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Author(s): DENISE AIGLE
Source: *Inner Asia*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2005), pp. 143-162
Published by: Brill
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/23615692
Accessed: 31-07-2017 10:12 UTC

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The Letters of Eljigidei, Hülegü, and Abaqa: Mongol Overtures or Christian Ventriloquism?

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the Great Khans and Ilkhans' letters, and with the question of their authenticity. Generally, these letters were written in Mongolian, but very few of the original documents have come down to us. The author analyses three letters sent by the Mongols to the Latin West. This paper points out the leading role of the Eastern Christians in the translation of the letters, and their hope for an alliance between the Ilkhans and the Latin West. In these letters the Mongols emphasised the protection afforded to the Christians, the legend of Prester John and the possibility of returning Jerusalem to the Franks. But the offer of collaboration went unheeded.

Keywords: Chinggis Khan, Hülegü, Abaqa, Louis IX, Eljigidei, Nestorians, Prester John, papacy.

We possess a number of letters addressed by the Mongol authorities to the Popes and the Kings of France. These documents have come down to us either in their original form in Mongolian, Persian and Latin, or in accounts by Franciscan and Dominican missionaries sent to the empire, as well as historical chronicles in Latin and French.[1] This diplomatic correspondence may be classified into two distinct categories. The replies of the Great Khans to letters sent by Pope Innocent IV and the King of France, Louis IX, belong to the first category. Written between 1246 and 1254, these are nothing less than invitations to total and unconditional submission to Mongol rule. The second category of documents contains the letters sent by the Ilkhans to Popes Gregory X, Honorius IV, Nicholas IV and Boniface VIII, and to the King of France Philippe the Fair. In these letters the Mongol rulers of Persia seek to establish contacts with the Latin West with a view to forming a military alliance against a common enemy, the Mamluk sultanate in Cairo. The first document in this series dates from 1262; and was sent by Hülegü two

Inner Asia 7 (2005): 143–62
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years after the defeat inflicted upon a Mongol army by Mamluk forces at Ain Jalut in Palestine.[2] Öljeitü, who was a Muslim, addressed the last document in this series to the King of France in 1305.

These letters, exchanged between the Mongols and the Latin West, obviously aroused the interest of scholars. The earliest studies on the subject can be traced back to the 18th century. The first orientalists who took an interest in the letters of the Great Khans formed a harsh opinion of these missives. They regarded them as a good example of 'the intolerable arrogance of the Mongols'. Laurent Mosheim, Abel-Rémusat and especially Paul Pelliot, however, made the best appraisals of these letters.

The first scholar who took an interest in these letters is Laurent Mosheim, whose *Historia Tartarorum Ecclesisastica* was published in 1741. The author's purpose was to study the Latin missionaries' endeavours to convert the Mongols and those populations subject to their rule. In order to conduct his research, Mosheim drew upon pontifical documents including correspondence exchanged between the papacy and the Mongol Khans. Apart from the usual remarks about Mongol arrogance, the letters were not discussed in detail but Mosheim collected all the versions in Latin that were then known of and published them in an appendix to his book. Thanks to this well documented section of almost 210 pages, the work, to this day remains a valuable reference.

In his book, *Mémoires sur les Relations politiques des princes chrétiens, et particulièrement des rois de France avec les empereurs mongols*,[3] Abel-Rémusat deals with these letters in greater depth. His study paved the way for the research carried out by Paul Pelliot. An analysis of the preamble to the letter in Mongolian, addressed by Arghun to Philippe the Fair, and the seal in Chinese, bears witness to Abel Rémusat's cultural perspective. His remarks (1824: 115) regarding the letter's seal read as follows: 'It is an especially noteworthy feature that these Chinese hieroglyphs should be inscribed over names from Egypt, Jerusalem and France translated in Tartar letters. Such a connection appeals to the imagination and seems the expression of new relations that the Crusades on the one hand and the conquests of Chinggis Khan, on the other, had generated between peoples at two extremes of the universe'.

This appraisal is accurate and pioneering. Abel-Rémusat (1824: 156) believes that contacts through the Mongols with Far Eastern civilizations brought Europe out of the spiritual and intellectual narrow mindedness into which it had sunk after the end of the Roman Empire. Paul Pelliot made the most significant contribution regarding these letters. In 'Les Mongols et la papauté', a study published in three installments in the *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, he describes and reproduces the texts known during his time, supplementing them with very useful philological observations.[4] However, like Mosheim, Pelliot's attention is mainly focused on the history of the missions

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and Christians of Inner Asia rather than on the cultural dimension and the political impact of these letters. Since the work undertaken by Pelliot, some additional documents have been discovered and edited by Antoine Mostaert and Francis W. Cleaves (1962, 1952), notably other letters in Mongolian, published with a rich critical apparatus. One must also cite the studies by Jean Richard on the diplomatic exchanges between the Ilkhans and the Latin West.[5]

For the most part, these letters were written in Mongolian, but very few of the original documents have come down to us in this language, especially those from the first category. An exception is the letter addressed by Güyük to Pope Innocent IV, for which there exists a version in Persian preserved in the Secret Archives of the Vatican, all the rest of the documents are Latin translations, thus raising questions as to their reliability. However, for the category of letters sent by the Ilkhans of Iran, we possess several original documents in Mongolian. These documents are all the more valuable because in some ways they enable us to evaluate by comparison the reliability of the Latin translations.

Here I would like to analyse three letters that are not replies to correspondence sent by the Latin West, but that were written on the initiative of the Mongols themselves. Two of them were sent with two missions. The first was sent to the King of France, Louis IX in 1248, while he was staying in Cyprus.[6] The second was dispatched to Pope Gregory X in 1274 during the Council in Lyons.[7] The third letter was sent to Pope Urban IV and the kings of the West, by Hülegü, who was seeking an alliance with the Franks.[8] Of special interest regarding these letters and the sources that provided accounts of these facts is the question of Prester John and rumours about the Great Khans' conversion to Christianity. Did the Christians, who played an important role in transmitting these letters, alter the text to suit their interests? Were they responsible for using the figure of the Prester John? Were the Mongols themselves aware of the significance of this legend for the Latin West?

THE MONGOL MISSION IN CYPRUS IN 1248

After landing in Cyprus on the 17th September 1248, Louis IX settled in Nicosia where King Henry Ist of Lusignan was staying. On the 14th December, a Mongol delegation landed in Cerine, on the southern coast; it arrived in Nicosia five days later and the following day, the King received the envoys. They presented a letter to the King of France on behalf of Eljigidei, the Mongol governor appointed by the Great Khan Güyük, then stationed in the province of Tabriz. Taken aback, the King, surrounded by the Pope's legate, Odon de Chateauroux, and some prelates, questioned the Mongol

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delegation. This mission is relatively well documented in chronicles and several letters.

The *Vie de Saint Louis* by Jean de Joinville, though written in 1309, more than half a century after the mission of 1248, is an important source for the history of this delegation since Jean de Joinville was present beside the King at Nicosia.[9] Vincent de Beauvais, Matthieu Paris, Guillaume de Nangis and the *Grandes chroniques de France* also provided accounts of the Mongol mission in Cyprus, an obvious sign that the event caused quite a stir in the Latin West. Eljigidei's letter has come down to us in several Latin versions and in a French translation by Matthieu Paris. The Latin translation was carried out in Nicosia.[10] It was re-copied by Odon de Chateauroux in a letter that he addressed to the Pope a few months later, on 12th March 1249.[11]

Odon de Chateauroux's letter is the most reliable account regarding the manner in which the mission took place in Cyprus. The delegation sent by Eljigidei consisted of two persons: two Christians originally from a village located a two days' journey from 'Moyssac sive Mussula' (i.e. Mosoul). The names of the ambassadors appear somewhat distorted in various sources but by comparing the different versions and with a detailed philological analysis, Paul Pelliot (1931–32: 14–16) was able to reconstitute them. The first, named Sabeldin Monfac (i.e. Sayf al-dîn Muzaffar Dawûd), was an Arabic speaking Nestorian Christian;[12] the second answered to the name Mark.

One may justifiably wonder how members of the Mongol delegation and the King of France were able to communicate. When the ambassadors introduced themselves in Nicosia, according to Vincent de Beauvais (*ibid.*: 22), 'brother André de Lonciumel (i.e. Longjumeau) who had known David[13] having seen him in the army of the Tartars' was present. This information is not provided by Odon de Chateauroux, but is essentially confirmed by the letter dated 23rd June 1249 from Jean Sarrasin to Nicolas Arrode (*ibid.*: 20). It refers to the Dominican André de Longjumeau who had been sent to the East by Pope Urban IV, where he stayed from 1245 to 1247. Upon his return, he had accompanied the King of France to Cyprus. André de Longjumeau had already met David during his first journey in 1246 when he found himself in the presence of a Mongol detachment in Azerbaijan. If André de Longjumeau met David in a military detachment, and perhaps Mark according to Jean Sarrasin, this does not necessarily mean that they were military leaders. During Eljigidei's time, the secretaries and interpreters of the Mongols were, in great part, Nestorians. Odon de Chateauroux states that the letter was 'written in Persian using the Arabic script' (*scriptas lingua Persica et litteris Arabicis*).[14] The letter was translated word for word (*de verbo ad verbum*) by André de Longjumeau. According to Matthieu Paris, he was familiar with both Arabic and Chaldean (*novit etiam linguam Arabicam et Caldeam*).[15] Moreover, Jean Sarrasin writes that when the Mongol' envoys were introduced to the King, André de Lonjumeau served as interpreter

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(*enroumancoit le Francoiz*) (*ibid.*: 22). In the Tabriz region, where he was stationed, Eljigidei was surrounded by Nestorians, Jacobians and Armenian Christians. It is probably thanks to these Christians that he was aware of what was going on in the Latin West and Eljigidei was thus able to commission his delegation to the King of France even before his arrival in Cyprus in order to save time.[16] The tone of this letter, which at first glance, was very different from the one Güyük had addressed to the Pope two years previously, led some scholars to doubt its historical value. Abel-Rémusat and d'Ohsson considered this document to be purely and simply a forgery composed by the Nestorian Christians, but Paul Pelliot (1931–32: 27–28) convincingly demonstrated its authenticity.

Before analysing Eljigidei's letter and pointing to its distinctive character, it is necessary to set out the general characteristics of the correspondence sent by the Great Khans. These letters, even where they have survived only in the form of a Latin translation, obey precise rules of construction. They begin with standard formulae: a reference to God and to the Great Khan, the name of the author of the letter, and the name of the addressee, followed by a declaration of the obligation to submit to the Great Khan. These letters establish the concept of power, as seen by the Mongols: God has given the Mongols power on earth, and they therefore enjoy a divine mandate; God alone reigns in heaven, Chinggis Khan and his successors are the sole masters on earth; all the peoples must submit to them. They will thus be in harmony (*il*) with the Great Khan; those who refuse will be in a state of rebellion (*bulgha*) against the decree of God.[17] It is clear that this theocratic conception of the world order could not readily be understood by the Latin West especially when coming from a pagan prince.

It is necessary here to consider the two opposing Mongolian terms: *il* 'to be in peace, to be in harmony' and *bulgha* 'to be in a state of confusion and rebellion'. We find both of these concepts in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, section 150: a faction of the Kereit, who had willingly submitted to Chinggis Khan is described as a people in a state of harmony (*il irgen*), and another faction of the Kereit who, within the clan, fights against the future Great Khan, is said to be a people in a state of rebellion (*bulgha irgen*).[18] A perfect Latin equivalent of this formula is found in the Latin translation of Güyük's order of general submission, transmitted via his general, Baiju, who was charged with spreading it among the foreign peoples:[19] 'We wish our order to be heard by all and in all the provinces which are submissive to us (*provinciis nobis obedientibus*, the Latin equivalent of the Mongol term *il*) and the provinces which are in a state of rebellion against us (*provinciis nobis rebellantibus*, equivalent to the Mongolian *bulgha*)'. This ideology is also found in the letters addressed, in Arabic, to the Mamluk sovereigns. In 1266 Abaqa sent a similar message to Sultan Baybars: 'You must submit (*nasîrû îl*) [...], from sunrise to sunset, all the world has been given to us [...], and thus it

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was in the orders (*farmân*) and the decrees (*yâsâ*) of Chinggis Khan' (Amitai-Preiss 1994: 18).

How can we relate Eljigidei's letter to this ideology? In this text, even though it is inspired by the standard practice of the Mongol chancelleries, there is no direct demand of submission. If we take a closer look at the way the King of France is referred to in the letter, it becomes clear that Güyük, through the intermediary of Eljigidei, is not treating the King of France as his equal. Güyük is the king of the earth (*rex terrae*) while the King of France is a superb king (*rex magnificus*).[20] Eljigidei's letter corresponds to the pattern of the earlier letters: it begins with the usual introductory formulae, followed by the announcement of the purposes of the letter and the enunciation of an order.

In the preamble, we find in the references to God (*per potentiam Dei excelsi*) and to the Great Khan (*missi a rege terrae Gan*)[21] the name of the author (*verba Elcheltay*)[22] and of the addressee (*regi magno provinciarum multarum*). To properly understand the meaning of this preamble, it is necessary to compare it with that of the letter in Mongolian sent by Arghun to Philip the Fair in 1289. The opening of that letter is along almost precisely the same lines. We find the reference to God in the formula '*möngke tengri kücündür*' (with the force of Eternal Heaven), which corresponds to the Latin '*per potentiam Dei excelsi*'. We also find in the reference to the Great Khan '*qa'an-u süü-dür*' (with the fortune of the Great Khan) the name of the author of the letter '*Arghun üge manu*' (Arghun, our word), a formula which corresponds to the Latin '*verba Elchelthay*', and the name of the addressee '*Ired Baran-s*' (to the King of France),[23] the Latin equivalent of which is the phrase '*regi magno provinciarum multarum*' in Eljigidei's letter. The Latin translation of the preamble to Eljigidei's letter corresponds, almost word for word, with that of Arghun's letter in Mongolian.

The formula '*missi a rege terrae Gan*' remains to be clarified. Paul Pelliot understands it as the Mongolian expression 'with the fortune of the Great Khan' (*qa'an-u süü-dür*). He considers that it amounts to a paraphrase designating the lofty personage that Eljigidei was – having been sent by the Great Khan, king of the earth, to Cyprus in his name, and owing his power entirely to the fortune of the Great Khan. Pelliot (1931–32: 28) translates the Latin formula as follows: 'by the grace of the Great Khan, sent by the Great Khan to act in his name'. One may entertain some doubt as to this interpretation when one compares it, not only to the letter in Mongolian from Arghun to Philip the Fair, but also to the Latin translation of Arghun's letter to Honorius IV which includes the formula '*gratia magni cam*',[24] plainly corresponding to '*qa'an-u süü-dür*' (with the fortune of the Great Khan) in the Arghun's Mongol letter. Arghun is an Ilkhan by the grace of the Great Khan. It seems impossible that a general, even of high rank, could be entitled to the same preamble as Arghun, even if the latter was subordinate to the

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Great Khan as was assuredly the case at that time. Eric Voegelin (1940–41: 401) suggests that '*missi a rege terrae Gan*' designates a military commander sent by the Great Khan. One could thus translate Eljigidei's preamble as follows: 'With the force of eternal heaven, sent by the Great Khan, king of the earth, the word of Eljigidei, to the great king of the many provinces'.

The lofty character of this letter is not at all in the style of the Great Khans' correspondence, the phraseology of which is much more sober. The letter was undoubtedly written directly in Persian. The scribes adopted the style of Islamic titles. Louis IX is thus attributed with a whole series of qualifications, all literal translations. The King of France is presented as the sword of Christianity, the defender of evangelical law, and he who brings victory to the Christian faith.

After this long preamble, Eljigidei explains that his intention is for the 'good of Christianity' (*utilitas christianitatis*). He expresses the wish that God will grant the King of France victory: 'so that he may triumph over his adversaries, those who hold the cross in contempt' (*et triumphet eos de adversariis suis contemnentibus crucem*). Following this, the Great Khan's order is announced:

> We come with the power and the mission (granted by the king) that all Christians be liberated from servitude and from tribute, from taxes and all things similar; that they be honoured and respected and that nobody lay hands on their property; that the churches that were destroyed be rebuilt, that the bells sound, and that no-one dare prevent them [the Christians] from praying for our kingdom with a tranquil and joyful heart.[25]

One of the elements contained in the Latin letters that rings true is the tax immunity for the churchmen if they accepted Mongolian authority.[26] This was a standard practice that began in Chinggis Khan's day. Prior to the Mongol conquest of China, the meeting, in 1222, between the Great Khan and Ch'ui Ch'u-chi, the fifth patriarch of a sect of Taoism, saved Chinese lives. After his encounter with the Taoist pontiff, Chinggis Khan decided to grant privileges and protection to members of Ch'iu Ch'u-chi's sect (Tao-chung 1986: 201–02). He did this out of this respect for religion in general, but he would not tolerate a religion unwilling to serve the Mongols.

Eljigidei's letter also deals with the application of a principle of the *jasaq*, the Mongol legal code:[27] 'In his letters, the King of the earth has indicated that in God's law (*in lege dei*) there is no difference between Latins, Greeks, Armenians, Nestorians and Jacobites, and all those who adore the cross. For us, they are all one. And thus, we ask that the magnificent king should not divide them, but that his piety and clemency should be over all the Christians'.[28] The King of France is invited to treat the different Christian communities of the Holy Land on the same basis (see Richard 1973: 212–22). The Letter points out that the Mongols make no distinction

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between different Christian Churches and even between different confessional groups, including Muslims and Buddhists.[29] One can also see in this an allusion to the fact that the Pope considered the Eastern churches to be heretical. One of the objectives of Latin Christianity was, in fact, to place these churches under the authority of the papacy.

The name of Prester John does not appear in this letter, but the messengers are charged with announcing 'good tidings' (*bonos rumores*) to the King of France. Odon de Chateauroux, a direct witness to the interview that the King had with Mark and David, reports the words of the messengers. The Mongols wanted to march against the Caliph of Baghdad the following summer, in order to 'avenge the injury inflicted on the Lord Jesus Christ by the Corasmins' (*vindicare injuriam a Corosminis illa tam Domino Jesu-Chrisio*).[30] The Great Khan wished the King of France to attack the Sultan of Egypt in order to stop him from coming to the Caliph's aid. To convince the king, the messengers revived the figure of Prester John and said that the current Great Khan, Kiokai (i.e. Güyük), had a Christian mother who was the daughter of the king called Prester John (*filiam Regis qui vocatur Presbyter Joannes*). They claimed that he received baptism on the feast of the Epiphany at the same time as eighteen princes and some high military commanders.[31]

The good tidings brought by David and Mark confirmed the content of the letter of Smbat, the constable of Armenia.[32] This letter which arrived in Cyprus shortly before Louis IX landed there, was written on the 7th February 1248 in Samarkand by Smbat while he was on his way to Mongolia. He wanted to send some news to his two sisters, one of whom was married to the King of Cyprus, Henry 1st de Lusignan, and the other to the Count of Jaffa, Jean d'Ibelin.[33] It was these persons who informed the King of France of the contents of the letter. Smbat claimed that Güyük and his followers had converted to Christianity (*cham et omnes suis modo facti sunt christiani*) and that they believed in Christ through the agency of the Three Kings (*et per illos tres Reges credunt in Christum*). It was for this reason, he said, that 'they have churches at their door [...], in such a way that all those who attend the Great Khan are forced first to visit the church, whether they be Christians or Saracens (i.e. Muslims)'. Persuaded that the Mongols had been converted by the 'Three Kings', Smbat established a natural link with Prester John:

> Know furthermore that in the land of India, which was converted by the apostle Thomas, there is a Christian king who was greatly troubled, because he was surrounded by Muslim sultans who pressed against him from all directions, until the time when the Tartars arrived in the country and he allied himself with them. Then with his army and that of the Tartars, he attacked the Saracens, and gained so much booty in that land of India that all the Orient is full of Indian slaves. (Odon de Chateauroux [D'Achery 1723: 626]).

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Prester John, in Smbat's letter, is the ally of the Mongols against the Muslim powers, whereas accounts of the Franciscan and Dominican missionaries record that he was defeated by Chinggis Khan. During his long reign King Hethum Ist (1226–1269) of Armenia served as a mediator between Europe and the Mongols with a view to forming an alliance against Islam. It appears that some of the information that arrived in the Latin West originated with Armenian sources. Smbat's letter confirms not only Mark and David's testimony, but also the information brought by the French missionary Giovanni de Piano Carpini. During his stay at the court of the Great Khan at Qara-Qorum, he had observed that Güyük was surrounded by Christians and that a chapel had been set up in front of his main tent.[34]

The good tidings brought by the Mongol embassy to Cyprus, along with Smbat's letter, must undoubtedly have revived the hopes of Christendom. Already in 1247, on his return from his first mission, André de Longjumeau had said that the Great Khan was a descendant of the Prester John's daughter.[35] In the course of his chronicle, under the year 1249, Matthieu Paris speaks of the powerful king of the Tartars who was converted to Christianity and had himself baptised. He supposedly sent messages to the King of France at Damietta to encourage him to continue the struggle against the Saracens so as to cleanse the East of their impurities.[36] In any case, Odon de Chateauroux seems to have taken the matter seriously and some months later, he sent the Pope a report on the Mongol embassy to Cyprus into which he carefully copied Eljigidei and Smbat' letters. It was not the information about Prester John that had such an impact in the Latin West, but rather the testimony as to the importance of Christianity among the Mongols. These accounts revived hopes of bringing them to the Catholic faith. Odon de Chateauroux says so clearly in his letter to the Pope:

> I myself sent letters to the Great Khan, to his maternal aunt, to Eljigidei (*Erchelchai*) and to the other prelates, to announce that the Holy Roman Church will hear, with thanks, their conversion to the Catholic faith (*quod sacrosanta Romana Ecclesia conversionem eorumdem ad fidem Catholicam gratulanda audiet*). She will willingly receive them as her dearest sons – even if they wish to adhere to the Orthodox faith – if they profess that the Roman Church is the mother of all the Churches, that he who presides over her is the vicar of Jesus Christ, and that all those who consider themselves Christians rightfully owe him obedience (d'Achery 1723: 627).

Louis IX did not pursue Eljigidei's offer, but he sent an embassy charged with complimenting the Great Khan Güyük on his conversion and giving him presents: a scarlet tent and a cross made from the wood of the True Cross.[37] When the embassy, led by André de Longjumeau, arrived at Qara-Qorum, Güyük was dead. The regent Oghul Qaimish, thinking that the embassy was bringing tribute as a sign of submission, expressed thanks for the sending of

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the gifts and entrusted the emissaries with a letter for the King of France. The letter deals with Prester John, who, having refused to submit to the Mongols, was annihilated:

> Peace is a good thing, for in the land of peace, those who go on four legs eat grazing on the grass; and those who go on two peacefully work the land, from which all wealth comes. And we inform you of this to warn you that you cannot have peace unless you have it with us; for Prester John rose up against us, as did this king and that – and they named many; and we put them all to the sword. We invite you therefore to send to us each year such amount of gold and such amount of silver as will keep us your friend; and if you do not, we will destroy you and your people as we did those whom we have named.[38]

In this missive, Oghul Qaimish sings the praises of peace while clearly telling the King of France that he can only attain this state of peace by accepting the reduction of his status to that of a tributary ruler.

THE MONGOL EMBASSY TO THE COUNCIL OF LYONS IN 1274

The second document I wish to analyse is a letter addressed by the Ilkhan Abaqa to Pope Gregory X. It was presented to the Council of Lyons in 1274 by a Mongol mission comprising sixteen members: Mongols, Eastern Christians among whom figured Brother David, and the notary Richard, a Frank. The content of Abaqa's letter addressed to the Pope is consistent with the policy of his father Hülegü. If the defeat of the small Mongol army at Ain Jalut in 1260 had raised the ardour of the Mamluk troops, it had by contrast considerably affected the Ilkhan's morale. It seems that it was in the aftermath of this defeat that Hülegü took the initiative of seeking an alliance with the Franks. In a letter dated on 10 April 1262 from Maragha, he announced to Pope Urban IV and the kings of the West his intention of restoring to Christianity the 'holy city of Jerusalem still held by the infidels'.[39]

Abaqa restated this proposal in another letter which he addressed to the Pope in 1267, but it was not accompanied by a Latin translation, and at Lyons nobody could read Mongolian. He renewed his offers in a letter, written in Mongolian and Latin, sent to Clement IV in 1268.[40] He explained in this letter the reason why, the year before, he had sent a letter in Mongolian: his translator had been at that particular moment absent in Tabriz (*quia illo tempore scriba noster Latinus presens non affuerat*) (Tisserant 1946: 556; Luppprian 1981: 234–5). Jean d'Aragon and Edward of England also received envoys from the Ilkhan in 1269 and 1271.

Abaqa's letter of 1274 generally repeats the content of Hülegü's letter to Urban IV, which I would like to consider briefly. From a drafting point of view, there are great similarities between the two letters. It would appear that

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they were both drawn up directly in Latin on the basis of a Mongolian original and without the intermediary of Persian, the language generally used by the Eastern Christians (Meyvaert 1980: 250; Richard 2005: 182). The author of these two letters was without any doubt the notary Richard, whose name is mentioned in Abaqa's letter of 1274: '*Ego Richardus notarius dicti domini regis at principis ac interpres latinorum*'. (Lupprian 1981: 230) Richard, of whom we really know very little, was familiar with the Bible. Living at the court of the Ilkhans, he undoubtedly worked in collaboration with the staff of the Ilkhanid chancellery.

Hülegü's letter begins with a quotation from the Epistle to the Hebrews (1:1): 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son (*multifarie multisque modis olim Deus loquens patribus in prophetis novissime diebus istis locutus est nobis in filio*)'. (Myvaert 1980: 252) In Hülegü's letter, the words '*in filio*' are replaced by '*Chingischan per Temptemgri*'.[41] Shortly afterwards, there follows a quotation from Jeremiah, but it is preceded by the affirmation of the celestial mandate accorded to Chinggis Khan by the intermediary of Teb Tenggeri (*per dictum Teptemgri nunciando significans*): 'In heaven I am the almighty God and I set you over nations and over kingdoms as master and king in all places (*in excelcis ego sum deus omnipotens solus te super gentes et regna constitui dominatorem et regem fieri tocius orbis*)'.[42] There follow the exact words of the quotation from Jeremiah.[43]

The notary Richard uses these biblical references in order to set out Mongol ideology in a language comprehensible to the recipients of the letter, Pope Urban IV and the kings and princes of the West. The emphasis on the divine mandate granted to Chinggis Khan, and therefore to his descendants, aims to show that the Mongols are the masters of the world. In this letter, he says in substance: 'We, with the force of Eternal Heaven (*möngke tengri*), Hülegü, eager to destroy the perfidious nations of the Saracens, to the illustrious King of France Louis. We inform you that you must obey us without hesitation as we invoke the name of the living God; he has granted us power' (Meyvaert 1980: 252). At the same time as he presents himself as the destroyer of the power of the Muslims and the friend of Christendom, Hülegü formulates in this letter an implicit demand for submission.

Abaqa's letter of 1274 is a sort of memorandum, intended to remind the Pope of Hülegü's conquests and of his good intentions towards Christians. The preamble reminds the kings and princes that the predecessors of Hülegü, through the power of the living God (*per virtutem dei vivi et potenciam sua*), extended their power over all the lands of the East, as far as the Gyon (Oxus). The tone of this letter is much more nuanced. The heavenly mandate granted to Chinggis Khan and his descendants is not mentioned, and therefore there is no longer any question of demanding submission.

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Abaqa is plainly seeking to obtain an alliance with the Latin West. He renews, as he had in 1268, his proposal to establish a treaty of perpetual peace with the Holy Roman Church (*confederacionem habere volens et pacem firman cum omnibus Christianis sacrosante ecclesie Romane subiectis*) (Lupprian 1981: 230).

The name of Prester John is cited in this missive: the wife of Hülegü, the very pious Toquz Khatun,[44] is described as the daughter of the 'most powerful John, king of India' (*filia potentissimi regis Indie Iohannis*) (*ibid.*: 229). But, apart from this mention of King John, it seems that the figure of the Christian king is the model according to which the progress of Hülegü in the Islamic territories is described. The author of the letter recounts the military exploits of Hülegü, who is described, like Prester John, as 'a most strong and powerful prince'. He crosses the Oxus and takes from the Saracens, through his own might, all the kingdoms of the Persians, then makes himself master of Baghdad. He kills the Caliph and an infinite multitude of that accursed race (*gentis maledicte*) (*ibid.*: 228). He continues his progress, crosses the Tigris, and renders all the regions tributary to him. At last, he crosses the kingdom of Jerusalem as far as the 'Stone of the desert, situated at the entry to the desert that the sons of Israel crossed' (*pertransierunt exercibus sui totum regnum Ierusalem usque ultra petram deserti, que est in introitu solitudinis, per quam transierunt filii Israel*) (*ibid.*: 229). Here, the 'Stone of the desert' refers to the town of Petra, which lies on the ancient route leading to Egypt. The allusion to the Exodus of the chosen people is clear. Hülegü appears, in an understated manner, as a 'new Moses'. The Ilkhan is thus bearer of a mission of salvation: to destroy the accursed race of the Saracens.

Abaqa's letter alludes to the role played by David d'Ashby, who had been sent to Hülegü by Thomas Agni de Lentini. The latter wished to enquire about the Mongol Khan's intentions after his Syrian campaigns of 1260.[45] David d'Ashby stayed at the court of the Ilkhan, where he explained to the king 'many things concerning the Catholic faith'. Then, according to the letter, moved by a 'divine inspiration' (*divinitus inspiratus*), Hülegü granted the Christians advantages resembling in all respects those demanded in Eljigidei's letter: granting the Christians all peace, freeing them from the payment of tribute and taxes, respecting their property, and granting all the Churches freedom of worship. Hülegü would have brought all these measures into effect, writes Richard, had not God, because of our sins, recalled the khan to him (*que omnia perfecisset, nisi peccatis nostris exigentibus ipsum deus de medio nostri tolli permisisset*) (*ibid.*: 229). The sinners mentioned here are no doubt the Franks who had rejected any alliance with the Ilkhans.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Eljigidei had sent his mission to Cyprus because, having been informed by his Christian allies that the powerful Frankish army had landed there, he feared that it would enter the territories under Mongol domination in the Near East and Anatolia. He wished to inform himself so as to find out about the real intentions of the King of France. In 1262 the political situation was greatly changed. Two years earlier, the Mongols had suffered a bitter defeat at Ain Jalut, which marked the starting point of a long period of internal strife between the Ilkhans and the khanate of the Golden Horde, whose sovereign, Berke Khan, a convert to Islam, had formed an alliance with the Mamluks. The Mamluk victory at Ain Jalut also marked, on the Latin side, the beginning of the reconquests of the crusaders' strongholds by Baybars, often in a brutal manner. This new political configuration provides the backdrop to Hülegü's diplomatic initiative in 1262, and subsequently to that of Abaqa, who was even further weakened by the inter-Mongol conflicts than his father had been. This new balance of power explains in large part the policy of the Ilkhans.

Did Christians take part directly in the drafting of the letters, as advisers of the Mongol authorities, or did they alter the texts, at the moment of translation? It appears to me that one can distinguish two phases in the process of transmission and translation of the letters. The accounts of the missionaries sent by Innocent IV to the Mongol Empire inform us as to how the first letters were translated, both from Latin to Mongolian and vice versa. Giovanni de Piano Carpini writes that the letters of the Pope, which he had carried, were translated into Russian, Persian and Mongolian (*in littera ruthenica, saracenica et in littera Tartarorum*) (de Piano Carpini [1929] § ix, 16: 109) at Batu's camp on the Volga. He tells us that Güyük's response was written in Mongolian and translated in Qara-Qorum by two Nestorian Christians who were ministers of the Khan. They explained the letter, word by word to Giovanni de Piano Carpini, who retranscribed its contents into Latin. Then, for fear of misunderstandings, the ministers had the Franciscan's translation explained to them (de Piano Carpini [1929] § ix, 16: 123–4). At the camp of Baiju, the Mongol leader of the Caucasian regions, the Pope's letter, carried by Ascelin di Cremona, was interpreted word by word into Persian: 'the Persian secretaries wrote down what they understood from the Greek and Turkish interpreters and even from the friars' (Simon de Saint-Quentin [1965] § xxxii, 47: 106). Finally, this Persian version was translated into Mongolian.

One notes here the essential role of the Christians, not only Eastern Christians but also Latins, in establishing the translations of the letters. In effect, the friars who took part in translating the Pope's letter at Baiju's camp were the companions whom Ascelin di Cremona had picked up while in the East, Simon de Saint-Quentin and Guichard di Cremona. During their long years spent in the monasteries of the Holy Land, they had learnt the languages

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of the East.[46] The important role of Persian as the language of communication, and also as an official language on the Mongol side, must equally be underlined. In any case, we can trust the accuracy of these translations as the Mongols, conscious of the political importance of these letters, saw to it that they were translated with the greatest care. And furthermore, at this period the Eastern Christians did not yet have any significant interests in the western policy of the Mongols. These letters, which are no more than orders of submission, make no reference to the Christian elements in the empire.

Eljigidei's letter raises another problem, not that of the reliability of the Latin translation, but that of the involvement of Eastern Christians in drawing up the content of the letter. This letter includes, for the first time, recommendations to the King of France as to how he should deal with the Eastern Christians: exempting them from paying tax, delivering them from servitude, treating all the Churches equally. Eljigidei asks the Latins to treat the Christians of the East well and to be tolerant in religious matters: everyone must be free to practice his religion as he wishes to. At Nicosia, as we have seen, the letter was translated from Persian into Latin, word for word, by André de Longjumeau. This latter, who was close to the King of France, could not therefore have been behind the letter's benevolent approach to the Eastern Christians, even though he may have had sympathies for them as a result of having spent a considerable time in the Holy Land. This letter points out the role of Eastern Christians and particularly that of David. In the letter which Guillemus de Rubruc brought back from Möngke for Louis IX in 1248, the Great Khan accused David of being a liar (*vir quidam nomine David et venit ad vos* [...] *mendax erat*).[47] The Franciscan friar himself appears to have accepted this view. He says to King Louis IX that the Mongols have written absurdities on three occasions to the Franks: 'the first time by David, who misled you' (de Rubruc [1929] 5: 331).

These favourable provisions regarding Christians of the East are found repeatedly in the letters of the Ilkhans. Arghun writes to Pope Honorius IV, in a letter dated from Tabriz on 18 May 1285 of which we possess only a Latin translation: 'Chinggis Khan, the first of all the Tartars, ordered that the Christians in his domains would pay no taxes and would be free (*Gingiscam, primo patri omnium Tartarorum, preceptum suum: et omnium Cristianorum non dentur aliquid de tributum et fiant franchi in sua tera*)' (Lupprian 1981: 246). In a letter written in Mongolian at Urmiya, dated on 14 May 1290,[48] Arghun replied to Pope Nicholas IV who had asked him to convert to Christianity along with his people: 'Our Mongol subjects either enter *silam*[49] of their own free will, or [of their own free will] they do not, only Eternal Heaven knows!' (Mostaert & Cleaves 1952: 451).

One may put forward the hypothesis that the Eastern Christians, who were undoubtedly influential in the Ilkhanid court, may have been able to have recommendations in their favour included in the letters. There were also

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a number of Franks at the court of the Ilkhans who had entered the rulers' service. The case of the notary Richard is not an isolated one. A certain Jean Bonastre appears among Arghun's interpreters. Zolo di Pisa, who was his son's tutor, had, according to the Persian historian Rashîd al-Dîn, gained a high position in the court (see Richard 1970: 186–94). The presence of these Franks in the entourage of the Ilkhans undoubtedly reinforced the Christian influence during the reigns of the first three Ilkhans, who, in addition, had Christian wives. Hülegü was married to Toquz Khatun, a Kereit princess, Abaqa had married Despina Khatun, an illegitimate daughter of the Byzantine emperor, and Örüg Khatun, wife of Arghun and mother of Öljeitü, had her son baptised as Nicholas in honour of the Pope.

It is likely that the use of the figure of Prester John in this diplomatic correspondence was the work of Nestorian Christians. The evidence of Guillemus de Rubruc on the subject of Prester John shows that they were responsible for spreading the legend of Prester John in the Mongol epoch. The Nestorians, he wrote, pass the bounds of the truth about King John and create big rumours out of nothing: 'Nobody knew anything about him except for a few Nestorians. (de Rubruc § xvii, 2: 206)'.

The legend of Prester John is in fact founded on a real historical event, the elimination by Chinggis Khan of To'oril, the khan of the Kereit in 1203. After his victory, the future Great Khan took Ibaqa Beki, one of the two daughters of Ja'a Gambu, the younger brother of To'oril, as his wife, and gave the other, Soqtaqtani Beki,[50] to his son Tolui.[51] It was through this marriage with the Kereit princesses that Christianity entered the line of Chinggis Khan. In search of alliances with the Latin West, the Ilkhans frequently recalled that 'our first mother was Christian' (*nostra prima mater erat Cristiana*).[52]

The Eastern Christians, who had placed so much hope in a possible alliance between the Ilkhans and the Latin West, did not succeed in convincing the Popes and the kings of France to provide military assistance to the Mongols in order to defeat Islam. The rumours of the conversion of the Ilkhans, the emphasis on the protection afforded to Christians, the legend of Prester John, and even the promise to return Jerusalem to the Franks all went unheeded. All this 'good tidings' failed to convince Christendom to form an alliance with the Mongols of Iran to overcome their mutual enemy, the Mamluk sultanate. Perhaps the ultimate reason was that conversion of the Ilkhans to Christianity was a precondition of any political alliance.

NOTES

[1]I wish to acknowledge Jean Richard who read the first version of this article.

[2]Forced to return to Persia after the death of the Great Khan Möngke, Hülegü had

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left a military detachment of some thousand cavalry men in the region that were defeated by Mamluk troops of some hundred and twenty thousand strong.

[3]Abel-Rémusat (1824). In the appendix, he also published a collection of ten documents in Latin and French, as well as two letters in Mongolian (sent by Arghun and Öljeitü to King Philippe the Fair).

[4]Paul Pelliot (1922–23: 3–30; 1924: 225–235; 1931–32: 3–84).

[5]See especially Richard: (1949: 291–297; 1973: 212–222; 1977: 30–44; 2005).

[6]Regarding this mission, see Paul Pelliot (1931–32: 12–22); Jean Richard (1976: 197–207; id., 1997: 57–69).

[7]Regarding this mission, see Roberg Bukhard (1973: 241–302); Jean Richard, (1977: 30–44).

[8]This letter was edited by Paul Meyvaert (1980: 245–259). There is now a commented translation by Jean Richard (2005: 175–182).

[9]See an account of the mission in Jean de Joinville (§ 471: 423–424).

[10]The Latin text was reproduced from several versions in both Latin and French by Paul Pelliot (1931–32: 23–26) translation of this letter in French by Jean Richard (2005: 160–162). Many versions of this letter exist, i.e. in *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, Règne de saint Louis, xliii, text reproduced by Abel-Rémusat (1824: 165–166).

[11]Odon de Chateauroux's letter is preserved in only one manuscript held at Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Latin 3768, ff. 76 v°–81 r°); the text has been edited by Luc d'Achery in *Spicilegium* (1723: 624–628).

[12]The Nestorians were the Syriac Christians. This name had been rejected by the Eastern Church, but medieval authors made use of this designation.

[13]Designed by the name of Sabeldin Monfac in Odon de Chateauroux's letter.

[14]Odon de Chateauroux (D'Achery 1723: 625).

[15]The Latin text of this passage by Matthieu Paris is reproduced by Paul Pelliot (1931–32: 56–57). He suggests that in this case, the term *caldeam* refers to Persian; Jean Richard considers it to be Syriac.

[16]On the chronology of this Mongol mission, refer to the speculations by Paul Pelliot (1931–32: 27–28).

[17]On the Mongolian imperial ideology, see Igor de Rachewiltz (1973: 21–36); Reuven Amitai-Preiss (1999: 57–72). Peter Jackson (in press) who, through an examination of the diplomatic correspondence of Chinggisid rulers, shows the fineness with which the 'heaven mandate' was interpreted and applied in practice.

[18]*The Secret History of the Mongols*, edited and commentary by Igor de Rachewiltz, (2004, i: 73); see his comments on these key political terms (ii: 550–51). We find the first mention of this concept on the Mongol seal, which closes the Persian Güyük's Letter to the Pope Innocent IV. This seal was analysed by Paul Pelliot (1931–32: 24–27). It is written: 'if [the khan's order] is sent to peoples in a state of submission and [to peoples] in a state of rebellion, they must have regard for it and fear it.'

[19]This text was published by Paul Pelliot (1924: 315) and by Karl E. Luprian (1981: 193–194).

[20]Odon de Chateauroux (D'Achery 1723: 625).

[21]*Terre* for *terrae* in Paul Pelliot (1931–32: 23) and Eric Voegelin (1941: 400).

[22]The manuscript of Odon de Chateauroux's letter gives Eljigidei's name in various forms. Paul Pelliot (1931–32: 16) chose Elcheltay, the form that uses by Jean Sarrazin, see his discussion of this point.

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[23]*Les lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Aryun et Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel*: 17.
[24]Letter send from Tabriz on 18th May 1285, see Karl E. Lupprian (1981: 245).
[25]Odon de Chateauroux (D'Achery 1723: 625)
[26]There is a good discussion of the origin of this policy in Yao Tao-chung, 1986: 201–19.
[27]On the Mongol legal code, see Igor de Rachewiltz (1993: 91–104); David Morgan (1986: 163–176); Denise Aigle, (2004b: 31–79; *id.*, 2004a: 971–996).
[28]Odon de Chateauroux (D'Achery 1723: 625)
[29]On the religious policy of the Mongols see Paul Ratchevsky (1991: 197–198); Peter Jackson (in press).
[30]Here the Corasmins are the soldiers of the Khwarazm-Shah.
[31]Odon de Chateauroux in d'Achery (1723: 627). Töregene, Güyük's mother was a war captive. She was first married to a Merkit, but she was probably of the Naiman tribe. There is no evidence she was a Christian, but she was well disposed towards the Christians.
[32]The text of this letter has been edited and translated in French by Jean Richard (1986: 683–696; *id.*, 2005: 166–170). In this article, I have used Odon de Chateauroux's Latin version edited by Luc d'Achery in *Spicilegium*: 626.
[33]The letter probably arrived during the summer of 1248, see Richard (2005: 166).
[34]Giovanni de Piano Carpini (1929 § ix, 43: 125).
[35]In his *Additamenta*, Matthieu Paris copied seven accounts dealing with the Mongol invasions. These accounts were edited by Henry R. Luard as a continuous narrative (n° 46 to 51), see Matthieu Paris, (*Chronica Majora*, vi: 163–165). André de Longjumeau's account of his first mission is in the seventh account (n° 61: 113–116). It deals with the Mongols' religious beliefs, the Empire's expansion and the links of the Mongols with Prester John.
[36]Matthieu Paris, *Chronica Majora*, v: 87 (Luard (ed.) 1872–3).
[37]Jean de Joinville (Monfrin (ed.) 1995 § 471: 425).
[38]Jean de Joinville (Monfrin (ed.) 1995 § 471–472: 437).
[39]Paul Meyvaert (1980: 258). According to the editor's letter, the Ilkhan does not say clearly that his intention is to restore to the Franks the Kingdom of Jerusalem. But the text is clear on this matter. Jean Richard (2005: 184) points to Hülegü's comprehension of the papacy's leading role in Latin West, and his conclusion that it would be necessary to return Jerusalem to the Pope. The English Dominican David d'Ashby, chaplain of the Papal legate Thomas Agni de Lendini and Bishop of Bethlehem, accompagnied Hülegü's envoys. He noted Hülegü's sympathy for Christians and that he was well disposed towards the Latin world. David d'Ashby remained in Hülegü's entourage, and subsequently in that of Abaqa, until 1274. He was the author of an account entitled *The Deeds of the Tatars*, only an extract of which has survived, see Jean Richard (1977: 34). On David d'Ashby, see Clovis Brunel (1958: 39–46).
[40]Letter edited by the Cardinal Eugène Tisserant (1946: 547–556). Repr. in Karl E. Lupprian (1981: 223–225).
[41]*Temptemgri* and *Teptemgri* are Latin equivalents of the Mongol name Teb Tenggeri.
[42]This description of the religious legitimation of Chinggis Khan's power is based on an account transmitted by the Persian historian 'Atâ' Malik al–Juvaynî, which assigns a major role to the shaman Teb Tenggeri. 'Atâ' Malik al-Juvayî's account affirms that Chinggis Khan received a mandate from the eternal heaven of the Mongols.

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[43]Jeremiah (1: 10) 'This day I set you over nations and over kingdoms, To root up and to tear down, to destroy and to disperse, to build and to plant.' (*Ecce constitui te hodie super gentes et super regna ut evellas et destruas et disperdas et dissipes et aedifices et plantes*).
[44]The Mongolian spelling of this name is certainly Toghus-Khatun.
[45]Jean Richard (2005: 173) points out that this mission was the starting point of a new stage in Frankish-Mongols relations.
[46]Paul Pelliot states, without providing any concrete evidence, that Guichard di Cremona did not know any oriental languages. However, I consider it very likely that Guichard, who lived in a monastery in Tiflis, had at least a good knowledge of Persian. This would explain why Ascelin di Cremona took him as his travelling companion (see also Jean Richard's argument to this effect in his preface to the edition of Simon de Saint-Quentin: 13).
[47]Guillemus de Rubruc, (*Itinerarium* § xxxvi: 308). On David's role, see Peter Jackson & David O. Morgan (1990: 36–38).
[48]This letter had been edited by Antoine Mostaert &t Francis W. Cleaves, 1952 (text: 450 ; French translation: 451). The letter is dated to the fifth of the new moon of the first month of the summer, the Year of the Tiger.
[49]A Syriac borrowing into the Mongolian, referring to baptism.
[50]There is a notice of this personnage in Rashîd al-Dîn (Boyle (ed.) 1971: 168–171).
[51]*Histoire secrète des Mongols* (de Rachewiltz 2004: § 186).
[52]Arghun's letter to the pope Honorius IV, dated 1285, (Luprian 1981: 246).

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