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A FAULTY READING IN THE SAFE CONDUCT OF  
АВАГА\*

The first of the three Mongol documents in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano published by A. Mostaert and F.W. Cleaves in 1952 is a safe conduct issued by the chancellery of the Īl-Khān Abaya (b. 1234, r. 1265–82) to the members of a papal diplomatic mission.<sup>1</sup> The members of this delegation – one of several exchanged between the Papacy and the Mongol rulers in the 13th century<sup>2</sup> – are identified in lines 7–8 of the document, the relevant portion of which reads (in Mostaert's and Cleaves' transcription) as follows:

[7] *Bab-ača iregsed Baračirqun*

[8] *terigüten marqasiyas*<sup>3</sup>

Mostaert and Cleaves translated these words as follows: 'les évêques ayant à leur tête Baračirqun qui sont venus de la part du pape.'<sup>4</sup> In their commentary, the two authors wrote: '*Baračirqun*. Nous n'avons pu identifier ce personnage; d'ailleurs d'autres lectures de ce nom sont possibles:

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\* To Mario Gout, in memoriam.

<sup>1</sup> See A. Mostaert et F.W. Cleaves, 'Trois documents mongols des Archives secrètes vaticanes', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15: 1952, pp. 430–445 (Document A) and Pl. I.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.432–433; J. Richard, *La papauté et les missions d'Orient au Moyen Age (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1977, pp. 65–120; J. Richard, *Croisés, missionnaires et voyageurs*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1983, Sections XIII, XIV, XV; K.-E. Lupprian, *Die Beziehungen der Päpste zu islamischen und mongolischen Herrschern im 13. Jahrhundert anhand ihres Briefwechsels*, Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1981, pp. 46–86 *et passim*. Cf. also D. Sinor, 'Les relations entre les Mongols et l'Europe jusqu'à la mort d'Arghoun et de Béla IV,' *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale* 3: 1956, pp. 39–61.

<sup>3</sup> Mostaert et Cleaves, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

*Baračirqun, Barařirqun, etc.*<sup>5</sup> On p. 432 of the same study they also wrote: 'Le nom du chef de la mission pontificale, laquelle était composée d'un certain nombre d'"évêques," désignés ici par le titre nestorien *mar-ħasiā*, muni d'un pluriel mongol [i.e. *marqasiyas* – I.R. ], est écrit Baračirqun, mot qui est susceptible d'encore d'autres lectures.'

The fact that Mostaert and Cleaves were unable to identify the head of the papal mission, hence the mission itself, accounts for their inability also to pinpoint the exact date of this particular embassy. The date given at the end of the document is 'the sixteen(th) of the first month of winter of the Year of the Hare'; however, since Abaya's reign covered two Years of the Hare (1267 and 1279), the date in the document could refer to either year.<sup>6</sup>

It seems from the above that, whereas Mostaert and Cleaves were aware of P. Pelliot's mention of the document in question in the latter's *Les Mongols et la Papauté* of 1923 (to which they refer on p. 430),<sup>7</sup> they overlooked Pelliot's earlier mention of the same document in which the eminent French scholar described it as a safe conduct given 'à une mission d'évêques (*mar-ħasia*) dirigée par un personnage qui doit s'appeler Frère Girard (Bar Ačirqun).'<sup>8</sup> Although Pelliot was wrong with regard to the date of the document and to the Īl-Khān who issued it,<sup>9</sup> he was remarkably accurate with regard to the identity of the leader of the mission. His reading of the name is virtually identical with that adopted by Mostaert and Cleaves: 'Bar Ačirqun' and 'Baračirqun' respectively. Following Pelliot and, subsequently, Mostaert and Cleaves, all other scholars, both historians and Mongolists, have read the name 'Baračirqun'.<sup>10</sup> This personage was further identified with the Italian Minorite friar Gerardo da Prato, and his

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 439.

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 434, 445; 432.

<sup>7</sup> See P. Pelliot, *Les Mongols et la Papauté*, Paris, 1923 [1931], as reprinted in one volume (with continuous pagination) of the articles which appeared in *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 23: 1922–23, 24: 1924, and 28: 1931–32, p. [3].

<sup>8</sup> *Compte rendu de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1922, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> In *Les Mongols et la Papauté*, p. [3], Pelliot describes the document as 'Un sauf-conduit mongol émanant d'Arghun, daté de 1291'. Cf. Mostaert and Cleaves, *op. cit.*, p. 430.

<sup>10</sup> See J. Richard, *La papauté*, p. 86; Lupprian, *op. cit.*, p. 242; L. Ligeti, *Monuments préclassiques 1. XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles, Monumenta linguae Mongolicae collecta II*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972, p. 243 (XXII, 1, line 7).

four companions as Antonio da Parma, Giovanni di Sant'Agata, Andrea da Firenze and Matteo di Arezzo. The embassy was sent by Pope Nicholas III (1277–80) in April 1278; after visiting Persia it was supposed to proceed to China, to the court of Qubilai Qayan (r. 1260–94), but we know that it never did, returning instead to Italy in the autumn of 1279.<sup>11</sup> It was on the occasion of their return that Gerardo da Prato and his companions were given the safe conduct on, or about, 21 November 1279.<sup>12</sup> So far so good. But how can one extrapolate the name Gerard (Gerardo) of the leader of the mission from the 'Ačirqun' of the safe conduct? *Bar* stands, of course, for his religious designation and form of address (Lat. *frater*, Fr. *frère*, Ital. *fra*), with Mongol *b* rendering *f*, and is therefore not part of the name. We are then left with 'Ačirqun' in which the initial *a* is evidently a prosthetic vowel;<sup>13</sup> thus, 'Čirqun' would per force be the Mongol 'transcription' of 'Gerardo' or, better, 'Girard (~ Girart)' – in the then more current French form – which is patently impossible, even if we read 'Ĵirqun' or 'Ĵiryun' instead of 'Čirqun' or 'Čiryun'. Consequently, we must discard the generally accepted reading 'Baračirqun'. Indeed, if we look closely at this name as it appears at the end of line 7 (see Plate 1), we see immediately that the letter following *Barač* (or *Barař*) is an *-r-* followed by a 'tooth' (= *-a/-e-*) which is, in turn, followed by an *-r-*, the two 'horns' of the *r* being clearly visible. Cf. the identical *-r-* of *Bar*. What follows the third *r* can be read as *un*, but is, in fact, a final *d* without the regular ductus because of lack of space in the line. Cf. the identical *-d* of the word *dabariydaysad* at the end of line 2. The name should, and must, be read *Barařirard* = *Bar Ařirard*, 'Ařirard' rendering 'Girard' or 'Girart'. That Pelliot, without any clue about Fra Gerardo's mission of 1278–9, should have recognized the true

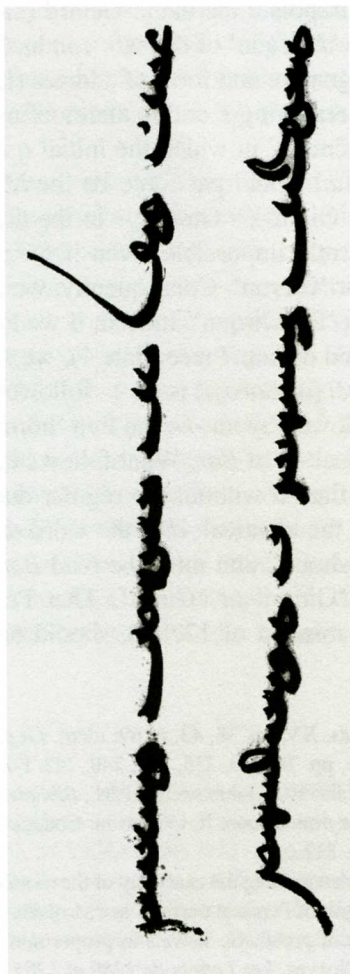
<sup>11</sup> See J. Richard, *Croisés*, XV, pp. 38, 43, n. 69; idem, *La papauté*, pp. 85–86, 103, 139, 143; Lupprian, *op. cit.*, pp. 76, 233, 235, 237, 240, 242. For further details regarding Fra Gerardo's mission see also P.G. Golubovich O.F.M., *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente francescano*, II, Quaracchi: Collegio di S. Bonaventura, 1913, pp. 426–428, s.a. 1278, no. 139.

<sup>12</sup> For the uncertainty in determining the exact day of the month in view of the Uighur calendar in use by the Mongols of Persia at the time, see Mostaert et Cleaves, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

<sup>13</sup> For the Mongols' use of prosthetic vowels in proper name and titles, cf. for example A. Mostaert et F.W. Cleaves, *Les Lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Arqun et Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962, p. 23; F.W. Cleaves, 'A Chancery Practice of the Mongols in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 14: 1951, p. 522.

name behind such a distorted form as 'Ačirqun' is further proof of his very remarkable intuition.

The correct reading of the name was made possible only thanks to an excellent photographic enlargement of the document provided by the Archivio Segreto through the good offices of my late friend Professor Mario Gout of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.



Pl. 1