. Aigle's analysis barely explores practical diplomacy, focusing instead on the eschatological dimension of the figure of Prester John.<sup>582</sup> Similarly, Silverberg examined the role of the Nestorians in shaping the legend of a "Prester John of the steppes," though his analysis remains largely confined to literary and historiographical representations.<sup>583</sup> A more factual analysis by Peter Jackson, in *The Mongols and the West*, provides an overview of Nestorian involvement in diplomatic exchanges, but portrays them in opposition to Latin clergy, or as conveyors of messages, chosen by the Mongols primarily for their Christian identity.<sup>584</sup> In relation to Rabban Šawma's embassy to Europe on behalf of the ilkhans, two recent studies also deserve mention. Morris Rossabi, in his *Voyager from Xanadu*, emphasises the religious tolerance of the Mongols, but at times misrepresents the nature of diplomatic contacts with the papacy, largely overlooking Nestorian participation before and after Rabban Šawma.<sup>585</sup> Pier Giorgio Borbone, in his editions and translations of the *History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Šawma*, does not frame its protagonists as substantive political actors within Ilkhanid diplomacy. His studies on the topic remain primarily focused on the internal role of Nestorian clerics within the Ilkhanate, rather than on their engagement with broader diplomatic

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<sup>581</sup> See Stewart, J. *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise* (Edinburgh, 1928), esp. Chapter 10. See also Gilman, I. and Klimkeit, H.J. *Christians in Asia before 1500* (Richmond, 1999). This latter work exemplifies both the misrepresentation and overstatement of the Nestorians' role, with the authors going so far as to claim that Hülegü and Abaqa employed only Jewish and Christian clerks at p.139.

<sup>582</sup> We have already cited Aigle's work in relation to previous topic, but it also contains a chapter entirely dedicated to the myth of Prester John. Aigle, *Myth and Reality*, esp. p.41-65.

<sup>583</sup> Silverberg, R. *The Realm of Prester John* (New York, 1972).

<sup>584</sup> See, for example, Jackson's account of Rabban Šawma's embassy. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.329.

<sup>585</sup> See Rossabi, M. *Voyager from Xanadu: Rabban Sauma and the first journey from China to the West* (New York, 1992), p.84, where he notes that "the Pontiff knew that the Ilkhan's mother and wife were Christians, and therefore mistakenly believed that Abaqa was a convert to Christianity."

structures. Nevertheless, his work offers a valuable point of departure for exploring the relationship between Nestorian ecclesiastical figures and the Ilkhanid court.<sup>586</sup>

This chapter builds on these contributions but shifts the focus to Nestorian agency, which, it argues, is most evident in the early phases of correspondence between the Mongols and Latin Christendom. Rather than viewing Nestorian clerics as symbols of pluralism, imperial tolerance, or just as passive envoys relaying Mongol directives, it contends that, for a time, they operated as agents of Mongol diplomacy, whose position afforded them substantive political agency. Their role is therefore examined as embedded within the Mongol *ordu*. In line with this dissertation's broader argument concerning the political function of intermediaries, the Nestorians are portrayed as agents occupying positions of high betweenness centrality who sustained, interpreted, and transmitted diplomatic initiatives across linguistic and confessional boundaries.

Despite the increased prominence of the Nestorian Church during the Mongol period in Persia, its activities are largely absent from Islamic sources. Chroniclers such as Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn offer scant commentary on Nestorian agency, rendering their influence difficult to assess without recourse to Latin and Syriac material. In contrast, the diplomatic correspondence between the Ilkhanate and Latin powers, together with the travel narratives of ecclesiastical envoys, provide a basis for reconstructing how some of Nestorians operated within and beyond the *ordu*. Thus, the methodological challenge of this chapter, which necessarily relies heavily on Latin sources, lies in assessing whether these episodes of clerical diplomacy represent more than isolated interventions. While Nestorian clerics acting on behalf of their Mongol overlords might not have been linked by a formal or unified structure, their repeated involvement in diplomatic affairs suggests a pattern of collaboration that was both meaningful and sustained. Therefore, rather than imposing coherence where the sources do not support it, this chapter treats the relationship between Nestorians and their Mongol overlords as a situational configuration shaped by access, affiliation, and negotiation. By

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<sup>586</sup> An overview of Borbone's work on the chronicle can be found in Borbone, "The History of Mar Yahballaha." p.349-372.

tracing how Eastern Christian actors leveraged such conditions (at times intermittently, at times with sustained effect) and the advantages they derived from them, it seeks to define their influence within Mongol diplomacy without overstating either its continuity or formalisation.

The first section of this chapter thus examines the initial contacts between the Mongols and Latin Christianity prior to the establishment of the Ilkhanate, with particular attention to the role played by Nestorian clerics in shaping these early encounters. The following part explores how Nestorian actors mediated contacts between the ilkhans and Latin Europe during the last decades of the thirteenth century, with a particular focus on Arghun's reign and Rabban Šawma's embassy to Europe. Finally, the third section considers the transformation of Ilkhanid-Nestorian relations in the later thirteenth century, assessing how changing religious and political circumstances led to a decline in their role as diplomatic intermediaries.

#### ◆ **The Church of the East, Crusade and Prester John**

The earliest encounters between steppe rulers and the Nestorian Church contributed to the formation of one of the most enduring Christian myths of the Middle Ages: that of Prester John, a Christian monarch said to rule a vast realm beyond the reach of Islam. As previously noted, several Christian leaders of the steppe opposed Činggis Khan during his rise to power, including To'oril, uncle of Sorqaqtani Beki, and Küchlüg, a prince of the Naiman tribe. Following their defeat, Küchlüg sought refuge with Yelü Zhilugu (r. 1178-1211), the Buddhist Gur-Khan of the Qara-Khitai in Central Asia. A few decades prior to these events, in the aftermath of the Second Crusade, in his *Chronicon*, Otto of Freising reported that a Christian king had defeated the Turks in Persia but was unable to join the crusader armies due to the impassability of the Euphrates. Otto linked the figure of the

mysterious king to the with those of the Magi.<sup>587</sup> Scholars such as Robert Silverberg and Denise Aigle have associated this story with the 1141 Battle of Qatwan, where the Qara-Khitai, under their first ruler Yelü Dashi, inflicted a crushing defeat on the Muslim Seljuks near Samarkand.<sup>588</sup>

Yelü Dashi was likely either a Buddhist or a Manichean and, as John Andrew Boyle notes, did not persecute his Muslim subjects. However, he appears to have shown particular favour to the Nestorian faith, allowing proselytization and exempting it from taxes.<sup>589</sup> Yelü Dashi's grandson, Yelü Zhilugu, agreed to shelter the Nestorian Küchlüg from Činggis Khan, and gave him his daughter's hand in marriage, posing as a condition his conversion to Buddhism. Küchlüg, however, overthrew Yelü Zhilugu and seized the Qara-Khitai throne for himself in 1213. Once in power, he abandoned Qara-Khitai's religious tolerance in favour of a more hostile policy towards Muslims, displaying instead favouritism towards Christians.<sup>590</sup> Küchlüg's rule, however, was short-lived: he was

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<sup>587</sup> Otto von Freising, *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A.D.* transl. Mierow. C. (New York, 1966), p.443-444. In the 1160s, a Letter of Prester John, purportedly addressed to the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143-1180), began to circulate widely in Latin Europe. The letter presented its author as "King of the Three Indies" and described a marvellous Christian realm that promised aid to fellow believers. See Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John*, p.40-45; Helleiner, K.F. "Prester John's Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia." *Phoenix*, 13, 2 (1959): 47-57; Brewer, K. *Prester John: The Legend and Its Sources* (Sydney, 2015), p.21.

<sup>588</sup> The Seljuks ruled over most of Greater Persia, and their decisive defeat had far-reaching repercussions. See Biran, M. "The Mongols and Nomadic Identity: The Case of the Kitans in China," in Amitai-Preiss, R. Biran, M. and Yang, A. eds. *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change: The Mongols and Their Eurasian Predecessors* (Honolulu, 2015): 152-181, p.155. On the figure of Yelü Dashi, see Biran, M. "True to Their Ways: Why the Qara-Khitai Did Not Convert to Islam," in Amitai-Preiss, R. and Biran, M. eds. *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden, 2004): 174-199, p.176-181. See also Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John*, p.72; Aigle, *Myth and Reality*, p.41-42; Brewer, *Prester John*, p.25, 29.

<sup>589</sup> Boyle, "The History of the Īl-Khāns." p.147. For background on the Qara-Khitai, see Grousset, R. *L'Empire des Steppes*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris, 1985), p.221, where he notes that the foundation of the Qara-Khitai had, decades earlier, arrested the spread of Islam across the steppes.

<sup>590</sup> JTJ/Boyle p.65-66; JTJ/Qazwīnī, I, p.49. "From here Küchlüg proceeded to Khotan, and seized that country; whereupon he compelled the inhabitants to abjure the religion of Mohammed, giving them the choice between two alternatives, either to adopt the Christian or idolatrous creeds. [...] One day, in Khotan, he drove the great imams out on to the plain and began to discuss religion with them. One of their number, the imam Ala-ad-Din Muhammad of Khotan, ventured to dispute with him: After he underwent torture he was crucified upon the door of his college, as will be hereinafter described." Tang, L. "Medieval Sources on Naiman Christians." in Winkler, D. and Tang, L. eds. *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia* (Berlin, 2009): 258-266, p.264. For more information about Qara-Khitai's offensives in Persia See Biran, M. *The empire of the Qara-Khitai in Eurasian history: between China and the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 2005).

overthrown during the Mongol invasion of the Qara-Khitai Khanate in 1218, after which Mongol forces advanced into Persian territory.

Contemporary to these events, while the crusader army was encamped at Damietta in 1221, Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Acre, relayed to King Louis the content of a documents obtained by the spies of Bohemond IV of Antioch (r. 1201-1233), which reported on military events unfolding in Central Asia and Persia.<sup>591</sup> The bishop summarised these events in his *Relatio de Davide*, which spoke of the victories of a Christian king named David, identified as the “filius regis Iohannis” (son of King John), against Muslim powers.<sup>592</sup> Roman Hautala argues that Vitry’s narrative was intended to explain why certain allies of the Ayyubid Sultan Al-Malik al-Kāmil (r. 1218-1238) had failed to offer help to Egypt.<sup>593</sup> Vitry’s report likely conflated and mixed accounts of multiple events, as he seems to reference the conflict between the Keraites and Činggis Khan’s forces, Küchlüg’s rivalry with the Khwārazmshāhiyān and the beginning of Mongol campaigns into Persian territories in 1219. This convergence of historical events and narrative elaborations is central to the broader argument of this dissertation. Although the legend of Prester John cannot be traced to a single episode or figure, it is likely that not one, but all the individuals mentioned above (To’oril, Küchlüg, Yelü Zhilugu) and their Nestorian affiliations contributed to the formation of the myth. What matters for this study is not the historicity or literary origin of the myth of Prester John, but its significance in Latin perception of the Nestorian faith. In fact, although there is no clear evidence that the myth of Prester John originated in Inner Asia, Nestorian clerics were well aware of it, and often invoked or alluded to it in their exchanges with Latin interlocutors, to the point that the latter became suspicious of it. Thus, at the same time, the myth became a narrative instrument through which Nestorians could

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<sup>591</sup> The text by Jacques de Vitry was also published by Rousset, P. “Lettres de Jacques de Vitry (1160/1170-1240), ed. Huygens, R.” *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 5,18 (1962): 216-216.

<sup>592</sup> On the *Relatio de Davide Rege* see also Richard, J. “The *Relatio de Davide* as a Source for Mongol History and the Legend of Prester John.” in Fraser, C. Hamilton, B. eds. *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes* (London, 1996): 139-158; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.48,143-144; Richard, J. “The Mongols and the Franks.” *Journal of Asian History*, 3, 1(1969): 45-57. For the integral text see Hautala, R. “History of the deeds of David, king of the Indies (1221), Latin text, Russian translation, and commentaries.” *Золотоордынское Обозрение*, Golden Horde Review (2013): 20-45.

<sup>593</sup> Hautala, “Deeds of David.” p.25-26.

frame their role as mediators, and through which Latins could conceptualise Christian presence at the heart of Mongol imperial power.<sup>594</sup> Yet it remained a myth, and Latin rulers soon discovered that Mongol affinity with Christianity (real or perceived) did not mitigate the violence of Mongol campaigns, nor did it alter the empire's expansion strategy.

The first Mongol incursions into the Caucasus, occurring as early as 1223, caused widespread devastation in the Christian Kingdom of Georgia, news of which soon reached Latin Christendom. The constable of Queen Rusudan I sent a letter to Pope Honorius III (r.1216-1227), explaining the Georgian failure to resist the Mongols. The Georgians had been deceived by reports that the Mongol armies bore crosses and carried a portable church in a tent, indications of a purported Christian allegiance.<sup>595</sup> Between 1236 and 1237, the Mongol general Chormaghun completely subdued Georgia and Greater Armenia. In 1238-41, Batu's armies launched a major campaign into Europe, overwhelming the Rus' principalities, Hungary and Poland, and reaching as far as Bohemia.

Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227-1241) responded by offering indulgences to those prepared to resist the invaders, but the Mongol advance was halted following the death of Ögödei in 1241, the same year of Gregory's own death. His successor, Innocent IV (r. 1243-1254), preoccupied by his conflict with the Holy Roman Emperor, adopted a different approach and sought to initiate diplomatic contact with the Mongols. In the months preceding the Council of Lyon in 1245, the pope issued a call for a *Remedium contra Tartaros* (remedy against the Tartars), and dispatched three distinct missions to the Mongol world. Led by Ascelin of Lombardy, André of Longjumeau, and John of Pian del Carpine, these embassies bore letters (*Cum Non Solus* and *Dei Patris Immensa*)

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<sup>594</sup> See, for instance, Marco Polo's positive and Rubruck's more suspicious description of the figures of King David and Prester John. *Rubruck/Jackson*, p.123; *Marco Polo/Yule-Cordier*, p.215-216.

<sup>595</sup> Knobler, A. *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration* (Leiden, 2017), p.10; *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.166-167. "False information arrived concerning (the Mongols), to the effect that they were mages or of the Christian faith, wonderworkers, and that they had come to avenge the Christians from the tyranny of the Tachiks."

which called upon the Mongols to clarify their intentions, cease their assaults on Christian populations, and embrace Christianity themselves.<sup>596</sup>

Overall, the papal envoys were not particularly successful in appealing to Mongol rulers and generals. John of Pian del Carpine reached the court of Güyük in 1246, after sojourning at Batu's *ordu*. After months of waiting, he was admitted to the *qa'an's* presence, only to receive a stern and hostile dismissal.<sup>597</sup> The Dominican friars Ascelin of Lombardy and André of Longjumeau were tasked with approaching the Mongols in the Middle East, while also assessing the disposition of Eastern Christian communities towards ecclesiastical union under papal authority. For this purpose, they carried a further document, *Cum simus super*, addressed to the "schismatic" Christians in the East. Peter Jackson suggests that Innocent IV may have hoped to strengthen ties with Orthodox, Nestorians, or even Muslim rulers to help contain the Mongol threat.<sup>598</sup>

Ascelin departed from Lyon in March 1245, accompanied later by Dominicans Guiscard of Cremona and Simon of Saint-Quentin, who served as interpreters. In 1247, the delegation reached Baiju's camp in the southern Caucasus.<sup>599</sup> There, their refusal to kneel before the Mongol general nearly led to their execution.<sup>600</sup> However, their mission achieved partial success, as they returned to Lyon accompanied by two envoys, named in the sources as Aïbeg and Serkis, the latter likely a Nestorian cleric named Sarkis or Sergius. Despite the positive predisposition of the Latin Church,

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<sup>596</sup> While the missions were framed as diplomatic enterprises, they were also secretly tasked with intelligence-gathering. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.88; Pelliot, P. "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1923), p.7. The letters *Cum non solum* and *Dei Patris Immensa* are transcribed in *Mosheim*, app. X, XI, p.43,45 and in *Lupprian*, p.141-149, n.20, 21.

<sup>597</sup> John of Pian del Carpine's prolonged sojourn at the Mongol court is reported in *Pian Del Carpine/Menestò*, esp. p.390-395. The text of Güyük's letter is partially transcribed in Aigle, *Myth and Reality*, p.146; *Lupprian*, p.182-189, n.32. reports several versions and a French translation by Pelliot.

<sup>598</sup> Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.93.

<sup>599</sup> *Saint Quentin/Ghazaryan*, XXX, p.69. Simon of Saint Quentin left a history of the tartars which is now lost and was partly conserved in Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*.

<sup>600</sup> The violent reaction of the Mongols in the entourage of Baiju, when Ascelin transmitted this invitation to them, is related in *Saint Quentin/Ghazaryan*, XXXII, p.42.

the two envoys were ultimately sent home in 1248, as they did not have the authority to engage in meaningful negotiations.<sup>601</sup>

André of Longjumeau set out around the same time with an unidentified companion.<sup>602</sup> After extended delays in the Holy Land and correspondence with the sultan of Homs, al-Mansūr Ibrāhīm, he headed north and encountered the Mongols at Tabriz in 1246.<sup>603</sup> Although he never reached Baiju's *ordu*, his mission was marked by the encounter with Simeon Rabban Ata, a Nestorian prelate reportedly placed in charge of Christian affairs in the Middle East by the *qa'an*.<sup>604</sup> Although the exact nature of his office remains unclear, multiple sources confirm his prominence. According to Kirakos Gandzaketsi's History of the Armenians:

He (Simeon) approached the Khan (Ögödei) 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 Rabban himself to his commanders with a written order that all obey his command.<sup>605</sup>

Pelliot convincingly demonstrates that Ögödei personally sent Rabban Ata in the Caucasus during Chormaghun's campaigns (ca.1233-1241).<sup>606</sup> Because of his official mandate from Karakorum, Nestorian soon acquired a significant amount of influence and power, which Kirakos describes as follows:

He built churches [...] where previously no one dared utter the name of Christ, [...] all the Tartar commanders gave him gifts from their booty.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.89; Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1924), p.327. Pelliot also reports a copy of Baiju's letter brought by the envoys and of an edict the general had received from Arghun Aqa on behalf of the *qa'an*.

<sup>602</sup> Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1932), p.3-8.

<sup>603</sup> Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1932), p.11.

<sup>604</sup> For an in -depth discussion of the role of Rabban-Ata in the Mongol Empire see Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1924), p.230-248.

<sup>605</sup> *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.238-239.

<sup>606</sup> Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1924), p.225.

<sup>607</sup> *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.239.

The papal registers preserve the text of the letters that Simeon gave to André of Longjumeau for the attention of Innocent IV, in which Simeon presents himself as *Vicarii Orientis*.<sup>608</sup> Rabban Ata's letters also included two pamphlets and a confession of faith written by the archbishop of Nusaybin and five other Nestorian prelates, two of whom were archbishops and three bishops. Two previously unknown letters conserved in the French National Library were also addressed by the Nestorian prelate respectively to the King of France and the Holy Roman Emperor, which Pierre-Vincent Claverie has more recently edited.<sup>609</sup> In the letter to the pope, after pleading with both Clement IV and the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II for mutual reconciliation, Rabban Ata voiced his concerns for the conditions of Nestorian and Jacobite communities living in the Levantine Crusader kingdoms:

We ask a favourable intercession of your Holiness (Paternitate Vestra) for I. (Johanne, John), archbishop of Jerusalem, who is one of our people, and for all our Eastern Christian brothers who live in Antioch, Tripoli, Acre, and in other lands under your rule. (We ask) You to recommend them so that no one could harm them.<sup>610</sup>

A similar formula can be found in the letter addressed by Rabban Ata to the king of France, with the addition of a blessing for the upcoming crusade:

For the venerable John, archbishop of Jerusalem, and all our other brothers who live in the Holy Land, (we ask) you to be attentive towards them and to recommend them, as Christ's charity commands.<sup>611</sup>

Apart from Longjumeau and his companion, Rabban Ata also interacted with Ascelin's delegation, and Simon of Saint Quentin left an account of the Nestorian, although markedly less favourable:

Rabban Ata, a Christian monk though a Nestorian one, belonged to the household of King David and perhaps was his counsellor; he was summoned, after David's death, by his daughter, the wife of Činggis Khan. Because of his friendship with her father and because

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<sup>608</sup> The letter has been edited by Pelliot in "Les Mongols et La papauté." (1924), p.227; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.94.

<sup>609</sup> Claverie, P.V. "Deux lettres inédites de la première mission en Orient d'André de Longjumeau (1246)." *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, 158, 1 (2000): 283-292.

<sup>610</sup> Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1924), p.227-228. "In spiritu (?) petimus iterum a Paternitate Vestra petitionem secundum pro I. Archiepiscopo Hierosolyinitano, qui est de gente nostra, et pro fratribus nostris Christianis Orientalibus qui sunt Antiochia, Tripoli et Accon, et in aliis terris vestris ut recommendetis eos, ne aliquis eos offendat."

<sup>611</sup> Claverie, "Deux lettres inédites." p.291. "Pro venerabili Johanne, archiepiscopo nostro Jerosolimitano, et aliis fratribus nostris habitantibus in Terra Sancta, ut sitis solliciti pro ipsis et recommendetis eos, sicut exigit karitas Christi."

she was a Christian, he became her confessor [...] But, as has been found out afterwards by careful questioning by the Dominicans who, by the command of the pope, had gone to the Tartars and who carried letters to this Rabban Ata himself, [...] he was a merchant and usurer, a diviner and heretic, hostile to Catholic and orthodox faith.<sup>612</sup>

The account reflects Latin discomfort with Nestorian proximity to Mongol power. Rabban Ata's access to the Činggisid court, initially framed as spiritual, is tainted by accusations of usury and heresy. These served to delegitimise a broker whose authority in the negotiations with Rome derived from political positioning rather than doctrinal authority. It is also notable how the account also presents a reference to King David, the alleged son of Prester John. Was the name of the king explicitly mentioned by Rabban Ata? The absence of any reference to it in his letters seems to conflict with this hypothesis, but in a later account by William of Rubruck we find the name of Prester John mentioned in relation to Nestorian clergy:

[...] That Nestorian (Prester John) raised himself to be king (in his stead), and the Nestorians used to call him King John and to say things of him ten times more than was true.<sup>613</sup>

This would at least confirm that the Nestorian were aware of the myth circulating in the Latin world, and certainly did not try to discourage its spread. A figure like the one of Prester John, even when referred to as a monarch defeated by the Mongols, could certainly confer authority to the Nestorians in their negotiations with Rome.<sup>614</sup>

Ascelin and Simon of Saint-Quentin's return in 1248 prompted a papal reply to Baiju, a letter titled *Viam Agnoscere Veritatis*.<sup>615</sup> Meanwhile, André de Longjumeau joined Louis IX's crusade, which had departed for Cyprus that same year. As soon as he landed in Cyprus, Louis received Marc

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<sup>612</sup> *Saint Quentin/Ghazaryan*, XXX, p.70. "Rabbanata vero monachus christianus sed tamen nestorinus, quia vivente David rege fuerat ei familiaris et fortasse quandoque consiliarius, post mortem ipsius David a filia ejus uxore Cingiscam tandem est evocatus et eidem occasione antique patris sui amicitie et quia christianus erat consiliarius ac penitenciaris ejus factus est. [...] sed, sicut postea diligenti inquisitione per fratres predicatorum, qui de mandato Pape ad Tartaros ibant et ad ipsum etiam Rabbanatam litteras deportabant, [...] mercator erat et usurarius ac divinus et hereticus, fideique catholice et orthodoxe inimicus."

<sup>613</sup> *Rubruck/Jackson*, p.122.

<sup>614</sup> Aigle, *Myth and Reality*, p.53; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.99, 174, 181.

<sup>615</sup> *Lupprian*, p.197, n.35.

and David, two Nestorian emissaries carrying message sent by the Mongol commander Eljigidei. The text of the missive is reported in a letter to the Curia by the papal legate Otto of Chateauroux, with a transcription done “word by word,” probably by André de Longjumeau.<sup>616</sup> Part of Chateauroux’s report, is dedicated to the Nestorian ambassadors’ audience with King Louis, where they explained Mongol plans and asked the king to move against Egypt and impede mutual assistance between Baghdad and Cairo, as the Mongols were about to attack the Caliph. However, there is no trace of such request in the letter, which is mostly dedicated to the description of Eljigidei’s mandate and his benevolence towards Christians:

We came with power and the mandate to free all Christians from servitude, tribute, persecution, taxes and similar things so that they could be honoured and respected, and nobody could touch their belongings. [...] We rebuilt ruined churches [...] so that no one would dare to forbid them to pray with a serene heart and to rejoice for our rule.<sup>617</sup>

In the following passage, the Mongol commander again demands from Louis better treatment for Eastern Christians living under Frankish rule:

Especially (we demand), as in God’s law, that there should be no difference between Latins, Greeks, Armenians, Nestorians, Jacobites and all the others who adore the Cross. As all of them are one in our kingdom, we ask that you do not make a difference between them, treating them with mercy and justice.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> Pelliot, “Les Mongols et la papauté.” (1932), p.22-24. Pelliot reports the Latin text found in *Spicilegium, sive Collectio veterum aliquot scriptorum qui in Galliae bibliothecis delituerant*, Vol.3. ed. D’ Achery, L. (Montalant, 1723), p.625; and in *Mosheim*, app. XII, p.47. The names of the bearers are Sabeldin Monfac, David and Marcum. They appear in Otto’s relation at the end of the letter. The envoys identify themselves as Nestorian Christians, and they claim to hail from Nineveh, a place next to Mosul. Aigle, “The letters.” p.146; The letter of Eljigidei has also been translated by Jackson, P. ed. *The Seventh Crusade, 1244-1254: Sources and Documents* (London, 2007). The translations that follow, however, are my own from the original Latin.

<sup>617</sup> *Mosheim*, XII, p.47; *Spicilegium*, p.625. “Venimus cum potestate et mandato ut omnes Christiani sint liberi a servitute et tributo et angaria et pedagiis et consimilibus, et sint in honore et reverentia, et nullus tangat possessione eorum [...] Et ecclesiae destructae raedificentur [...] et non audeat aliquis prohibere ut orent corde quieto et libenti pro regno nostro.”

<sup>618</sup> *Spicilegium*, p.625; *Mosheim*, app. XII, p.48. “Ita precipue quod in lege dei non fit differentia inter Latinum, Graecum, Armenicum, Nestorinum at Jacobinum et omnes qui adorant crucem Omnes enim sunt unum apud nos et sic petimus rex magnificum non dividat inter ipsos, sed fit eius pietas et clementia.”

There has been considerable debate over the aims and circumstances under which Eljigidei's letter to Louis IX was written. While the content of the letter and the motives behind it have invited scepticism, there is no compelling reason, as Aigle and Pelliot have stressed and Jackson seems to concede, to doubt that the letter originated directly from the general himself.<sup>619</sup> Yet, its conciliatory tone and appeals to Christian solidarity cannot be dismissed as opportunistic fabrications. Crucially, at least one of Eljigidei's emissaries, the Nestorian David, was encountered in Georgia with the Mongols by André de Longjumeau during his first embassy in 1246. This meeting not only confirms the ambassador's affiliation to Eljigidei's *ordu* but also connects it to Rabban Ata, who was also at Eljigidei's court.<sup>620</sup> Jackson suggests that Eljigidei's overture was primarily designed to mislead Louis' crusade and direct it away from Mongol-controlled zones.<sup>621</sup> His interpretation rests on Simon of Saint-Quentin's report, in which the friar explains that Mongol commanders repeatedly questioned him and Ascelin about the expected arrival of Frankish forces in Syria, and seemed preoccupied by the upcoming crusade:

In their initial questions, however, they kept asking the friars circumspectly and with great insistence whether the Franks had already crossed over into Syria.<sup>622</sup>

This passage, if read in contrast Rabban Ata's missives a year earlier, shows that, while Nestorian clerics appear to have been well-informed about the expedition's objectives and timelines, the Mongols, at least while Baiju was in command, were less certain. The situation, however, might have changed by the time of Eljigidei, as his Nestorian envoys landed in Cyprus before Louis' arrival.<sup>623</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1932), p.27-28; Aigle, "The letters." p.147; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.99.

<sup>620</sup> Guzman, G. "Simon of Saint-Quentin and the Dominican Mission to the Mongol Baiju: A Reappraisal." *Speculum*, 46, 2 (1971): 232-249, p.236; Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum Historiale*, ed. Koberger, A. (Nuremberg, 1483), XXXII, 90. This part is not included in Saint Quentin's history. Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1932), p.20.

<sup>621</sup> Jackson, P. "The crisis in the Holy Land in 1260." *The English Historical Review*, 95, 376(1980): 481-513, p.497-498.

<sup>622</sup> *Saint Quentin/Ghazaryan*, XXXII, p.41. "In primis autem questionibus suis caute multumque solícite a fratribus inquirebant utrum adhuc in Syriam Franci transfretassent."

<sup>623</sup> Pelliot notes that the letter itself was written three months before the departure of Louis from Aigues-Mortes. Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1932), p.18.

This was possible because Rabban Ata, then at Eljigidei's *ordu*, had been informed of the details of the expedition by André of Longjumeau and by some Venetian or Genoese merchants.<sup>624</sup>

Eljigidei's letter was shortly followed by another letter from Smbat, constable of Cilician Armenia, who was then en route to Karakorum to formalise the kingdom's submission to the Mongols. In his letter, Smbat described the favourable treatment of Christians under Mongol rule, and relayed what he had been told by Christians in Central Asia about the privileges they enjoyed.<sup>625</sup> His letter also included an oblique reference to Christian kings in the East, a likely echo of the Prester John myth.<sup>626</sup> We cannot possibly know if Smbat's letter was also, in some ways, influenced by Nestorian accounts, but Eastern Christian communities scattered across west Asia had solid connections with one another, and all depended on the main patriarchal seat of Baghdad. Therefore, the Nestorians Smbat encountered must have been aware of who he was, and to whom he was in contact with.<sup>627</sup>

The letters of Eljigidei and Smbat caused great excitement at the Christian camp, and later in Latin Europe, prompting Louis to respond via André of Longjumeau in 1249.<sup>628</sup> The main counter-argument to the authenticity of Eljigidei's letter remains precisely the outcome of these successive diplomatic missions sent to Louis to Mongolia to establish an alliance with the Mongols. According to Joinville, Longjumeau's party was eventually received near Emil and returned to the Levant in 1251 with a letter from Oghul Qaimish that reframed Louis's gifts as tribute and demanded their

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<sup>624</sup> Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1924), p.307.

<sup>625</sup> *Mosheim*, app. XII, p.49 "Ita quod Christiani illius terrae in praesentia avi istius Kan venerunt; quos ille cum magno honore suscepit, et libertati donavit, et fecit prohiberi ne quis faceret vel diceret de quo vel ad modicum possent contristari."

<sup>626</sup> For the letter of Constable Smbat see *Mosheim*, app. XII, p.49-50. See also below, p.225-227.

<sup>627</sup> On the Church of the East's reach at this time, see Dickens, M. "Syriac Christianity in Central Asia," in King, D. ed. *The Syriac World* (London and New York, 2019): 583-624; Halbertsma, *Early Christian Remains*, p.63-66.

<sup>628</sup> Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.99-104. Jackson notes that the news caused considerable excitement in western Europe. Matthew Paris recorded it in his *Chronica majora*, including a copy of the French translation of Eljigidei's letter that Louis IX had sent to his mother, Queen Blanche, and which she forwarded to the English king, Henry III. Adam Marsh wrote that reports of the Mongols' conversion were spreading across the world.

annual repetition.<sup>629</sup> The tone of Oghul Qaimish's response, possibly dictated by the regent's preoccupation with other more pressing matters, made clear that the Mongols had no interest in a symmetrical alliance, and Joinville claims that Louis regretted the entire enterprise. Despite this blunder, Louis was soon convinced by reports of the alleged conversion of Batu's son Sartaq to send a second expedition to the Mongols, this time led by the Franciscan William of Rubruck. The latter departed in 1253 and, after an initial disappointing encounter with Sartaq arrived in Karakorum in 1254. After being received by the *qa'an*, Rubruck reported Möngke's violent rebuttal of Eljigidei's letter:

A certain man by the name of David came to you as the ambassador of the Mo'al, but he was an impostor.<sup>630</sup>

David was the name of one of the Nestorians who had carried the letter to Louis' camp. His companions have also been identified as Nestorians, a fact that prompted Rubruck to dismiss Prester John's story as a Nestorian legend and to harshly criticise Eastern Christians:

For this is the way of the Nestorians who come from these parts: out of nothing, they will make a great story, just as they have spread abroad that Sartach is a Christian, and so of Mangu Chan and Keu Chan (Güyük Khan) because they show more respect to Christians than to other people; though of a truth they are not Christians.<sup>631</sup>

While the Mongol responses to these embassies undoubtedly constituted a rebuttal of earlier contacts, this study argues that the apparent contradiction with the messages received by Longjumeau and Rubruck at the *ordu* must be understood within the context of the political crisis that followed Güyük's death in April 1248. Eljigidei's letter to Louis IX can be certainly framed in the context of frontier autonomy: as a Mongol commander stationed far from the imperial centre, Eljigidei operated with broad discretion, particularly during the political vacuum following the *qa'an*'s death.<sup>632</sup> By the time André of Longjumeau arrived, the regency of Oghul Qaimish had little interest in, or perhaps

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<sup>629</sup> Joinville and Villehardouin, *Chronicles of the Crusades*, ed. Smith, C. (London, 2008), p.267.

<sup>630</sup> The text of the letter, an extract of William travel's account, is reported in *Mosheim*, app. XIV, p.55-56.

<sup>631</sup> Rubruck/Jackson, p.122.

<sup>632</sup> On this, see above, p.59.

knowledge of, prior diplomatic overtures. What had been promised by the general was not necessarily true in Karakorum, as Möngke and Güyük made it clear that no negotiation could occur without prior submission.

Furthermore, Jackson's interpretation of Eljigidei's letter and his request to move against Egypt as an attempt to mislead the crusaders presents several problems. The only mention of an upcoming Mongol expedition against Baghdad is contained, in fact, not in the letter itself, but in the notes attached to its translation by Chateauroux, which relay what the Nestorian ambassadors referred orally. If the Mongols truly intended to manipulate Latin movements to steer the crusade away from their operational zone, it is difficult to explain why such a critical point would be left to oral transmission alone. Mongol diplomacy was never sparing of orders and appeals, especially when addressing foreign powers. To omit such intentions from the letter, while delegating them to the spoken testimony of emissaries, makes little sense. Eljigidei, though Christian, was above all a Mongol commander. His aim was to exploit Louis' campaign against the Mamluks, not to negotiate privileges for Nestorian communities under Frankish rule. Jackson's hypothesis would be persuasive if the letter was primarily concerned with military matters, leaving the protection of Nestorian communities to the oral testimony of the envoys rather than to the written message. In sum, there is simply no need to posit deliberate deceit in Eljigidei's overture. He recognised a convergence of strategic interests and employed Nestorian envoys, likely under the guidance of figures such as Rabban Ata, who had earlier written to the French king, to present that alignment in terms intelligible to a Latin audience.

Secondly, Jackson's interpretation carries the implication that the envoys relayed misleading information to Louis IX, and does not consider the envoys' agency. It is clear that the Nestorian clerics and laymen involved in Eljigidei's embassy played an instrumental role in the formulation of his letter. The reference to Nestorian communities under Latin rule indicates that they advanced their own priorities alongside Mongol objectives, and their appeals for ecclesiastical protection and repeated assertions of Mongol favour, found in both Rabban Ata's and Eljigidei's letters, reveal that

safeguarding these communities was central to their role. The stakes for the envoys were thus considerable, as their credibility depended on aligning the defence of their co-religionists with the wider aims of Mongol diplomacy. Their credibility depended on being trusted by both sides, and they therefore sought to strengthen their legitimacy among Latin Christians. What they conveyed to Louis was, therefore, a strategic rendering of a genuine Mongol overture, framed to resonate with a Frankish monarch. As brokers, David and Marc connected the ordu with the Latin world, operating with high betweenness centrality by bridging actors otherwise divided by language and custom. By casting Eljigidei's request as a call to defend Christian communities, they aligned Mongol military aims with their concerns and reinforced their own legitimacy as mediators. The letter must therefore be read as a genuine act of outreach, shaped by Nestorian intermediaries who translated Mongol strategy into Christian diplomatic idioms.

#### ◆ **Ilkhanid-papal correspondence and the Nestorians**

During the second half of the thirteenth century, Mongol policy towards Latin Christendom underwent a reorientation. The fragmentation of the empire and the intensification of hostilities with the Mamluks, compelled the Mongols in Persia to seek new strategic alignments. Ilkhanid rulers displayed a greater willingness to engage diplomatically with European powers, and to temper the ideology of universal rule in favour of more pragmatic forms of alliance-building.<sup>633</sup> This change in Mongol attitude coincided with a greater openness among the Latins, starting with the pontificate of Clement IV. This section analyses Ilkhanid diplomatic epistolary exchanges with Latin Christendom from the 1260s onwards. Although this correspondence, extending across more than five decades, is now largely accessible thanks to the efforts of scholars such as Abel-Rémusat, Antoine Mostaert, Francis Woodman Cleaves and Karl-Ernst Lupprian, there has been no attempt to interpret all these

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<sup>633</sup> See, on this topic, Amitai-Preiss, R. "Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War Against the Mamluks," in Amitai-Preiss, R. and Morgan, D. eds. *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy* (Leiden, 2000): 57-72.

letters within a unified conceptual framework, or to use them to evaluate to what extent the Church of the East influenced the formulation and transmission of diplomatic initiatives.<sup>634</sup>

The surviving evidence suggests that Hülegü took the initiative in opening official diplomatic contact with Latin Christendom. In 1260, Thomas Agni of Lentini, the future Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, then bishop of Bethlem, had dispatched the Dominican David of Ashby to the Ilkhanid court in Tabriz to enquire into Hülegü's intentions.<sup>635</sup> It is unclear whether Hülegü's missive was prompted by this mission. As the text of the Mongol letter was unknown to earlier scholars, Johann Lorenz von Mosheim dated both the missive and the papal response to 1260, thereby excluding any connection between these and Ashby's arrival.<sup>636</sup> However, Paul Meyvaert, who recovered the original text of Hülegü's letter, has convincingly demonstrated that it was composed in 1262 and addressed to Louis IX.<sup>637</sup>

Hülegü's missive marked a watershed in Mongol-Christian relations, as it contained a concrete proposal for military cooperation against the Mamluks and included a promise to restore Jerusalem to the crusaders.<sup>638</sup> The letter was intercepted en route by Manfred of Sicily (r. 1258-1266), then an ally of the Mamluks.<sup>639</sup> Despite this, Jean Richard has established that a copy of the letter reached Louis IX, and the text of the papal response confirms that the letter was also received by Pope Urban

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<sup>634</sup> See *Lupprian*; Mostaert, Cleaves, "Trois documents mongols" cited above p.45; Abel-Rémusat, J.P. "Mémoires sur les relations politiques des Princes chrétiens, et particulièrement des Rois de France, avec les empereurs Mongols." *Mémoires de l'Institut de France*, 7 (1824): 335-438.

<sup>635</sup> Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.117.

<sup>636</sup> *Mosheim*, app. XVII, p.66.

<sup>637</sup> The text of the letter has been transcribed from a manuscript preserved in the Nationalbibliothek of Vienna by Paul Meyvaert, who published a study on the content of the missive in 1980. Meyvaert, P. "An unknown letter of Hülegü, Il-Khan of Persia, to king Louis IX of France." *Viator*, 11 (1980): 245-260, p.252-253.

<sup>638</sup> Urban IV returned an answer to the ilkhan in 1264, the text of which is conserved in the Vatican Archives. *Mosheim*, app. XVII, p.66; *Lupprian*, p.216-220, n.41.

<sup>639</sup> This is confirmed both also by a later papal response in 1267 and Abaqa's memorandum in 1274 *Lupprian*, p.220-222, n.42; p.226-230, n.44.

IV (r. 1261-1264), having been delivered by a certain John the Hungarian.<sup>640</sup> Little is known about John the Hungarian, other than that he held a position of trust at the Ilkhanid court. In Hülegü's letter, he is credited with facilitating the release of Latin Christian pilgrims who had been caught in the crossfire of the Mamluk-Ilkhanid conflict.

Rychaldus, another European in Ilkhanid service, known to have acted as Hülegü's Latin secretary, has been identified by Meyvaert as the likely author of the letter.<sup>641</sup> Meyvaert's attribution rests primarily on stylistic parallels with the letter sent by Abaqa in 1274, a memorandum submitted to the Council of Lyon, in which Rychaldus is explicitly named leading Hülegü's mission in 1262. This identification has been reiterated by Jackson, Borbone, and Aigle.<sup>642</sup> However, the style of the letters of 1268 is markedly simpler and lacks the elaborate formulae and theological framing found in Hülegü's 1262 communication, which suggests at least a co-authorship.<sup>643</sup>

Contrary to Meyvaert's suggestion, the letter was most plausibly not composed originally in Latin, but rather translated from a draft in another language. In particular, presence of the Syriac greeting *Barachmar*, rendered in the Latin text as *salutem*, has been shown by Pier Giorgio Borbone to derive from the Syriac *barekh mār*, a formula used within the Church of the East in both liturgical settings, where it addressed God as Lord, and in formal or deferential correspondence, directed to individuals endowed with the power to confer blessings, such as bishops, monks, or priests.<sup>644</sup> Borbone suggest that the word's insertion, together with that of a few other terms in Mongolian, at the end of an otherwise Latinate salutation suggests that it had already acquired a kind of formulaic

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<sup>640</sup> The fact that the letter we possess today was transcribed in Wien in the fourteenth century opens the possibility that the missive we possess is not a copy that was delivered, but one that was intercepted by Manfred. Meyvaert, "An unknown letter." p.247. Meyvaert suggests that we only possess the letter addressed to Louis, but also that the missive likely never reached the King of France.

<sup>641</sup> Meyvaert, "An unknown letter." p.251.

<sup>642</sup> Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.173; Borbone, P.G. "Syro-Mongolian Greetings for the King of France: A Note about the Letter of Hülegü to King Louis IX (1262)." *Studi Classici e Orientali*, 61,1 (2015): 479-484; Aigle, "The letters." p.156-157.

<sup>643</sup> To confront the letters, see, Meyvaert, "An unknown letter." p.252; Mosheim, app. XIV, p.70; Lupprian, p.223-225, n.43.

<sup>644</sup> Borbone, "Syro-Mongolian Greetings." p.482.

status within the Mongol court, likely via Nestorian usage.<sup>645</sup> The preservation of untranslated terms in the Latin text suggests that the letter was copied from a pre-existing draft rather than composed through real-time dictation and translation. The retention of the *Barachmar* implies either that the translator was unaware of its linguistic origin or that they recognised its rhetorical significance. In this case, it would suggest the hand of a Nestorian intermediary, as no Latin scribe or cleric would have employed such a formula to address the pope or the king of France.

As concerns the content of the letter, after a lengthy formulaic introduction, Hülegü describes all his exploits against the “Saracens,” their Prophet (described as “*nefandissimi pseudoprophete*”) and their “pope” (the caliph of Baghdad), calling himself “benevolent exalter of the Christian faith” (*Christiane fidei benignus sublimator*).<sup>646</sup> The letter then contains a description of the privileges accorded by the ilkhan to the Christians living under his rule, in particular to the Nestorian Patriarch:

We ordered the Nestorian Patriarch’s residence to be moved to the city of Baghdad so that he could reside there in peace and security. And we protected him with all his clerics, bishops, monks and all the others (Nestorians) from the Saracens, bestowing upon them great honours.<sup>647</sup>

The description of how the patriarch, bishops, monks, priests, and clerics were separated from the Muslim population, protected, and enriched by Hülegü’s command occupies a central place

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<sup>645</sup> Borbone, “Syro-Mongolian Greetings.” p.480-481.

<sup>646</sup> Meyvaert, “An unknown letter.” p.252.

<sup>647</sup> Meyvaert, “An unknown letter.” p.256. “Patriarcham quidem Nestorianorum in dicta civitate Baldacense commorantem cum suis episcopis, monachis, prespiteris, clericis et Christianis universis eosdem singillatim a Sarracenis segregando et eisdem bona maiora conferendo, in suis bonis quiete et salve iussimus residere.” While Hülegü’s claim of hostility towards Islam were clearly exaggerated, his mother Sorqaqtani Beki and his wife Doquz Khatun were both Nestorian, and Bar Hebraeus and Kirakos Gandzaketsi agree on the fact that the ilkhan was particularly favourable to Christians, to the point of granting the palace of the Caliph in Baghdad to the Nestorian patriarch *Bar Hebraeus/Budge*, p.491. Also translated in part in Spuler, B. *History of the Mongols* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), p.40; *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.318. “However, Hülegü’s wife, the senior Qatun, named Doquz Qatun (Toghuz xat’un) was a Christian. She spared the Christians of Baghdad, Nestorians and other denominations and beseeched her husband not to kill them. And he spared them with their goods and property.” For more information on Hülegü’s real and perceived stance towards Christians, see Stewart, A.D “Hülegü: The New Constantine?” in Hillenbrand C. ed. *Syria in Crusader Times: Conflict and Co-Existence* (Edinburgh, 2020): 321-335, p.330-331; Jackson, P. “Hülegü Khan and the Christians: The Making of a Myth,” in Edbury, P. and Phillips, J. eds. *The Experience of Crusading, Volume 2: Defining the Crusader Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2003): 196-214.

in the letter. In the same section, Hülegü offers praise to Louis IX for having acted as a protector of “all who bear the name of Christ.” This statement clearly alludes to Louis’s favourable stance toward other Christian confessions, and closely echoes the appeals made in earlier correspondence by Eljigidei and Rabban Ata, both of whom encouraged the king, over a decade earlier, to act as defender of all Christians regardless of rite.<sup>648</sup> In addition to this, the letter opens with a citation from the Epistle to the Hebrews (1:1), followed by a quotation from the Book of Jeremiah (1:10), both of which are used to affirm the divine election of Činggis Khan.<sup>649</sup> This form of scriptural framing is not only entirely absent from Mongol diplomatic correspondence in Persian or Mongolian, but also in the surviving diplomatic texts in Latin produced by Ilkhanid scribes. It is, instead, found in previous Nestorian correspondence with Rome, for instance in the letters sent by Rabban Ata.<sup>650</sup>

Taken together, these elements make it unlikely that the letter was exclusively dictated by the ilkhan or one of his Mongol advisors. The prominence given to Nestorian concerns would be difficult to explain if the text had been drafted by a Latin cleric alone, especially one writing for the pope or a Capetian king, given the Church’s longstanding condemnation of the Church of the East as heretical. At the same time, the structure of the official salutation, which places Louis IX at the top of a descending Latin feudal hierarchy, follows western diplomatic protocol with a precision that a Nestorian scribe, unfamiliar with Latin chancery conventions, is unlikely to have produced.<sup>651</sup> The most plausible explanation is, therefore, that the letter emerged from a collaborative drafting process. A Nestorian likely shaped the ideological and theological content, while the Latin redaction, possibly undertaken by Rychaldus or, more likely, David of Ashby, adapted it to the stylistic norms expected

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<sup>648</sup> See above, p.179.

<sup>649</sup> “God having spoken to our fathers at various times and in various ways through the prophets, he has finally come to speak to us in these last days through his own son.” Aigle, “The letters.” p.419; Borbone, “Siro-Mongolian Greetings.” p.480.

<sup>650</sup> See, for instance, Claverie, “Deux lettres inédites.” p.290.

<sup>651</sup> Borbone, “Siro-Mongolian Greetings.” p.482; Richard, J. “Une ambassade mongole à Paris en 1262.” *Journal des savants*, 4 (1979): 295-303, p.295.

by a royal audience.<sup>652</sup> Such cooperation was far from unusual. Mongol diplomatic protocol required that letters be reviewed and read aloud at the *ordu* before dispatch. Simon of Saint Quentin describes in detail how Baiju received a papal letter, noting its translation several times and the involvement of multiple scribes and advisers:

Afterwards, the said magnates returned and repeated to Baiju Noyan the words of the friars. After remaining there a short while, they returned to the friars, saying: Our lord Baiju Noyan, through us, commands you to entrust to us, as his loyal and reliable envoys, the letters of your lord pope for him to keep and examine them. [...] But they, having gone back with the letters to their lord, returned a short while later, saying that the letters would be translated into the Persian language with the assistance of the friars and other interpreters who were present there, then presented to Baiju Noyan, translated once more from Persian to Tartar, and would be read before Baiju Noyan loudly and publicly. Then Friar Ascelin, with three of his friars and three interpreters and scribes of Baiju Noyan, removed himself from the crowd of attendants and, [...] explained the letters of the lord pope word by word to the Persian notaries who wrote down what they were hearing from the Turk and Greek interpreters as well as the friars. [...] As it was already evening and the friars had to leave the court, the aforementioned scribe, who had to leave the next morning, had the friars summoned and, in the presence of everybody, read to them the letters which the khan sent to Baiju Noyan so that he could communicate them to the entire world. The scribe advised the friars to commit to memory the content of the letters which they were to hear.

If such a procedure was routine for a Mongol general, however influential, one can only imagine a greater number of participants when the addressee was a Činggisid prince.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> The letters also slightly differs in style with letters we know being authored by Rychaldus. In Abaqa's 1274 memorandum Rychaldus, the author of the document, does not describe himself as the author of Hülegü's letter, but rather as one of the envoys, sent by the ilkhan to Europe. *Lupprian*, p.226-230, n.44.

<sup>653</sup> *Saint Quentin/Ghazaryan*, XXXII, p.47. "Post hec dicti barones reversi, verba fratrum Baiiothnoy (Baiju) referentes, aliquantulum ibidem morati rursus ad fratres redierunt dicentes: "Dominus noster Baiiothnoy per nos mandat vobis ut domini vestri pape litteras ab ipso tenendas et inspiciendas,[...]Itaque frater Ascelinus, non vocatus ad presentiam Baiiothnoy sed exclusus, commisit ei litteras, licet contra consuetudinem nunciorum approbatam hoc faceret invitus. Illi vero regredientes cum litteris ad dominum suum reversi sunt post paululum dicentes ut mediantibus fratribus et aliis interpretibus ibidem astantibus littere pape in persica lingua scriberentur, deinde Baiiothnoy porrecte iterum de persico in tartaricum exponite ab ipso Baiiothnoy perlucide et aperte audirentur. Tunc frater Ascelinus cum tribus suis fratribus ac tribus interpretibus et scriptoribus Baiiothnoy se a multitudine astantium sequestravit [...] litteras domini pape de verbo ad verbum, mediantibus aliis interpretibus, exposuit, Persis siquidem notariis scribentibus ea que audiebant a Turcis et a Grecis interpretibus et etiam a fratribus.[...] Cumque jam vespere fratres debebant a curia licentari scriba predictus, in crastino profecturus, fratres coram se fecit advocari legitque coram omnibus litteras quas chaam Baiiothnoy transmiserat per totum orbem demandandas admonens fratres ut ea que in eisdem litteris audirent memoriter retinerent. Omnia vero predicta utrinque proposita fuerunt in die prima."

After Hülegü's letter, to which Pope Clement possibly responded in 1263 or 1264, correspondence resumed under his immediate successor, Abaqa, who was willing to continue the relations established by his father with Latin Christendom. Abaqa's reign (1265-1282) was marked by increased hostilities with the Mamluk Sultanate; for this reason, his embassies contain repeated appeals to military cooperation. Additionally, Abaqa had married Maria Palaiologina, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Michael VII Palaeologus. The event played a role in boosting his popularity in Europe, so much so that there was a belief that the ilkhans had decided to be baptised.<sup>654</sup>

The first letter sent by Abaqa to Rome, now lost and dated to 1267, was written in Mongolian as confirmed by Pope Clement IV's reply, which specifies that nobody at the Papal court was able to translate it. This first abortive communication attempt was followed in 1268 by a Latin letter that reiterates the commitment of the ilkhans to the well-being of their Christian subject, this time without specifying their affiliation:

We already explained to Your Holiness by letter how much we favour Christians, defend their churches, and guard them with benevolence.<sup>655</sup>

The letter also apologised for the earlier missive in Mongolian, due to absence of a Latin scribe, presumably Rychaldus. On the eve of the crusade of James I of Aragon (r.1213-1276), Abaqa was willing to coordinate with the Latins, because he had been advised to do so by his father in law, the Byzantine Emperor Michael VII. In the letter, the ilkhans entrusted the discussion of plans for a joint expedition to two Nestorians, one of whom can be identified as a prelate:

Concerning these things, which have to be discussed and established with Your Holiness, we have sent with our envoys Solomon Archaon, the custodian of the Holy Church of God at our court, and Nepkei.<sup>656</sup>

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<sup>654</sup> Schein, S. "Gesta Dei per Mogolos 1300. The Genesis of a Non-Event." *The English Historical Review*, 94, 272 (1979): 805-819, p.809.

<sup>655</sup> "Qualiter vero christianos dilligendo eorumque ecclesias defendendo benigne custodivimus quotiens sanctitati vestrae litteratorie dilucidavimus." Tisserand, E. "Une Lettre de l'Ilkhan de Perse Abaga Adressée en 1268 au Pape Clément IV." *Le Muséon, Revue d'études Orientales*, 59, 1/4 (1946): 561-571, p.556.

<sup>656</sup> Tisserand, "Une Lettre." p.556. "Super hiis quidem vobiscum ordinandis sanctitati vestrae Solomonem Arkaoun sacrosancte Ecclesie Dei in curia nostra custodem atque Nekpei nuncios nostros destinavimus."

The title Archaon attributed to Solomon is a transcription of the Mongolian *erke'ün*, which the Mongols commonly used to refer to Nestorian priests. The description of Solomon's job suggests that he was Abaqa's court chaplain, and he was possibly at the service of Abaqa's royal consorts and family.<sup>657</sup> Despite ultimate failure of his attempts to secure military cooperation with Louis IX and James I of Aragon, Abaqa responded favourably to Edward I's request for help in 1271, dispatching a small contingent to relieve pressure on the English troops.<sup>658</sup>

Soon after the failure of the Ninth Crusade, diplomatic contact between Abaqa and the Latins resumed with renewed intensity. In 1274, the ilkhan sent a substantial embassy, comprising at least sixteen envoys, to the Second Council of Lyon. This delegation was led by the English Dominican David of Ashby.<sup>659</sup> Following the presentation of the Ilkhanid letters at the council, in 1275 David also carried Abaqa's reply to a letter sent by Edward I in 1272 to England.<sup>660</sup> He had remained at the Mongol court long enough to gather materials for a formal report delivered in Lyon and for a now-lost work known as *The Deeds of the Tartars*.<sup>661</sup>

In Lyon Ashby was accompanied, according to a brief report uncovered and published by Gino Borghezio, by several Mongol envoys who decided to embrace Latin Christianity and receive baptism.<sup>662</sup> In the letter they delivered, once again, Abaqa reiterated both his own commitment and

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<sup>657</sup> On the use of this term by the ilkhans, see Richard, J. *Au-delà de la Perse et de L'Arménie, L'Orient latin et la découverte de l'Asie intérieure* (Turnhout, 2005), p.185. The use of *erke'ün* is also reported by Rashid al-Din. See, for instance, *RJT/Thackston*, p.411,496; *RJT/Karimi*, p.597,710.

<sup>658</sup> Paviot, J. "England and the Mongols (c. 1260-1330)." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 10, 3 (2000): 305-318, p.309; Lockhart, L. "The Relations between Edward I and Edward II of England and the Mongol Ilkhans of Persia." *Iran* 6,1 (1968): 23-31, p.24. Edward's diplomatic mission was led by Reginald De Rossel, Godefroi De Waus and John De Parker.

<sup>659</sup> See Boyle, J.A. "The Il-Khans of Persia and the Princes of Europe." *Central Asiatic Journal*, 20, 1/2 (1976): 25-40, p.30; Lockhart, "The Relations." p.24. See also *Lupprian*, p.226-230, n.44.

<sup>660</sup> Paviot, "England and the Mongols." p.310-311.

<sup>661</sup> David of Ashby's work is lost in its entirety, but some of its parts have been edited by Brunel, C. "David D'Ashby auteur méconnu des faites Tartares." *Romania*, 79, 313 (1958): 39-46.

<sup>662</sup> The conversion and baptism of some of Abaqa's delegates at the council of Lyon prompted great excitement in the West, spreading rumours that the ilkhan was converted by Prester John's daughter and was baptised. See Borghezio, G. "Un episodio delle relazioni tra la Santa Sede e i Mongoli (1274)." *Rivista di studi di vita Romana Roma*, 14 (1936): 362-372.

that of his father to the protection of Christians. Referring to Hülegü's consort, Doquz Khatun, Abaqa identifies her as the daughter of Prester John. The relevant passage of the letter describes her as *excellentissima domina principali sua regina christianissima, videlicet filia potentissimi regis Indie lohannis* (his most noble principal wife, the most Christian queen, the daughter of the most powerful King John of India).<sup>663</sup> This passage constitutes an appropriation of the Prester John myth for diplomatic purposes, an appropriation that reveals much about the authorship and intended audience of the letter. While Rychaldus may have been responsible for drafting the Latin text, the content suggests that he did so with the support of figures well-versed in Mongol genealogies and Christian expectations. Abaqa's claim that Doquz Khatun was the daughter of Prester John is not without genealogical basis: if Prester John is identified with To'oril, as discussed in the previous pages, then both Sorqaqtani, Abaqa's grandmother (To'oril niece), and Doquz, his granddaughter, could plausibly be presented as descendants of the fabled Christian king.<sup>664</sup> The inclusion of such a formulation in a Latin letter addressed to Latin Christendom and carried by a Dominican envoy implies a consensus between David of Ashby and whoever helped draft the letter or suggested the inclusion of such passage. This coordination is particularly significant in light of the documented scepticism shown by members of the *ordines minores* toward the legend of Prester John. That the claim was nonetheless inserted suggests a strategic alliance in which both Latin and Nestorian actors recognised the utility of the myth for advancing Mongol-Christian cooperation.

Despite the inconclusiveness of contacts before and during Lyon, Abaqa's embassies kept arriving to Europe. In 1276-77, an Ilkhanid diplomatic expedition led by the Vassalli brothers, presumably two Georgians, reached Naples, Rome and Paris carrying a now lost missive, and prompting a response from the king of France and Charles of Anjou (r.1268-1285).<sup>665</sup> John Vassalli departed from Naples in late 1277 carrying the French reply, while the papal embassy followed a year later, delayed by the death of Pope John XXI (r. 1276-1277) and the election of his successor,

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<sup>663</sup> Lupprian, p.236-240, n.44.

<sup>664</sup> See above, p.169.

<sup>665</sup> Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.168,174-175.

Nicholas III (r. 1277-1280). In a letter dated 1279, Abaqa expressed frustration that no papal envoys had accompanied the Vassalli brothers, specifically naming John Vassalli under the Latinised form *Ioannem Archium*, and inquired why the pope had not responded through them.<sup>666</sup> In the meantime, the pope had sent the friars Gerard of Prato, Antony of Parma, John of St. Agata, Matthew of Arezzo and Andrew of Florentia in Persia carrying a letter to be forwarded to the *qa'an* Qubilai.<sup>667</sup> They had instructions to stay in the Ilkhanate, work towards a possible baptism of Abaqa and take care of the Christians in the region.<sup>668</sup> The presence in Persia of the mission is testified by a safe conduct in Mongolian issued by Abaqa in 1279, published by Mostaert and Cleaves, in which is clearly indicated that a group of “bishops” from Europe were not to be harmed and were to be provided with supplies and protection.<sup>669</sup>

The letter written by Abaqa in 1279 was published by Thomas Tanase in 2008, together with a critical apparatus. In his commentary, Tanase notes that this letter diverges significantly in tone and composition from earlier Mongol missives received in Europe. Although there is a discernible continuity in content and intent between the Latin version of Hülegü’s 1262 letter and Abaqa’s first two letters of 1268 and 1274, the 1279 missive is stylistically far simpler. It was evidently composed by an individual with considerably less familiarity with Latin than earlier scribes such as Rychaldus or David of Ashby. This is particularly evident in the incipit of the letter, which exemplifies the rudimentary nature of the Latin employed:

Per virtutem dei immortalis et gratiam kam abagua. Sumo nostre pape. Anno praeterito per Iohanem archium universi reges France nuntios suos ad nos miserunt. Unde per alium et nuntii vestri non venerunt cum illis.<sup>670</sup>

Tanase notes that Abaqa’s 1279 letter closely mirrors Mongol syntactic structures, with Latin phrasing that is frequently awkward and, at times, reduced to direct calques. Richard offers the least

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<sup>666</sup> Tanase, T. “Une lettre en latin inédite de l’Ilkhan Abaqa au pape Nicolas III: croisade ou mission ?” *Oriente Moderno*, 88, 2 (2008): 333-347, p.335.

<sup>667</sup> *Mosheim*, app. XXI, p.72-76; *Lupprian*, p.237-242, n.47

<sup>668</sup> *Mosheim*, app. XXIII, p.80-83.

<sup>669</sup> Mostaert and Cleaves, “Trois documents mongols.” p.430-434.

<sup>670</sup> Tanase, “Une lettre.” p.334.

economical explanation: that the letter was dictated in Mongolian to a Latin speaker at court, likely a mercenary with limited command of the language.<sup>671</sup> A more plausible scenario is that the letter emerged from a process of collective composition, as in the case with Hülegü's 1262 missive. Given the presence of Central Asian and Mongol personnel adhering to Nestorian Christianity, and the prominent role of Eastern Christians in earlier embassies and the drafting of previous correspondence, it is reasonable to assume their involvement. The letter was likely shaped by individuals more proficient in Mongolian than in Latin, and directly dictated by the ilkhan or possibly translated from a preliminary draft composed in Mongolian following his instructions. Furthermore, while stylistically distinct from previous letters, the content of Abaqa's 1279 missive remains closely aligned with that of his earlier correspondence. It reiterates the Ilkhan's favourable disposition towards Christians and includes references to figures such as Doquz Khatun and Sorqaqtani, albeit in a more rudimentary tone.<sup>672</sup> The stylistic simplicity of the 1279 letter thus reflects not a shift in intention, but the absence of trained Latin scribes, with Rychaldus and William of Ashby no longer present at the ordu to oversee its final formulation.<sup>673</sup> If we accept the hypothesis that this letter was composed with very limited or not Latin participation at all, then the recurrence of these themes suggests that the content of earlier, more polished missives was likewise not shaped by Latin figures at the Ilkhanid court.

As concerns the Papal responses to Ilkhanid letters, written in 1267, 1268, 1275 and 1278, it seems that the missives' main purpose was to convince Abaqa to embrace the Catholic faith. Therefore, dialogue with the Ilkhanid rulers developed in a fairly asymmetrical manner, as Abaqa's main focus was on military matters and the logistical problems of a possible joint expedition.<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> Tanase, "Une lettre." p.342; Richard, J. *Histoire des Croisades* (Paris, 1996), p.467.

<sup>672</sup> Tanase, "Une lettre." p.334 "Et quod nostras terras christianorum recepimus gratiare et salvavimus plus fuit propter aviam nostram qui servavit legem et mandatam christianorum."

<sup>673</sup> There is no evidence of Ashby going back to the Ilkhanate after 1274. As for Rychaldus, the last mention of his name is that at the council of Lyon in 1274.

<sup>674</sup> In the papal letters there are a lot of biblical references and invitation to consider the fleeting nature of human condition, see for example, the letter written to Qubilai in 1278, *Mosheim*, app. XXII, p.76.

Especially in the responses in 1274 and 1278, Rome seems to largely ignore the military aspects of a joint expedition and appeal for the ilkhan's baptism and conversion.<sup>675</sup> Aigle has asked whether these epistolary exchanges were more productive than those happening at the time of Güyük or Möngke.<sup>676</sup> The continuation of diplomatic correspondence, in contrast to the earlier Mongol disregard for Latin letters, suggests that both sides still saw value in maintaining contact. For those Nestorian figures involved, such exchanges offered an opportunity to remain engaged in Ilkhanid courtly and diplomatic activity, as brokers on behalf of the ilkhan. As proof of their continued influence, under Arghun, Nestorian participation in these exchanges becomes even more clearly attested.

The first letter sent by Arghun to Honorius IV (r.1285-1287), Charles of Anjou and the king of France in 1285 is, in fact, delivered by a certain "Isa Turciman," who has first been identified by Pelliot as 'Īsa Kelemechi (The Interpreter), a Nestorian Christian born in the Caucasus around 1227. 'Īsa had entered Mongol service while still young and moved to Karakorum and then to China, rising to the prestigious position of privy councillor in the Central Secretariat of the Yuan government.<sup>677</sup> It is worth mentioning 'Īsa's stay at the Mongol court in this context as, when he was still a young cleric, he was brought to the attention of Güyük by Rabban Ata, who was then visiting Karakorum. This detail, identified by Pelliot by reading 'Īsa's funerary inscription, lends further support to the view that communication within Nestorian networks was active and relatively efficient, at least during the period in which the Mongol Empire remained unified.<sup>678</sup> After achieving a position of great prestige at the Yuan court, 'Īsa was then dispatched to Iran in the 1280s as one of envoys of Qubilai. He arrived in the Ilkhanate with Bolad Chīngsāng in 1285 to witness and confirm Arghun's second coronation.<sup>679</sup> There, he was put in charge of Arghun's embassy to Pope Honorius. According to the letter he carried, he travelled with two unidentified Mongol dignitaries and two Europeans, the

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<sup>675</sup> *Mosheim*, app. XXI, p.72-74; *Lupprian*, p.231-232, n.45; p.233-236, n.46;

<sup>676</sup> See Aigle, D. "The letters." p.145.

<sup>677</sup> Kim, "'Īsa Kelemechi." p 255.

<sup>678</sup> Pelliot "Les Mongols et la papauté." (1924) p.249

<sup>679</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.565; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.811.

Italian merchant Tommaso de Anfusiis and Hugh, another interpreter.<sup>680</sup> In the letter brought by 'Īsa, Arghun renewed his military commitments, asked for logistic support and, once again, reminded the pope of his and his predecessor's benevolence towards Christians:

Our first (original?) mother was Christian (Sorqaqtani?). [...]Our good father Hūlegū, and the virtuous Abaqa, his son, have preserved and protected all the Christians living in their lands and under their rule.<sup>681</sup>

Much like Abaqa's final letter, the style of this missive is notably simple and includes interpolations of Mongolian and Turkish terms.<sup>682</sup> Of particular interest in the letter is the reference to *nostra prima mater*, likely an allusion to Sorqaqtani Beki, under whose patronage 'Īsa had served for many years and who was known to have been his first master.<sup>683</sup> Identified by Rashīd al-Dīn as one of the authors of Qubilai's anti-Muslim edict in China, 'Īsa is described in the letter as the *qa'an*'s envoy, an indication that his role extended beyond that of a routine messenger. Kim contends that Rashīd al-Dīn's portrayal of 'Īsa as hostile to Islam merely reflects the anti-Christian sentiment prevalent under Ghazan and should not be regarded as reliable.<sup>684</sup> This interpretation, however, overlooks a critical point: even if one accepts the possibility that Rashīd al-Dīn never met 'Īsa directly (a claim that is itself debatable, as the Nestoria was in Persia until 1286), the Persian historian was a close associate of Bolad, 'Īsa's travel companion and colleague.<sup>685</sup> That relationship would have afforded Rashīd a more immediate understanding of 'Īsa's position than Kim allows.

No papal response to 'Īsa's embassy has been preserved, and it is therefore not possible to determine the extent of his involvement in the composition of the letter, nor whether he conveyed additional messages to the pope. What can be stated with relative confidence, however, is that, given

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<sup>680</sup> Mosheim, app. XXV, p.84-85; Lupprian, p.247-248, n.50.

<sup>681</sup> Nostra prima mater Christiana erat. [...]nostrum bonum patrem Alaun, et bonus Abaga, filius eius, qui custodiebantur omnium Christianorum in terra sua, et posse suo. Mosheim, app. XXV, p.85; Lupprian, p.244-246, n.49.

<sup>682</sup> Lupprian, p.246.

<sup>683</sup> Kim, "'Īsa Kelemechi." p.256.

<sup>684</sup> Kim, "'Īsa Kelemechi." p.259.

<sup>685</sup> RJT/Thackston, p.19; RJT/Karīmī, p.19; Kim, "'Īsa Kelemechi." P.259-260.

‘Īsa’s religious background and prior activities, he likely undertook his mission without personal reservation.

In contrast to the relative paucity of information surrounding the embassy of 1285, the second diplomatic mission dispatched by Arghun in 1287 and led Rabban Ṣawma, a Nestorian, prelate, is comparatively well documented. Rabban Ṣawma composed a travel account in Persian, recording his impressions and observations of the lands he visited. Although the original text is now lost, substantial portions are preserved in *The Story of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Ṣawma*, a narrative in Syriac compiled by an anonymous Nestorian cleric in the early fourteenth century.

According to the chronicle, Rabban Ṣawma and his friend and disciple Mar Yahballaha were born, respectively, in Qanbaliq and Koshang from families of Nestorian Christians.<sup>686</sup> After deciding to retire from society and live as a hermit, Rabban was joined by Mar Yahballaha, then named Markos, who persuaded him to embark on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The story follows the itinerary of the two monks from Koshang through a Central Asia ravaged by the Ilkhanid proxies, into Iran and Azerbaijan. Once they reached Iraq, Rabban and Markos could not proceed further because of the ongoing Mamluk-Ilkhanid conflict. They decided to wait and live with local monastic communities, until Markos was appointed “bishop of Cathay and Ong” (China and inner Mongolia) by the Nestorian patriarch Mar Denha.<sup>687</sup> While trying to return to China, the two priests were once again trapped in Persia by the Ilkhanid-Chaghadaid conflict and returned to Mesopotamia. There, in 1281, Markos was appointed as Patriarch of the Nestorian church after the death of Mar Denha, with the name of Mar Yahballaha III.<sup>688</sup> According to the chronicle, he was chosen because he was familiar with the customs of the Mongols, and could better interact with Ilkhanid rulers to communicate the needs of the Nestorian Church in Persia and Mesopotamia.<sup>689</sup> The text describes how Mar Yahballaha

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<sup>686</sup> For this brief summary, I refer to Rossabi, *Voyager from Xanadu*, and to Borbone’s text.

<sup>687</sup> *Rabban Ṣawma/Borbone*, p.78-79.

<sup>688</sup> *Rabban Ṣawma/Borbone*, p.80-81.

<sup>689</sup> *Rabban Ṣawma/Borbone*, p.78 80.

and Rabban Şawma were held in high esteem by Abaqa and Arghun.<sup>690</sup> When the latter asked Mar Yahballaha for advice about “the most fitting man to be sent with his envoys”. Mar Yahballaha proposed to send Rabban Şawma.<sup>691</sup>

While the text was undoubtedly composed within a Nestorian milieu, it is worth asking why the chronicle would have fabricated this particular detail. We know that Rabban Şawma was ultimately sent to Rome, and it would have been entirely logical for the ilkhan to consult the Nestorian patriarch when selecting a Nestorian envoy. Moreover, if diplomatic missives were first read aloud at the ordu, it is difficult to see why the ilkhan would not have sought the advice of those Christian figures already present at his court. Although our understanding of decision-making processes within the Ilkhanate remains limited, the account appears to support the broader thesis that close consultation between the ilkhans and their Christian advisers preceded diplomatic missions to Europe. This interpretation is further reinforced by a notable feature of Arghun’s embassies to Europe: they were consistently led by Christian figures who possessed a high degree of familiarity with Mongol language and customs. It is plausible that Arghun preferred envoys with whom he could communicate directly, particularly given his limited command of Persian.<sup>692</sup> Both Rabban Şawma and ‘Īsa Kelemechi were fluent in Mongolian, which may partly explain their selection for such missions.<sup>693</sup>

Rabban Bar Şawma sailed from Trebizond to Constantinople, where he was received by the Byzantine Emperor. From there, he sailed to Naples, where his party was hosted by Charles II of Anjou (r.1285-1309). Once in Rome, Şawma found that the apostolic seat was vacant; in the city, he was interrogated by the cardinals forming the Conclave, who were mainly interested in his faith and in correcting the bishop’s doctrine rather than in his message from the ilkhan. Rabban Şawma’s

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<sup>690</sup> *Rabban Şawma /Borbone*, p.110; app. p.249. The text describes how Arghun honoured greatly the Catholicos and used to offer him cups of wine or *qūmis* from his own hands.

<sup>691</sup> *Rabban Şawma /Borbone*, p.89.

<sup>692</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.533; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.791. Rashīd al-Dīn, for instance, writes that Arghun was unable to write in Persian.

<sup>693</sup> Kim notes that ‘Īsa married a Mongol of the Kerait tribe named Hushinisha. Kim, “‘Īsa Kelemechi.” p.256; *Rabban Şawma/Borbone*, p.81.

reaction was quite harsh, as after reciting the Creed, he reminded them of the true purpose of his visit: military cooperation in the Holy Land.

I have not come from distant lands to discuss or expound matters of faith, but rather to receive the blessing of the Pope and the shrines of the saints, and to transmit the words of the king and the Catholicos.<sup>694</sup>

While waiting for a new pope to be elected, Rabban left Italy for France, where he was received by Philip the Fair in Paris and by Edward I in Bordeaux. After hearing the kings' promises of a new crusade, he left the country, returning to Italy and spending the winter in Genoa. Upon the election of Pope Nicholas IV (r.1288-1292) in February, Şawma returned to Rome, where he delivered Arghun's message. After celebrating Easter with Nicholas IV, Şawma began the return journey with several letters addressed to the Ilkhan, the Patriarch, Eastern ecclesiastics and nine interpreters.<sup>695</sup>

The Nestorians were not necessarily eager to establish friendly contacts with Rome, but their participation in these endeavours could keep them close to the figure of the ilkhan. It was for this reason that Mar Yahballaha was chosen by the community, and ultimately, he seemed to have achieved his objective. Proposing his companion Rabban Şawma as envoy also underscores the high stakes at play for the Nestorian community: winning the favour of Arghun would have certainly made a difference in terms of privileges and status. This seems to be confirmed many of the non-Muslim sources from Arghun's period, which depict his rule as extremely favourable to Christian communities.<sup>696</sup>

We do not know the content of Rabban's letters to pope Nicholas IV or to other European monarchs. According to Thomas Tanase, judging from the papal response and the accounts in Rabban's travels, the missive alluded to "a possible baptism of Arghun in a liberated Jerusalem if the

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<sup>694</sup> *Rabban Şawma/Borbone*, p.95-96.

<sup>695</sup> The letters are in *Mosheim*, app. XXVI- XXX, p.86-92. The letters are also reported in part by *Lupprian*, p.247-254 n.47-53.

<sup>696</sup> For instance, see below, p.209.

ilkhan obtained Frankish help.”<sup>697</sup> Arghun was not discouraged by the vague papal response and sent another letter in 1289, the content of which is also lost. The papal response to this letter arrived in Persia the following year, with letters addressed to the *qa’an* Qubilai and Qaidu, and a plea to protect Giovanni di Montecorvino and other missionaries that the pope was planning to send to China.<sup>698</sup> Although Arghun granted passage to Giovanni and the other missionaries, the repeated papal insistence on his conversion appears to have provoked a measure of frustration. In his subsequent letter, he responded with the following statement:

[...]Your statement: “Let (the Ilkhan) enter the *silam* (= become Christian)” is just. We, the descendants of Chinggis Khan, say: “(As for) our own Mongols (= our Mongol subjects), whether they willingly enter the *silam* or whether they willingly do not, let only the Eternal Heaven know!”

The people who have entered the *silam* and who, like you, have a truly sincere heart and are pure, do not contravene the religion and the commands of the Eternal Heaven and of the Messiah. [...]Now, because I have not entered the *silam*, you take offence and give yourself over to thoughts (of discontent). (But) if one prays only to the Eternal Heaven and thinks as it is proper to do, is that not as though one had entered the *silam*?<sup>699</sup>

The letter was carried to Italy by a Genoese merchant, Buscarello de’ Ghisolfi, who left Persia in 1290.<sup>700</sup> By the time the missive arrived, the pope had already sent another embassy to Persia in 1291, probably after hearing that Arghun’s son Öljeitü had become Christian and had been baptised with the name of Nicholas in his honour. In the letters, apart from to Öljeitü and his father, the pope also addressed several court members, including Arghun’s son Ghazan. The missives would reach Persia after Arghun’s death in late 1291.<sup>701</sup>

The final letter analysed in this chapter appears, overall, more hostile in tone than those that preceded it. Unlike earlier communications, which emphasised the Ilkhan’s benevolent stance

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<sup>697</sup> Tanase, T. “Les Mongols et le monde dans les registres de la papauté au XIIIe siècle, l’écriture d’une histoire.” actes du colloque des 2-3 décembre 2008, *La correspondance entre souverains, princes et cités-États. Approches croisées entre l’Orient musulman, l’Occident latin et Byzance, (XIIIe-début XVIe)* (2013): 77-100, p.89-91(40-42); Mosheim, app. XXVI, p.86; Lupprian, p.247-250, n.50; p.253-254, n.53.

<sup>698</sup> Mosheim, app. XXXI, p.92; Lupprian, p.255-257, n.54.

<sup>699</sup> As the original is in Mongolian, this translation is taken from Tanase, “Les Mongols et le monde.” p.46. Mostaert and Cleaves, “Trois documents mongols.” p.451-452.

<sup>700</sup> On Buscarello, see below, p.286.

<sup>701</sup> Mosheim, app. XXXVI-XLIII, p.98-107; Lupprian, p.267-279, n.58-64.

towards Christians, this missive contains no clear indication that it was shaped by the same ecclesiastical figures involved in previous exchanges. If Nestorian actors did participate in its composition, they seem to have adopted a more distant or passive role.

In sum, when considering the Nestorian agenda in the Ilkhanid letters, this chapter has shown that attempts to analyse them and to reconstruct Ilkhanid decision-making are constrained by severe evidentiary limitations. Yet, even within this narrow evidentiary frame, the repeated presence of the Church of the East (whether through named figures such as Rabban Ata, Rabban Şawma and ʿĪsa Kelemechi, or through less prominent and unnamed collaborators), leaves little doubt that Nestorian actors were involved, to varying degrees, in Ilkhanid diplomatic missions to the Latin West. Their authority in these contexts depended not only on their personal access to the court, where such missions were initiated, but also on their linguistic fluency and cultural familiarity with both Mongol and Latin contexts.

The key question, then, is not merely why these individuals were selected to serve in such roles, but what they stood to gain. Nestorian clerics were undoubtedly chosen by the ilkhans because they were Christians and, in cases such as ʿĪsa and Rabban Şawma, recognised at the *ordu* as familiar and trusted figures.<sup>702</sup> Yet these missions also offered an opportunity to assert their relevance in a political environment that remained multi-confessional and highly competitive. The Nestorians operated as brokers and translators of political intent, yet that position was never without risk. The refusal to endorse papal appeals for conversion suggests a deliberate posture of defensiveness. By the late 1280s, several members of Arghun's family appear to have adopted forms of Christianity, though their exact confessional affiliation remains uncertain. Given the growing Latin Christian presence in Persia at the time, and the papal-sponsored mission of 1279, Nestorian prelates had reason to fear marginalisation. A Catholic ilkhan would have posed a far greater challenge to their

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<sup>702</sup> "The *History* attests to the Catholicos's and his associates' links with the Great Khan's court. It records that Mar Yahballaha was permitted to use the state courier (*yam*) in the manner of a Mongol official, and that he had in fact sent letters to the *qa'an*." Borbone, "The History of Mar Yahballaha." p.357.

authority than a pagan, Buddhist, or shamanist ruler. Thus, supporting diplomatic overtures to Rome without endorsing their theological content allowed Nestorian clerics to work towards the accomplishment of their objectives avoiding doctrinal subordination. In sum, Nestorian involvement in Ilkhanid-Latin diplomacy was never exclusively the outcome of shared religious identity, but a form of brokerage, where Nestorians stood to gain only insofar as they remained useful, and to remain useful they had to navigate their roles with care.

### ◆ Reports from the Ilkhanate

The fact that its status depended on the good graces of Mongol rulers would become the main source of problems for the Church of the East in the years following Arghun's death. Already in 1282, the Nestorian patriarch had been arrested on charges of treason and tortured by Aḥmad Tegüder, who had converted to Islam.<sup>703</sup> This perhaps could have been just a momentary setback of relations if it had not shortly been followed by Ilkhanid definitive conversion to Islam under Arghun's son Ghazan. During the first years of the latter's reign, a much worse persecution was unleashed against Christians. Almost all the sources seem to blame the event on the figure of Nawrūz:

An emir by the name of Nawrūz, a man who did not fear God, manifested himself by sending messengers to spread his orders to the four corners of the empire: the churches were to be destroyed, and the altars overturned, the offerings suspended, the chants forbidden, the leaders and the notables of the Christians, as well as those of the of the Jews, killed.<sup>704</sup>

While sources place all the blame on Nawrūz, the situation for Christians living in Persia had fundamentally changed. It is quite clear that Ghazan's conversion to Islam deeply impacted how Christians were treated by the populace of the Ilkhanate. The beginning of Ghazan's rule was marked by a violent outburst of intolerance, which translated in the massacre of many Christians and the

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<sup>703</sup> *Rabban Šawma/Borbone*, p.86; app. p.210.

<sup>704</sup> *Rabban Šawma/Borbone*, p.117. See also above, p.160.

destruction of churches and holy sites.<sup>705</sup> Even when Ghazan had reinstated a climate of religious tolerance after his vizier's execution, the wounds caused by the persecutions were not easy to heal. From the beginning of his reign, Nestorians disappeared from Ilkhanid embassies sent to Europe. Their place was taken by Italian merchants, who were certainly less attentive to the well-being of Christian communities in the Middle East.<sup>706</sup>

Ghazan's foreign policy was still one of cooperation with the Latins against the Mamluks. However, his internal policies were oriented towards the welfare of Islamic institutions, and his entourage in the administration and the *noyat*, as we have observed, was mostly composed of Muslims.<sup>707</sup> After Ghazan's death in 1304, Öljeitü (who had been baptised as Nicolaus around 1285), now a fervent Muslim, introduced measures against the Christians living in the Ilkhanate. Contemporary colophons of Armenian manuscripts give an idea of the scope and the harshness of the persecutions against Christians in this period, in stark contrast with the climate of religious tolerance under Öljeitü's predecessors:

And in this city (Theodosiopolis) they demolished many churches; and some individuals, abandoning their faith in Christ, joined the wicked nation of the Ismaelites, and others sold their children and fled to various places, but they found refuge nowhere; and there were numerous other afflictions and sufferings everywhere on account of our sins.

They (The Mongols) harass all the Christians to convert to their false hope; some they molest, some they torture, some they kill, and they confiscate the possessions of others. Not contented with all these, they also levied taxes upon all the Christians and made them wear symbols of opprobrium, a black linen over the shoulders, so that whoever saw them would recognize that they are Christians and would curse them; and they make every effort to efface Christianity from the earth.<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>705</sup> The entirety of the last part of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Šawma's chronicle is dedicated to an account of the persecutions suffered by the Nestorians at the hands of the Muslim population of Iraq, with almost no intervention from the ilkhans. See *Rabban Šawma/Borbone*, p.144-170. Particularly telling is the plight of the Christian population of Erbil, almost completely massacred. (The events narrated start in 1297).

<sup>706</sup> Not a single Nestorian name appears in Ilkhanid correspondence with Europe after Arghun's death in 1291. For the envoys taking part in these embassies see below, p.282-288.

<sup>707</sup> See above, especially p.165.

<sup>708</sup> Sanjian, A.K. *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), p.53, 57-58.

Despite reports of widespread persecutions being increasingly common in almost all sources written at the beginning of the fourteenth century, in the official correspondence Ghazan and his brother still portrayed themselves as sympathetic to Christianity. However, the writings of Latin missionaries in the Ilkhanate make more realistic assessments of the situation of Christians living under the Mongols. Particularly interesting is the work of the Dominican Riccoldo of Monte di Croce, who travelled and lived in Ilkhanid territories from 1288, residing in Baghdad until 1295, and then spending three more years in Iraq after leaving the city. Although in his works the friar seems to be mainly concerned with mounting a theological debate against the Islamic faith, in his *Liber Peregrinationis*, the friar does not spare harsh judgments against the Nestorians:<sup>709</sup>

When, therefore, we arrived in Baghdad, where their seat is, they received us gratefully first, but when they heard (our preaching), expelled us from their church. [...] They had thus driven us out and excommunicated us from all their churches, and would not receive the word of God from us.<sup>710</sup>

Riccoldo's harsh treatment by the Nestorians must have reflected the attitude of the Church of the East towards Rome elsewhere in the Ilkhanate and perhaps in the Middle East. This kind of behaviour was possible because, during Arghun's reign, like those of his predecessor, the Nestorians were allowed to preach freely, and Christian communities were tolerated, and perhaps even favoured at the *ordu*. During this period, the Nestorians must have been surely worried by the increasing number of missionaries coming from Rome and their interference in local affairs.

A matter that is quite central to Riccoldo's account is that of slavery. Lambton notes that, during the Ilkhanid period, there was a drastic overall increase in the number of slaves in the Persian region.<sup>711</sup> In his writings, Riccoldo seems concerned about the increasing number of Christians enslaved by the Mongols. These Christians mainly came from Anatolia, as they are referred to as

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<sup>709</sup> For more information about the context of the work see Jensen, K.V. *Riccoldo da Monte di Croce's Libellus ad nationes orientales* (University of South Denmark).

<sup>710</sup> Riccoldo, XXI, XII "Cum igitur accederemus ad eos in Baldaccum ubi est sedes eorum, receperunt nos gratanter prima facie, sed audito quod predicabamus [...]nos de eorum ecclesia turpiter eiecerunt [...]Cum vero nos sic eiecissent et excommunicassent de omnibus ecclesiis suis, nec verbum Dei a nobis reciperent.

<sup>711</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.145.

“Greeks.” The presence of Greek slaves in the Ilkhanate is confirmed by Rashīd al-Dīn. In a letter to his son and governor of Anatolia, Jalāl al-Dīn, he asks him to send him forty Greek (Rūmi) slaves to settle and cultivate small villages which he had founded in the Rab‘-i Rashīdi.<sup>712</sup>

While Greeks certainly constituted the majority of the enslaved population, their number was certainly augmented by the Christians enslaved locally, as well as by war prisoners.<sup>713</sup> Riccoldo’s account of the aftermath of the fall of Acre is particularly notable in this sense. When news of the crusaders’ defeat reached him in Baghdad, the friar noted with dismay the celebrations of the “Saracens” and observed that Christian captives from Acre were being brought to the city to be sold as slaves.<sup>714</sup>

The Franciscan William Adam, sent by the pope to Persia in one of his embassies in 1314 and appointed bishop of Soltanieh until 1317, also laments “the plague” of Christian slavery within the Ilkhanate. Adam wrote a treatise on how to reconquer the Holy Land soon after his experience in Persia, which he named *Tractatus quomodo Sarraceni sunt expugnandi*. This treatise can be situated within a long tradition of similar works, “de recuperatione terrae Sanctae,” a genre that enjoyed great popularity at the time.<sup>715</sup> Adam paints a grim image of Christian slavery in the Ilkhanate, indicating the Anatolian Turks as the main suppliers of Greek (Eastern Christians, Armenians, Georgians, etc.) slaves to the Ilkhanate.

As I and my companions have often seen, the miserable spectacle full of grief and compassion of large bands of captive Greeks from Asia, numbering sometimes two thousand, sometimes more, led like flocks of sheep into Tabriz to be sold. It is estimated that 200,000 were enslaved, became Saracens, and sold in the empire of Persia alone.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>712</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, p.145-146.

<sup>713</sup> On the subject, see Biran M. “Forced Migrations and Slavery in the Mongol Empire (1206–1368),” in Perry, C. Eltis, D. Engerman, S.L. Richardson, D. eds. *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*. (Cambridge, 2021): 76-99.

<sup>714</sup> Shagrir, I. “The Fall of Acre as a Spiritual Crisis: The Letters of Riccoldo of Monte Croce.” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, 90, 4 (2012):1107-1120, p.1112.

<sup>715</sup> See, on the topic of crusading treatises, Leopold, A. *How to Recover the Holy Land: The Crusade Proposals of the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*. (Ashgate, 2000). On William Adam see p.39-45.

<sup>716</sup> *Adam/Constable*, p.81-82.

Adam also provides a (probably inflated) estimate of the number of slaves held in the Ilkhanate, placing their number at around 100,000 just in the city of Tabriz.<sup>717</sup>

While painting a grim image of Christians living under Ilkhanid rule, both Riccoldo and Adam provide a unique perspective on the Ilkhanate's politics in their works. Their knowledge of the people and political situation in Persia characterises their account as very distant from the official narrative of the diplomatic correspondence. Riccoldo, in particular, is very critical of the Mongols and their customs, which he describes as an obstacle to their conversion. In his *Liber Peregrinationis*, he reports:

As we entered Turkey, we found the monstrous and horrible people of the Tartars.<sup>718</sup>[...]They destroy almost all houses and buildings, and if someone humiliates them, they hurt him terribly. They believe that all the reverences and honours they receive are due. They say they are the true masters of the world, and that God only created the world for them to rule it.<sup>719</sup>[...]The Tartars secretly despise Christians and consider them cruel and stingy because they do not provide their dead with clothes, money or food.<sup>720</sup>

Concerning the possibility of a Mongol conversion to Christianity, the friar is quite pessimistic. In his *Libellus ad nationes Orientales*, he explains:

The Mongols think that Christians are better than Muslims. Rarely, however, they embrace our faith, as they have many wives and sons [...] and our law is too rigid. [...] It would be almost impossible to convince such a multitude of Mongols to implement Lent or any other period of fast. [...] The Mongols can be led back (into the Christian community?) through rational explanations, preaching or miracles. (One) must start with their kings and notables, as the common people are too stupid and beast-like that they refuse in any way to be converted, unless money is promised to them.[...] Therefore, so far, there was no major conversion of the Mongols to our faith, except that of some excellent queens and kings.[...] The great emperor of the Tartars gladly accepts friars at his court, and treats them

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<sup>717</sup> Adam/*Constable*, p.83.

<sup>718</sup> Riccoldo, XII, "Intrantes autem infra Turchiam, invenimus orribilem et monstruosam gentem Tartarorum."

<sup>719</sup>Riccoldo, XII. "Quasi omnes civitates et castra et omnes habitationes et edificia destruunt, et illum magis ledunt qui magis se eis humiliat. Omnem autem reverentiam sibi factam et omne obsequium non gratiam reputant sed debitum. Dicunt enim se esse veros dominos mundi ; dicunt etiam quod Deus fecit mundum solum propter eos ut ipsi dominantur et gaudeant."

<sup>720</sup> Riccoldo, XIII, "Ipsi vero tartari multum murmurant contra cristianos et dicunt eos esse homines crudeles et avaros quia suis mortuis non provident in expensis, nec in cibo nec in vestibus."

honourably. However, he mainly does this out of diplomatic pomp rather than out of a genuine interest for conversion.<sup>721</sup>

Riccoldo's account is important because the friar arrived in Ilkhanid territory during amicable relations between the ilkhans and the Latin world, that is, the last years of Arghun's reign. Particularly interesting is the friar's take on the figure of Arghun. While the ilkhan is often presented in positive terms by Christian authors, Riccoldo's image of Arghun is more similar to the one that emerges from the Persianate sources, as he is described as a cruel king:

The first Chan and ruler of the Tartars in Persia and Baldacco was Aahalau (Hülegü), a friend of the Christians and a most just man without law or faith. He was succeeded by his son Abaqa, who was less just. He was succeeded by his son Argon, a man worst in every crime yet a friend of the Christians.<sup>722</sup>

It is noteworthy that Riccoldo, despite describing some of the ilkhans as "friends of the Christians", never advocates for an alliance with Persia, even though he was worried about the lack of support for the crusader states of Outremer. His diffidence towards the Mongols and the Nestorians must have certainly played a role in his stance, as probably did his direct experience with the Ilkhanate's population. Riccoldo's view of Islam throughout his work is notably nuanced. Yet, as he was an outsider to the grand diplomatic endeavours of ilkhans and popes, the friar likely saw the inevitable difficulties of a cooperation between a militant Christianity and a kingdom with a predominantly Muslim population. Despite its pessimistic undertones, Riccoldo's analysis invites reflection on the

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<sup>721</sup> Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, *Libellus ad nationes Orientales*, ed. Panella, E. (Firenze, 2009), "Meliores tamen reputant cristianos quam sarracenos. Sed difficulter accedunt ad nos propter legem strictam, ut dicunt, et quia habent plures uxores et filios [...] unde difficile esset nimis inducere super multitudinem tartarorum quadragessimam vel aliquod longum ieiunium. Possunt autem tartari reduci via et confabulatione verbali et rationis et per miracula. Et incipiendum est a regibus et maioribus eorum; nam plebei et populares eorum sunt ita stolidi et bestiales quia nullo modo volunt converti nisi promittatur eis pretium pecunie. [...] Unde factum est quod adhuc nulla magna multitudo de tartaris conversa est ad fidem nostram, sed aliqui reges et regine et excellentes viri et mulieres. Magnus autem imperator tartarorum libenter tenet fratres in curia sua et eos honorifice tractat, set magis propter secularem pompam quam propter aliquam spem de conversione ad fidem."

<sup>722</sup> Riccoldo, XVII "Primus autem chan et inperator tartarorum in Perside et in Baldacco fuit Aahalau, amicus cristianorum et homo iustissimus sine lege et fide. Cui successit filius eius Ahabaga, minus iustus. Cui successit filius eius Argon, homo pessimus in omni scelere, amicus tamen cristianorum."

status of affairs in the Ilkhanate. After all, the friar experienced Mongol persecution firsthand: when Nawrūz became vizier, he was forced to flee from Baghdad, hiding in the desert and becoming a camel driver while trying to find his way back to Europe.<sup>723</sup>

William Adam seems more eager for cooperation with the Ilkhanate, even if his account comes at least a decade later, at a time when the ilkhans had already converted to Islam. Yet Adam's approach prioritises *realpolitik*. Almost half of Adam's work is centred on the role of Latin merchants, blaming them for conducting trade with the Mamluks and acting as their intermediaries instead of helping the common cause of Christianity.<sup>724</sup> Adam exhibits a remarkable knowledge of Middle Eastern politics in his work, which makes it especially interesting for the study of Ilkhanid diplomatic relations.

Among those who are ready to help a crusade is the emperor of Persia [...], for this emperor holds the lands between the emperor of the northern Tartars and the sultan of Babylon, again whom [...] he wages constant war and deadly hostilities. Since there are no nearby kings he can ask for help, he (the Khan) tries to win the friendship of us Romans and to arouse us Christians as much as he can against the Saracens. He promises great supplies of food and armed men to promote a crusade, and for this, he has often tried to send solemn messengers to the Roman Curia, especially this year, except some of these messengers were held up by the death of the emperors and others by the vacancy in the Curia.<sup>725</sup>

While Adam advocates for an alliance with the ilkhans of Persia, it is clear from the text that he has no sympathy towards the ilkhans. He understands it would be an alliance born out of opportunity "since there are no other nearby kings." Soon after, in another passage, Adam suggests that the best method to recover the Holy Land would have been to cut Egyptian provision and trade, "starving the Mamluk Sultanate."<sup>726</sup> Adam emphasises possible military cooperation with the ilkhans, citing as precedents Louis' crusade and the contributions to the Mongol campaign of the Kings of Georgia and Armenia..<sup>727</sup>

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<sup>723</sup> Shagrir, "The Fall of Acre." p.1111.

<sup>724</sup> *Adam/Constable*, p.103-105.

<sup>725</sup> *Adam/Constable*, p.57-58. Adam refers to Oljeitu's and Clement V's deaths (1314-16).

<sup>726</sup> *Adam/Constable*, p.55-57.

<sup>727</sup> *Adam/Constable*, p.59-60, 64. His plan for a possible crusade revolves around the prospect of an attack on Anatolia, where the Turks would be isolated from Mamluk support by Ilkhanid domains in Rūm

Adam and Riccoldo's works find space in this dissertation as a reminder that intermediary configurations under Ilkhanid rule were not equally influential. What emerges from their accounts concerning the late Ilkhanid period is confirmation that the transformation of the ilkhans into Muslim rulers had been, at least in part, accomplished. This does not mean that the episodes of intolerance are to be considered typical of Muslim rule in the Middle East, the remarkable accomplishment of which, in terms of tolerance and cultural integration, still stands unparalleled. The persecutions and episodes of intolerance must be seen as part of a process which was slowly reversing the policies of the first Ilkhanid rulers, which had often favoured minorities over the majority of the Muslim population. The reaction to over fifty years of such policies was inevitably going to be violent, and the persecutions and the mass enslavement of Christians would erode the relations between the ilkhans and their Christian subject.

In the same year of Öljeitü's rise to power, the Nestorian patriarch Mar Yahballaha sent a peculiar letter to Pope Benedict IX. After a genuine acceptance of papal primacy and of the principles of the council of Nicaea of 325, the Patriarch writes:

We beseech your blessing, and we are prepared to accept all that you command; we humbly ask and beg your help in our necessities and troubles, in which we have been for a long time, and in which we remain, and (we beg) the Holy Father to not turn his sight away from us, as we are all brothers in Christ.<sup>728</sup>

Some important elements emerge from this letter. Firstly, the Patriarch's attitude towards matters of faith is very different both from that showed by Rabban Şawma in Rome two decades earlier and from the content of Rabban Ata's letters.<sup>729</sup> It also stands in stark contrast with Riccoldo's reports about the Nestorians which, by that time, must have reached Rome. This allows us to infer that the Nestorian situation worsened during the years of political chaos within the Ilkhanate. The submissive tone and the absence of any request other than a generic appeal for help betray the difficulty of the

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<sup>728</sup> *Mosheim*, app.XLIII, p.110. "Imploramus suas benedictionem et sumus parati ad omne eius praeceptum, requirentes humiliter atque implorantes eius auxilium in necessitatibus nostris et tribulationibus, in quibus longo tempore iam fuimus, et permanemus, et ipse pius pater ne avertat nobis facies sua, cum sumus omnes fratres in Christo."

<sup>729</sup> See above, p.179-181,201.

moment. The Nestorians have clearly lost their connections to the sovereign and his family which they enjoyed at the time of Hülegü and Arghun. Without the possibility to appeal directly to the ilkhan, their situation had considerably worsened. Secondly, it is understandable from the date and the content of the letter that the troubles of the Nestorians did not start under Öljeitü, but presumably under his predecessor Ghazan, specifically under Nawrūz's vizierate. There is no doubt that, as of 1304, Rome had already been alerted about the important changes that occurred in Persia. That same year, in fact, Giovanni di Montecorvino sent a letter to the pope referring to a "persecution against Nestorians" occurring in the Ilkhanate.<sup>730</sup>

Much had changed since the enthusiastic description made by Rabban Ata and Smbat the Constable. The Nestorians, who once played a role in the dialogue between Persia and Europe, were not to participate in Ghazan's diplomatic endeavours. Their influence had rested on the ambiguous attitude towards religion adopted by the first Mongol rulers, and on the more or less exclusive "conversion" of members of the *ordu*. In Ghazan's Ilkhanate, the only space where such ambiguities could be cultivated was the realm of diplomatic correspondence. The episodes of intolerance, whether spontaneous or engineered from above, were only the manifestation of a return to the status quo ante, which, as we have seen, characterised many other aspects of Ghazan's rule. These represented a point of no return, cutting off Nestorian influence in the Ilkhanid court effectively and permanently. Unfortunately for the Church of the East, other voices were raised to advocate for an Ilkhanid-Frankish alliance in its stead by Ghazan and his successor, as we will discuss in the following chapters. Among these were not those of Riccoldo and William Adam who, like many other members of their orders, never advocated for an alliance, underlining the different strategic objectives and the irreconcilable differences and between the Church of Rome and the Nestorians and between them and the Mongols.

Despite the bleak reports that reached Europe from Persia, correspondence between the papacy and the Mongols did not cease. In Rome, there remained a strong incentive to maintain channels of

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<sup>730</sup> *Mosheim*, app. XLV, p.118.

communication, however tenuous, in the hope that Mongol power might yet be directed against the Mamluks in the Levant. The papacy was well informed about conditions in the Ilkhanate through the reports of missionaries, as well as through Nestorian letters, and could hardly have believed that Mongol promises guaranteed a stable alliance, much less a conversion. What mattered was the possibility that continued correspondence might still bear fruit at a time when the Christian fortunes in the Levant were under increasing strain.

## IV. Mediating Sovereignty: Armenian Elites and Ilkhanid

### Diplomacy

This chapter builds on the previous analysis of Ilkhanid diplomacy by turning to the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and its evolving relationship with the Ilkhanate. From the mid-thirteenth century, elites from both Greater Armenia and Cilicia played a visible role in Ilkhanid military and diplomatic activity. In the case of Cilicia, the relationship with the Ilkhanate was formally asymmetrical: the small kingdom became a tributary to the Mongols in 1247, and its cooperation with the Ilkhanate was a condition of its submission. Yet, this chapter contends that elites from the two polities operated within a mutually beneficial relationship to safeguard their strategic interests. The Armenian submission to the Mongols intensified Mamluk hostility toward Cilicia, subjecting its population to recurrent incursions. Even so, protection from the Ilkhanate contributed to Cilicia's survival as the last Christian polity in the eastern Mediterranean well into the fourteenth century. Armenian allegiance to the Mongols extended beyond military assistance. For Cilician rulers, Mongol support was necessary for survival; for the ilkhans, their Armenian vassals created a buffer along the Ilkhanate's western frontier and extended their influence into the Levantine sphere by serving as a diplomatic conduit to Latin powers. In this respect, Cilician elites did not function solely as passive recipients of Ilkhanid authority but as brokers, who mediated between Ilkhanid strategic priorities and Latin Christendom in the interest of Cilicia.

The existing historiography on the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia is substantial but uneven, shaped by differing disciplinary frameworks and engagements with the source base. The two most complete works for a general overview of the history of kingdom are the quite dated *Histoire politique et religieuse de l'Arménie*, written in 1910 by François Tournebize, and Thomas Sherrer

Ross Boase's collection of essays titled *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, published 1978.<sup>731</sup> More recently, Claude Mutafian has contributed to the field with his *Le Royaume arménien de Cilicie* (1993), *La Cilicie au carrefour des empires* (1988) and *L'Arménie du Levant, XIe-XIVe siècle* (2012), books which mostly combine historical narration and with visual material. These works, as Angus Stewart points out are often precise and well-informed, but are sometimes lacking in primary source criticism, especially concerning of Arabic material.<sup>732</sup> A narrative of the period analysed in this chapter can be also found in Sirarpie Der Nersessian's chapter in the *History of the Crusades*, which, though clear and accurate, is conceptually bound to a Latin frame of reference and marginalises Cilician interactions with the Mamluks and the Ilkhanate.<sup>733</sup>

Works on Cilician diplomacy with the Mamluks constituted an important base for this chapter, especially because this dissertation lacks access to sources in Arabic. In his 1967 study "Le royaume d'Arménie-Cilicie et les Mamelouks jusqu'au traité de 1285," Marius Canard framed Armenian-Mamluk relations primarily through the lens of Mamluk frontier policy and military reaction.<sup>734</sup> A similar approach appears in the work of Reuven Amitai-Preiss, particularly in *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260-1281*, where Cilician Armenia affairs are narrated within the broader logic of the Mamluk-Ilkhanid wars.<sup>735</sup>

More recently Angus Stewart's work has provided an exhaustive analysis of Cilician internal affairs and diplomacy between the second half of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century. Stewart's *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks* is largely centred on the reign of Het'um

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<sup>731</sup> Tournebize, F. *Histoire politique et religieuse de l'Arménie, depuis les origines des Arméniens jusqu'à la mort de leur dernier roi (l'an 1393). Avec une table alphabétique des noms et des matières et trois cartes* (Paris, 1910); Boase, T.S.R. ed. *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia* (Edinburgh, 1978).

<sup>732</sup> Mutafian, C. *La Cilicie au carrefour des empires* (Paris, 1988); Mutafian, C. *Le royaume arménien de Cilicie: XIIe-XIVe siècle* (Paris, 1993); Mutafian, C. *L'Arménie du Levant, XIe-XIVe siècle* (Paris, 2012). For a critique of some of the aspect of Mutafian's work, especially his approach to Arabic sources see Stewart, A.D. *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks, War and Diplomacy during the Reigns of Het'um II (1289-1307)* (Leiden, 2021), p.5-6.

<sup>733</sup> Der Nersessian, S. "The Kingdom of Cilician Armenia," in Setton, K.M. ed. *A History of the Crusades* (Philadelphia, 1962): 630-659.

<sup>734</sup> Canard, M. "Le Royaume d'Arménie-Cilicie et les Mamelouks jusqu'au traité de 1285." *Revue des études arméniennes, Nouvelle série*, 4 (1967): 217-259.

<sup>735</sup> Amitai-Preiss, R. *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260-1281* (New York, 1995).

II, but also extends retrospectively to the rule of his predecessors. The study focuses on diplomacy, politics and military campaigns, reconstructing the details of negotiations, truces, and military expeditions and using a balanced reading of Arabic and Armenian sources.<sup>736</sup> Stewart has also produced several papers on Armenian-Mongol relations in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Most notably, his articles “The Assassination of King Het‘um II: The Conversion of the Ilkhans and the Armenians” and “Reframing the Mongols in 1260: The Armenians, the Mongols and the Magi” constituted a major reference point for this study.<sup>737</sup> Across all his works on the topic, Stewart presents Cilician Armenian diplomacy as limited by the kingdom’s territorial fragility, its internal tensions and the unreliability of Mongol interventions. His interpretation foregrounds the constraints under which Cilician rulers operated, and remains cautious about overstating their strategic autonomy. Stewart convincingly shows that Cilicia was not a full strategic partner of the Mongols, like many of the Armenian sources claimed, but a subject nation navigating a highly volatile diplomatic landscape. His insistence on contextualising Armenian conduct within the logic of Mamluk aggressiveness serves as a necessary corrective to overreaching interpretations of Armenian independence.<sup>738</sup>

Concerning Armenian relations with the Mongols, the most substantial work remains that of Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog. In her *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220-1335)*, Cilicia occupies a considerable portion of the analysis and is examined within the broader picture of Mongol interactions with Greater Armenia.<sup>739</sup> When talking about Cilicia, Dashdondog mainly focuses on military campaigns, and her reliance on Armenian sources sometimes risks overstating Cilician

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<sup>736</sup> See note above n.732.

<sup>737</sup> Stewart, A.D. “The Assassination of King Het‘um II: The Conversion of the Ilkhans and the Armenians.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 15,1(2005): 45-61; Stewart, A.D. “Reframing the Mongols in 1260: The Armenians, the Mongols and the Magi.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28,1(2018): 55-76.

<sup>738</sup> Stewart, “The Assassination.” p.49. Stewart stresses how Armenian initiatives cannot be understood if we do not consider the continuous threat posed by the Mamluks. He also rightly points out that the Mongols’ assistance to Cilicia was often limited in nature, and at times, did not serve kingdom’s best interests.

<sup>739</sup> Dashdondog, B. *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220-1335)* (Leiden, 2010).

contribution to Ilkhanid military efforts.<sup>740</sup> Despite these minor flaws, her work remains the most complete overview of Mongol-Armenian relations, and its structure and content have shaped this dissertation's approach considerably. While Dashdondog's study offers a comprehensive assessment of events across the political, military and religious fields, this dissertation mainly focuses on the of brokerage exercised by Armenian elites within Ilkhanid power structures. This chapter builds upon Dashdondog's analysis of the political experiences of the Armenians living under direct Mongol rule in Greater Armenia, treating them as a case of negotiated sovereignty, an approach consistent with the dynamics explored in the preceding chapters. It also situates Armenian elites within the broader networks of intermediaries who mediated between imperial authority and regional constituencies. Cilician nobility, the focus of the second part of the chapter, though formally subordinate, exercised a distinct diplomatic agency that expanded Ilkhanid engagement with the Latin world. Cilicia thus emerged as an integrated yet autonomous node within the Ilkhanid diplomatic system, extending Mongol influence without requiring political incorporation. The coordination between Armenian and Ilkhanid initiatives suggests not mere compliance but a shared strategic interest. A case study of Hayton of Corycus' *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient*, situated at the end of this chapter, will serve to illustrate these dynamics. The treatise, with its proposal for a Mongol-Frankish alliance, stands as both the culmination and the main textual expression of Armenian-Ilkhanid cooperation.<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>740</sup> Dashdondog sometimes overstates the role of Armenians in Mongol campaigns and decision making. For instance, she overstates the importance of Het'um's imposition of terms in his submission to Möngke: "As the Armenian King Het'um wished, the Mongol Khan agreed to free the Holy Land from the Muslims." Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.136.

<sup>741</sup> Hayton, *Flor*, cited above, p.41. For a more comprehensive survey of Armenian primary sources in this period see. Bais, M. "Armenian sources on the Mongols." *BAZMAVEP*, 168, 3/4 (2010): 39-53; Alpi, F. "La Storia del Popolo degli Arcieri di Grigor di Akner: i modi della narrazione." *BAZMAVEP*, 170, 3/4 (2010): 673-684.

## ◆ Armenians and Mongols outside of Cilicia

The collaboration between the Mongols and Armenian elites can be framed within the broader process of elite integration across the Mongol Empire. While the Mongols first entered the Caucasus in 1222, several years were necessary to mount an organised and systematic effort to subdue the region.<sup>742</sup> When Chormaghun arrived in Persia in the 1230s, his expedition in the Caucasus commenced with the subjugation of Azerbaijan.<sup>743</sup> Soon after, the Mongol general entered Greater Armenia and conquered the city of Gandzak in 1231.<sup>744</sup> At that time, Armenian principalities operated under the suzerainty of the Georgian Bagratids, whose authority faltered under successive Mongol assaults. As Georgian rule fragmented under Mongol pressure, Armenian nobles sought to safeguard their positions by aligning with the advancing power. After an initial period of resistance, many offered their allegiance to the Mongols.<sup>745</sup> The extensive devastation wrought by the Mongols in the Caucasus, vividly depicted in the works of Kirakos Gandzaketsi and Grigor Aknertsi, provided justification for the actions of Armenian princes who chose to submit to the invaders, framing submission as a political necessity and a rational adaptation to reality.<sup>746</sup> In his work, the *History of the Province of Siwnik*, the Armenian bishop Step'annos Orbelean explains how, faced with the overwhelming power of the Mongol armies, several Armenian princes made the calculated decision to surrender voluntarily.<sup>747</sup> The submissions of the princes Eikum, Smbat, Hasan Jalāl Dawla and, in particular, Awag Zak'arian Mkhargrdzeli in 1236, were reported to have prompted other noble families to follow suit.<sup>748</sup> In return for their allegiance, Armenian princes received generous rewards from the Mongols: they secured titles, lands, and even direct access to the *qa'an*'s patronage. Awag, for instance, travelled to Karakorum sometimes before 1241 to present homage to Ögödei, returning

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<sup>742</sup> For Jalāl al-Dīn's exploits in the region refer to *JTJ/Boyle*, p.430-432; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.163-165.

<sup>743</sup> See above, p.60.

<sup>744</sup> *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.197-199.

<sup>745</sup> For a general overview of Mongol relations with Greater Armenian nobility after the conquest refer to Dashdondog, *Armenians* chapters 1-2; Dashdondog, "Darughachi in Armenia." p.219-221.

<sup>746</sup> *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.194-203; *Grigor/Bedrosian*, Ch.3.

<sup>747</sup> *Orbelean/Bedrosian*, p.208.

<sup>748</sup> *Orbelean/Bedrosian*, p.208-209; Dashdondog, *Armenians*. p.59; Lane, *Mongol Rule*. p.54.

with both enhanced status and a Mongol bride, an arrangement signifying his incorporation into the *noyat's* kinship networks.<sup>749</sup> Awag was highly esteemed by the Mongol nobility, and he managed to preserve and expand his domains and wealth under Mongol patronage.<sup>750</sup> Furthermore, the absence of leadership at the Georgian court after Queen Rusudan's death in 1245 allowed him to quickly become the most influential figure in the Kingdom.<sup>751</sup>

Another similar instance is detailed in the chronicle of Bishop Step'annos Orbelean. His family pledged allegiance to the Mongols, with Smbat Orbelean, Step'annos' uncle, securing sovereignty over his dominions through two journeys to Möngke in 1251 and 1256.<sup>752</sup> Following Hülegü's arrival, the prince appointed Smbat as overseer of the construction works for the new Ilkhanid summer residence at Ala Tagh.<sup>753</sup> Soon, however, prince Sadun, a rival of the Orbeleans, entered the political foreground by gaining favour with Hülegü and through his association with Awag's family. After her father's death, Koshak, Awag Zak'arian's daughter, had been placed under the guardianship of Smbat Orbelean, who, according to Step'annos Orbelean, arranged her marriage to Shams al-Dīn Juvaynī, the *ṣāhib-dīvān*, in 1269. Later, Sadun formed an alliance with Awag's widow, eventually becoming Koshak's guardian and, by extension, assuming influence over the family's affairs.<sup>754</sup> Consequently, Smbat Orbelean lost his influential position, and Sadun became a favourite of Abaqa, likely with Shams al-Dīn's intercession. Additionally, Sadun obtained Awag's former position of *atābak* of Georgia. Smbat Orbelean's son, Tarsayic Orbelean, gained renown for his exploits against the Egyptians and the Turks while serving Abaqa. However, he had to wait for

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<sup>749</sup> Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.224-225; Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.61-62,68-69; Orbelean/Bedrosian, p.208. Differently from Kirakos, Orbelean does not mention the trip and instead suggests that Awag was convinced to submit by the other Armenian princes, probably because of his family's feud with Awag's family.

<sup>750</sup> Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.216-221, 225-229.

<sup>751</sup> Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.72-74. On Awag's influence at the Georgian court: Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.251,264-265.

<sup>752</sup> Orbelean/Bedrosian, p.212-213; Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.77. Dashdondog suggests that inscriptive evidence supports the idea that Smbat enjoyed a prestigious career and notes his title as king.

<sup>753</sup> Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.114; Orbelean/Bedrosian, p.213.

<sup>754</sup> Orbelean/Bedrosian, p.215. Sadun is referred to by Dashdondog "the atabeg and army commander of Awag," Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.77.

the downfall of the Juvaynī family to regain and even increase his family's power under the patronage of Arghun.<sup>755</sup>

The integration of Armenian elites into the Mongol administrative and military structures facilitated Mongol control and influence over the Caucasus, as local alliances were essential to manage a geographically challenging and politically fragmented region. By exploiting regional political rivalries and integrating Armenian nobility into kinship and military structures, the Mongols could pre-empt the establishment of independent power bases by influential individuals, suppress resistance, and reward loyal service. However, this cooperation carried its risks. The career trajectories of nobles such as Awag Zak'arian, Hasan Jalāl and Smbat Orbelean are examples of how these networks were competitive arenas in which power was negotiated through access and service.<sup>756</sup> Holding a position of influence under Mongol rule in a vast and complex region like the Caucasus carried visibility, and with it, the risk of falling victim of alliance systems of competing actors. It also carried the responsibility to use the influence acquired to represent their families' and subjects' interests by navigating Mongol politics and jurisdictional contestations. Between 1246 and 1254, for instance, significant tension arose in the Caucasus concerning the enforcement of Mongol fiscal authority. According to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, in 1246 Prince Awag resisted the intrusion of Muslim tax officials sent from Iran with a certain Buqa Noyan, who was presumably acting under the orders of Arghun Aqa, then newly appointed as fiscal overseer. Although Awag, presumably because of his status at the Mongol court, managed to assert his authority without directly confronting Mongol troops, other Armenian nobles fared less well.<sup>757</sup>

Kirakos reports that Prince Hasan Jalāl, lacking the same prestige, attempted to defy the imposition but was severely punished: his fortresses were destroyed and he himself subjected to torture on charges of insolvency.<sup>758</sup> Yet these incidents did not appear to undermine Armenian

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<sup>755</sup> *Orbelean/Bedrosian*, p.217. Sadun's intrigues certainly affected Orbelean's view of the Juvaynīs, who are accused of poisoning Hülegü and his wife in *Orbelean/Bedrosian*, p.215.

<sup>756</sup> *Grigor/Bedrosian*, Ch.16.

<sup>757</sup> *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.267-269; *Grigor/Bedrosian*, Ch.9.

<sup>758</sup> *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.260-262.

cooperation with the Mongols. George Lane, who has analysed the role of Armenian nobility in Mongol governance in his work on Persian notables, notes that figures like Awag and the Orbeleans functioned as core actors within the Empire's administrative structure, facilitating governance, military mobilisation, and political control.<sup>759</sup> In short, Armenian elites were not merely clients but possessed all the attributes of brokers: geographical position, cultural fluency, ties that stretched across confessional and political boundaries, and access to both local and imperial networks. In 1249, for instance, Awag is found first alerting Mongol authorities to a potential Georgian revolt and then, as Grigor Aknertsi suggests, mediating on the Georgians' behalf. Thus, his mediation proved instrumental both in preventing a conflict and in maintaining Mongol control in the Caucasus.<sup>760</sup>

Although few Armenian nobles attained the same degree of influence as Awag, the sources clearly attest to their political reach and their ability to navigate the complexities of Mongol politics. For instance, following his dispute with Arghun Aqa concerning taxation, Hasan Jalāl Dawla secured the restoration of his domains by appealing directly to Batu and his son Sartaq in Sarai, which proves that the prince was well aware of the disputes surrounding the Caucasus that have been discussed earlier in this dissertation.<sup>761</sup> This type of engagement deepened after Hülegü's arrival, as Armenian elites became increasingly integrated into Ilkhanid military and administrative structures. The involvement of Greater Armenian nobility in Ilkhanid military affairs is, in fact, well documented. For instance, Armenian forces took part in Hülegü's campaigns in Mesopotamia and Syria (1258-1260), and in 1270, during Tegüdar's rebellion, both Armenian and Georgian troops supported Abaqa

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<sup>759</sup> Lane, *Mongol Rule*, p.54. Lane uses the expression "pillars of Mongol administration" to describe Armenian nobles. Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.77.

<sup>760</sup> *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.261-262.

<sup>761</sup> Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.74; *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.295,297.

by defending his northern frontier while he confronted Baraq in Khurasan.<sup>762</sup> Furthermore, throughout the Ilkhanid period, the sons of Armenian and Georgian nobles were often appointed as royal guards, referred to by Grigor Aknertsi as *k'e'sikt'oyk'* (*kešik*).<sup>763</sup>

The early Ilkhanid period also saw a systematic rebuilding effort launched in the Caucasus, which had become a strategically important region.<sup>764</sup> This effort extended beyond elite families such as the Orbelean, involving local administrative bodies, which, likely through the mediation of regional elite, were incorporated into the Ilkhanid census and administrative systems, often with great damage for the local population, as they behaved worse than their Mongol counterparts.<sup>765</sup> In summary, while Armenian nobles initially navigated Mongol imperial authority to preserve their positions, over time they achieved a greater level of integration within Mongol institutions, that eventually positioned them as an important instrument of Ilkhanid rule. However, this newfound role and increased visibility at court sometimes provoked tensions with Mongol elites, particularly where

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<sup>762</sup> Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.314-320; Bar Hebraeus/Budge, p.505; Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, p.26; RJT/Thackston, p.554; RJT/Karīmī, p.794. Rashīd al-Dīn, in one of his rare mentions of Christian military exploits, reports that the Georgian king David took part in the campaign against Tegüdar in the Caucasus. There is thus no reason to think that the Armenian nobility was not involved in the campaign, as Kirakos reports at. Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch.16. Concerning Armenian participation to Mongol campaigns, it is important to not overestimate their contribution. Shnorhokian, R. *Hayton of Korykos and La Flor Des Estoires: Cilician Armenian Mediation in Crusader-Mongol Politics, C.1250-1350* (PhD dissertation, Queens University, 2015), p.70,71. While as Shnorhokian notes, both the Armenians and the Georgians were formidable soldiers, it is very likely that they were treated as expendable troops, and often put in the front. This would explain the celebratory tone of many of the source, while also justifying the great number of casualties these troops routinely suffered. The Armenians and Georgians appear to be on two different sides in Aḥmad Tegüder's conflict with Arghun, as Orbelean mentions Armenians on Arghun side, while many Georgians sided with Aḥmad's Georgian half-brother Alinaq. Orbelean/Bedrosian, p.217.

<sup>763</sup> Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch.12 "He (Hülegü) chose the handsome and young sons of the princes of the Armenians and Georgians and set them up as his guards, calling them *k'e'sikt'oyk'* who are the guards with sword and bow."

<sup>764</sup> Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch.12. "He (Hülegü) also started to rebuild the destroyed places. They took from each cultivated (*shen*) village one householder, one from the small (villages), two or three from the large ones, and called them *lam*. And he sent them to all the ruined places to undertake construction. They paid no tax whatever but (provided) only bread and *t'an* (a yoghurt beverage) for traveling Tatars. With such arrangements he established the seat of his khanate."

<sup>765</sup> Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.299-300. "Furthermore, the princes, lords of the districts, became their coworkers in harassing and demanding taxes for their own profit. Nor were they content with just this. Instead, all the artisans whether in the cities or the villages were taxed. Furthermore, fishermen of the seas and lakes, miners and blacksmiths and painters/plasterers (were taxed). Is it necessary to explain in detail the level of profit which they extracted from people? And they alone profited."

religious and administrative rivalries intersected. In the case of Hasan Jalāl, such tensions appear to have escalated into open conflict with the Muslim Arghun Aqa.<sup>766</sup> Following Hülegü's arrival and the consolidation of Arghun Aqa's authority as one of the Ilkhan's main supporters, tensions between Jalāl and Arghun escalated. Kirakos notes that the Armenian prince was falsely accused and detained. His daughter, married one of the sons of Chormaghun Noyan, appealed for clemency to Doquz Khatun, but Arghun Aqa pre-empted any intervention and had Jalal executed in 1261.<sup>767</sup>

### ◆ Mongol-Cilician cooperation until 1307

In the regions south of the Caucasus, contacts between the Mongols and the Armenians developed much later than in Greater Armenia, as the first Mongol invasions did not directly involve Anatolia. The confrontation between the Sultans of Rûm and the Mongols in 1243 provides a clear example of how members of the Greater Armenian nobility's effectiveness not only as local power brokers, but also as diplomatic intermediaries. As Baiju Noyan advanced against the Seljuks of Rûm, King Het'um I of Cilician Armenia, formally a tributary to Sultan Kaykhusraw II, was summoned to provide aid. Het'um delayed action, trying to stall by sending his father, Konstantin, as an envoy to Kayseri, while also establishing contacts with the Mongols.<sup>768</sup> It is likely, at this point, that Het'um had prior knowledge of the Mongols, not least through Armenian nobles already serving within their ranks.<sup>769</sup> Among them was Prince Hasan Jalāl Dawla, who not only facilitated interactions between Het'um and the Mongols following the Seljuks' defeat at Köse Dağ, but also likely played an important role in encouraging the Cilician king to submit. It was through Jalal's intercession that Het'um's envoys were presented to Baiju Noyan.

Once this (battle) had occurred, when Het'um 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

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<sup>766</sup> Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.326.

<sup>767</sup> Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.327-328.

<sup>768</sup> Mutafian, *L'Arménie du Levant*, p.132.

<sup>769</sup> Awag took part in the Mongol expedition against Anatolia and the siege of Erzurum, where he interceded in favour of the Christian population. *Orbelean/Bedrosian*, p.209; *Grigor/Bedrosian*, Ch.6.

in submission. Through the intercession of prince Jalal, those who came to the great court were presented to Baiju-*noyan*.<sup>770</sup>

When the Mongols heard the king's message and saw the gifts, they asked him to hand over the mother, wife and daughter of the sultan, who had sought refuge at his court, and Het'um complied.<sup>771</sup> This episode is but one example of how an intermediary could fill the “structural holes” in Mongol diplomacy. Hasan Jalāl's mediation and his betweenness centrality are here represented by his command of both Mongol and Armenian languages and customs, and by his shared religious and political space with Cilicia, allowed him to advance Mongol aims by facilitating a submission shaped not solely by fear, but also by trust in their intermediary. Although Het'um was no doubt conscious of the dangers of resistance, particularly in light of the Seljuk defeat at Köse Dağ, he was now also informed of the potential benefits that a submission to the Mongols could bring. Such a result would have been significantly harder for the Mongols to achieve exclusively through direct diplomatic efforts.

After his homage to Baiju, in 1247 Het'um dispatched his brother, the constable Smbat, to Karakorum.<sup>772</sup> There, Smbat remained at the court of Güyük Khan to formalize Cilicia's tributary status and was even granted a Mongol princess in marriage, much like other princes from Greater Armenia.<sup>773</sup> In 1248, Smbat stopped in Samarkand while en route to Karakorum, writing a letter to his Latin in-laws King Henry I of Cyprus and John of Ibelin, the Constable of Jerusalem.<sup>774</sup> While the letter has received a lot of scholarly attention, most recently from Aleksandr Osipian and Angus Stewart, it is necessary here to briefly discuss its content.<sup>775</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.246-248.

<sup>771</sup> Het'um/Bedrosian, p.81; Smbat/Bedrosian, p.106; Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.247.

<sup>772</sup> Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.265-266; Het'um/Bedrosian, p.8; Flor, p.296.

<sup>773</sup> Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch.7; Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians*, 93-94.

<sup>774</sup> Jean Richard has produced a modern French translation of the letter. Richard, J. “La Lettre du Connétable Smbat et les rapports entre Chrétiens et mongols au milieu du XIIIème siècle.” *Armenian Studies-Études arméniennes: In Memoriam Hair Berberian*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Lisbon, 1986): 683-696. Peter Jackson has also produced an English translation of the letter in Jackson, *The Seventh Crusade*, p.267.

<sup>775</sup> See Stewart, “Reframing.”; Osipian, A. “Armenian Involvement in the Latin-Mongol Crusade: Uses of the Magi and Prester John in Constable Smbat's Letter and Hayton of Corycus' *Flos historiarum Terrae Orientis 1248-1307.*” *Medieval Encounters*, 20,1 (2014): 66-100.

It has been mentioned in the previous chapter that the letter arrived in the crusader camp in late 1248, and was almost immediately followed by Marc and David's embassy on behalf of Eljigidei.<sup>776</sup> Both documents were brought to the attention of King Louis IX, who was then preparing to storm the city of Dumyat. In the missive, Smbat claims that the Christian legacy of the Magi had persisted in the East, as shown by the existence of Christian communities in the region of "Chata" (Cathay or China). His letter refers to Christians honoured and protected by the Mongols, and notes the presence of numerous priests and churches, referring to an alleged conversion of the *qa'an* to Christianity. In one passage, he writes:

Also, the Christians of this country went to the grandfather of the present khan, who received them with great honour, granted them freedom, and forbade anyone to do or say anything that might rightly, even in a small measure, upset them.<sup>777</sup>

Jean Richard has thoroughly examined Smbat's emphasis on the presence of Christians within the Mongol world, noting its clear parallels with the Nestorian-inflected rhetoric of Eljigidei's embassy. He also commented on Smbat's surprise at encountering established Eastern Christian communities in Central Asia. Both elements that have been analysed in the preceding chapter.<sup>778</sup>

This study here advances a distinct argument from that made in the previous chapter, as it focuses on the political function of Smbat's missive. In this context, the letter becomes the product of the agency of a figure already positioned, however marginally, within the circuits of Mongol power. The letter can be seen, in fact, as a carefully crafted rhetorical intervention, designed to render Mongol authority acceptable to a Latin audience. The emphasis on the presence of Christian communities in Mongol lands, the benevolent treatment of clergy, and even the suggestion of the *qa'an* potential baptism, all serve to construct a reassuring image of the Mongol Empire.<sup>779</sup> The letter also consistently works to reframe the Mongols as powerful and legitimate allies, especially through its emphasis on their military strength and their war with Muslim powers. By presenting them as

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<sup>776</sup> See above, p.183.

<sup>777</sup> Richard, "La lettre." p.693.

<sup>778</sup> See above, p.170.

<sup>779</sup> Richard, "La lettre." p.696.

participants in a shared struggle, Smbat positions Cilicia's "alignment" as a model, inviting other Christian rulers to follow Armenia's lead. His account of Mongol honour and generosity toward him personally also suggests that Cilicia's proximity to the Mongols had already yielded benefits.

About our mission, all those we meet, Tartars and others, tell us that they will treat us well and wisely.<sup>780</sup>

This argument is not entirely novel, as Alexandr Osipian has interpreted the letter as an effort to counter the negative portrayal of the Mongols found in the writings of John of Pian del Carpine, whose embassy is explicitly referenced at the close of the text.<sup>781</sup>

In the context of this chapter, Smbat's letter is important because it reveals how Armenian engagement with the Mongols had already moved beyond submission and was beginning to replicate the same patterns of brokerage previously observed in the case of Hasan Jalāl. Another proof of this is king Het'um's first diplomatic engagement as a Mongol subject, which took place either just before or immediately after Smbat's departure in 1247.<sup>782</sup> According to both Matthew Paris and Andrew of Longjumeau in fact, that same year Bohemond V of Antioch became a tributary to the Mongols. The role of Het'um in the submission of Antioch was doubtlessly crucial, as Cilicia at the time exercised a significant influence in the internal affairs of the Principality and had a long history of familial ties with Antiochene nobility and ruling family.<sup>783</sup> Bohemond V of Antioch, however, had been condemned by the patriarch of Jerusalem for his unsanctioned submission. This posed a reputational danger to the entire diplomatic effort of Cilicia, making it vulnerable to diplomatic isolation from its

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<sup>780</sup> Richard, "La lettre." p.693-694. Note that Smbat never mentions Cilician submission, so the letter is not framed as an invitation to submit to the Mongols. Louis would send Andrew of Longjumeau on his second mission partly because of this ambiguity, as it has been amply discussed in the previous chapter. See above, p.183-184.

<sup>781</sup> Osipian, "Armenian Involvement." p.70.

<sup>782</sup> Jackson, "Crisis." p.486-488, 494-495. Jackson discusses the submission of Bohemond V and his son Bohemond V at length in this article.

<sup>783</sup> *Lignages D'Outremer, Assises de Jérusalem ou recueil des ouvrages de jurisprudence composés pendant le XIIIe siècle dans les royaumes de Jérusalem et de Chypre*, ed. Beugnot, A. (Paris, 1843), p.447; Shnorhokian, *Hayton*, p.67; Cahen, C. *La Syrie du Nord à l'Epoque des Croisades et de la Principauté Franque d'Antioche* (Paris, 1940), p.702. Bohemond VI was eventually denounced to the Pope by Thomas Agni, Patriarch of Jerusalem, who asked for his excommunication on the account of his collaborations with the Mongols. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.117.

Frankish allies. In this context, the significance of Smbat's letter becomes even more apparent. Het'um had successfully brokered a new connection between a Latin Christian polity and the Mongols, and Smbat's correspondence was as a deliberate effort to publicise and legitimise this initiative to other Christian powers. Thus the importance of Cilicia to the Mongols did not stem from the Kingdom's military might, but rather from its capacity to create access points for Mongol diplomacy across political and religious boundaries.

Armenian allegiance was soon to be confirmed by the presence of King Het'um I at Möngke's court after the *qa'an's* enthronement in 1251, an event that required the attendance of the rulers subject to the Empire. Disguised as a monk to travel through Seljuk lands, passing Great Armenia and travelling along the coasts of the Caspian Sea through Central Asia, Het'um arrived at the Mongol court in 1254. Het'um's encounter with Möngke Khan, if we follow the Armenian sources, is presented as a considerable diplomatic success for Cilicia. Kirakos Gandzaketsi and later Armenian chroniclers describe the event in celebratory terms, portraying the Armenian king as a Mongol ally received with honour by Möngke.<sup>784</sup> Yet, these sources are the only detailed accounts available, and their narrative function as instruments of legitimation for Cilician submission makes them difficult to evaluate at face value. Juvaynī confirms that the meeting took place but offers no substantive details about its content or tone, limiting our ability to reconstruct the nature of the exchange.<sup>785</sup> Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog seems to broadly accept the Armenian narrative, treating Het'um's journey as a straightforward affirmation of loyalty and mutual respect.<sup>786</sup> Other historians adopt a more cautious stance: Angus Stewart and Peter Jackson, for example, note the political utility

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<sup>784</sup> *Smbat/Bedrosian*, p.109; *Flor*, p.297-298. An account of Het'um's encounter with Möngke can be found in his nephew's and his brother's chronicles, as well as in *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.301-309. *Grigor/Bedrosian*, Ch.7. As concerns historiographical contributions, see Canard, "Le Royaume d'Arménie-Cilicie." p.223-244; Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.44. The most exhaustive commentary on the topic remains that of Boyle, who translated Kirakos Gandzaketsi's account of the journey. Boyle, J.A. "The journey of Het'um I, king of Little Armenia, to the court of the Great Khan Möngke." *Central Asiatic Journal*, 9, 3 (1964): 175-189.

<sup>785</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.250; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, I, p.205.

<sup>786</sup> Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.88. Dashdondog, following other Armenian historians, argues that a previous document existed and was the product of Smbat's encounter with Güyük in 1247.

of such narratives but refrain from reading them as direct evidence of Ilkhanid policy.<sup>787</sup> The lack of corroborating sources and the reliance on Armenian tradition necessitate a similarly sceptical approach. As the following pages will show, the diplomatic encounter between Het'um and Möngke is better understood not as a moment of equal dialogue, but as a submission framed in ways that enhanced Cilicia's status vis-à-vis the Armenian people and the Latin world. The Armenian narrative, as preserved by Kirakos Gandzaketsi and Hayton of Corycus, continues with Het'um's encounter with Hülegü, whom he accompanied for a short distance as the Mongol prince moved westward to assume command over the campaigns in Mesopotamia.<sup>788</sup> After his return in the Levant, Het'um obtained a confirmation of the Antiochene submission to the Mongols by Bohemond VI, his son-in-law, and prepared to join the Mongol campaign.<sup>789</sup>

What has been discussed so far positions Het'um and his brother Smbat as intermediaries. Just as Hasan Jalāl had linked Het'um to the Mongols, Het'um, in turn, brokered access between Hülegü and Bohemond VI and his family. Both men operated within fragmented and overlapping spheres of authority, leveraging personal ties (kinship, proximity, mutual trust) to mediate between otherwise disconnected political formations. This study accepts the broader significance of Smbat's 1248 letter, as emphasised by Stewart and Osipian, but moves away from their focus on ideological messaging, regarding the missive as a functional exercise in brokerage. Smbat was not merely advocating for confessional alignment but attempting to consolidate Armenia's role as a diplomatic hinge between Latin powers and the Mongol. Thus, Smbat's letter reflects the understanding that Cilician survival required more than formal allegiance; it depended equally on the ability to frame those allegiances in ways that could be justified and accepted by multiple audiences. In summary, while shaped by the vulnerabilities its geopolitical position, Cilician efforts were not merely reactive, but a calculated intervention designed to secure influence through the strategic management of diplomatic access. Hülegü's westward advance boosted this strategic posture. His presence transformed what had

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<sup>787</sup> Stewart, "Reframing," p.73 ;Jackson, "Crisis." p.485-486.

<sup>788</sup> Flor, p.299; Boyle, "The journey of Het'um." p.183; *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.305.

<sup>789</sup> Jackson, "Crisis." p.494-495.

previously been cautious diplomacy into something more ambitious: an effort to mediate in pursuit of durable protection and renewed political relevance. For the Cilician elite, such coordination, even if fragile or short-lived, promised a reprieve from isolation and a potential revival of the Christian position in the Levant. This initial triangulation of diplomatic interactions between the Armenians, the Mongols, and the Latins marks the emergence of a recurring pattern: Armenian initiatives toward Latin rulers were frequently followed, or at times preceded, by Mongol embassies. This pattern of double embassies suggests a measure of coordination, as it will be detailed in the following pages.<sup>790</sup>

While Het'um and the princes of Cilicia did not participate in Hülegü's expeditions of 1256 and 1258 the Armenian king joined Hülegü's troops at in northern Syria, and participated in the siege of Aleppo.<sup>791</sup> The submission of Cilicia and Antioch to the Mongols translated into practical military coordination during the Syrian campaign of 1259-1260. Although the Templar of Tyre is the sole source for the claim that Kitbuqa and two Christian rulers entered Damascus, a report now widely considered spurious, its existence reflects the symbolic expectations attached to the Mongol alliance. As Stewart has shown, representations of the Mongols as allies contributed to a broader reframing of their image within iconography which was mostly created for internal consumption.<sup>792</sup>

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<sup>790</sup> While this topic will be discussed throughout the chapter, it is worth listing the chronology of some of the embassies here: Smbat's letter and Eljigidei's embassy in 1248, (above at p.181-183); Leo's appeals and Abaqa's embassy of 1278-1280 (below, p.233); Het'um and Smbat's appeals to Europe and Ghazan's appeals to Cyprus in 1298-1303(below, p.239). Finally, Hayton's composition of *La Flor* and Öljeitü's embassy of 1305 (below, p.252). Particularly noteworthy, though not directly analysed in this work, is the embassy sent by Het'um in 1291 to Edward I of England, in parallel with the efforts carried out by Arghun in the same direction just a year or two earlier. The text of Het'um's letter is contained in Bartholomew de Cotton, *Historia Anglicana* ed. Luard, H.R. (London, 1859), p.219-223.

<sup>791</sup> *Smbat/Bedrosian*, p.111.

<sup>792</sup> Stewart, "Reframing." p.76. Both Stewart and Jackson talk about this specific event, attributing it to a later tradition, as the only direct source recounting it is the templar of Tyre. *Gestes*, p.161-162. Jackson insists that the account itself was mainly a propaganda piece, but does not explain why the man he describes the chief Mongol propagandist, Hayton of Corycus, does not mention such an important event in his *La Flor*. It is very likely that the account is simply an embellishment of reality, a fact which should make us rethink the credibility of Hayton's work. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*. p.117; Jackson, "Crisis." p.486-487; Stewart, "Reframing." p.67-69. Stewart also writes at length on the event, discussing its importance in Christian iconography, particularly the relation of the figure of Kitbuqa with those of the Magi in an icon from Mount Sinai.

Both Het'um and Bohemond were generously rewarded for their help in Syria. Aside from taking part in the distribution of the spoils of war, Het'um received fortresses in western Cilicia, while Bohemond retook various districts in the Orontes valley and Latakia.<sup>793</sup> The difference between Bohemond's actions and the diffident behaviour of the Latins of Outremer toward the Mongols efficiently serves as proof of Het'um's influence in the campaign. While the Principality of Antioch offered military help and Bohemond allegedly entered Damascus as a conqueror with his father-in-law, the other Latin lords provided safe passage to the Egyptian army, which would defeat the Mongols at 'Ayn Jālūt in late 1260.<sup>794</sup>

As with many aspects of Het'um I's reign, our understanding of his military and diplomatic activities is shaped largely by the writings of his close relatives Smbat, Het'um II, and Hayton of Corycus. These authors portray Het'um in a favourable light, praising his decision to submit to the Mongols as a display of foresight and political acumen. Their narratives, much like the significance acquired by the king's alleged parade in Damascus, offer much more to the historian than just mere admiration or reverence for a "wise" king. They serve as a testament to the efforts of Cilician elites to emphasise their cooperation with the Mongols and to justify an ideologically complicated alliance as a potential opportunity for the resurgence of the Christian cause in the Levant. In some instances, as with Hayton's *La Flor*, they should be interpreted as part of the Cilician royal family's endeavours of self-promotion with European readership, a topic that will be further explored in the subsequent

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<sup>793</sup> Jackson, *Islamic world*. p.258.

<sup>794</sup> Smbat/Bedrosian, p.111; Kirakos/Bedrosian, p.324; *Gestes*, p.164-165; Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch.13. "They (The Egyptians) retook Jerusalem, Aleppo, and Damascus and this with the blessing of the Frank cavalry since at that time there was no friendship between the Tatars (and themselves)." For the battle of 'Ayn Jālūt see Amitai-Preiss, R. "Mongol raids into Palestine (ad 1260 to 1300)." *Journal of the royal Asiatic Society*, 119 (1987): 236-55; Masson-Smith, J. "Ayn Jalūt: Mamlūk success or Mongol failure." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 44, 1265 (1984): 307-345.

pages.<sup>795</sup> These texts, therefore, should be read as a continuation of the same political logic that informed the submissions at Köse Dağ and Antioch. They were crafted not only to reflect Armenian embeddedness within Mongol imperial structures, but to actively produce new access points into Latin Christendom.

After Hulegu's campaign, the emergence of the Ilkhanate coincided with the rise of the Mamluks, whose consolidation of power in Egypt and aggressive expansion into the Levant left Cilicia increasingly exposed.<sup>796</sup> Baybars, the new sultan of Cairo, was resolved to punish Cilicia and Antioch for cooperating with the Ilkhanate, and unleashed an offensive in Syria after the Mongols retreated. In 1268 Antioch fell to the Mamluks and Bohemond V fled to Tripoli. The Armenians were also defeated in 1266: the death of one of his sons (T'oros) in battle, Mamluk raids in Cilicia and the lack of Mongol military support prompted Het'um to initiate negotiations.<sup>797</sup> In 1267, Het'um I secured the release of his other son Leo, who had been held captive in Cairo. As part of the negotiations, Abaqa agreed to permit the cession to the Mamluks of several border fortresses previously taken during Mongol campaigns. Two years later, in 1269, Het'um abdicated the throne in favour of Leo II (r. 1269-1289) and withdrew to monastic life. After Het'um died in 1270, Leo decided to pursue continuity with his father's pro-Mongol policies, but lacked the strategic

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<sup>795</sup> Stewart, "Reframing," p.76. "The Mongol alignment may have been imposed on the Armenians by force of circumstance, but perhaps one should be careful not to underestimate the depth of the emotional commitment made by the Armenian 'elite to its possibilities, foremost being the conversion of these Tatars themselves." Shnorhokian posits this theory in her work: Shnorhokian, *Hayton of Korykos*. p.106-107. This dissertation takes a different view from interpretations like that of Shnorhokian, who presents Ilkhanid outreach to the Latin world as a coherent pro-Christian policy. Figures such as Hayton, much like Rabban Ata and Rabban Şawma, did represent Ilkhanid interests abroad, but their role must be understood in terms of brokerage rather than ideological alignment. Their ability to act depended on their access to both Latin and Mongol spheres, their visibility within specific religious and diplomatic spheres, and the convenience they offered to rulers who lacked direct means of communication with distant courts. These actors did not simply transmit instructions, they interpreted, reframed, and at times redirected diplomatic aims. They advanced Ilkhanid outreach while simultaneously pursuing the agendas of the communities they belonged to.

<sup>796</sup> For an analysis of the reasons for Mamluk aggressiveness towards Cilicia see Northrup, L. "The Bahri Mamlūk Sultanate, 1250-1390," in Daly M.W. and Petry C.F. eds. *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol.1. (Cambridge, 1998): 242-289, p.253.

<sup>797</sup> *Grigor/Bedrosian*, Ch.14. Grigor Aknertsi provides a detailed account of the Mamluk attack of 1266 and the capture and death of Het'um's sons. See also *Bar Hebraeus/Budge*, p.445-446.

opportunities that had defined his Het'um's earlier initiatives. Nevertheless, the logic of brokerage remained. Leo's reign coincided with several renewed efforts to synchronise Mongol and Latin campaigns. After Abaqa failed to contact Louis IX of France, then besieging the city of Tunis, he was allegedly urged by Leo to approach Edward I of England, another member of the Seventh Crusade, in 1271.<sup>798</sup> Edward I coordinated with the Mongols from Acre, but the joint military effort resulted in failure as Abaqa, engaged with Baraq in the East, could only send a small force.<sup>799</sup> Increasingly under pressure from the Mamluks, between 1272 and 1274, Leo had to negotiate with Baybars, but also travelled to Abaqa's court in Baghdad and received 20,000 men to protect his kingdom.<sup>800</sup> On his way back with a Mongol escort, Leo managed to avert a plot to dethrone him. The nobles responsible, primarily Greek or perhaps simply Orthodox, were seized and dispatched to Abaqa to be executed.<sup>801</sup>

During the following years, Cilicia came under Baybars' renewed attacks. The sultan used the complicity of the vizier of Sultan Kaykhusraw III, Mu'in al-Din Sulaymān Parvānah to open a passage to Anatolia in 1275. From there, he could extend his influence after his victory against Ilkhanid forces at Abulustān in 1277.<sup>802</sup> Despite the repeated appeals by Leo, the Mongols could not

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<sup>798</sup> Lockhart, "The Relations." p.24. The response of Edward to the Mongols also generally addresses All Eastern Christians", *Foedera, conventiones, literæ, et cujuscunque generis acta publica, inter reges Angliæ et alios quosvis imperatores, reges, pontifices, principes, vel communitates*, ed. Thomas, R. Vol 2. (1641-1713), p.144.

<sup>799</sup> For Edward's campaign and his correspondence with the Mongols on the battlefield see Paviot, "England and the Mongols." p.320-311; Boyle, J.A. "The Il-Khans of Persia." p.31-32.

<sup>800</sup> *Smbat/ Bedrosian*, p.120. "In the same year the sultan of Egypt, Baybars Bunduqdārī, moved to enter the country of Cilicia. King Lewon sent an embassy to him (Baybars) and he returned to his own land of Egypt, while the king went East to Abagha-Khan. The khan granted 20,000 men for him to take back to his land for its protection. After a few months, the khan himself would arrive. King Lewon took a few of them and returned to his own land."

<sup>801</sup> *Grigor/Bedrosian*, Ch.17.

<sup>802</sup> See above, p.143.

help Cilicia, which was ravaged by the Mamluk armies. By coordinating with Qaramanid contingents from Anatolia Baybars occupied strategic fortresses and ravaged Cilician economy.<sup>803</sup>

In 1277-78, another attempt was made to persuade Edward to intervene by sending envoys to England. It is worth highlighting that, in this period, the pattern of the double embassy seems to resurface, as Leo sent a letter to Europe with Abaqa's envoys, the Vassalli brothers.<sup>804</sup> Following the death of Baybars, Abaqa invaded Syria in 1280. In September 1280, again both the ilkhān and Leo urged the Franks join the expedition, but only the Hospitallers responded favourably.<sup>805</sup> After the initial success, Mongol troops retreated to return to Syria the following year. In October 1281, a Mongol-Armenian army confronted the Mamluk sultan Qalāwūn at the Second Battle of Homs. After a bloody clash, the Mongols retreated, and the Armenians suffered heavy losses. Left without protection, Cilicia was only temporarily saved by a dynastic crisis at Cairo, but Stewart mentions that in 1283 "a Mamluk expedition from Aleppo sacked Ayas defeating Armenian forces both on their advance and their return."<sup>806</sup> In the years 1282-1284, The Ilkhanate was not only unable but likely unwilling to help. In fact, while the ambivalent diplomatic stance towards the Mamluks of Aḥmad Tegüder has been the object of debate, his hostile stance towards Christians (and thus, presumably towards Cilicia) has been widely accepted.<sup>807</sup> Left without a choice Leo was forced to submit. The

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<sup>803</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn mentions Baybars' attack on Cilicia: "Bunduqdārī killed some Christians and Armenians and pulled back." *RJT/Thackston*, p.537; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.768. The Turks' offensive was successfully averted by Smbat the Constable, who lost his life in a fight. Baybars' offensive is mentioned in *Het'um/Bedrosian*, p.83. Stewart, reporting Bar Hebraeus, states that Lewon probably knew Parvānah's true intentions and had warned Abaqa. Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.51-52.

<sup>804</sup> *Gestes*, p.210-211. The first embassy sent by Abaqa is probably that led by David of Ashby. See above, p.193; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.174-175; Lockhart, "The Relations." p.24. We know of another Mongol embassy, which is probably the one led by the Vassalli brothers in 1276, but an Armenian embassy is also mentioned in *Flor*, 309-310. "Et (Leo) consuluit Abaga quatinus nuncii mitterentur ad Apostolicum et ad alios reges et dominos Christianos parcium Occidentis, ut ad subsidium Terre Sancte mitterent vel venirent, ut, cum terras acquirerent, Terre Sancte tradere possent in custodia Christianis. Unde rex Armenie ad patriam sua m rediit, et nuncios suos misit ad Summum Pontificem et ad alios reges et dominos parcium Occidentis."

<sup>805</sup> Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*. p.54; Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.172-174.

<sup>806</sup> Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.55.

<sup>807</sup> See above, p.96,204.

1285 treaty he signed with Sultan Qalāwūn imposed tribute payments and recognised Mamluk suzerainty over Cilicia, marked the culmination of this period of containment.<sup>808</sup>

What distinguishes the period following the treaty is the progressive emergence of what Stewart defines as a decline of the strategic importance of Cilicia. The Ilkhanate's priorities in this period were concentrated elsewhere, and Cilicia became a less important because Ilkhanid military commitment in the Levant diminished.<sup>809</sup> Dashdondog's analysis reinforces this picture, noting that Greater Armenia retained a more stable place in Ilkhanid administrative hierarchies, whereas Cilicia depended increasingly on episodic military reinforcement and tribute-mediated peace.<sup>810</sup> That said, Leo II still enacted brokerage. His effort demonstrate a continuing strategy of alignment-building. What changed was the degree of leverage: the kingdom could no longer efficiently translate diplomacy into sustained offensive action or military protection.

Following Leo's death in 1289, his son Het'um II ascended the throne. According to *La Flor*, the new king refused both coronation and marriage. Although this account may reflect the author's personal hostility towards Het'um, other contemporary sources likewise criticise the Cilician king for his repeated abdications and for twice withdrawing from political life to enter a monastery.<sup>811</sup> The reasons for Het'um's actions remain a subject of debate. Stewart argues that the volatile political situation in Cilicia, both external and internal, played a decisive role in prompting the king's repeated abdications and his reluctance to exercise direct authority. A personal inclination towards religious life may also have influenced his decisions.<sup>812</sup> At any rate, soon after assuming control of the

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<sup>808</sup> The text and the terms of the treaty of 1285 are analysed at length by Stewart, who emphasises the subordinate status of the Cilician Armenian Kingdom at this stage. Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.55-61.

<sup>809</sup> Stewart, "The assassination." p.49, 61.

<sup>810</sup> Dashdondog, *Armenians*, p.177-182.

<sup>811</sup> Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.65; *Flor*, p.326; *Samuel Anetsi/RHC Arm.* Vol.1, p.464; *Gestes* p.282-284.

<sup>812</sup> Mutafian *L'Arménie du Levant*, p.188; The choice of the name John during his second attempt to retire to religious life is probably due to the influence of John of Montecorvino, who resided in Cilicia during his travels in 1291. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.258; Frazee also references the spiritual Franciscan Angelo Clareno. Frazee, C.A. "Church and State in Cilician Armenia, 1998-1375." *Byzantine Studies: Études Byzantines*, 3, 4 (1976): 30-58, p.46.

Kingdom, Het'um had to confront a Mamluk invasion. After the fall of Acre in 1291, the Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil launched a campaign against Cilicia. In 1292, Mamluk forces seized the city of Hromkla on the Euphrates and captured the Catholicos, the highest religious authority for the Armenians. At this time, Arghun's death and Nawrūz's rebellion prevented the ilkhans from dispatching a substantial force to relieve the city, and the small detachment they sent withdrew before engaging the Mamluks.<sup>813</sup> Het'um was then compelled to negotiate his way out of the crisis by relinquishing control of the border fortresses of Behesni, Marash and T'il Hamdun, and paying a substantial tribute.<sup>814</sup> The already precarious position of Cilicia was further complicated by a series of internal power struggles among Het'um II's relatives in the years following the siege of Hromkla. The first of these episodes occurred in 1293 and appears to have been either an attempted coup or, more plausibly, a disrupted abdication in favour of Het'um's brother T'oros.<sup>815</sup>

The following year, however, another attempt to dethrone Het'um II was made while the king was en route to Persia to visit Baidu, the new ilkhan. Encouraged by parts of the nobility, Het'um's

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<sup>813</sup> For an account of the siege of Hromkla and Het'um's stratagems to save the city see Stewart, A.D. "If the Cap Fits: Going Mongol in Thirteenth Century Syria." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 26,1/2 (2016): 137-146.

<sup>814</sup> *Het'um/Bedrosian*, p.13; Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.89-91.

<sup>815</sup> *Flor*, p.326-327. Hayton states that In 1293, Het'um II decided to leave the kingdom to his and retired to the monastery of Mamistra, transferring the guardianship of the kingdom to his younger brother T'oros, only to later reverse his decision and reclaim power. The Chronography attributed to the king himself refers to 1293 as the year of "a conspiracy against the kingdom," and reports that Hayton, the author of *La Flor*, together with his brother Oshin, supported T'oros's against Het'um. *Het'um /Bedrosian*, p.14. This is also supported by *Gestes*, p.283. While this casts doubt on the narrative found in *La Flor*, other sources seem to confirm that Het'um did, in fact, voluntarily relinquish power at this stage. *Continuator of Samuel Anetsi/RHC Arm.* Vol. 1, p.463-464.

brother T'oros attempted to seize the power for himself.<sup>816</sup> Whatever the case, the prince was likely forgiven, as we can find him travelling with Het'um in 1296. Taking advantage of the absence of his elder brothers, Smbat, a younger sibling of the king, had himself crowned king in Sis supported by a large part of the nobility. On their way back to Cilicia, Het'um and T'oros were intercepted and captured in 1297. Het'um was blinded and imprisoned in the dungeons of the fortress of Bardsberd, while T'oros was strangled.<sup>817</sup> The political instability in Cilicia soon drew the attention of the Mamluks, who launched another offensive in 1298. When Smbat proved incapable of resisting the invasion, a group of Armenian nobles, led by his brother Konstantin, turned against him.<sup>818</sup> According to Mutafian, Konstantin took power for a few months, supported by a large part of the nobility and the Hospitallers. Once in power, he could free his brother Het'um, who, after partially

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<sup>816</sup> *Chronique de l'île de Chypre, par Florio Bustron*, ed. de Mas-Latrie, R. (Paris, 1884), p.162. The second alleged conspiracy is mentioned in Het'um's chronography, which references Constable Oshin (Smbat the Constable's son), as one of the main conspirators, and places the events in 1296. *Het'um /Bedrosian*, p.14. The conspiracy allegedly occurred while Het'um was travelling to Persia, and events are often confusingly reported in the chronicles. Some of the most important sources, such as the Templar of Tyre, tend to combine the events of 1294-95 with the previous conspiracy, uniting the two plots and placing them in 1294. Het'um probably left Cilicia when Gaykhatū or Baidu were still in power. At his arrival in Tabriz, he found Ghazan on the throne. According to his own account, Het'um was not aware of the rapid alternation of the Īl-Khāns on the throne in the two-year period 1294-95. *Het'um /Bedrosian*, p.14; *Gestes*, p.282. The lack of any mention of Thoros among the conspirers and his presence in other chronicles like the *Gestes* could indicate that Het'um did not consider his brother guilty in any of the conspiracies due to his young age, blaming instead his closest advisors. At any rate, the *Gestes* sources suggest that Het'um returned in 1295 with Mongol forces and reasserted control without punishing T'oros. Instead, in the following year, he travelled with him to Constantinople to negotiate a dynastic union with the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II. Mutafian, *L'Arménie du Levant*, p.191. Mutafian does not support the view that Het'um left for Constantinople for matrimonial matters, and dates the plot to 1295, relying on Nerses Palients.

<sup>817</sup> According to the chronicle, after seizing power Smbat went to the Ilkhanid court seeking recognition as sovereign of Cilicia, where he was confirmed as ruler and received a Mongol wife. *Gestes*, p.283.

<sup>818</sup> *Gestes*, p.283. According to the Templar of Tyre, the latter would have rebelled against Smbat once he learned of the death of T'oros, to whom he was very close, restoring Het'um to the throne. However, it is very likely that the cause of the coup was Smbat's military ineptitude, bringing Cilicia to the verge of disaster against the Mamluks.

recovering his sight, exiled both Konstantin and Smbat to Constantinople and seized power.<sup>819</sup> By the end of 1298, while Het'um was in power again, a large part of Cilicia had fallen to the Mamluks, and the damages of the invasion were irreversible.<sup>820</sup>

In the Ilkhanate, Ghazan was at this time engaged in a confrontation with the rebellious amir Sülämish, having dispatched Qutlughshäh to suppress the revolt in Anatolia. While it is plausible that he received appeals from Cilicia during this period, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that these were the decisive factor in his decision to advance toward Syria. As Angus Stewart has argued, Ghazan's primary motivation was more likely the Mamluk support offered to Sülämish, alongside continued Mamluk incursions across the Mesopotamian frontier. Nevertheless, Armenian sources such as Hayton and the *Gestes des Chiprois* suggest that Ghazan's expedition was also a response to Armenian appeals for assistance.<sup>821</sup>

Ghazan's campaigns hold particular significance for this dissertation, as they marked a brief resurgence of Cilicia's function as a diplomatic intermediary between the Mongols and the Latin powers. Armenian participation in Ghazan's three successive military campaigns in Syria is extensively attested in Mamluk chronicles, in the works of Rashīd al-Dīn, and in Armenian sources.<sup>822</sup> Beyond the battlefield, however, Cilician efforts also involved sustained attempts to align Mongol military action with Latin counterparts, especially in Cyprus. The first such effort followed the Mongol victory at Wādī al-Khaznadār in December 1299, where Ghazan's army, supported by Armenian forces under Het'um, defeated the Mamluks and occupied Damascus. After the battle,

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<sup>819</sup> For the events 1296-98 see Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.100-104; Mutafian, *L'Arménie du Levant*, p.191; *Gestes*, p.282-284; *Continuator of Samuel Anetsi/RHC Arm.* Vol.1, p.464. According to the Templar of Tyre, Het'um was reluctant to share royal power with Konstantin, so decided to send both him and Smbat in exile to Constantinople. It is also possible that contrasts between the two developed in 1298 during a situation of co-rule. *Gestes*, p.292; Luttrell, A.T. "The Hospitallers' Interventions in Cilician Armenia: 1291-1375," in Boase T.S.R. ed. *Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, (Edinburgh, 1978): 118-44, p.122.

<sup>820</sup> Stewart has dedicated several pages to the catastrophic consequences of the Mamluk campaigns for Cilicia. Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.126-128.

<sup>821</sup> *Gestes*, p.292-293.

<sup>822</sup> Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.143; *Gestes*, p.302; Rashīd al-Dīn reports how some Armenians raided the suburbs of Damascus, *RJT/Thackston*, p.647; *RJT/Karīmī*, p.942.

Ghazan retreated to Baghdad, leaving a sizeable garrison to hold his recent territorial gains.

According to the Templar of Tyre:

And after Ghazan had departed, some Christians from Cyprus had gone to Gibelet and to Nefin, and into those lands of the seacoast, (these men) I shall name for you: Guy, Count of Jaffa, and Sir John of Antioch and their knights; and from there they intended to go to (to the king of?) Armenia, which was with the army of the Tatars. But Ghazan had already returned.<sup>823</sup>

Thus, although an initial attempt was made to support Ghazan's 1299 campaign, the Latin troops from Cyprus ultimately limited their actions to a coastal raid on Byblos (Gibelet). Unable to hold the city against Mamluk forces, they withdrew. According to the Templar of Tyre, a more substantial expedition followed a few months later. In 1300, King Henry II of Cyprus personally led a fleet composed of sixteen galleys, five fustes, and several transports.<sup>824</sup> This force, which included Templars and Hospitallers, launched a series of coordinated raids along the Syrian coast. Despite their initial success, the Latin forces failed to establish a lasting foothold and eventually returned to Cyprus. The Templar of Tyre reports that a banner of Ghazan was flown on the Christian galleys, and envoys of the ilkhān were on board.<sup>825</sup> The presence of Mongol representatives, alongside the symbolic use of Ghazan's standard, suggests a degree of coordination between the Ilkhanid court and the Latin forces. The chronicle also records that several Tatars, previously held among the Saracens, escaped and joined the Franks. Ultimately, the absence of Mongol pressure contributed to the partial failure of the expedition.<sup>826</sup>

Another attempt at cooperation followed the next year. After losing control of Damascus, Ghazan prepared a renewed invasion of Syria. Coordination with Cyprus appears to have resumed, perhaps following indications from Het'um that there was renewed willingness among the crusaders

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<sup>823</sup> *Gestes*, p.303.

<sup>824</sup> *Gestes*, p.303-304.

<sup>825</sup> *Gestes*, p.304.

<sup>826</sup> *Gestes*, p.305.

to act. According to the Templar of Tyre, Ghazan sent letters to the rulers of Cyprus in 1300, possibly through Het'um, requesting military support.<sup>827</sup>

In that same year, (winter of 1300) a messenger came to Cyprus on behalf of Ghazan, king of the Tatars, who said that Ghazan was to come that winter and wanted the king and all the Franks to go to meet him in Armenia. So, the king and his men prepared their equipment.<sup>828</sup>

The choice of Cilicia as the designated point of rendezvous for Christian forces underscores Het'um's central role in facilitating these diplomatic efforts. This emphasis would later reappear in Hayton's *La Flor*, where the kingdom's function as a logistical and strategic hub is presented as self-evident, a theme that will be explored in the following pages. Unfortunately for the Armenians, this second attempt at Latin-Mongol coordination also ended in failure. The Cypriot contingent, led by Amaury of Lusignan, brother of King Henry II of Cyprus, seized the island of Arwād but discouraged by the Mongols' delayed arrival, refrained from attacking the city of Tartus on the mainland. When the Mongols eventually entered Syria, Het'um joined them, bringing with him Lord Guy of Ibelin, Count of Jaffa, and John, Lord of Gibelet, to coordinate with Ghazan's forces. However, Ghazan, suffering from ophthalmia, had delegated command to Qutlughshāh. Rather than confronting the Mamluks, the Mongol general led a limited raid into Syria and withdrew. Deprived of support, the crusader force was compelled to retreat to Arwād after suffering losses in clashes with the Mamluks.<sup>829</sup>

In 1303, a final attempt at military cooperation was launched. Het'um II and the Mongol general Qutlughshāh led a joint Armenian-Mongol force against the Mamluks but suffered a decisive defeat at the second Battle of Homs. Around the same time, the remaining Latin garrison on the island of Arwād was expelled by a Mamluk naval force, marking the collapse of the Latin foothold

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<sup>827</sup> *Gestes*, p.302-303. "Et après que Cazan fu partis, aucuns crestiens de Chipre estoient alés à Giblet & à Nefin, et en seles terres de seles marines, lesquels vous nomeray: Guy conte de Jaffe & messire Johan d'Antioche et lor chevaliers; et de là cuyderent aler en Ermenie quy estoit à l'ost des Tatars. Cazan s'en estoit retornés."

<sup>828</sup> *Gestes*, p.305. "En ce dit an, vint en Chipre un message de par Cazan, roi des Tatars, quy dist que Cazan devet venir en cel yver, et voloit que le roy et tous les Frans alaient atendre sa venue en Ermenie, dont le roy et sa gent firent lor atir." The military cooperation is also reported in *La Flor*, p.319.

<sup>829</sup> *Gestes*, p.310.

on the Syrian coast. Despite the ultimate failure of the campaign, Het'um's close relations with the Cypriot royal house and his strong ties to the Military Orders suggest that he played a key role in organising and sustaining the coordination that made the expedition possible.<sup>830</sup> The victory at Homs and the military operations of 1299-1300, during which Armenians, Mongols, Cypriots, Templars and Hospitallers defeated the Mamluks represent a diplomatic success enabled by Het'um, and his continued effort to broker military cooperation.<sup>831</sup> Whether or not Het'um succeeded in entering the city of Jerusalem in 1300 and celebrating the Christmas mass there, the degree of military cooperation reached during his reign would mark one of the highest point of Mongol-Christian relations.<sup>832</sup>

After the defeat at Homs, Het'um was forced to follow the Mongols in Mesopotamia, while the Mamluk forces continued their assault on Cilician Armenia until 1305, and ravaged most of the country before being stopped by a Cilician-Mongol army near Ayas. They continued until 1305, when they were repelled near Ayas by a combined Armenian-Mongol force.<sup>833</sup> By this point, Het'um had transferred the formal responsibilities of the kingdom to his nephew Leo III, although he remained active in guiding policy.

In 1307, Het'um and Leo were summoned by Bularghu, who has been identified by Stewart as one of the commanders of the Mongol garrison present in Cilicia. They were then killed during the meeting in Anazarba, along with members of their entourage. The reasons for the killings are not entirely clear. Some sources, including those used by Angus Stewart, suggest that Bularghu had personal motives or acted from religious hostility. Others speculate on the possibility of coordination

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<sup>830</sup> Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.104 (footnotes); Luttrell, A.T. "The Hospitallers' Interventions." p.122.

<sup>831</sup> Flor, p.320.

<sup>832</sup> Het'um presence in Jerusalem is debated: it is mentioned both by the Templar of Tyre and by *Nerses Palients/RHC Arm.* Vol.1, p.660. Supposedly, Het'um spent Lent in the holy city, Stewart brands Latin and Armenian accounts on the event as mere propaganda since, according to Arab sources, Het'um had left the Mongol army soon after the conquest of Damascus See Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p.140.

<sup>833</sup> For the account of Mongol campaigns between 1299 and 1303 and Frankish participation see *Gestes*, p.316. The Mamluk retaliation against Cilicia is mentioned in *Flor*, p.325, 331.

with Mamluk agents. Though Öljeitü executed Bularghu and confirmed the succession of Oshin, another brother of Het'um, the consequences of the event were serious. It marked a rupture in relations between Cilicia and the Ilkhanate. While formal ties were maintained, the sense of confidence and mutual interest was weakened.<sup>834</sup>

In Armenian sources, including monastic colophons, the killing of Het'um is linked to a broader sense of religious decline and insecurity. There were increasing reports of pressures on Christian communities in the Ilkhanate, particularly under Öljeitü, whose policies were less tolerant than those of Ghazan. Stewart rightly observes that the ilkhans' conversion was not a decisive factor in the events surrounding the assassination of Het'um II. While this point stands, as discussed in previous chapters, the reign of Öljeitü nonetheless marked a turning point in Mongol-Latin relations, and therefore in Mongol-Armenian cooperation.<sup>835</sup> The Islamisation of the Ilkhanate under Ghazan's successor had a more direct impact on Christian communities within Mongol territories and, to a lesser extent, also influenced the ilkhans' external diplomatic posture. This does not mean that the conversion of the ilkhans had a direct impact on the assassination, or on the continued recognition of Cilician vassalage, but certainly its consequences affected mutual trust and perception. This is partly testified by the Colophons after 1305, which report extensive "state-sponsored" destructions and persecutions in Christian territories, and are in stark contrast with earlier reports from Ghazan's reign.<sup>836</sup> While Öljeitü's subsequent execution of Bularghu and confirmation of Oshin's succession formally preserved the alliance, the killings exposed the limits of Cilician security and the fragility of the trust that had sustained Mongol-Armenian cooperation. The event signalled the collapse of the

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<sup>834</sup> The assassination of Het'um II marks a turning point in Armenian attitude towards the Mongols. This can be seen in numerous colophons published by Sanjian in Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts*. For the colophons relating to 1307 see p.52-55. More recently, Stewart published a very interesting paper on the topic, encouraging historians to approach Egyptian sources on the matter, and reconsidering the role of Mongol conversion. See Stewart, "The assassination." p.50. Many Armenian nobles perished in the ambush as well. *The continuator Samuel Anetsi/ RHC Arm.* Vol. 1, p.465; *Gestes*, p.326. The Templar of Tyre estimates that about fifty knights and Armenian grandees lost their lives along with Het'um and the young king. Shnorhokian, *Hayton of Korykos* p.86.

<sup>835</sup> See above, p.205.

<sup>836</sup> Stewart, "The Assassination." p.60-61.

broader diplomatic logic that had framed Cilicia as a broker between the Latin and Mongol worlds, a logic that had been strategically constructed over decades that could no longer be efficiently sustained within the shifting ideological and political landscape of the early fourteenth century.

Throughout the second half of the thirteenth century, Cilician reliance on Mongol assistance had been both necessary and precarious. Military aid helped secure the kingdom on multiple occasions and allowed rulers to suppress internal rebellions. Yet, that support was often limited by the Ilkhanate's internal problems. While Cilician diplomacy succeeded in aligning Mongol and Latin actions, these alignments were rare and never sustained for long. Moreover, the dependence on foreign diplomacy exposed the kingdom to the challenge of asserting authority among domestic factions who had differing views on foreign alliances and ecclesiastical policy. The long-term outcome of this double-alignment was mixed. On one hand, the alliance with the Mongols allowed Cilicia to outlast the crusader states and to maintain a measure of sovereignty at a time when most small polities in the region were being absorbed or destroyed. On the other hand, the political cost was considerable. The kingdom suffered repeated invasions and growing tensions between pro-Latin and traditionalist factions. Mongol garrisons did not always guarantee security, and the limits of external support became clearer with each passing decade.

By the time of Het'um's death, the vision of Armenia as a mediator between Mongol power and Latin Christendom had been overtaken by events. The Ilkhanate was no longer able to project strength in Syria, and the Latin world had lost its footing in the region. While Cilicia survived, its ability to shape its own future had diminished. What remained was a record of sustained effort to balance competing forces, often under great pressure, and to preserve a form of independence in the face of overlapping demands. Het'um II operated in a setting where every decision required weighing risk against necessity, and where the outcomes were always uncertain. While the alliance with the Mongols brought survival, his role as a broker also brought exposure. The end of his life, marked by violence from his very allies, is a final reminder of the fragile ground on which diplomacy rested.

## ◆ Hayton of Corycus and *La Flor des Estoires*

In the context of Mongol-Armenian relations, Hayton of Corycus emerged as a central figure in Cilician diplomacy between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. A member of the Cilician royal family, he was the son of Oshin, brother of King Het'um I, and therefore nephew to the king. His position within the extended Het'umid dynasty allowed him to cultivate connections that reached from Cilician Armenia to Cyprus, Europe, and the Ilkhanid court. Following the death of his father, Hayton inherited the fortress and fief of Corycus, while his elder brother Oshin went the fief of Gantchi and the title of seneschal of the kingdom.<sup>837</sup> A colophon in a Gospel manuscript copied at Corycus in 1293 identifies Hayton explicitly as "Hayton, son of Oshin, brother of the king of Armenia," confirming his familial link to King Leo II.<sup>838</sup> Prior to acquiring the fiefdom of Corycus, Hayton had, in fact, resided at the court of his uncle Het'um I in Sis. In his writings Hayton mentions that he was present during the events of the first Mongol raid in Syria (1260), although he was probably very young.<sup>839</sup> Most of the events he refers to before this date come from the accounts of his uncles, King Het'um I and the constable Smbat who had travelled through the Mongol Empire and visited its capital, Karakorum.<sup>840</sup>

Apart from his main work, which circulated in Europe with the title *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient* or *Flos Historiarum Terre Orientis*, a work of chronography has been attributed to Hayton by Dulaurier.<sup>841</sup> It covers almost all of the thirteenth century, stopping abruptly in 1296. Several historians, including Robert Bedrosian and Claude Mutafian, have contested the attribution

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<sup>837</sup> For the genealogies of the Cilician royal family this work refers to Mutafian, *L'Arménie du Levant*, appendixes, to Rüdts-Collembert, W.H. *The Rupenides, Hethumides, and Lusignans. The Structure of the Armeno-Cilician Dynasties* (Paris, 1963), and to the *Lignages D'Outremer*. The fiefdom of Corycus was passed to Hayton after the death of his brother Gregor, presumably in 1277. The title of seneschal before 1275 is held by Smbat, Hayton's uncle.

<sup>838</sup> Mutafian, C. "Héthoum de Korykos historien arménien. Un prince cosmopolite à l'aube du XIV siècle." *Journal of medieval and humanistic studies*, 157 (1996): 157-176, p.161.

<sup>839</sup> *La Flor*, p.301.

<sup>840</sup> All of these information are based on Hayton's statements at *Flor*, p.318,334.

<sup>841</sup> *RHC*, Vol.1, p.469.

to Hayton, and the work is now believed to have been completed by his nephew, King Het'um II, and cited as such in this work.<sup>842</sup>

The first evidence of Hayton's role in the political life of the Kingdom of Cilicia can be found precisely in his nephew's chronography. In 1293, Hayton, alongside his brother Oshin, was among the leaders of the attempted coup to dethrone Het'um, after which he left Cilicia in 1294.<sup>843</sup> Once the coup failed, we can assume from his writings that Hayton spent approximately four years in exile. In *La Flor*, Hayton mentions that he decided to undertake a pilgrimage to Europe. Mutafian states that the prince spent some time in the abbey of Vauvert, near Paris.<sup>844</sup>

The most consequential aspect of Hayton's activities beyond Cilicia was his presence at the Mongol court in Tabriz. In his account, he records having witnessed the enthronement ceremonies of two ilkhans. Mutafian plausibly situates his sojourn at the court around the year 1295.<sup>845</sup> *La Flor* makes no mention of an Armenian or Georgian delegation attending Gaykhātū's enthronement, despite recording such embassies for all other ilkhans except the Muslim ruler Aḥmad Tegüder. Moreover, Hayton's narrative allocates only a few lines to Gaykhātū's four-year reign, while offering a more detailed account of Baidu's brief rule. These omissions strongly suggest that Hayton was not present in Persia at the time of Gaykhātū's accession in 1291.<sup>846</sup> Even if his participation in Arghun's enthronement in 1284 were to be hypothesised, it would only account for one of the two ceremonies he claims to have witnessed. The remaining episode must therefore correspond to one of the closely spaced accessions of Baidu and Ghazan in 1295. According to Mutafian's reading, with which this dissertation agrees, Hayton's testimony refers exclusively to the investitures of these two rulers.<sup>847</sup> It is also possible that a reconciliation between Hayton and Het'um took place in 1295 in Tabriz, while the Armenian king was in Persia to pay homage to the newly crowned ilkhan and to ask for military

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<sup>842</sup> Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos." p.163. According to Mutafian there is also a genealogical text written by him in 1296 and a medicine treaty commissioned in 1294.

<sup>843</sup> *Het'um/Bedrosian*, p.85-86.

<sup>844</sup> Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos." p.166; *Flor*, p.330.

<sup>845</sup> Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos." p.165; *Flor*, p.285.

<sup>846</sup> *Flor*, p.315.

<sup>847</sup> Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos." p.165

aid.<sup>848</sup> Hayton's return to Cilicia was, however, delayed until 1298, during the short tenure of Het'um II's successor, Konstantin, whom he lavishly praises in *La Flor*.<sup>849</sup> Hayton's pilgrimage to France, which he states lasted two years, can therefore be dated with confidence to the period 1296-1298. This chronology is further corroborated by the fact that the journey constitutes the final event recorded in *La Flor* prior to his return under Konstantin's rule.<sup>850</sup> This suggests that the Prince resided at the Ilkhanid court for a significant period, possibly two to three years. During this time, he must have absorbed knowledge about Mongol politics, warfare, and administration, as well as the changing internal dynamics and the status of Christians following Ghazan's rise to power.<sup>851</sup>

Concerning Hayton's relationship with his family, it is worth mentioning that a common feature of all his work is the hostility towards his nephew, whom he considered a weak and incapable ruler.<sup>852</sup> Throughout Hayton's work, Het'um II is seldom treated with respect, in stark contrast to the praises addressed to his predecessors. He is often addressed as the "lord" of the Armenians instead as king, clearly alluding to his willingness to relinquish the crown and join the religious orders.<sup>853</sup> According to the Cypriot chronicler Amadi, Hayton rejoiced at the news of his nephew's death in 1307 "for he was always disloyal to him."<sup>854</sup>

Hayton's tone toward Het'um II likely reflects both the political instability that marked the latter's reign and a desire to portray himself as the more competent custodian of Armenian interests, particularly in relation to Mongol-Latin diplomacy. While not overtly hostile, Hayton's narrative

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<sup>848</sup> Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos." p.165.

<sup>849</sup> *Flor*, p.210.

<sup>850</sup> Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos." p.166-167.

<sup>851</sup> *Flor*, p.357. Hayton specifies that he has a profound knowledge of the affairs of the Tatars.

<sup>852</sup> *Flor*, p.327. It is enough to read Hayton's description of Het'um II's reign to see how the prince voluntarily omits details and attacks Het'um II for his indecision. In a passage that seems to betray his implication in the plot, he admits that the nobles of Armenia were against Het'um II's return to power.

<sup>853</sup> Het'um II is addressed as "dominus" in *Flor*, p.325-331.

<sup>854</sup> *Chroniques d'Amadi et de Strambaldi*, Vol.1, ed. De Mas-Latrie, R. (Paris, 1891), p.280. From this point onward, Amadi. The Chronicle also insists on the favourable disposition of the Papal court towards Hayton. "et quando stette detto signor de Curico sei giorni a Nicosia, si parti et andò in Armenia, perché seppa la morte del suo signor Haitonte, che era detto herede del reame de Armenia; verso el quale costui sempre era traditor et procurava di posserli far vergogna o danno, et della sua morte si trovò molto contento."

diminishes Het'um's diplomatic achievements. The narrative structure of *La Flor* casts Hayton's own journey to Europe as an effort to revive diplomatic efforts that had lost effectiveness. In doing so, the prince constructs an autobiographical rationale for his political initiatives, implicitly distinguishing his actions from those of his nephew and legitimising his intervention by connecting it with the diplomatic efforts of his uncles. It is also notable that Hayton frames does not blame the plight of Cilicia on external forces (e.g. Mongol failures) but on internal dynastic discord.<sup>855</sup> This includes a veiled criticism of Het'um II's abdications and religious withdrawals, which are contrasted with Hayton's own pragmatism and willingness to postpone monastic life for the sake of duty.<sup>856</sup>

During the turmoil brought about by the series of usurpations, Hayton had taken an active role in the military campaigns waged against the Mamluks between 1299 and 1303, fighting alongside Het'um.<sup>857</sup> Yet the apparent concord between the two did not last. In 1305, Hayton once again departed from Cilicia.<sup>858</sup> Although Hayton framed his withdrawal as the result of a restored stability declaring that, with the kingdom now secure, he could finally embrace the monastic life, his exit more likely reflects a deeper and unresolved estrangement from his royal kin.<sup>859</sup> Following his departure, Hayton entered the Premonstratensian order in Cyprus, where he soon emerged as a trusted advisor to Amaury, count of Tyre and bailiff of the Kingdom of Cyprus.<sup>860</sup> The *Gestes des Chiprois* suggests that Hayton played a role in the political machinations surrounding Amaury's attempted usurpation of his brother Henry II's throne.<sup>861</sup> Hayton's prior engagement in Ghazan's campaigns of 1299-1301 must have shaped his support for Amaury, which appears as an effort to restore strategic coherence and military credibility to the Latin cause in the eastern Mediterranean.

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<sup>855</sup> *Flor*, p.329-330.

<sup>856</sup> *Flor*, p.325. Hayton writes: "Ego vero, frater Haytonus, hujus operis compilator, interfui omnibus prelibatis, qui dudum proposueram habitum sumere regularem, sed propter incumbentia discrimina et ardua negocia regni Armenie, cum honore meo non poteram in tantis necessitatibus derelinquere consanguineos et amicos."

<sup>857</sup> *Flor*, p.324-326.

<sup>858</sup> *Flor*, p.326 .

<sup>859</sup> Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos." p.168.

<sup>860</sup> *Lignages d'Outremer*, p.445. Amaury was also a relative of Hayton he had married Zabel, daughter of Leo II, Hayton's cousin.

<sup>861</sup> *Amadi*, Vol.1, p.249,254; *Gestes*, p.316.

Amaury's military efforts are mentioned in *La Flor* in conjunction with Ghazan's campaign of 1301.<sup>862</sup> The prince is described as more willing to pursue military collaboration with the Mongols and to assert Latin presence in the Levant, in contrast with his brother Henry's reluctance to intervene and his ill-conceived plans for a raid on Egypt. Here too, Hayton's opposition to a "weak" king in favour of a "stronger" and more resolute claimant can be framed in his eagerness to act in conjunction with the Mongols in a concerted military operation in the Levant. Thus, Hayton subsequent mission to Europe in 1306 to secure diplomatic recognition for Amaury's rule must be viewed as part of this same continuum.<sup>863</sup>

After failing to obtain recognition for Amaury, in 1307, Hayton was forced to return to Cyprus carrying the papal bull *Pastoralis Praeeminentiae*, which ordered the arrest of the members of the Order of the Temple, which had supported Amaury's coup.<sup>864</sup> Hayton could also return to Cilicia in the same year after Het'um II's death. Regaining his influence in his homeland, he managed to secure a marriage between the king's successor Oshin and his daughter. Soon afterwards, he became seneschal of the Kingdom of Cilicia until his death, probably around 1310.<sup>865</sup> While at the papal court in France, Hayton dictated his main work, *La Flor des Estoires d'Orient* (The Flower of the Stories of the East), which he dedicated to Pope Clement V.

Hayton dictated the text of *La Flor* in French, while his secretary Nicolas Faulcon is probably the author of the Latin translation, presented to the pope in 1307. *La Flor* presents a peculiar structure that reflects its nature as a "hybrid" piece. The work consists of four books, three of which contain a geographical and historical overview of the Asian continent. The fourth is a crusade proposal, explicitly encouraging Mongol-Christian cooperation. The first book describes the geography of

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<sup>862</sup> *Flor*, p.320-321,355.

<sup>863</sup> *Amadi*, p.249-254; *Gestes*, p.316; *Flor*, p.320-321. "Unde Christiani, absque more dispendio, de adventu Tatarorum rumoribus intellectis, cum galiis et aliis lignis pervenerunt [...]et applicaverunt ibidem dominus Tyri, frater regis Cypri, qui erat milicie dux et rector."

<sup>864</sup> Barber, M. *The Trial of the Templars*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2006), p.253. Although Hayton did not obtain the complete recognition of Amaury as the sovereign of Cyprus, the Armenian prince could avoid any papal interference with the internal affairs of the kingdom.

<sup>865</sup> Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos." p.171-172.

Asia, dividing the continent into fifteen different kingdoms, thus exhibiting a remarkable level of accuracy in Hayton's geographical knowledge. The subject of book two is what Hayton calls the "Lordship of the Saracens," or a brief history of Muslim expansion, starting from the Rashīdun Caliphs. The third and longest book, known as "History of the Tartars," focuses on the history of the Mongol Empire, starting with Činggis Khan's unification of the Mongol tribes. The book also contains the account of Cilician submission to the Empire. The final book, almost akin to a standalone work, features a different subject matter from the preceding three. The book discusses the project for a crusade and advocates for an alliance between Latin Christendom and the Ilkhanate, finalised to the reconquest of Jerusalem. The work concludes with a detailed plan for a new campaign, which Hayton claims was requested to him by Pope Clement V.

For the narration of the events before Möngke in *La Flor*, Hayton relies on a source he refers to as "History of the Tartars" and on the accounts of his uncles, King Het'um I and Smbat, and their travels in the Mongol Empire four decades earlier.<sup>866</sup> Another source at Hayton's disposal was the *Chronicon Pontificum et Imperatorum*, written by the Dominican Martin of Opava (Martinus Polonus).<sup>867</sup> The chronicle served as a didactic aid for clerics, and perhaps for this reason the prince must have had access to a copy. In addition to Hayton's *La Flor*, a version of the Dominican's text also reached Rashīd ad-Dīn, who was the vizier at the Ilkhanid court during Hayton's visit. The *Chronicon* is likely one of Rashīd ad-Dīn primary sources for his *History of the Franks*.<sup>868</sup>

Hayton's career as an Ilkhanid vassal, Cilician grandee, papal emissary, and counsellor to the regent of the Kingdom of Cyprus provided him with a singular vantage point from which to observe and shape the relations between the Mongols and the Latin world. His role extended far beyond that of an eyewitness. His position as participant-observer at the centre of Latin, Armenian, and Mongol politics, is implicitly invoked in his work as a warrant for credibility to broker cooperation between polities with divergent religious and political orientations, helping to articulate and circulate a shared

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<sup>866</sup> *Flor*, p.334.

<sup>867</sup> Shnorhokian, *Hayton of Korykos*. p.155.

<sup>868</sup> *RJT/Rushan*, introduction, p.3.

ideological project between the Ilkhanate and the Latin world. Hayton's capacity to move across cultural and political frontiers rendered him an especially valuable intermediary, placing him in a position of high betweenness centrality. In this capacity, he functioned not simply as a transmitter of messages but as a broker situated at the intersection of otherwise disconnected worlds, capable of shaping the flow of information. His position is so strategic that one might be tempted to postulate the existence of explicit instructions issued from Tabriz. Yet the absence of direct evidence for Mongol commissioning is analytically irrelevant. There is no need to invoke compulsion or formal patronage to recognise the convergence between Hayton's programme and Ilkhanid vision. As he himself explained:

Knowing well enough the Tatars' conditions and attitude, I firmly believe that the land the Tatars will conquer, they will give to the Christians freely so that they keep it and take care of it.<sup>869</sup>

This articulation captures the logic of "proxy diplomacy" that underpins the Ilkhanid approach to Christian allies, and that is evident in Mongol diplomatic correspondence. Hayton's presence in Tabriz suggest that his political work was shaped through engagement with Ilkhanid agents, as his description of Mongol aims is strikingly aligned with Ilkhanid letters sent to European courts. As shown in the previous chapter, Mongol rulers had already offered many of the concessions described in *La Flor* in their embassies to the pope, and to the kings of France and England, including Christian control of conquered territory, tax exemptions for clergy, and military coordination.<sup>870</sup> What Hayton's treatise accomplished was the consolidation of these overtures into a single, coherent strategic narrative designed not only for papal consumption, but also for broader circulation among the aristocracy.<sup>871</sup>

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<sup>869</sup> *Flor*, p.357. "Et ego, qui satis bene novi Tatarorum condiciones et modos, credo firmiter quod Tatari libenter terras quas acquirerent custodiendas et tenendas traderent Christianis libere et quiete et absque censu sive alia servitute."

<sup>870</sup> See, for instance, Hülegü's and Arghun's promises above at p.187,201-202.

<sup>871</sup> Jackson discusses the wide circulation of *La Flor* in Europe noting that "Hayton may have been especially responsible for popularizing the image of friendly Mongols, although the wide publicity given to Ghazan's recovery of the Holy Land in 1300 must also have played a significant role." Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.333-336.

That *La Flor* was dictated in 1307 while Öljeitü's embassy was in Poitiers strengthens the interpretation of the work as an effort to synchronise ideological and diplomatic initiatives.<sup>872</sup> Hayton's simultaneous presence with Mongol envoys also suggests a resurfacing of the double embassy pattern discussed earlier in this chapter, and a division of labour in which direct Mongol representation and Christian-mediated advocacy could operate at the same time.

Even if we posit that the work was conceived independently, *La Flor* still functions as an extension of Ilkhanid soft power, deploying Armenian legitimacy to advance narratives typical of Ilkhanid diplomacy. The triangulation of Mongols, Latins, and Armenians is presented as an enduring strategic logic, with Cilicia positioned as the necessary medium between Latin strategic intent and Mongol military capacity. The importance of this idea is reinforced by Hayton's use of historical precedent. Hayton's account of Het'um I's journey to Möngke in 1254, for instance, is not one of submission but of covenant. It actively reconfigures diplomatic contact as the genesis of a principled alliance between equals. Möngke is said to have "received him (Het'um I) honourably and gave him many gifts and praises."<sup>873</sup>

In a passage that strains the boundaries of plausibility, Hayton recounts how Möngke agreed to a sweeping list of demands: conversion to Christianity, the abolition of taxes on Christians, the legalisation of church building and preaching, military aid to Cilicia and restoration of the Kingdom's borders, and even a pledge to attack the Caliph and reclaim the Holy Land.<sup>874</sup> Although these claims are exaggerated, their ideological purpose is clear. By portraying Het'um I as a negotiator setting conditions, Hayton elevates Cilicia to the status of an equal partner with the Mongols in a crusading project. We cannot rule out the possibility that Möngke was, in effect, baptised. Mongol rulers in the were receptive to blessings from multiple traditions and avoided exclusivist religious commitments.

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<sup>872</sup> *Flor*, p.351. Hayton acknowledges the presence of Öljeitü's embassy at the Papal court.

<sup>873</sup> *Flor*, p.296-297.

<sup>874</sup> *Flor*, p.297-298. According to the Russian historian Galystan, who produced a partial translation of *La Flor*, a preliminary agreement existed between Smbat and the Khan, which Het'um confirmed. *Kirakos/Bedrosian*, p.367. Kirakos Gandzaketsi also seems to allude to the presence of a document: "He (Möngke) also gave him a document proclaiming freedom for the Church everywhere."

Yet, Hayton does not offer a portrait of syncretism but a rhetorical inversion. The plausibility of Möngke's conversion is secondary to the function it performs, as the episode gives continuity to the Mongol-Cilician relationship, treating past interactions as precedent for renewed cooperation.

The same logic underpins Hayton's description of Hülegü and his successors. Hülegü's Christian affiliations are traced through familial association, much like those in the letter of Constable Smbat: his wife and lieutenant are described as descendants of the Magi, and his actions favour Christianity.<sup>875</sup> This narrative also mirrors that of the Nestorian envoys and several Armenian chronicles, including those of Grigor of Akner and Vardan Areweltsi, who likewise depict Hülegü and his son as liberators of Christians and enforcers of anti-Muslim policies.<sup>876</sup>

Hayton's representation of Ghazan and Öljeitü follows a similar pattern of strategic reframing, this time in the opposite sense. Ghazan's conversion to Islam is carefully downplayed. Religious allegiance is now presented not as a fixed identity but as a contingent element in Mongol political behaviour. In Hayton's account of Ghazan's accession, he constructs a narrative of initial submission to pro-Muslim pressures, followed by a decisive realignment in favour of Christianity, or at least, in favour of Mongol tolerance:

At the beginning of his reign, he did not dare to oppose the promises made by those who had helped him attain power [...] therefore he showed himself excessively harsh toward Christians. But once he had secured his authority [...] he began to honour and favour the Christians.<sup>877</sup>

Or again:

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<sup>875</sup> Flor, p.301.

<sup>876</sup> Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch.12-13; Vardan/Bedrosian, Ch.90. The tensions between the Juvaynīs and Abaqa may have shaped the accounts of these historians, particularly Grigor's claim that the khan forcibly fed pork to his Muslim subjects. Jackson, *Islamic World*, p.277. See above, p.148.

<sup>877</sup> Flor, p.316. "In inicio sui domini non audebat contraire promissionibus quas fecerat illis qui ipsum in dominio posuerunt, modo superius enarrato, qui Mahometi sequebantur fidem et sectam, et ideo se austerum ostendit nimium Christianis. Postquam vero in sede sui domini se firmavit, cepit honorare et diligere Christianos."

He had several magnates put to death, those who daily urged him to embrace the faith of the Saracens and cruelly persecute the Christians.<sup>878</sup>

Ghazan's earlier hostility is not attributed to belief, but to political necessity. Once that necessity vanishes, so too does his favour for Islam. The narrative thus isolates the Islamisation of the Ilkhanate from its ruling figure, preserving the viability of Latin alliance despite the reality of the situation, of which Hayton was, no doubt, aware. Similarly, the vague framing of Öljeitü's Islamisation as a hypothetical danger rather than a present reality, allows Hayton to maintain the appearance of ideological proximity.

It is thus necessary for the Christians to properly help the Holy Land, for there is great danger in putting it off: the danger that Carbanda (Öljeitü), who is now a friend, should fail, and another (Ilkhan) might arise who is a terrible enemy, who would practise Muhammad's ways and agree with the Saracens. This would cause to the Christians great danger, sorrow and inconvenience.<sup>879</sup>

Such rhetorical manoeuvres reflect a broader technique of narrative control, geared towards *realpolitik*, where the Mongols, even if Muslim, are the lesser evil and a viable strategic partner. For instance, when Hayton recounts the early Islamic conquests, he describes the Arabs as usurpers and invaders. "(They) set up one state and elected for themselves a ruler from the line of Muhammad whom they called Caliph," he writes, but immediately asserts that Christian kingdoms such as

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<sup>878</sup> *Flor*, p.316. "Et primo fecit occidi plures magnates qui ei cotidie suadebant ut Sarracenorum fidei adhereret et persequeretur crudelissime Christianos." Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.177; Jackson, "Crisis." p.485. Peter Jackson interprets this passage as a deliberate attempt to mislead a Latin readership. Notably, Hayton does not claim that Ghazan or Öljeitü were non-Muslim. He also presents Nawrüz as a persecutor of Christians, a fact of which we have evidence from *RJT/Thackston*, p.627; *RJT/Karimi*, p.914. Finally, Hayton presents the ilkhans as allies or protectors of the Christians. He is thus largely consistent with Ilkhanid diplomatic communications to Europe from this period, which similarly emphasised friendship towards Christendom while glossing over Ilkhanid internal dynamics. To characterise *La Flor* as simple propaganda is to obscure its function as a tool of brokerage. Its narrative reflects Hayton's efforts to frame Mongol rulers in terms comprehensible and advantageous to Latin Christian audiences. As such, the text constitutes not disinformation (because it does not lie), but a strategically crafted representation of the ilkhans' conversion.

<sup>879</sup> *Flor*, p.351. "Deceret itaque Christianos prope dare subsidium Terre Sancte et absque nimia tarditate, nam mora periculum (et discrimen) ad se trahit, ne forte, quod absit, Carbanda, Christianorum amicus, deficiat, et loco ejus resurgat aliquis pessimus inimicus, et qui forte adhereret secte perfidi Mahometi, et per consequens cum Sarracenis concors et unanimes deveniret. Et hoc posset Christianis cedere ad maximum incomodum, periculum et gravamen."

Georgia and Armenia “never wanted to submit.”<sup>880</sup> Islamic dominance is thus treated an historical anomaly, and the displacement of the Caliphate by the Mongols a correction. The Mongols, while characterised as different, “they neither pray nor fasts, nor honour God in any other way a faithful should [...] they take many wives” and they “confess faithfully [...] even if they should be condemned or lose their lives.” are also distinguishable from Hayton’s descriptions of the Saracens, who are always describe as perfidious and deceitful.<sup>881</sup> Hayton’s portrayal of Mongol customs and practices is precise and unapologetic. He does not depict the Mongols as an agent of divine providence (a *topos* used, for instance, in the works of other Armenians and even in those of Persian historians), but as a geopolitical reality that Latin Christendom must confront through informed negotiation and cooperation. He does not obscure traits that he deems morally questionable such as polygamy, avarice, or disregard for settled governance, but presents them alongside his admiration for Mongol military discipline and cohesion. His honest assessment makes it impossible to dismiss *La Flor* as mere propaganda, but rather encourages us to see the work as a diplomatic instrument: it communicates a pragmatic understanding of Mongol power and seeks to position Cilician Armenia and himself as mediators between the Latins and the Ilkhanid court. If Mongol favour could once be secured by Armenian diplomacy, it can be regained, if the Latin world acts in time. In this sense, *La Flor* does not merely describe the conditions of a potential alliance, but it articulates its premises and urges its realisation.

In the fourth book of *La Flor*, Hayton offers a campaign manual, grounded logistical and historical precedent. The alliance Hayton proposes is made credible by the precision of the intelligence he provides. Hayton’s knowledge of Mongol military practice is one of the most technically developed sections of *La Flor*, and it significantly exceeds the descriptive conventions

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<sup>880</sup> *Flor*, p.276.

<sup>881</sup> *Flor*, p.337-338. Especially notable is that Hayton describes the Mongols as monotheistic, misunderstanding their religious beliefs. He also specifies that they are superstitious and “Tatari sunt ab aliis nationibus gentium modis et moribus sic diversi quod vix posset ipsorum diversitas explicari. Credunt enim Deum simpliciter, et in omnibus eorum operibus invocant nomen ejus. Et credunt et confitentur unum Deum immortalem.”

of contemporary geographical writing.<sup>882</sup> The recommendations for landing sites, provisioning, weather timing, and route selection are essential in the narration, as Hayton does not simply argue for an alliance; he shows how it could work.

The logistical centrality of Cilician Armenia is embedded throughout Hayton's account as prerequisite for the crusade's success. *La Flor* treats Cilicia as an active operational base. The proposed crusading operations discussed in Book IV begin with a preliminary landing in Cyprus, followed by transfer to Cilicia, more specifically to the city of Tarsus, where troops and horses would rest and resupply before proceeding inland.<sup>883</sup> Tarsus is favoured "because there is an abundance of water and pasture" and because it serves as a nexus between maritime and terrestrial lines of advance. From there, the army is to advance into Syria, with Armenia acting as rear supply base. Hayton notes that:

From the kingdom of Turkey, which is near, as well as from the kingdom of Armenia, they can obtain an abundance of horses, provisions, and everything else they need.<sup>884</sup>

Cilicia thus appears as the only entity with the regional intelligence and logistical infrastructure to support the campaign, but it also play a role in the diplomatic coordination of the expedition. In a later passage, Hayton explains how the crusader leaders "should send messengers to Kharbanda (Öljeitü) without delay, with the counsel of the King of Armenia."<sup>885</sup> This reasserts the fundamental role of Cilician mediation in his narrative, but complements it with actual military support to the expedition. Hayton explains how the Armenian and Cypriot forces attached to the crusader expedition:

Should wage war on the Saracens, and attack the enemy vigorously both by land and by sea, especially striving to secure the coast so that absolutely nothing could be brought to the enemy by sea.<sup>886</sup>

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<sup>882</sup> The entirety of the third book of *La Flor* is dedicated to the Tatars.

<sup>883</sup> *Flor*, p.355-356, 359.

<sup>884</sup> *Flor*, p.360.

<sup>885</sup> *Flor*, p.355. In a different passage at p.358, Hayton also suggests to send letters to other monarchs, including the Georgians and the Ethiopians.

<sup>886</sup> *Flor*, p.355. "Et peregrini, cum fidelibus regni Armenie atque Cypri, Sarracenis guerram moverent, et, tam per terram quam per mare, impugnarent viriliter inimicos, et precipue conarentur taliter maritimam custodire, quod eisdem per Tua re nihil penitus portaretur."

Once the crusade secures the coast, Hayton suggests to enlist the help of “Christians living in the mountains of Lebanon, probably Maronites, who are in his words “excellent archers, around forty thousand strong,” and have “often rebelled against the sultan and inflicted heavy losses on his army.”<sup>887</sup> The use of these forces in combination with incoming Latin contingents is proposed as integral to initial territorial acquisition, especially the rebuilding and defence of Tripoli until the general passage arrives.<sup>888</sup> This realism extends to environmental assessments. Hayton specifies the need for each Mamluk soldier to have more than one horse and enough provisions for eight days when mobilising to Syria.<sup>889</sup>

The same empirical attitude informs Hayton’s analysis of Mamluk vulnerabilities. He observes that while the Egyptian army is large, its infantry is weak, and proposes that a joint Christian-Mongol offensive would force the sultan to deplete his forces through repeated deployments between Syria and Egypt, eventually leading to exhaustion.<sup>890</sup> Further, he distinguishes between the salary-based regulars of Egypt and the more autonomous Turkmen and Bedouin contingents, who must be bought off or will simply retreat into the desert.<sup>891</sup>

At this point, the second important element of Hayton’s plan comes into play as Mongol involvement. The crusaders should hold Tripoli and Antioch while Mongol allies operate in Syria, dividing the theatre to avoid tensions and maintain independent manoeuvrability. Tactical limitations connected to Mongol mobility are carefully described: the Mongols are “bold warriors and good soldiers,” but “not skilled on foot, since they are slow and clumsy as infantry.” Their logistic needs are noted, with their autonomy on the ground “do not give stipends but live off booty, of which they give a share to their lord.”<sup>892</sup> Hayton’s tactical awareness of Mongol warfare is clear in his treatment

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<sup>887</sup> *Flor*, p.273,360.

<sup>888</sup> *Flor*, p.357.

<sup>889</sup> Hayton mentions the provisions in relation to Egyptian soldiers, *Flor*, p.354.

<sup>890</sup> *Flor*, p.356.

<sup>891</sup> *Flor*, p.338,343,361.

<sup>892</sup> “Tatari sunt omnes equites et valde festinanter incedunt.” *Flor*, p.361,362. Hayton also mentions Mongol war tactics at *Flor*, p.338 . See also *Flor*, p.323 (footnotes).

of possible Christian-Mongol friction, which he does not idealise. One passage of his work relates to the 1260 Mongol raid on Sidon. Hayton recounts that the violence was provoked not by Mongol aggression but by the rash actions of Julian, lord of Sidon, who killed the nephew of Kitbuqa without cause. The Mongols retaliated, devastating the city. Hayton does not excuse the Mongols but frames the incident as an avoidable outcome of Christian indiscipline and ignorance of Mongol customs.<sup>893</sup> Jackson has discussed this episode at length, characterising Hayton's account as propaganda. He argues that, even if the Mongol only resorted to a punitive raid, they had no real intent to collaborate with Latin Christendom, and that Hayton's omission of a Mongol occupation of Jerusalem in *La Flor* reveals his bad faith. Yet this reading relies on a retrospective imposition of motives. Hülegü's first proposals to the Franks for a joint expedition to the Holy Land only emerged after the 1260 campaign, so there was no expectation from the Latin side, at the time, that Jerusalem would be returned to the Christians. Hayton had no reason to conceal a promise that had not yet been made to Latin Christendom.

Soon after, Hayton notes that in the case a larger Mongol force under the ilkhan should participate in the campaign, it would be best to avoid merging the two armies.

(when the Tartars) know they are strong and have power, they become proud and unreasonable, and would harm Christian forces, which the latter might not tolerate.<sup>894</sup>

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<sup>893</sup> *Flor*, p.304-305; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.120; Jackson, "Crisis." p.485-486, 500-501. Jackson has amply discussed this event, dismissing Hayton's narration as "propaganda." In his view, even if the Mongols had only conducted a retaliatory strike, they had no intention of bargaining with Latin Christendom. If we follow Hayton's narration, Möngke's promise to the Armenian king only concerned quod "omnes terre jurisdictionis regni Armenie," with a generic promise to give Jerusalem to the Christians (not necessarily the Latins) only mentioned at the end of the meeting. *Flor*, p.297. Therefore, no promise was made to Latin Christendom at the time, and Franks from the former Kingdom of Jerusalem had done everything they could to antagonise the Mongols. There is simply no need of a retrospective reading on this episode. If we look at the narration in light of his crusade proposal, Hayton was certainly aware of the regime of strictly enforced discipline of Mongol armies. If anything, this passage shows Hayton's concern about possible Mongol reactions to the indiscipline and disorderly behaviour so characteristic of crusader troops freshly disembarked in the Levant.

<sup>894</sup> *Flor*, p.361 "Quando vero sunt fortiores, valde sunt austeri, tumidi et superbi, et non possent stare quin debilioribus injurias irrogarent, quod quidem Christiani nullatenus paterentur."

His proposed remedy is that Mongol and Christian armies “should not travel together,” but that “the Tatars should go via the Damascus route, which they are used to, while the Christians go to Jerusalem,” ensuring that “peace and friendship would be preserved.”<sup>895</sup> His caution is particularly sharp when discussing the danger of overreliance on Mongol support. He warns that if Öljeitü were to lead a large force into Egypt, he would not follow the lead of the Christians.<sup>896</sup> Jackson has interpreted Hayton’s suggestion to divide the forces into separate routes as a precaution motivated by the expectation that the Mongols would demand tribute from the Latin Christians, with Hayton portrayed as cynically aware of this and manoeuvring accordingly.<sup>897</sup> This reading, however, seems to rely too much on a presumption of bad faith and underestimates the strategic rationale of the *Flor*. Hayton, at one point explicitly express his preference for a small and mobile Mongol force.<sup>898</sup> This work argues that, rather than seeking to avoid tribute obligations, this arrangement was based on Hayton’s experience in previous campaigns and designed to preserve operational autonomy. It reflects Hayton’s concern that a larger joint force under direct Ilkhanid command might undermine the ability of the Christian side to act independently. Given that a Mongol general or even the ilkhan himself would have been entitled to assume leadership over a numerically inferior crusader army, Hayton’s proposal to separate the forces seems intended not to evade submission but to avoid the subsumption of the crusaders’ objectives into a Mongol campaign plan.

The tactical apparatus of *La Flor* thus also performs a brokerage function. By grounding the crusade plan in measured descriptions of terrain, army compositions and Mongol capacity and

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<sup>895</sup> *Flor*, p.361. “Quod Tatars per viam Damasci incederent [...] et Christiani ad partes regni Ierosolimitani dirigerent [...] hoc modo inter Christianos et Tataros concors amicitia [...] servaretur.”

<sup>896</sup> *Flor*, p.361 “Si vero Carbanda vel alius loco sui, ingrederetur Egiptum cum magna multitudine Tatarorum, tunc eorum societas esset evitanda, nam dominus Tatarorum non dignaretur sequi voluntatem Christianorum.”

<sup>897</sup> Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.184.

<sup>898</sup> Note that the passage where he advocates for a smaller force, Hayton does not suggest that the Christians and the Mongols should take two different itineraries, but the same route. *Flor*, p.361 “De societate vero Christianorum et Tatarorum videtur mihi quod aliqua quantitas Tatarorum, circa X<sup>m</sup> (10,000) videlicet, posset multa conferre commoda Christianis, per vias et itinera incedendo.”

practices, Hayton constructs a space in which Armenian leadership is necessary, because Armenians like him are the only one who possess the knowledge and the experience to navigate such a plan.

Stewart interprets the text of *La Flor* as an ideological restatement of the alliance ideal, with a language understandable by Latin audiences and some plausible connection to Ilkhanid strategic needs.<sup>899</sup> This study builds on that premise but argues further that *La Flor* is neither a treatise nor a plea. It should not be read as an entirely spontaneous initiative, nor as the product of direct instruction. The work represents the ideological surplus of a relational system in which information, personal connections and trust dictated diplomatic exchanges.

The prince's role as broker reflects the Ilkhanid practice of mobilising intermediary elites to pursue foreign alliances, regardless of whether the prince received explicit instructions. The alignment of Hayton's project with Ghazan's diplomatic rhetoric and Öljeitü's strategic aims remains nonetheless striking. As previously argued, the narrative of *La Flor* closely matches the offers and omissions contained in many of the Mongol embassies. It is thus the functional role Hayton's work that is important. By anchoring Mongol ambitions within an Armenian voice and framing them in a language legible to the Latin world, Hayton rendered the ilkhans' military projects thinkable. What *La Flor* reveals, then, is the capacity of Armenian elites to act as narrators of Mongol intent through established trust and credibility. This also explains the structural design of *La Flor* itself. The work operates through an assemblage of narratives (geographical, logistical, diplomatic, military) that are all subordinated to the central claim that the moment of convergence is now, and that the hinge of this convergence is Cilician Armenia. Its themes are all subsumed into this greater architecture of alliance.

If the ambition of Hayton's project exceeded its plausibility, it was not because his narrative was incoherent but because the geopolitical conjuncture had changed. By the time the work was completed, the Islamisation of the Ilkhanate and the diminishing returns of diplomacy for both sides had all rendered the Armenian strategy obsolete. *La Flor*, in this sense, is the final articulation of a

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<sup>899</sup> See for instance, Stewart, "Reframing." p.73.

world that was already receding. It stands not only as a testament to Cilician diplomatic creativity but as an artefact of Ilkhanid diplomatic practices. It exemplifies how actors could channel, translate, and transform Mongol agendas into viable projects. And in doing so, it confirms the central claim of this dissertation: that the history of Mongol diplomacy cannot be written without that of its brokers.

## V. Italian Merchants in Persia

The current chapter expands on the previous discussion of Ilkhanid networks by exploring the relationship between the ilkhans and Italian merchants, who became more involved in Ilkhanid diplomatic affairs during the final decades of the thirteenth century. While Italian activity in Persia exemplifies the broader link between trade and diplomacy in Mongol contexts, the role of Italian merchants in Ilkhanid diplomacy stems from the expansion of their commercial presence across the Eastern Mediterranean.

One of the earliest works to take an interest in the subject was *Geschichte des Levantehandels im Mittelalter*, published by Wilhelm Heyd at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>900</sup> Heyd's work remains one of the most comprehensive studies of Latin trade in the Middle East and continues to serve as a key reference for historians today. Building on Heyd's foundation, many historians integrated their discussions of Latin commercial activity in Persia into broader studies of Mediterranean and Black Sea trade. A notable example is Eliyahu Ashtor's *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, a landmark work that remains essential for our understanding of the commercial networks connecting the Latins with the Islamic world and the Ilkhanate.<sup>901</sup> While broader studies have occasionally addressed Latin activity in Persia, more specialised works tend to offer only brief mentions. An example of this is Gheorghe Brătianu's research on Italian trade in the Black Sea, later echoed by Freddy Thiriet in *La Romanie vénitienne au Moyen Âge* and by Michel Balard in *Les actes de Caffa du notaire Lamberto di Sambuceto, 1289-1290* and *Gênes et la mer Noire*. Similar patterns appear across Balard's wider body of work, where references to Latin presence in the Ilkhanate are generally treated as peripheral to his core focus on Genoese and Venetian activities in the Black Sea

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<sup>900</sup> Heyd, W. *Geschichte des Levantehandels im Mittelalter*, 2 Vols. (Stuttgart, 1879). I have consulted the French translation of this work, Heyd, W. *Histoire du Commerce du Levant au moyen-âge*, 2 Vols. (Leipzig, 1885).

<sup>901</sup> Ashtor, E. *Levant Trade in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983); Jacoby, D. "Oriental Silks Go West: A Declining Trade in the Later Middle Age." *Islamic Artefacts in the Mediterranean World: Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer* (2010): 71-88; Jacoby, D. *Trade, commodities and shipping in the medieval Mediterranean* (London 1997).

and Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>902</sup> Despite the general tendency to include Persia in studies on Levantine commerce, several scholars, during the last century, have devoted exclusive attention to Italian trade in Persia and Central Asia. Since the 1940s, Robert Sabatino Lopez analysed the activities of European merchants in Inner Asia through commercial sources in his *European Merchants in the Medieval Indies: The Evidence of Commercial Documents* (1943), *China Silk in Europe in the Yuan Period* (1952), and *L'extrême frontière du commerce de l'Europe médiévale* (1963).<sup>903</sup> In the 1960s, Luciano Petech published *Les marchands italiens dans l'empire mongol*, which complemented his broader research on papal missions and mendicant activity in Mongol Asia. Jean Richard, for his part, was especially interested in individual careers and travel narratives. In *European Voyages in the Indian Ocean and Caspian Sea (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, he discusses the broader movement of Latin travellers across Asia while, in successive studies, he explores the careers of European mercenaries and adventurers active at the Ilkhanid court.<sup>904</sup> Finally, in 1997, Jacques Paviot contributed to a volume on Ilkhanid Persia edited by Denise Aigle with *Les marchands Italiens dans l'Iran Mongol* which is, to my knowledge, the only comprehensive work exclusively dedicated to the Ilkhanate.<sup>905</sup>

While the contributions of Lopez, Petech, and Richard remain foundational to the study of Latin commercial and diplomatic presence in Mongol Asia, these works share certain limitations in

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<sup>902</sup> Brătianu, G.I. "La mer Noire, plaque tournante du trafic international a la fin du Moyen Age." *Revue historique du Sud-Est européen*, 21 (1944): 36-39; Brătianu, G.I. *Recherches sur le commerce génois dans la mer Noire au XIIIe siècle. Avec 5 planches et une carte* (Paris, 1929); Thiriet, F. *Régestes des délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Romanie: Documents et recherches sur l'économie des pays byzantins, islamiques et slaves et leurs relations commerciales au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1958); Thiriet, F. *Quelques observations sur le trafic des gelées vénitienes d'après les chiffres des incanti (XIV-XVe siècles)* (Milan, 1962); Balard, M. *Les latins en Orient. Xe-XVe siècle* (Paris, 2006); Balard, M. "Gênes et la mer Noire (XIII e-XV e siècles)." in *Revue Historique*, 270, 1,547 (1983): 31-54; Balard, M. *Gênes et l'outremer: Les actes de Caffa du notaire Lamberto di Sambuceto, 1289-1290* (Paris, 1973); Balard, M. "La Romanie Génoise (XIIIe-début du XVe siècle)." *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria, nuova serie*, 18,2, Vol.1. (Rome, 1978).

<sup>903</sup> Lopez, R.S. "European merchants in the medieval Indies: the evidence of commercial documents." *The Journal of Economic History*, 3, 2 (1943): 164-184.

<sup>904</sup> Richard, J. "European Voyages in the Indian Ocean and Caspian Sea (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries)." *Iran* 6,1 (1968): 45-52; Petech, L. "Italian Merchants in the Mongol Empire," in Ryan, J.D. ed. *The Spiritual Expansion of Medieval Latin Christendom: The Asian Missions* (London, 2013): 211-234; Petech, L. "Les marchands italiens dans l'empire mongol." *Journal Asiatique*, 250 (1962): 549-574.

<sup>905</sup> Paviot, J. "Les marchands italiens dans l'Iran mongol," in Aigle, D. ed. *L'Iran face à la domination mongole* (Tehran, 1997): 71-86.

scope and method. Lopez's work takes an economic perspective, emphasising long-distance trade networks based on European commercial documents, with little attention to the geopolitical context. Richard's research focuses on individual episodic contacts, acknowledging the merchants' diplomatic roles, but falls short of explaining their significance in a Mongol context. Though Petech's work stands apart for his philological expertise and use of Persian, Arabic, and Tibetan materials, his piece on Italian merchants reflects the travel historiography of his time: largely descriptive and focused on chronology, it prioritises facts over interpretation. Finally, Paviot's contribution represents a valuable compilation of data, but his study is largely descriptive rather than analytical, offering little in the way of cross-cultural interpretation. It remains largely focused on quantifying commercial exchanges, listing names, and tracing the chronology of Italian presence, with diplomatic engagement discussed only briefly in the final pages.

In recent years, the work of Nicola Di Cosmo has marked a significant development in the study of Mongol-Latin relations. His essays, *Black Sea Emporia and the Mongol Empire: A Reassessment of the Pax Mongolica* and *Mongols and Merchants on the Black Sea Frontier in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: Convergences and Conflicts*, represent, arguably, the first attempt to bring Thomas Allsen's conceptualisation of medieval Eurasian exchange into dialogue with western commercial sources and the established historiographical tradition.<sup>906</sup> Also noteworthy are recent contributions that shift the geographic focus from the Mediterranean: in particular, the collection of essays edited by Judith Pfeiffer, which examines the significance of Tabriz, and the work of Thomas Sinclair, who, though primarily concerned with trade, offers valuable insight into regional trade dynamics and long-distance networks.<sup>907</sup>

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<sup>906</sup> Di Cosmo, N. "Mongols and merchants on the Black Sea frontier in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: Convergences and conflicts." in Amitai-Preiss, R. and Biran, M. eds. *Mongols, Turks and others. Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden, 2004): 391-424; Di Cosmo, N. "Black Sea emporia and the Mongol empire: A reassessment of the Pax Mongolica." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 53,1/2 (2009): 83-108.

<sup>907</sup> See Sinclair, T. *Eastern Trade and the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages: Pegolotti's Ayas-Tabriz Itinerary and its Commercial Context* (London, 2019); Pfeiffer, J. ed. *Politics, Patronage, and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th-15th Century Tabriz* (Leiden, 2013).

Thus, while the presence of Latin merchants in the Ilkhanate has long been acknowledged, and their occasional participation in diplomacy is not a novel observation, the specific relationship between commercial practice and diplomatic function remains insufficiently explored. Commercial documentation offers evidence not only of a sustained Latin mercantile presence from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, but also of individuals who can be cross-identified in diplomatic sources. This is particularly valuable when these individuals also appear in Mongol diplomatic correspondence. Notably, while narrative sources from the Ilkhanid period contain only a single explicit reference to a Latin residing in Persia, official missives from Ilkhanid rulers name multiple individuals (most of whom are identifiable as merchants) operating within the court in functions that exceeded the strictly commercial.<sup>908</sup> These roles encompassed linguistic mediation, negotiation, and, in some instances, ceremonial or military service. Such roles reflect a familiar pattern within Mongol governance: the repurposing of commercial actors for diplomatic and administrative functions by virtue of their connections and versatility. In this regard, the experience of Latin merchants within the Ilkhanate parallels that of their Muslim counterparts, who similarly transitioned into bureaucratic or representational positions. This work argues that many of the Italian merchants in Persia adapted quickly to the Ilkhanid political environment, engaging with the court and its networks in ways that served both their interests and those of their Mongol rulers. Their ability to navigate these structures made them useful to the ilkhans, who employed them as trusted intermediaries in their exchanges with Latin Europe.<sup>909</sup> In return, access to the Ilkhanid *ordu* offered merchants courtly protection and opportunities for personal enrichment.

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<sup>908</sup> *RJT/Rushan*, p.52. See below, p.284.

<sup>909</sup> This chapter draws in part on my earlier research on Italian merchants in Persia, published as *Forging Bonds across Continents: Italian Merchants and Ilkhanid Diplomacy*. That study will be duly cited at the outset of the section in which its material is incorporated.

## ◆ From the Black Sea and the Levant to Persia

During the latter half of the thirteenth century, the commercial expansion of the Italian maritime republics led to a gradual but steady increase in their economic presence along the coastal regions of the Levant and the Black Sea. However, trade with the interior of the Middle East remained largely dominated by Muslim merchants. Italian involvement in overland trade routes to Persia was minimal until the final decades of the century.<sup>910</sup> From the reign of Hülegü onwards, Italian mercantile activity began to take root around Tabriz. Fragmentary sources, like Genoese notarial records and private correspondence, provide evidence of a gradual rise in the number of Italian merchants operating in the region as early as the 1260s, which increases further towards the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>911</sup> This calls for a closer examination of the reasons behind their growing activity.

European merchants bound for Persia during the second half of the thirteenth century typically travelled through Mediterranean or Black Sea ports under Ilkhanid vassalage. These included Armenian Cilicia, then ruled by the Het'umids, and Trebizond, which was under the Komnenoi dynasty. Although Venetian and Genoese merchants had established trading posts in Cilician Armenia earlier in the century, it was only after the fall of the last crusader ports that the

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<sup>910</sup> Ciocîltan, V. *The Mongols and the Black Sea* (Leiden, 2012) p.47-49; Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p.17-18, 43, 57.

<sup>911</sup> Archivio Veneto, p.161; Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce*, p.110. Brătianu, *Recherches sur le commerce génois*, p.315. Brătianu, *Actes des notaires de Pera et Caffa*, p.257, 286-87; Balard, *Les actes*, p.129,192.

region emerged as a key hub for Italian commerce in the Levant.<sup>912</sup> Similarly, access to Black Sea trade routes improved following the end of hostilities between Genoa and Venice in 1299 and between Venice and the Byzantine Empire in 1302.<sup>913</sup>

One source that provides information on these routes is *La Pratica della Mercatura*, a trade manual compiled by the Florentine merchant Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, a member of the Bardi banking company. Pegolotti's text, completed around the mid-fourteenth century, offers a detailed itinerary for merchants travelling from Ayas in Cilician Armenia to Tabriz. Although the manual was written at a time when trade to Persia was already in decline and the Ilkhanate was facing internal instability, scholars generally agree that Pegolotti relied on the accounts of merchants who had

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<sup>912</sup> Research on the Italian presence in Ayas based on notarial records shows a significant volume of activity in the latter half of the thirteenth century. Between 1274 and 1280, eleven Genoese and thirteen Venetian *accommedacio* contracts were drawn up in the city. Genoese notarial acts produced in Ayas over only three years (1274-1277) list as many as 684 individual names. From the reign of Levon II (r. 1270-1289), Venetian and Genoese merchants were granted trading privileges, although Venice maintained the stronger political influence within the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. In 1288 Genoa secured a renewal of its agreements with Levon by offering military assistance against pirates and the Mamluks, dispatching a small squadron under the command of Benedetto Zaccaria. Evidence from the same period also attests to Genoese construction in Ayas: in 1289 a Genoese loggia (palace) appears in a contract dating to the early years of Hethum II's reign. Venetian privileges, first confirmed by Levon II in 1271, were renewed again by his son Hethum II (r. 1289-1307) in 1307. See Balletto, L. *Notai Genovesi in Oltremare, atti rogati a Laiazzo da Federico di Piazzalunga (1274) e Pietro di Bargone (1277, 1279)* (Genova, 1989), p.198,174,398; Otten-Froux, C. "Les relations économiques entre Chypre et le royaume arménien de Cilicie d'après les actes notariés (1270-1320)." *L'Arménie et Byzance: Histoire et culture: Byzantina Sorbonensia* 12 (1996): 157-179, p.174-176; Otten-Froux, C. "Ayas dans le dernier tiers du XIIIe siècle d'après les notaires génois." *Asian and African Studies*, 22, 1/3 (1988): 141-171, p.152. Heyd dedicates an entire chapter to Ayas, describing Cilicia as the main access to Persia. Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant*, p.73-92. Langlois, V. ed. *Le trésor des chartes d'Arménie: ou, Cartulaire de la chancellerie royale des Roupéniens* (Paris, 1863), p.126-128, 156; *Diplomatarium*, p.38.

<sup>913</sup> Around this time Genoese merchants established the emporium of Caffa (ca. 1275), while their activity is attested at Soldaia already in 1274; the rise in notarial production there is reflected in the registers of Federico di Piazzalunga. The expansion of Genoese commerce in the Black Sea was closely linked to their alliance with Byzantium, the concessions secured through the treaty of Nymphaeum in 1261, and the reconquest of Constantinople in the same year. Among these privileges was the right to found a colony on the Golden Horn, known as Pera (or Galata), which was established in 1267. Yet, as Balard has observed, the examination of several hundred contracts does not indicate a marked growth in traffic between Trebizond and Tabriz before the closing years of the thirteenth century, since the goods most frequently traded in Persia appear only occasionally in contracts signed in Trebizond. A reference to the residence of the Genoese consul in Trebizond appears in 1291. A notarial act in 1302 reports: "factus logia in qua regitur Curia Januensium." Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p.114-118; Balard, "Gênes et la mer Noire." p.33.

travelled these routes in earlier decades.<sup>914</sup> Modern attempts to reconstruct the Ayas-Tabriz route have been made by scholars such as Heyd, Sinclair, and Paviot. While their reconstructions differ in various details, they broadly agree on the main stops. In this chapter, I have synthesised their accounts in order to better understand the movements of Italian merchants in the region and the significance of their presence in the broader context of Ilkhanid commerce and diplomacy.<sup>915</sup>

According to Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, the journey from Ayas to Tabriz comprised twenty-seven stages, with significant urban centres along the route including Sivas, Erzincan, and Erzurum.<sup>916</sup> Pegolotti's itinerary was probably the most accessible and frequently utilised path for merchants during the period. Building upon Pegolotti's account, Thomas Sinclair's modern analysis facilitates the identification of several locations along this route on contemporary maps.<sup>917</sup> Departing from Ayas, merchants would travel through Ilkhanid-held Rûm, stopping at various caravanserais. Among these, the Sultan Han, constructed by the Sultan of Rûm Kayqubad I prior to the Mongol invasions, referred to by Pegolotti as the "Gavazera del Soldano."<sup>918</sup>

Pegolotti's explicit mention of four caravanserais along the route to Tabriz testifies to the vitality of the trade networks linking inner Anatolia and the Mediterranean. Caravanserais were integral to the economic infrastructure of the Ilkhanate, serving as nodes in the facilitation of trade and the collection of tolls, which constituted a substantial portion of the empire's revenues. Ilkhanid rulers actively participated in the financing and construction of caravanserais, like those strategically positioned adjacent to each gate within the walls of the Ghāzāniyya, the monumental complex

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<sup>914</sup> Pegolotti/*Evans*, introduction, xiv, xv, xvi.

<sup>915</sup> See Sinclair, *Eastern Trade*, p.165-257; Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce*, p.113-118; Paviot, "Les marchands italiens." p.71-74.

<sup>916</sup> Pegolotti/*Evans*, p.28.

<sup>917</sup> See Sinclair, *Eastern Trade*, p.171-188.

<sup>918</sup> Pegolotti/*Evans*, p.28-29, glossary, p.389.

erected by Ghazan on the outskirts of Tabriz.<sup>919</sup> The significance of these establishments is further corroborated by Ibn Battūta, who visited Tabriz in the early 14th century. During his stay, the Moroccan traveller noted the existence of caravanserais outside the city walls, where he was afforded lodging and provisions.<sup>920</sup>

After stopping at the city of Sivas, where the presence of a Genoese community is attested as early as the 1280s, the merchants had to cross the mountainous inner Anatolia towards the city of Erzincan.<sup>921</sup> They likely stopped in one of the caravanserais located outside the city, namely Gavazera or Bagni di Arzerone, as mentioned by Pegolotti. From Erzincan, the rest of the journey could be undertaken relatively easily. Sinclair convincingly argues that merchants continued north of Lake Van, as Pegolotti mentions Arcanoé, which can be clearly identified as Mount Ararat.<sup>922</sup> This indicates that commercial expeditions would reach the southern Caucasus and then proceed towards the city of Tabriz, approaching it from the north.

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<sup>919</sup> Farshi, G. *Gateways of Paradise: Mongol Foundations of Charity and the Making of Muslim Sacred Kingship* (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2024), p.161. Farshi notes that Rashīd al-Dīn himself was a patron of such structures: "Additionally, Rashīd al-Dīn allots thirty-six thousand and sixty *mans* of bread for the Alkī caravanserai that he built in the New Harzand village." On the complex of the Ghāzāniyya, see Haneda, M. "Ghāzāniyya in Tabriz." *The Proceedings of the International Conference on Urbanism in Islam*, Vol. 2 (Tokyo Urbanism in Islam, A Comparative Study, 1989): 283-299. Haneda specifically notes that the Ghāzāniyya hosted a tax office and that the complex received caravans coming from the west at p.287.

<sup>920</sup> "We reached the town (Tabriz) after ten days' travelling, and encamped outside it in a place called ash-Sham. Here there is a fine hospice, where travellers are supplied with food, consisting of bread, meat, rice cooked in butter, and sweetmeats. The next morning, I entered the town and we came to a great bazaar, called the Ghazan bazaar, one of the finest bazaars I have seen the world over." Ibn Battūta, *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-54* transl. Gibb, H.A.R. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (London, 1953), p.101.

<sup>921</sup> We can observe increased notarial activity in Sivas around the second half of the thirteenth century, especially from the famous notary Federico di Piazzalunga from 1274; Saglam, S. *Urban Palimpsest at Galata & An Architectural Inventory Study for the Genoese Colonial Territories in Asia Minor* (PhD dissertation, Politecnico di Milano), p.299; Liščak, V. "Italian City-states and Catholic Missions in the Mongolian World of the 13th and 14th Centuries." *Anthropologia Integra*, 3,2 (2012): 1-10, p.4; *Statuti della colonia genovese di Pera*, in *Miscellanea di storia italiana*, XI, ed. Promis, V. (Torino, 1870), p.213; referring to the year 1288, there is a reference to a Genoese Consul in Savasto, which Promis misidentifies as Sevastopol. I could not find any information on a Genoese consul there. Instead, the city identified as Savasto or Sevasta in that period is the one of Sebasteia, now called Sivas. Canale, M. *Nuova istoria della Repubblica di Genova, del suo commercio e della sua letteratura, dalle origini all'anno 1797*, Vol.2, (Firenze, 1860), p.459. Canale mentions Sevasta (Sivas) as one of the main centres of Genoese trade in the period.

<sup>922</sup> Pegolotti/Evans, p.29.

If we compare Pegolotti's itinerary with that of another source, *I Conti dell'Ambasciata al Chan di Persia*, it is also possible to trace the Black Sea route to Tabriz. The document details the journey of the embassy dispatched by King Edward I of England to Persia between 1290 and 1292.<sup>923</sup> Led by the English nobleman Geoffrey Langley, this expedition, accompanied by the Genoese merchant Buscarello de' Ghisolfi, departed from Genoa towards the end of 1290, taking the Black Sea route to the Mongol capital.<sup>924</sup> The document, submitted by Buscarello to claim reimbursement from the English crown, consists mainly of a report outlining the route followed and the associated costs. Although concise and practical in tone, the account provides useful details. It suggests that the group received support from Genoese merchants in several of the cities through which they passed. Based on the information recorded, the route they followed also appears to have run parallel to the final part of the itinerary described by Pegolotti, passing within roughly one hundred kilometres of Mount Ararat.<sup>925</sup>

Considering the length of the journeys and the data provided by Pegolotti, it is reasonable to conclude that the shortest route from Trebizond to Tabriz would have taken more than a month to complete, while the route from Ayas likely required even more time.<sup>926</sup> These estimates would increase further in cases of conflict or adverse weather. The difficulty of these routes made the transport of large volumes of raw materials inefficient, and suggests that the costs associated with

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<sup>923</sup> See below, p.286; *I Conti dell'Ambasciata al Chan di Persia nel 1292*, ed. Desimoni, C. (Torino, 1879), p.19-20. From this point onward, *I Conti*. On Buscarello see Paviot, J. "Buscarello de' Ghisolfi, marchand génois intermédiaire entre la Perse mongole et la Chrétienté latine (fin du XIII<sup>me</sup>-début du XIV<sup>me</sup> siècles)." *La Storia dei Genovesi*, 9 (1991): 107-117.

<sup>924</sup> For a detailed description of the embassy's route, see *I Conti*, p.6-10.

<sup>925</sup> The stop in Erzurum appears in both routes, signifying the importance of the city in Anatolian overland trade. Sinclair, T. *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey*, Vol.2 (London, 1990), p.286. Sinclair stresses how Ibn Battuta describes the decadent state of the city in the 1330s, a period in which Italian presence starts to drastically reduce in the Ilkhanate. *I Conti*, p.75; Sinclair, T. "Some Conclusions on the Use of Coins on the Ayas-Tabriz Route (Late 13th and First Half of 14th Century AD)." *Publications de l'Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes*, 25, 1 (2012): 87-103, p.92. Paviot, J. "Les marchands italiens." p.72. Paviot remarks that the Ayas-Tabriz and Trebizond-Tabriz routes took two different paths, but fails to observe that both Buscarello and Pegolotti mention a stop between Lake Van and Mount Ararat. This means that both expeditions followed the north side of the lake and then moved south towards Tabriz.

<sup>926</sup> *Pegolotti/Evans*, p.29.

escorting and maintaining large shipments over such distances would have outweighed any potential profit. Trade with Persia, under such conditions, was feasible only when it involved goods of high value and low volume.<sup>927</sup>

La Pratica della Mercatura provides a list of all the goods that were generally sold and bought by Latin merchants in Tabriz. Bulky goods are completely absent from the catalogue, which instead reports several values for the price of silk, pearls, indigo, gemstones, incense, fine spices and other precious and rare materials.<sup>928</sup> In the passages relative to Persia and Central Asia, Pegolotti specifically suggests travelling light on the outward journey and carrying, as an exchange, goods like European textiles to keep travel expenses low:

(It would be convenient) to carry several bundles of very fine textiles, because they are worth the same as bulkier textiles and are easier to transport.<sup>929</sup>

While Italian merchants engaged in the trade of heavier goods (such as cereals, timber, wool, and weapons) within their Levantine and Black Sea settlements, as noted by Ashtor, these items rarely reached the interior.<sup>930</sup> The presence of Persian, Armenian, and Arab intermediaries in ports like Trebizond and Ayas, although under nominal Ilkhanid protection, created a point of transition.<sup>931</sup> Italians could bring larger volumes of manufactured goods and raw materials to these ports, where local intermediaries would then manage the exchange for luxury items and carry them further inland.<sup>932</sup> In the trade circuits of Cilicia and the Levant, raw materials were often bartered for spices, while in the Black Sea region, textiles were commonly exchanged for silk.<sup>933</sup> Sinclair also supports

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<sup>927</sup> To determine this, I compared prices for certain goods sold both in Persia and the Levant using the conversion tables reported by Pegolotti.

<sup>928</sup> Pegolotti/Evans, p.26-27.

<sup>929</sup> "Avesse alquante balle di tele molto sottilissime che tengono piccolo imbuglio e non vogliono più di spesa che vogliano altre tele più grosse." Pegolotti/Evans, p.23.

<sup>930</sup> Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p.62-63.

<sup>931</sup> Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p.53-55.

<sup>932</sup> For a detailed description of exchanges taking place in Levantine ports, see Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p.23.

<sup>933</sup> Caspian silk coming from Central Asia was preferable to that coming from China because it was cheaper to transport. Pegolotti/Evans, p.32; Preiser-Kapeller, J. "Civitas Thauris. The Significance of Tabriz in the Spatial Frameworks of Christian Merchants and Ecclesiastics in the 13th and 14th Centuries," in Pfeiffer, J. ed. *Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th-15th Century Tabriz*, (Leiden, 2013): 249-299, p.258.

this interpretation, identifying an imbalance in the trade passing through the port of Ayas, where luxury goods flowed westward. At the same time, Latin merchants typically sold lower-cost materials locally.<sup>934</sup> This raises a question: why were Italian merchants drawn to establish trading links deeper into Asia, when they could already acquire Persian luxury goods through exchanges on the coast? A brief observation in Marco Polo's account of Tabriz may offer part of the answer. He writes:

Merchants go (to Tabriz) from all over the places: Latin merchants there especially seek strange wares, coming from distant places, and they make great profit out of them. In the city, one can find many precious stones.<sup>935</sup>

La Pratica della Mercatura seems to confirm Polo's assertion, mentioning that goods like pearls and silverware were exempted from taxes in Persia. In 1264, the testament of Pietro Viglioni listed several strings of pearl among the properties of the merchant, attesting that Italians had already been dealing in pearls at least since the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>936</sup> Thus, the idea that Italian merchants could cut the cost of intermediaries by establishing emporia in the Caucasus could, in theory, represent a valid explanation for this sudden "push east". Another plausible hypothesis could be the increasing papal hostility to the Mamluk Sultanate, and the willingness to find an alternative route for luxury goods bypassing the Levantine ports.<sup>937</sup> The concept that the Persian market could represent a valid alternative to Egypt for Italian merchants comes from a passage of the *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*, written by Marino Sanudo the Elder in 1307. According to the Venetian, the Persian market provided an excellent alternative for Italian merchants if they were to put in place an embargo against Egypt and Syria.<sup>938</sup> Following Sanudo, several historians have suggested that,

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<sup>934</sup> Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p.60, 63; Sinclair, *Eastern Trade*, p.95.

<sup>935</sup> Marco Polo/Yule-Cordier, p.70.

<sup>936</sup> *Archivio Veneto*, p.161.

<sup>937</sup> Pegolotti/Evans, p.26-27.

<sup>938</sup> Marinus Sanutus Torsellus, *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis super Terrae Sancte recuperatione et conservatione*, ed. Bongars (Hannover, 1611). p.23. "Maior enim pars speciarum et mercimoniorum[...] consuevit per Baldac facere viam suam et exinde per Antiochiam et per Liciam ducebatur ad nostrum mare: et tunc temporis speciarum et alia mercimonia Indiae et habundantius et pro-minori praetio habebantur, quam habentur ad praesens." Peter Jackson comments on the rest of this passage from Marino Sanudo, in which the Venetian, advocating for a crusade against Egypt, states that Persian luxury items are superior to Egyptian ones, as the latter are ruined by the long sea journey. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.312.

especially after 1291, it was economically expedient for Venetian and Genoese to bypass their Middle Eastern intermediaries and, therefore, increase the margin of profit on goods coming from Asia because of the growing hostility and competition with the Mamluk Sultanate.<sup>939</sup>

This interpretation, however, disregards the fact that Italians could still trade in neutral or Ilkhanid-controlled Levantine and Black Sea ports. It also implies that the prohibition of trade with the Mamluks issued in 1291 by Pope Nicolas IV forced the merchants to find alternative trade routes. However, Sanudo's objective was to convince rulers and aristocrats of the feasibility and guaranteed success of a *passagium* (crusade), making his reliability in this matter doubtful. Furthermore, this hypothesis is not confirmed by evidence of large commercial exchanges with Persia. During the papal embargo on the Mamluk Sultanate in the early fourteenth century, for instance, Venetians still preferred to illegally import cotton from Egypt rather than turning to Persia, despite the fact that cotton was abundantly produced in regions such as Tabriz and Isfahan, as recorded by Mustawfi in the *Nuzhat al-Qulūb*.<sup>940</sup> Italian trade manuals make no mention of cotton in the context of Tabriz. This suggests that Persia was not considered a viable source for bulky or low-margin commodities, even where a low-cost supply existed.

If Italians deemed any substantial export from Persia impractical, the Ilkhanate equally favoured inner Asian trade routes for its basic commercial needs.<sup>941</sup> As seen in previous chapters, fourteenth-century Ilkhanid long-distance trade revolved around Chinese and Indian trade routes.<sup>942</sup>

A broader approach here could help to clarify this subject. This dissertation contends that the presence of Latin merchants in Ilkhanid Persia must be understood through the dual lens of economic constraint and political brokerage. These merchants, operating from within a Mediterranean system characterised by a silver surplus, often found themselves compelled to use bullion to finance their

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<sup>939</sup> See Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce*, Vol.2, p.185.

<sup>940</sup> *Mustawfi/Le Strange*, p.556-558.

<sup>941</sup> See Favreau, "The Mongol Peace." p.64-66.

<sup>942</sup> Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic worlds*, p.109; See also Chaffee, J. *The Muslim merchants of premodern China: The history of a maritime Asian trade diaspora, 750-1400* (Cambridge, 2018). See also above, p.140-141.

imports from the East.<sup>943</sup> This consistent trade deficit made it essential that exchanges be highly profitable, which partly explains their focus on compact, high-value goods such as silk, gemstones, and rare spices. If silver and textiles were to be invested, they had to yield maximum returns.

Despite the long and perilous trade routes, it is reasonable to assume that the allure of substantial profit margins enticed many, particularly for goods such as silk and gemstones that were in high demand in Europe. However, considering the complex nature and exorbitant costs associated with travelling to Persia, it is implausible to believe that dozens, if not hundreds of individuals continuously traversed these routes, especially in the face of local competitors who often enjoyed the patronage of the Ilkhanid capitals. Therefore, it is more likely that the majority of merchants who journeyed to Tabriz aimed to establish semi-permanent or permanent commercial bases within the city, a settlement that is sufficiently attested in the available sources.<sup>944</sup> This phenomenon fostered interactions with the Ilkhanid elites and initially received a favourable response from the Mongols. However, Ilkhanid support for Latin trade cannot be explained solely by commercial priorities, which in practice lay elsewhere. As it will be demonstrated in the following pages, these arrangements allowed the ilkhans to use intermediaries who could facilitate diplomatic outreach to Europe. Italian engagement in Ilkhanid trade too, other than limited immediate profit, reflected a broader set of calculations: it promised long-term advantages in courtly favour, access to protected routes and commercial privileges.

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<sup>943</sup> See Blake, R. "The Circulation of Silver in the Moslem East Down to The Mongol Epoch." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 2, 3/4 (1937): 291-328; Day, J. "The Great Bullion Famine of the Fifteenth Century." *Past & Present*, 79, 1 (1978): 3-54, esp. p.6. Day dedicates an entire section on the European imbalance of trade with the Levant.

<sup>944</sup> See below, p.281.

## ◆ The case of Pietro Viglioni: Gift giving and Ortāq

In 1264, the Venetian merchant Pietro Viglioni had his testament drafted in the city of Tabriz, crafting the earliest surviving testimony of Italian presence within the borders of the Ilkhanate.<sup>945</sup> The document provides a remarkably detailed inventory of Viglioni's possessions during his stay "in Turiso apo mei."<sup>946</sup> Viglioni referred to these as "mine and others' things," suggesting co-ownership with fellow merchants and financing with shared capital from Venice.<sup>947</sup>

Viglioni's inventory can be conveniently divided into two sections. The first section comprises a list of a variety of generic goods, where their values are not specified, except for pearls said to be worth eighty Tabrizi bezants.<sup>948</sup> The list includes two cases filled with sugar, twenty-one beaver hides, and a substantial quantity of European textiles, totalling approximately three kilometres in length. In the second section, the testament showcases an extensive catalogue of opulent luxury items, constituting a significant portion of the document's content. Notably, Viglioni specified that, in the unfortunate event of his demise, these possessions were to be sold in Tabriz. He estimated their collective value to be approximately four thousand Tabrizi bezants, equivalent to roughly one

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<sup>945</sup> From this point on, until the end of this chapter, this dissertation incorporates broadly my published article, Liberati, R. "Forging Bonds across Continents: Italian Merchants and Ilkhanid Diplomacy." *Crossroads*, 22, 1/2 (2023): 26-50. While certain passages are reproduced verbatim, most have been revised to align more closely with the themes and analytical framework of the present study.

<sup>946</sup> This can be translated both as "in Tabriz with myself," and "in Tabriz at my place," although the second translation is more probable because of the final genitive. This would also indicate that the merchant has paid for a private residence. The testament is edited in its entirety in *Archivio Veneto*, p.161-165.

<sup>947</sup> (The original text reads "le cose mie et altrui"). Such arrangements were quite common in Italian merchant republics and often involved members of the same family or kinship network. They could be formalised in a contract in which individuals participated in the risk of a commercial expedition by choosing to invest in the purchase of commodities destined for foreign markets. Such contracts were known as *accommodacio*, *colleganza*, or *collegantia*. The Venetian term *colleganzia*, known as *commenda* in the other Italian merchant republics, identifies one of the most popular forms of contract, signed by two counterparts, namely the debtor and creditor, or *socii*. Baskin, J. Miranti, P. *A History of Corporate Finance* (Cambridge, 1999), p.48.

<sup>948</sup> On Ilkhanid coinage in this period see Bastani, M. Alimohammadi, N. "Numismatics of Tabriz Mint during the Ilkhanate Period." *Journal of Archaeological Studies*, 16, 2 (2024): 327-357; Blair, S.S. "The Coins of the Later Ilkhanids: A Typological Analysis." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 26, 3 (1983): 295-317.

thousand gold florins.<sup>949</sup> Petech and Molà, in their analysis of Viglioni's inventory, argued that the items listed were intended for sale. They based this interpretation on the structural features of the document, the assignment of fixed values to individual goods, and the participation of other merchants in the venture.<sup>950</sup> This interpretation warrants further consideration in light of the nature of the goods themselves, as well as the broader patterns of Mongol court culture and exchange practices.

Among the remarkable items detailed, two double chessboards adorned with crystal, jasper, silver, precious stones, and pearls stand out. Additionally, we can find a cameo intricately carved with the narrative of Moses using agate, chalcedony, and sardonyx, a horse saddle embellished with crystal, jasper, silver, precious stones, pearls, and a pectoral breastplate enveloped in green silk interwoven with silver threads and gold embellishments. The testament further enumerates various objects crafted from lead glass and rock crystal, including a glass vessel featuring a silver-spouted arrangement with crystal and silver edges, embellished with precious stones and pearls, as well as two crystal and silver candlesticks, a crystal cup with a silver lid, and two crystal cups adorned with silver, precious stones, and pearls.<sup>951</sup>

Most, if not all, of the items listed in Viglioni's inventory appear to have been acquired from European manufacturers. This is supported by Viglioni's note that the goods belonged not only to himself but also to fellow citizens, indicating a commercial arrangement in which the items were purchased using jointly invested funds.<sup>952</sup>

A cursory examination of the materials employed in these items further substantiates their European origin. According to Luca Molà, a significant portion of the inventory can be traced back

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<sup>949</sup> I calculated the amount using the data provided by Pegolotti in *Pegolotti/Evans*. The most detailed analysis of the items is the one provided by Molà, L. et al. *Venezia, Genova e l'Oriente: i mercanti italiani sulle Vie della Seta tra XIII e XIV secolo*. (Venice, 2012), p.133.

<sup>950</sup> *Archivio Veneto*, p.161; Molà, *Venezia, Genova e l'Oriente*, p.139-140. Molà suggests that Viglioni was about to embark on an expedition to China, but there is no evidence to support this statement. Petech

<sup>951</sup> *Archivio Veneto*, p.163-164.

<sup>952</sup> *Archivio Veneto*, p.161.

to the embryonic Venetian glass industry, which would be organised into a guild in 1284.<sup>953</sup> Additionally, the testament includes materials such as jasper, sardonyx, agate, and heliotrope. These four mineral aggregates are derived from quartz, and during the Middle Ages, the distinctions between different forms of non-crystalline quartz were rather unclear.<sup>954</sup> In the Persian encyclopaedia *Nuzhat al-Qulub* (c. 1340), quartz stones similar to those mentioned by the testament are referred to as “plasma” and “rock crystal”. The author, the Ilkhanid official Hamdallah Mustawfi Qazvini (c. 1281-1339), notes their abundant presence in the “hills of the Frankish countries” and their renowned status in Ilkhanid Persia.<sup>955</sup>

The unique nature of the inventory list has, in my opinion, not received the attention it warrants. In fact, approaching the document from a different perspective could improve our understanding of the endeavours undertaken by merchants like the Polos and Viglioni. This dissertation contends that these individuals served as pioneers of a broader movement, comprising merchants and adventurers who not only sought personal wealth by winning the favour of the Ilkhanids, but also aimed to integrate themselves into the Mongol economic system, establishing personal political and economic ties with the Mongol elites. Therefore, to better understand how Viglioni’s collection of items might have been used, it is important to consider whether these items were meant for trade, or rather as gifts to win favour with powerful *noyat* and officials.

This strategy would not be unprecedented in European interactions with the Mongols. As Yihao Qiu has rightly pointed out, the practice of gift giving underwent a radical transformation during the Mongol expansion. As a foreigner, presenting gifts to a ruler or to a Mongol official not only meant adhering to the rituals of hospitality, but also acknowledging the superiority of the conqueror and entering under his protection: in short, the practice slowly transformed into a sort of tribute, becoming extremely important to those who wished to win the favour of nobles and

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<sup>953</sup> Molà, *Venezia, Genova e l'Oriente*. p.139.

<sup>954</sup> Holmes, U. “Mediaeval Gemstones.” *Speculum* 9, 2 (1934): 195-204, p.198.

<sup>955</sup> *Mustawfi/Le Strange*, p.13-14.

princes.<sup>956</sup> European merchants and missionaries had previously recognised the significance of gift-giving at their own expense. Apart from the instances already referenced earlier in this work, it is worth mentioning how John of Pian del Carpine emphasised the indispensability of valuable gifts for any envoy dealing with the Mongols. The friar himself frequently had to justify the absence of gifts from those who had sent him.<sup>957</sup> Other friars had the same problem due to their poverty, and Giovanni's text was widely circulated, suggesting that this aspect of dealing with Mongols was widely understood in the Latin west.<sup>958</sup> Italian merchants likewise demonstrated a clear understanding of Mongol customs, as emphasised by Michael Balard and Nicola Di Cosmo in their analysis of the notarial acts of Lamberto di Sambuceto. In 1291, for instance, a Genoese merchant named Pietro de Braino enlisted the services of a falconer and embarked on a journey to the court of Arghun, bringing with him several falcons as gifts. The falconer was promised the substantial sum of 800 aspres, a significant investment meant to secure favour with the ilkhan upon successfully delivering the animals to the *ordu*.<sup>959</sup> Marco Polo also reported instances of gift exchange between his father Niccolò (ca 1230-1294), his uncle Maffeo (ca 1230-1309) and the ruler of the Golden Horde Berke in 1263, the year prior to Viglioni's testament.<sup>960</sup>

Viglioni's family had been active in the Pontic region for several decades. Hence, the merchant was surely aware of these dynamics and certainly intended to present gifts as a means to secure his position within Mongol elite circles.<sup>961</sup> The precious items listed in Viglioni's inventory evoke the same diplomatic register as those prepared for a later, well-documented embassy to the Yuan court. Luciano Petech reports the case of the Genoese merchant Andalò da Savignone, who in 1338 was

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<sup>956</sup> Yihao, Q. "Gift-Exchange in Diplomatic Practices during the Early Mongol Period." *Eurasian Studies*, 17,2 (2020): 202-227, p.213-227.

<sup>957</sup> *Pian del Carpine/Menestò*, p.398.

<sup>958</sup> See Watson, A.J. "Mongol Inhospitability, or How to Do More with Less? Gift Giving in William of Rubruck's Itinerarium." *Journal of Mediaeval History* 30 (2011): 1-12.

<sup>959</sup> A huge sum considering that di Cosmo says that that around the same period the price for a house in Tana was 400 aspres. Di Cosmo, "Mongols and Merchants." p.400, 410; Balard, *Gênes et l'outre-mer*, p.192.

<sup>960</sup> See below, p.279.

<sup>961</sup> *Archivio Veneto*, p.163.

authorised by the Venetian senate to acquire *iocalia* (jewels) and horses in the city for a total worth of up to two thousand gold florins as gifts for the Yuan emperor Toghon Temür (r. 1333-1368).<sup>962</sup> Significantly, Viglioni's items also resemble gifts described in several Mongol and Persian chronicles, reflecting Mongol taste for jewels and finely decorated materials. For instance, some of the items received as gifts by Činggis Khan at the beginning of his conquests are described as follows in *The Secret History of the Mongols*:

Burqan came for an audience with Činggis Khan. During the audience, Burqan (presented Činggis Khan with a set of gifts): first among them were golden images of the Buddha. They also included bowls and vessels of gold and silver, nine of each [...] various (other things), also arranged in nines by kind or colour, (were presented) in the course of the audience.<sup>963</sup>

Juvaynī also mentions gifts many times in his work, although he only occasionally describes what was given or received.<sup>964</sup> At a later date, Waṣṣāf also reports a list of gifts, this time brought by the Ilkhanid merchant and official Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭībī to China:

Presents of cloths, jewels, costly garments, and hunting leopards [...] were given to him, and (he) loaded them (ships and junks) with his own merchandise and immense (numbers of) jewels and pearls.<sup>965</sup>

The provenance of the gifts listed in these chronicles necessarily slightly differentiates them from those presents in Viglioni's inventory. However, the recurrence of expensive garments, precious stones and religious figures matches with the content of the Venetian's testament.

The logic underpinning these exchanges, where lavish gifts created long-term political and economic relationships, finds its most important analogue in the institutionalised practice of *ortāq* partnerships, which flourished throughout the Mongol domains. The nature of this commercial partnership has been a subject of significant debate. However, the studies conducted by Thomas

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<sup>962</sup> Petech, "Les Marchands." p.554-555.

<sup>963</sup> *Secret History/Rachewiltz*, p.188.

<sup>964</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.496; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.233. "Among the presents was a belt studded with stones, also called jaundice stones, made and devised by Körgüz himself and altogether priceless. Upon seeing it, the Khan, out of curiosity, fastened it around his waist."

<sup>965</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭībī was the son of the Juvaynīs' *ortāqs*, Jamāl al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Ṭībī. See *Waṣṣāf/Purgstall*, III, p.45. See above, p.141.

Allsen and Elizabeth Endicott-West have shed light on its intricacies.<sup>966</sup> Arrangements linked to the *ortāq* are first mentioned in The Secret History of the Mongols, where Činggis Khan and his family provide gold and precious goods to their commercial partners before dispatching them for trade in Persia. This capital presumably originated from the wealth amassed by Mongol elites during military campaigns, acquired in the form of either booty or tribute.<sup>967</sup> Such practices consolidated and expanded as the empire grew, with Mongol princes, officials and *noyat* actively promoting and participating in Eurasian trade through their *ortāqs*, as seen in the previous sections of this dissertation.<sup>968</sup> Studies on the partnership between Mongol aristocracy and Asian merchants, particularly Uyghurs, reveal the widespread popularity of the *ortāq* among Mongol elites even after the division of the Mongol Empire.<sup>969</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn documents that women from the Mongol-Persian elite invested their revenues from in their own *ortāqs*. This practice became so prevalent that Persian families would sell their offsprings to Mongol ladies and dignitaries, hoping they could eventually enter their service as *ortāqs*.<sup>970</sup>

The *ortāq*, in this sense, was also a form of control over individuals, as demonstrated in the case of the *sāhib dīvān* Shams al-Dīn Juvaynī.<sup>971</sup> Mongol ruling classes could reward the merchants' loyalty by granting generous trade privileges and involving them in political roles, further deepening and diversifying their patronage networks and strengthening their rule over certain regions.<sup>972</sup> For Mongol aristocrats, sharing their capital with a merchant was never an agreement between equals; it inherently represented both "privilege" and submission.<sup>973</sup> In general, merchants in the Mongol empire enjoyed privileged status due to their economic and administrative importance to the Mongol

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<sup>966</sup> For comprehensive studies on the *ortāq* (also rendered as *ortoq* or *ortoy*), see Allsen, "Mongolian Princes." p.114-115; Endicott-West, E. "Merchant Associations in Yüan China." *Asia Major* (1989): 127-154.

<sup>967</sup> Allsen, "Mongolian Princes." p.115.

<sup>968</sup> See above, p.139-141.

<sup>969</sup> Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic worlds*, p.110.

<sup>970</sup> *RJT/Thackston*, p.714. The exact passage is absent in Karīmī's edition.

<sup>971</sup> See above, p.140.

<sup>972</sup> Enkhbold, E. "The role of the *ortoq* in the Mongol Empire in forming business partnerships." *Central Asian Survey*, 38, 4 (2019): 531-547, p.543.

<sup>973</sup> Allsen, "Mongolian princes." p.119.

rulers. However, this privilege also implied service and cooperation in various other fields. Muslim merchants, particularly Uyghurs, were highly esteemed by the Mongols, who employed their skills in diverse areas, including administration and tax collection, for the benefit of the entire Empire.<sup>974</sup>

As pointed out by Allsen, who cites as an example the numerous *ortāq* established by Rashīd al-Dīn, an *ortāq* partnership was created and maintained through the exchange of gifts, which often concealed substantial business transactions. Merchants were expected to present gifts when received by their patrons. They then received generous compensation that was presented in the form of a gift (*sauya* or *sauyat* in Mongolian) but was actually a capital investment in their enterprises.<sup>975</sup> Allsen has also emphasises how Mongolian princes often paid exorbitant prices for certain goods or compensated merchants more than the value of accidentally lost items as a display of their generosity. This indicates that the *ortāq* system was, initially at least, not necessarily economically advantageous for the princes, but rather served to attract merchants willing to cooperate with the new conquerors. Juvaynī reports one such occurrence at Ögödei's court: "Several merchants had come that day. They took the wares of each of them, and the Khan gave them all a greater sum than the actual price."<sup>976</sup> If we come back to the Polos, it is impossible not to notice how the previous passage finds an almost exact correspondence in what is reported by Marco in relation to his relatives' encounter with Berke:

They gifted him with all the jewels they were carrying. The Khan gave them goods that were worth twice as much as the things he received; (the Khan) then sent them to sell those goods in parts, which were sold at very good prices.<sup>977</sup>

Marco Polos' account, with its emphasis on profitable gift exchange and reinvestment, further reinforces the idea that Latin merchants were aware of conventions like the *ortāq*. If that were not sufficient the term *ortāq* is also present in the *Codex Cumanicus*, a religious guide compiled for the purpose of evangelisation around the end of the thirteenth century by missionaries with the help of

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<sup>974</sup> Allsen, "Mongolian princes." p.83-84, 121-124.

<sup>975</sup> Allsen, "Mongolian princes." p.120-121.

<sup>976</sup> *JTJ/Boyle*, p.605; *JTJ/Qazwīnī*, II, p.244.

<sup>977</sup> *Marco Polo/Olivieri*, p.2; *Marco Polo/Yule-Cordier*, p.10. The two translations only differ in the last part, with the Yule-Cordier edition not reporting the last line of the transcribed text.

merchants.<sup>978</sup> The Latin term *socius*, which in this context denotes a partner in commercial contracts, is equated with *ortāq* in the *Codex*.<sup>979</sup>

Our evidence therefore seems to suggest that Italian merchants sought to establish partnerships or engage in the Mongol system of wealth and prestige distribution, in ways that resembled the role of, or perhaps simply were, *ortāq*. To this end, Italian merchants consciously adopted Mongol customs and gift-giving practices to navigate the complexities of Mongol society. These efforts might have included establishing relations with the Persianate administrative class, to gain benefits from their extensive networks of contacts, or perhaps even economic facilitations. Unfortunately, we do not possess evidence to substantiate this claim. However, as we have seen concerning the case of the Juvaynīs, the Persianate elites actively sponsored merchants and entertained *ortāq* relations with them. One obstacle to the establishment of similar relations with Italian merchants might have been the different religious confession, although this did not constitute a major impediment elsewhere in the Middle East. Regardless of these considerations, the evidence suggests that Italians were, for some decades, very successful in building a remarkable degree of cooperation with the Ilkhanid aristocracy and, on occasion, with the ilkhans themselves. It is this evidence to which we now turn.

### ◆ More than just Merchants

During the two decades immediately following Viglioni's testament, there appears to be a relative dearth of surviving sources documenting Italian activities in Persia. This can be attributed, at least in part, to political upheavals in the Byzantine Empire and the conflicts between Genoa and Venice, which likely disrupted trade routes in the Black Sea and Mediterranean, discouraging merchants from venturing further inland. From the beginning of the 1280s, however, more

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<sup>978</sup> Ligeti, L. "Prolegomena to the Codex Cumanicus." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 35, 1 (1981): 1-54, p.6-7.

<sup>979</sup> The earliest copy of the codex is dated c. 1303. *Codex Cumanicus*, ed. Kuun, G. (Budapest, 1880), p.114.

commercial documents survive; the earliest example reported by Balard is the settlement of a debt to Luchetto di Recco of 180 pounds of silver by deed of the notary Giovanni Amico di Soziglia. The contract was drawn up in Sivas in 1280, in the house of a fellow Genoese, Lamba Doria. In a previous contract, Luchetto had chosen to be reimbursed in Tabriz; the payment did not happen, so the merchant was again claiming the sum in the presence of Giacomo Embriaco, Percivalle Castagno, and Niccolò Zaccaria.<sup>980</sup> Balard also reports a sale of rubies from the region of Badakhshān recorded in Genoa in 1283. The gemstones belonged to a certain Ospinello, a merchant stationed in the city of Tabriz.<sup>981</sup>

The volume of Genoese trade seems to increase as we approach the end of the century. We have already reported Marco Polo's description of Tabriz as full of Genoese. In the city, several sales contracts have been registered for the years 1291 and 1292, like the aforementioned hiring of a falconer on the Trebizond-Tabriz route and the sale of French textiles.<sup>982</sup> Bautier edited a contract referring to the formation of a *societas* by the Maloncello brothers in the year 1293, with the objective to venture further inland and perhaps reach the island of Kish and the Indian Ocean.<sup>983</sup>

The evidence suggests that Arghun Khan was particularly keen on developing a relationship with the Genoese, which eventually led to the establishment of a permanent colony.<sup>984</sup> In 1304, Genoa already had a well-established presence in the city, with a consul, a notary and perhaps even a *fonduk* or *fondaco*.<sup>985</sup> According to William Adam, the Genoese undertook several commercial enterprises with the approval of Arghun. Among these were a project to arm galleys to safeguard the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea coasts, and the preparation of an expedition in Baghdad along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers with the intention of disrupting Mamluk trade with India.<sup>986</sup>

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<sup>980</sup> Balard, M. "La Romanie." p.139.

<sup>981</sup> Balard, "La Romanie." p.140.

<sup>982</sup> Paviot, "Les marchands italiens." p.74; Brătianu, *Actes des notaires génois*, p.257,286-287; Brătianu, *Recherches sur le commerce génois*, p.315; Balard, *Gênes et l'outre-mer*, p.129, 192.

<sup>983</sup> Balard, "La Romanie." p.139.

<sup>984</sup> Petech, "Les marchands italiens." p.561.

<sup>985</sup> Balard, "La Romanie." p.141. A *fondaco* was a sort of trading post, or trading factory, where merchants were allowed to stay and deposit trading goods.

<sup>986</sup> Adam/*RHC Arm*, Vol.2, p.551; Adam/*Constable*, p.105.

It is not until later that a substantial Venetian presence can be detected, with the first official documents concerning the relations between the Republic of Venice and the Ilkhanate appearing in first decade of the fourteenth century.<sup>987</sup> It also seems that prior to the 1290s, Italian activity in the Ilkhanate was largely a consequence of individual initiatives of merchants and adventurers. Like Viglioni, these individuals knew the region very well and were previously active either in Anatolia or in the crusader ports along the Levantine coast. It is quite evident that the objective of these expeditions was not only to trade with the Ilkhanate, but to associate with the Mongols. As we have seen, during the reigns of Hülegü, Abaqa, Arghun, and Gaykhātū, and only with a brief interruption during the reign of Aḥmad Tegüder from 1282 to 1284, Christians had been favoured by the ilkhans. Therefore, on the Latin side, travel to Persia might have also been encouraged by rumours of an Ilkhanid conversion to Christianity, for during the 1270s and the 1280s, these expeditions brought a considerable number of Latins to the borders of the Ilkhanate.

Once in Persia, merchants and adventurers alike entered the service of the ilkhans as envoys or mercenaries. The presence of mercenaries identified as “Franks,” but probably Genoese, is recorded on several occasions. In addition to the galley patrolling the shores of the Black Sea on behalf of Arghun, we know of crossbowmen following the Mongol army in its Syrian campaigns and as far as modern-day Afghanistan.<sup>988</sup> William Adam’s account of Genoese cooperation in the Indian Ocean is corroborated by Bar Hebraeus’ *Chronicon Syriacum* when it hints at the commercial/military Genoese expedition of 500 men along the Euphrates, organised by Arghun to curtail Mamluk trade.<sup>989</sup> Adam uses the expression “favente eodem imperatore, imo poc[t]ius

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<sup>987</sup> Although, according to Paviot, the republic sent the merchants Pietro Viadro and Simeone Avianturo as early as 1286, we do not know the purpose of their expedition. Paviot, “Les marchands italiens.” p.74.

<sup>988</sup> Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.315.

<sup>989</sup> *Bar Hebraeus/Budge*, p.486. “certain franks, about two hundred men, came down the Tigris by water to Mawsil by the command of the King of Kings, as if they were going to Babil (Baghdad) to construct ships there and to go down to Bosra (al-Basrah), and from there by the sea of pantos to attack the Egyptians. And others of the franks, about seven hundred men, went by land; and they remained in Baghdad the whole winter, until their plan was fulfilled.” The Genoese expedition eventually failed because of internal rivalries within the Genoese community (Guelphs-Ghibellines feuds).

faciente,” meaning that the emperor not only favoured the enterprise but took an active part in it by providing trade goods or arming the galleys for the expedition.<sup>990</sup>

Latins were not the only Christians tasked with important missions. Throughout this dissertation, we have observed how the Mongol *ordu* was a place where the lines between the roles of merchant, diplomat and administrator were quite blurred. Italian merchants, however, often from affluent and prestigious families, possessed exceptional skills in reading, writing, and multilingual communication. Their extensive experience in long-distance travel and negotiation made them perfect messengers and intermediaries. During the reigns of Arghun and Ghazan, Italian merchants were the preferred agents to convey information and messages to the Latin west. While during the reigns of the first three ilkhans (1256-1284), Mongol envoys to the west were mainly monks, friars, or simply people who were employed in Ilkhanid bureaucracy. The shift towards merchants began around the second half of the 1280s, when diplomatic missions to Europe were increasingly entrusted to Italians.

Between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, there are numerous examples of Italian merchants not only serving as envoys for the ilkhans, but also presenting themselves as being in their permanent service. The first, and probably the most important one, is that of Pericciolo or Isol De Anastasio Bofeti, a Pisan. Often mentioned as Iolus or Tchol, Isol is perhaps the most interesting figure at the service of the Khans. His period at the Mongol court was the longest among the Italians known to have served there, as his name is attested to for at least two decades.

Both Paul Pelliot and Jean Richard refer to two letters of thanks from Pope Nicolas IV (r. 1281-1292) addressed to Isol.<sup>991</sup> One of the letters, as Mosheim points out, refers to a report received by the pope from Latin missionaries, who praise Isol for the favour and help he granted them at the

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<sup>990</sup> *Adam/RHC Arm, Vol.2, p.551; Adam/Constable, p.105.*

<sup>991</sup> See Pelliot, P. “Isol le Pisan.” *Journal Asiatique*, 2 (1915): 495-497; Richard, J. “Isol le Pisan: un aventurier franc gouverneur d'une province mongole?” *Central Asiatic Journal* 14, 1/3 (1970): 186-194.

Ilkhanid court.<sup>992</sup> The report, full of praise for the Pisan, would suggest that the Isol was active at the Ilkhanid court perhaps even before Arghun acceded to the Ilkhanid throne in the early 1280s. Isol is also mentioned in a variety of other sources. The Armenian historian Orbelean, referring to events of 1288, designates him as a “Frankish prince” under the name of sire Tchol, indicating him as a possible godfather for Öljeitü’s baptism.<sup>993</sup>

It is debatable whether Isol was a merchant or simply an adventurer. None of our documents suggests commercial activities. Richard considers that he had extensive knowledge of commercial routes and shipping, as it was thanks to him that several merchants engaging in illegal trade with Egypt were excommunicated by Boniface VIII (r. 1294-1303) in 1300.<sup>994</sup> In 1301, Isol appears twice in the registers of the Genoese notary Lamberto di Sambuceto. In two different contracts, he is named *Nobilis Vir Ciolus Bofeti* and *Zolus de Anastasio*.<sup>995</sup> His position at the Persian court is unclear, but he can plausibly be identified with the only Latin mentioned by a Persian literary source. Rashīd al-Dīn refers to him as *Ġōl Bahādur*, specifying that he was the “sovereign of Pisa:”

And next to the Maghrebi Sea, near the city of Genoa, there is a very famous city called Pisa. It has a great army both on land and on the sea. Gol Bahadur is king there, and he was in friendship and agreement with the Činggisid kings of the Mongols and the Turks.<sup>996</sup>

Because of this passage Pelliot and Richard have identified *Ġōl Bahādur* with Isol, and also believe him to be one of the Persian historian’s main sources on European history. A now-lost Florentine chronicle copied by Domenico Manni (1690-1788) mentions, in 1295 (with a margin of error of at least four years), that, around the same time, an embassy from the ilkhan in Europe was led by the Florentine “Guiscard [...] the ambassador of the Great Khan, with one hundred men, all brought

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<sup>992</sup> *Annales Ecclesiastici*, Vol.14, ed. Raynaldus, O. (Rome, 1693), p.420; *Mosheim*, p.77 text; p.105, app. XXX; p.97, app XXXIV.

<sup>993</sup> Richard, “Isol le Pisan.” p.187. *Orbelean/Bedrosian*, p.244. On the baptism see above p.202.

<sup>994</sup> It was also the Pisan who suggested their excommunication be lifted if they participated in the war against the Mamlūks. Richard, “Isol le Pisan.” p.190.

<sup>995</sup> Kohler, C. “Documents inédits concernant l’orient latin et les croisades (XIIe-XIVe siècle).” *Revue de l’orient latin*, 7 (1899): 1-37, p.34-37.

<sup>996</sup> *RJT/Rushan*, p.52. The original Persian reads:

“و در جنب دريای مغرب نزديک شهر جنوه شهري است معتبر مشهور بيزا نام، و در بز و بحر آن لشکر فراوان و چول بهادر نام که او را با پادشاهان مغول و اروق چنگيز خان دوستي و اتحاد بود، پادشاه آنجا است.”

from the land of the Tartars.”<sup>997</sup> This Guiscard was probably a subordinate of Isol, as a document attests his presence as an emissary to Charles of Anjou on the Pisan behalf, asking for the release of a prisoner “who had fought alongside Ghazan against the Saracens.”<sup>998</sup> The chronicle of Giovanni Villani (c. 1280-1348), though notoriously unreliable, mentions that Guiscard was born and raised in the Ilkhanate, with his parents presumably in Persia as early as the 1270s.<sup>999</sup>

In 1301, Guiscard was received by the pope, where he delivered a letter from Isol. He described the Pisan as Ghazan’s *vicarius* of the newly conquered Syria after the victory at Homs in 1299.<sup>1000</sup> Richard’s hypothesises that Ghazan asked Isol to negotiate the return to the Holy Land to the Latins in case of victory, as in the previous missives an agreement on the matter had been reached since the reign of Arghun.<sup>1001</sup> We do not possess any source that testifies to the presence of Isol in Persia after 1301, but the material I have analysed opens some interesting considerations: His role as Ilkhanid “vicar” was probably centred on Syria. Furthermore, Isol seems to be a stable presence at the Ilkhanid court, acting more as a sort of coordinator than a normal envoy.

In that case, one can easily see how such a powerful individual could have been instrumental in the Ilkhanid open-door policy towards the Latins for almost two decades. Isol’s activity, after all, coincides with both the emergence and the peak of Italian merchants serving as Ilkhanid envoys, many of whom appear to have been active during his tenure at the Persian court, especially in the years ranging from 1285 to 1301. This is the case for Tommaso de Anfusiis, a Genoese merchant or banker. There is no indication that he held a title at the Mongol court, but Arghun chose him to escort Rabban Şawma during his embassy to Europe in 1287. The merchant followed Rabban Şawma to Genoa during the summer of 1287 and the winter of 1287-1288, went to the courts of Philip IV the Fair in Paris and Edward I in Gascony, then returned to the East, bringing with him letters from Pope

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<sup>997</sup> “Dominus Guisciardus de Bastaribus de Florentia, Ambaxiator Magni Tartari cum centum sociis omnibus tartarice indutis” Manni, D. M. *Osservazioni istoriche circa i sigilli antichi dei secoli bassi*, XXX, (Firenze 1786), p.94-95.

<sup>998</sup> Richard, “Isol le Pisan.” p.187.

<sup>999</sup> Villani, *Nova Chronica*, ed. Porta, G. (Parma, 1991), XXV, p.561.

<sup>1000</sup> Richard, “Isol le Pisan.” p.188,189.

<sup>1001</sup> See above, p.201-202.

Nicholas IV.<sup>1002</sup> In early 1289, Pope Nicholas IV dispatched Giovanni da Montecorvino to the East, carrying letters addressed to Arghun. He was accompanied by the Venetian merchant Pietro di Lucalongo, who had previously been engaged in trade in the Near East. Lucalongo later joined Montecorvino and the Dominican friar Nicholas of Pistoia in their mission to establish Christian communities in China, a journey that had begun in Rieti in July 1289. The group likely passed through Tabriz, travelling via the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, and eventually reached the Mongol capital of Khanbaliq in 1291.<sup>1003</sup> In 1289, Arghun also sent an embassy to Rome. It was led by another Genoese, Buscarello De' Ghisolfi, and its aim was to secure military help against the Mamluks from the pope, the king of France and the king of England. In the letter, the merchant is referred to as Muskeril and given the title of *qurči* (quiver bearer), suggesting membership of the Khan's royal guard.<sup>1004</sup> Buscarello obtained from the pope a letter of recommendation for the king of England, arriving in London the same year with an escort. After less than a month, he was in France at the court of Philip the Fair, delivering the Khan's letter and a summary written in French by himself.<sup>1005</sup> In 1291, Edward responded by sending the English nobleman Godfrey of Langley, escorted again by Buscarello. The group departed from Genoa and arrived in Persia at the beginning of 1292.<sup>1006</sup> By then, Arghun was dead, and his successor, Gaykhātū, was not as interested in negotiations with the Latins. After the embassy of 1292, Buscarello seems to disappear from the sources for almost a decade. At the apex of Mongol-European cooperation, his place was perhaps taken by Isol's envoy, Guiscard. In 1302, Buscarello reappears as a member of one Ghazan's embassies to European monarchs. The expedition arrived in Rome the same year, then departed from

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<sup>1002</sup> See Rabban Ṣawma's embassy above p.200-201. The papal letters can be found in *Mosheim*, app. XXVI, p.86.

<sup>1003</sup> After first trading in the Near East, the Venetian merchant Pietro di Lucalongo travelled to southern China. Giovanni da Monte Corvino was founder of the Church's missions in China. *Sinica Franciscana*, p.352. See above p.200.

<sup>1004</sup> Spuler, B. *Die Mongolen in Iran: Politik, Verwaltung und Kultur der Ilchanzeit 1220-1350* (Leiden, 1985), p.229-230.

<sup>1005</sup> For the text of Buscarello's letter see Abel-Rémusat, "Memoires." p.432.

<sup>1006</sup> *I Conti*, p.6-7.

Italy to meet Edward in England.<sup>1007</sup> On 20 June 1303, Buscarello left Genoa again, presumably to come back to the Ilkhanate. His name does not appear among the members of the embassy sent by Öljeitü to Boniface VIII in 1305.<sup>1008</sup> He may have died during the first decade of the fourteenth century. Paviot cites a notarial act mentioning Argone De' Ghisolfi, Buscarello's son, in 1317: the choice of the name of Arghun Khan for his son is probably the best expression of the merchant's devotion and gratitude towards the Khan or, at least, of the significance of their relationship to him.<sup>1009</sup> Tommaso Ugi, a merchant from Siena, seems to have taken Buscarello's place in the last Ilkhanid-Papal exchange of missives, probably from 1303 to 1307. Öljeitü names him in his letters as *ildüchi* (sword bearer).<sup>1010</sup> In 1305, while on a diplomatic mission to the pope, Ugi also acted as a witness in an economic dispute between a Persian and a Venetian merchant and had an important role in mediating the first treaty between Venice and the Ilkhanate.<sup>1011</sup>

This brief reconstruction of Italian cooperation with the ilkhans allows us to determine that most of the attested cooperation occurred during the reigns of Arghun and Ghazan. It was concentrated in a period ranging roughly from 1285 to 1305, with a small break during the four years (1291-1295) of Gaykhātū's reign. Drawing together the diplomatic sources and the commercial data, it becomes quite evident how the growth of a Genoese presence (and perhaps even an Italian presence in general) coincides with this period. In fact, while we have very little commercial data for the years 1280-1290, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, we can be certain of the presence of well-structured communities, as attested in the first commercial treaties.<sup>1012</sup> If my hypothesis is correct

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<sup>1007</sup> Paviot, "England and the Mongols." p.314. Paviot has published a copy of the summary of expenses sustained by Buscarello submitted to the treasury in London. Paviot "Buscarello." app. I, II.

<sup>1008</sup> Paviot, "Buscarello." p.112; For the letter of 1305 see Mostaert A. Cleaves, F.W. *Les Lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Arghun et Oljeitu a Philippe le Bel* (Cambridge, MA, 1962). For the papal response see *Mosheim*, app. LI. p.128-130.

<sup>1009</sup> Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.178; Paviot "Buscarello." p.112.

<sup>1010</sup> Richard, *The Crusades*, p.456; *Mosheim*, p.98-107.

<sup>1011</sup> Tommaso Ugi's name appears in *Diplomatarium*, p.222.

<sup>1012</sup> Paviot "Les marchands" p.81. Both the treaty concluded with Venice in 1320, and the regulations promulgated by Genoa mention the figure of a Consul in the city, a sign that Italian presence had grown considerably in the previous decades.

and the two phenomena are strictly related, on the Ilkhanid side, we can interpret the growth of an Italian presence in Tabriz as a signal of diplomatic overture to Europe, a sign of a favourable predisposition towards the Latins. At the same time, this increase probably also came as a consequence of the influential positions of some Italians (i.e., Isol) at the Ilkhanid court, who could act as intermediaries to broker favourable commercial treaties, as in the case of Tommaso Ugi. This suggests that engagement with the Ilkhanate cannot be understood merely in terms of isolated transactions. The increase of Italian commercial presence in Tabriz was not only a response to opportunity, but also the product of relational brokerage, channelled through a few individuals embedded within the *ordu*.

This logic is further illustrated by the ability of Italian merchants to move between diplomatic activity and commercial enterprise. Buscarello de' Ghisolfi, while accompanying the English ambassador Godfrey of Langley, invested 600 silver pounds in Genoa. Michele Dolfin, the Venetian envoy who signed the 1320 treaty, collected credit in Trebizond during his journey.<sup>1013</sup> Such instances indicate that Ilkhanid envoys were able to operate simultaneously across political and economic registers and that, while acting as diplomatic agents, they still remained merchants too.

There is no evidence, however, that these merchants traded on behalf of their Ilkhanid patrons in Europe, in contrast with figures such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭībī. Ṭībī was sent to China under Ghazan not only to represent Ilkhanid diplomatic interests but also to manage revenue streams, secure shipping, and oversee investment. While in the region, Fakhr al-Dīn also pursued his own business deals.<sup>1014</sup> His mission exemplifies the close integration of commercial and bureaucratic roles within Ilkhanid administrative practice. The absence of comparable documentation for Italians does not exclude the possibility that they were selected precisely for this kind of adaptability rather than representational status. Italian merchants allowed the Ilkhanate to project its diplomatic interests into

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<sup>1013</sup> Pavot, "Les marchands." p.75.

<sup>1014</sup> Enkhbold, "The role of the ortoq." p.533. Concerning the voyage of Fakhr al-Dīn, see Qiu, "Background and Aftermath." p.147-175; More details on Fakhr al-Dīn's career under Ghazan above p.140-141.

the Mediterranean world, undermine Mamluk control over key trade routes, and sustain diplomatic relations with Latin powers. Their presence should thus be read as an extension of the same logic that shaped Ilkhanid relations with other elite groups.

The merchants' motivations lay not in loyalty to Christendom or the Italian republics but in the pursuit of opportunity. This attitude mirrored the behaviour of Italian merchant communities elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean and corresponded with the competitive dynamics of the Ilkhanid court, where individuals vied for proximity to power, access to resources, and advancement. The prospect of securing favourable treatment, cultivating new markets, or entering the good graces of the ilkhan, exemplified by adventurers like the Polos, proved more compelling than achieving ideological or religious alignment, so dear to Christian clerics.

Figures such as Isol de Bofeti, Buscarello de' Ghisolfi, and Tommaso Ugi acted as intermediaries entrusted with sensitive diplomatic tasks, and operated through personalised arrangements. These partnerships, though informal, they reflected the same logic as more formalised structures such as the *ortāq*, and fit within the broader Ilkhanid approach to governance, in which brokerage was cultivated where it proved functionally effective, regardless of origin.

### ◆ An inevitable decline?

After 1303, the failed Ilkhanid campaigns in Syria and the waning interest in territorial expansion in the Levant coincided with significant changes in the relations between the Ilkhanate and Italian merchants. European sources from this period provide insights into these evolving dynamics. Venice and Genoa, for instance, began imposing regulations on their merchants' presence in Tabriz. The *Officium Gazarie*, a Genoese institution responsible for Black Sea trade, extended its jurisdiction to Tabriz, delegating administrative affairs to the consul and a council of wise merchants.<sup>1015</sup> Venice also established an institutional presence through treaties signed in 1306 and

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<sup>1015</sup> *Historiae Patriae Monumenta*, 222-223. "Item quod consul Taurisii debeat stare in regimine consulatus per menses sex [...]. Item quod perdictum dominum consulem Taurisii et consilium suorum vigintiquatuor."

1320, and the appointment of a consul by 1324.<sup>1016</sup> These regulations, particularly those related to conducting business with locals, suggest that the Italian republics sought to exert stricter control over their activities in the region due to the changing internal situation within the Ilkhanate.

A progressive decline in the development of relations can be observed starting after Ghazan's death. It is, however, as we have seen, during the reign of his successor Öljeitü, that Christian sources provide accounts of mounting intolerance and religious persecutions.<sup>1017</sup> Moreover, after the Ilkhanid campaign against the Mamlūks proved unsuccessful in 1313, Öljeitü abandoned military action in the Levant, thereby reducing the significance of the "Frankish alliance." Ultimately, the alliance dissolved when Abū Sa'īd (r. 1316-1335), Öljeitü's successor, signed a treaty with the Mamluks in 1322.<sup>1018</sup> Under his rule, hostility towards Christians escalated, resulting in the near eradication of the Roman Church within the Ilkhanate by 1330.<sup>1019</sup> It was during Abū Sa'īd's reign that animosity towards Christian merchants, including Italians, emerged within the Ilkhanate. This change of attitude can be attributed to several factors, including the absence of immediate economic benefits for Persia in engaging in trade with Europe.

Despite the growing intolerance, Italian communities remained active in Persia during the first two decades of the fourteenth century. After 1305 Tabriz housed several official representatives from both the Genoese and Venetian communities. Recognising the need to formalise these communities' presence and their relations with the Ilkhanate, Venice and Genoa negotiated a series of treaties. Interpreting the clauses of these treaties is challenging due to the lack of contextual information. One common element is that they highlight concerns about harassment of merchants by Mongol authorities, as exemplified by a dispute in 1306 that led to the signing of a treaty between Venice and

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<sup>1016</sup>*Diplomatarium*, p.173, 192, 209, 222; Pavot, "Les marchands." p.74.

<sup>1017</sup> See above, p.204-206.

<sup>1018</sup> For the treaty signed by Abū Sa'īd see Amitai-Preiss, R. "The Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War," in Amitai-Preiss, R. Biran, M. eds. *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden, 2004): 359-390.

<sup>1019</sup> Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta*, ed. Yule, H. (London, 1863), p.8-9. The role of Italian merchants in the establishment of missionary activities in Persia, aside from the sources that have been cited in this dissertation, is not clear. There are also few mentions of missionary activity in general, and almost always connected with Rome's diplomatic efforts in the Īl-Khānate.

the Ilkhanate.<sup>1020</sup> The treaty sought to safeguard Venetian merchants' safety and economic independence, addressing issues such as compulsory sales of goods and the return of wares upon a merchant's death.<sup>1021</sup> These provisions indicate the prevalence of predatory practices and the Mongol elites' attempts to impose *ortāq*-like practices on Venetian merchants against their will.<sup>1022</sup>

Regarding Genoa, the interpretation of the regulations issued by the *Officium Gazarie* is more complex. Starting from the 1310s, the Genoese council implemented restrictions on conducting business in Tabriz. Merchants were required to obtain a license from the consul of Tabriz and were only allowed to trade for a maximum consecutive period of four months. They could only use cash and goods brought from Italy, and they had to keep track of their transactions. The patrimony of the locals accompanying merchants was limited to a maximum of two thousand Tabrizi bezants to prevent fraud. The consul and three reputable men (*boni homines*), chosen from the Genoese community, had to oversee negotiations involving pack animals. Additionally, all Genoese merchants were prohibited from forming partnerships or pooling capital with locals to purchase trade goods.<sup>1023</sup>

The imposition of these restrictions raises the question of whether they were voluntarily imposed by the Genoese themselves or if they were a direct outcome of an Ilkhanid decree. It is quite striking, after all, that the first significant institutional interventions by the Italian republics in the region coincided with the beginning of the decline of Italian trade.

Did the Italian republics actively seek to exploit the presence of influential Latin individuals to establish commercial control over the region? By leveraging the status and connections of Italian merchants, the Republics might have aimed to expand their influence within the Ilkhanate, securing advantageous trade agreements and protecting the rights of their merchants (or rather enforcing their own regulations). The Republics perceived the merchants as valuable assets in maintaining their

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<sup>1020</sup> *Diplomatarium*, p.47.

<sup>1021</sup> *Diplomatarium*, p.174. "Se alguno nostro Venetiano morisse in lo nostro Imperio, che [...] niuna altra persona possa ne no debia entrometer."

<sup>1022</sup> *Diplomatarium*, p.173. "Che in nessuna citade o luogo del nostro imperio li nostri Veneciani no possa esser costretti a tomagar ne vender le soe cose senza soa volontà."

<sup>1023</sup> For all the above see *Historiae Patriae Monumenta*, p.222. "Negocia vel aliquam habere societatem vel facere aliquam empicionem comunem cum aliquibus extraneis habitantibus in imperio Persie."

economic and political dominance and preserving their position in the Mediterranean trade networks. In this sense, Italian merchants acted as brokers, facilitating a gradual extension of the Republics' political control, a behaviour that would eventually collide with Ilkhanid interests and strategies.

Unfortunately, Genoese sources do not provide clear insights into this matter. However, a Venetian document from 1324 sheds light on the changing Ilkhanid attitude towards Italians. In a letter to the Doge, the Venetian consul Marco da Molin complains about the lack of discipline among the Venetian community in Tabriz and warns that conducting business there had become increasingly dangerous.<sup>1024</sup> The letter recounts an incident involving a Venetian merchant named Domenico Quirini, who disregarded the consul's prohibitions and traded with a "Saracen" merchant. Quirini was heavily fined after his compatriots reported him to the Venetian authorities. In retaliation, Quirini reported to the "Saracen" merchant, likely an *ortāq* of Abū Sa'īd's mother. Once admitted to the Khatun's presence, the Venetian allegedly complained as follows:

My Lady, I came here to make your land rich. I wanted to buy expensive goods, and I would have paid very well for them. I was, however, beaten and overpowered by the Venetians. I, therefore, ask you to give me some of your guards so that I can beat them, capture them, and bring them here before you.<sup>1025</sup>

The Khatun responded harshly by arresting the individuals who reported the irregularity and setting their ransom at an exorbitant price. This violation of the 1320 treaty may have served as a punishment for Venetian interference in Ilkhanid trade policies. While it is unclear if Venetian institutional interference or a broader change in attitude towards Europe led to this shift, contemporary Armenian and Nestorian chronicles suggest that increasing hostility towards Christians played a role. The Venetian letter seems to foreshadow the subsequent shift in Mongol attitudes towards Italian merchants, both from Genoa and Venice, moving towards indifference or even intolerance despite

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<sup>1024</sup> *Diplomatarium*, p.223. "I notify to your lordship that Tabriz is a very dangerous place for us Venetians."

<sup>1025</sup> *Diplomatarium*, p.193. The term Khatun is here utilised to designate an elderly royal family member in the Īl-Khānate, but we cannot possibly be sure of the identity of the Mongol lady.

the merchants' commercial success in the region. Cases like this help explain the stricter trade regulations issued by Venice and Genoa, likely aimed at avoiding conflicts with the local population.

After the death of Abū Saʿīd in 1335, the Ilkhanate began to disintegrate into multiple princedoms governed by prominent noble families. The fall of the Ilkhanate marked the abandonment of any political alliances and cooperation with Europe. Local dynasties like the Chobānids and the Jalāyirids had little interest in the Levant and did not share the broad political goals of the early Ilkhanid rulers. They resorted to violence to extract wealth from Latin merchants whenever possible, enticing them to Persia with false promises. In the decades leading up to 1348, several episodes of violence against merchants occurred in Tabriz, resulting in significant losses for Italian merchants. As a result, both Genoa and Venice ceased all trade with Persia.<sup>1026</sup> In a brief report from 1344, the Venetian representative in Constantinople sought instructions from the Doge after being approached by a Chobānid delegation. The Doge's response recommended extreme caution:

In the way you think is the most appropriate, talk to them and try to make them disclose whether any reparation can be made (for the losses) of our merchants [...] (Therefore do not) sign anything but rather report (any response) directly to us.<sup>1027</sup>

The fact that Italian trade in Persia did not outlast the Ilkhanate confirms its political significance rather than its structural importance to either the Persian or European economy. After the collapse of the Ilkhanate, Italian merchants no longer maintained a consistent presence in the region, nor did they succeed in establishing new lasting enterprises. Their temporary integration into Ilkhanid commerce and diplomacy was then not the result of economic incentives, but of their embeddedness within a political configuration, one in which their negotiation of favour, proximity to the *ordu*, and diplomatic function mattered above all. The nature of the Italian presence in Persia, therefore, cannot be understood without reference to Ilkhanid long-term strategic concerns.

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<sup>1026</sup> *Annales Ianuenses, Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Vol.4, ed. Muratori L. (Milano, 1725), p.139. Under Chobanid rule, the estimated losses were equivalent to 200,000 Genoese pounds of silver.

<sup>1027</sup> *Diplomatarium*, p.277. "Per illam meliorem viam que vobis videbitur, loqui eis vel loqui facere, si posset fieri aliqua compositio pro nostris mercatoribus [...]. Non tamen firmantes aliquid sed rescribentes nobis quecumque habueritis."

## Conclusion

The death of the last Ilkhan, Abū Saʿīd, in 1335 commenced a period of internal conflict in Persia that led to the dissolution of the Ilkhanate. What followed was the definitive collapse of a diplomatic ecology that had sustained Mongol power in Persia for nearly a century. However, already during the first decades of the fourteenth century, (where this work ends), the Ilkhanate had begun to increasingly define itself as a Muslim and Persianate polity, a transformation that marginalised those groups whose fortunes had been tied to Mongol cosmopolitanism. This reorientation, as has been demonstrated, reflected both the rulers' aspirations and the agendas of their subjects. Yet, the adoption of Islam and its forms of legitimacy and governance narrowed the religious and cultural bases of Mongol rule and reconfigured the terms on which subject communities could participate in it. To trace this process has been to reveal a central point of this dissertation: Mongol rule was negotiated in character, and its "diplomacy" was not sustained by the isolated exploits of exceptional individuals travelling across Eurasia, but by the persistent engagement of its subjects.

Thus, the argument developed across these chapters has been simple but far-reaching. The Ilkhanid polity was held together by *agents*. These were men (and occasionally women) who represented constituencies at court, mediated between rulers and subjects, and managed the territorial, religious, diplomatic, and commercial channels from which the Ilkhanate drew its sustenance. By analysing their activities, this dissertation has defined diplomacy as a form of governance that operated simultaneously inward and outward, bringing together communities within and outside the empire in the Ilkhanid *ordu*, an arena where negotiation was the medium through which the empire was sustained. It has shown that diplomacy in the Mongol world was not ancillary to politics, but constituted politics itself.

The Ilkhanate provides the best case for analysing these dynamics, for reasons both structural and evidentiary. Structurally, the Ilkhanate's diverse populations, its long frontiers, and its position at the intersection of long-distance trade routes made it a setting in which numerous cultures and

minorities interacted and competed for influence. Consequently, on the evidentiary level, the survival of Persian, Armenian, Syriac, and Latin sources allows us to reconstruct the operations of agents with a detail unavailable elsewhere.

Thus, this dissertation uses the term *agent* for figures such as merchants, clerics, or princes whose lives were too often stitched together into patchwork biographies highlighting their uniqueness. This study has rejected that frame, explaining how agents derived their authority from their ability to stand for or with wider constituencies and to form temporary coalitions to back them at the *ordu*. Their significance lay not in their eccentricity but in their *brokerage*: their capacity to link otherwise unconnected communities and to make negotiation possible. Network analysis has been utilised primarily because it provides the language to describe this positionality. Agents occupied nodes of *betweenness*, connecting constituencies that lacked direct access to the *ordu*, while also linking the latter to the territories it ruled or to potential allies. Their authority rested on relational advantage, on the recognition that only through them could information, loyalty, or resources flow. This made them indispensable, but also made their position precarious, for with visibility often came the envy and suspicion of their peers and superiors.

The Mongols treated such intermediaries with their characteristic pragmatism, much as they treated siege engineers, astrologers, or artisans. Their utility was not determined by belief system but by the specific skills and connections they brought. Persian administrators, Christian clerics, Armenian princes, Italian merchants: each opened doors into political or diplomatic arenas the Mongols could not access unaided. Like engineers or physicians, they extended Mongol capabilities, complementing their governance. Yet, these agents were not mere auxiliaries. By virtue of their embeddedness, they could gradually reshape the very structures they served. Persian administrators, in progressively aligning the Ilkhans with Islamic traditions of governance, decisively redefined the cultural and political character of the Mongols in Persia. The turbulent *noyat*, through their capacity for pressure and negotiation, repeatedly altered the balance of power at court, forcing and

accelerating reform. Agents thus not only facilitated Mongol governance but also influenced, redirected, and at times even dominated it.

The argument advanced here is not confined to the Ilkhanate. While the Ilkhanid polity stands out for its cosmopolitan composition, other branches of the Činggisid Empire, from the Yuan dynasty in China to the Golden Horde in the steppes, also relied on intermediaries who connected them to their diverse populations. Outside the Mongol world, polities such as the kingdoms of Europe, although with different dynamics, also depended on clerics, aristocrats, and merchants to mediate internal and external relations. Therefore, the framework developed in this study invites historians to move beyond both the “biography of the exceptional” and the abstractions of diplomacy, to see “the diplomacy of governance” as a practice embedded in social networks and enacted by individuals positioned at their intersections.

The method of this study has itself mirrored the practices it analyses. To reconstruct Ilkhanid networks required drawing on Persian, Armenian, Syriac, and Latin sources, each shaped by cultural and religious agendas, each fragmentary. Bringing them together has been an act of historiographical brokerage: weaving narratives across traditions that rarely spoke to one another. The result is not a seamless account but a mosaic that reflects the realities of the Ilkhanid polity itself: diverse and contested. The division of this work into many different sections was necessary to convey to the reader different kinds of information and to give structure to these arguments. However, the present work aims to be more than a mere sum of its parts. Much of its value comes from its interrogation of the sources, and the efforts that were made in weaving them together to breathe life into figures such as Arghun Aqa, Buqa, Nawrūz, the Juvaynīs, Sa’d al-Dawla, Rashīd al-Dīn, Rabban Šawma, Hayton of Corycus, and Isol of Pisa as interconnected Ilkhanid agents, active in the same regions and serving the same ilkhans during the same period. This study has shown that their service was not exceptional, but part of a much larger mechanism. It therefore aims to be a model for studying Eurasian interactions, promoting a holistic perspective on the dynamics of patronage, trust, and negotiation as the very fabric of governance during the Mongol era and beyond. Despite its

limitations, this study shows that it is possible to view these exchanges as a processes, dispelling their perceived chaos and inevitability.

In sum, the Ilkhanate's history reveals that diplomacy was the glue of empire. Agents were the indispensable artisans of imperial politics, extending Mongol reach into arenas they could not otherwise enter. Their brokerage reshaped Mongol domination until it was barely recognisable from its origins. The collapse of the Ilkhanate after 1335 did not erase these practices. Turco-Mongol aristocracies and Persian bureaucracies carried their traditions of collegiality, patronage, and cultural legitimacy into the successor states of the Middle East. Armenian, Nestorian, and mercantile networks continued to seek patrons and to adapt to shifting alignments. The history traced here is thus not only the story of a Mongol dynasty but a chapter in the longer history of Eurasian political culture. In the end, the Ilkhanid experience compels us to rethink what we mean by diplomacy. It was not what happened between sovereigns, but the ongoing process of negotiation through which empire was made. To recognise this is to see agents not as curiosities but as actors: the artisans of a global medieval history.

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