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La Horde d'Or et l'islamisation des steppes eurasiatiques

Tolerance as a political tool



Comparing the Islamisation of the Jochid and Hülegüid *Uluses*: Muslim and Christian Perspectives

Comparer l'islamisation des ulus Jochid et Hülagüid : les perspectives islamiques et chrétiennes

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Résumés

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Résumé : *Comparer l'islamisation des ulus Jochid et Hülagüid : les perspectives islamiques et chrétiennes.* L'accession au pouvoir du khan Özbek peut être considérée comme une période charnière dans l'islamisation des nomades de la Horde d'Or. Récemment, de nombreuses publications russes ont porté sur la politique religieuse d'Özbek et sur la question du niveau d'islamisation des nomades durant son règne. Plusieurs chercheurs affirment qu'Özbek mena avec succès une politique d'islamisation massive de ses sujets dès le début de son règne. Cependant, cette interprétation est largement fondée sur les sources écrites islamiques qui doivent être utilisées avec plus de sens critique. Les sources franciscaines produites dans la Horde d'Or à la même époque suggèrent que l'islam ne fut pas uniformément accepté dans l'*ulus* de Jochi. Une comparaison avec l'ilkhanat voisin, à la fin du XIII^e siècle, semble confirmer que les souverains mongols ne réussirent que de manière limitée à islamiser leurs sujets nomades.

Abstract: Khan Özbek's rise to power was a pivotal moment in the Islamisation of the Golden Horde nomads. Recently, Russian researchers have shown an increased interest in Özbek's religious policy and the degree to which Golden Horde nomads were Islamised during his

reign. Several researchers argue that Özbek succeeded in completely Islamising his domain at the beginning of his reign. However, this interpretation is largely based on written Islamic sources that should not be taken at face value. Franciscan sources written within the Golden Horde suggest that Islam was not uniformly adopted in the Jochid *ulus*. A comparison with the neighbouring Ilkhanate at the end of the 13th c. shows that the Mongol rulers achieved relatively limited success in their attempts to forcibly impose Islam on their nomadic subjects.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : islamisation, ulus de Jochi, Horde d'Or, Mots clefs : empire mongol, comparaison textuelle, ilkhanat, ulus de Chagatay, Ghāzān, Özbek, politique religieuse

Keywords : Jochid ulus, Islamisation, Golden Horde, Keywords : Mongol Empire, Textual comparison, Ilkhanate, Chagatayid ulus, Ghāzān, Özbek, religious policy

Texte intégral

- 1 Contemporary scholarship has repeatedly emphasised that Mongol rulers' attempted to separate religion and state in the governance of their vast empire. Some Mongol rulers had a personal preference for certain world religions, be it Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam, but throughout the 13th c. religion and state remained clearly segregated¹. However, from the late 13th c. Mongol religious policy underwent several significant changes. Current scholars emphasise the growing influence of nomadic religious affiliations during this time and the ways in which these shaped internal power conflicts in the western regions of the Mongol empire. The rise to power of khan Özbek (1313-1341) in particular has been associated with conflicts between pagan and Muslim nomads.
- 2 According to various scholars², Khan Özbek's rise to power was followed by the proclamation of Islam as the state religion of the Golden Horde. Khan Özbek's rise to power in early 1313 and his almost three-decade-long reign were of undeniable importance in rooting Islam in the Jochid *ulus*. Islam became noticeably more important in Golden Horde urban centres in the Volga and other regions of the *ulus*. Contemporary Islamic sources and archaeological surveys clearly show the expansion of Islamic areas in Golden Horde cities and the widespread construction of Muslim religious buildings. The establishment of urban Islam in the Jochid *ulus* was an obvious consequence of the religious sympathies of Khan Özbek and his closest entourage. However, Islamic written sources pay little attention to religious changes in the steppes, despite the fact that nomads continued to play a leading role in the political life of the Golden Horde and most likely significantly exceeded the urban population in size. The Mamluk author al-'Umarī underlined that most of Özbek's subjects consisted of « tents' inhabitants living in the steppes » (Tiesenhausen, 1884 : 230).
- 3 The nomads represented the main military and political force in the western *ulus* of the Mongol Empire. The religious sympathies of the Mongol rulers often depended on the religious orientation of the nomads that provided them with crucial military support at the time of their ascension (DeWeese, 2009 : 121). When succession led to a clash between warring nomadic factions with opposing religious orientations, the victory of either of these factions and the subsequent enthronement of its champion resulted in both the elimination of the new khan's competitors and the forced religious conversion of their subordinates. Muslim chroniclers presented Özbek's rise to power as the result of a battle between nomads with opposing belief systems, which was followed by the full conversion to Islam of Özbek's opponents. However, Latin sources written within the Golden Horde present very different views on the circumstances and consequences of Özbek's ascension, allowing historians to provide a more nuanced and diversified view of Özbek's religious policies.

- 4 Discussions of the Islamisation of Mongol *ulus* tend to adopt the somewhat anachronistic concept of a state religion, which naturally does not appear in medieval sources. Nevertheless, it is commonly used in secondary sources, often with little effort to specify in detail what the term is supposed to mean and which contexts of usage are being embraced or rejected. With regard to the Ilkhanate, researchers have clearly indicated that the Islamisation of the Hülegüid *ulus* entailed only the conversion of Mongol nomads, since the overwhelming majority of the Ilkhanate population was Islamic long before the khanate's foundation (DeWeese, 2009 : 122). Scholars also highlight that the establishment of Islam as Iran's state religion was directly related to a change in the religious orientation of the nomads living in the Hülegüid *ulus* (Amitai, 2013 : 69).
- 5 For a variety of reasons, the following description of the Iranian Mongols' Islamisation under Ilkhan Ghāzān may be useful for better understanding both the circumstances of Khan Özbek's rise to power and his religious policies. Islamic and Christian sources provide more detailed and diverse information about Ilkhan Ghāzān's ascension than for Özbek's in the Golden Horde. Although there are differences in the populations of the Hülegüid and Jochid *ulus* (most importantly, the overwhelming majority of the Golden Horde population initially did not consist of Muslims), Islamisation processes in these areas share some similarities. In both cases, the rise to power of an 'Islamising' khan was made possible through the military support of Islamic nomads, and the religious convictions and later policies of the khan were largely predetermined by this support. In addition, the Islamic victory in both cases resulted in a short-term persecution of non-Islamic religions. However, these deviations from traditional Mongol religious tolerance were only short-lived and ended because a significant part of the nomad population resisted forced Islamisation.

The Islamisation of the Hülegüid ulus' Mongols under the rule of Ilkhan Ghāzān

- 6 Ghāzān came to power in Iran in the autumn of 1295 after winning a military conflict against Ilkhan Baidu. Ghāzān's conflict with Baidu had a political background : a number of the Mongol amīrs questioned Baidu's legitimacy and considered Ghāzān, a son of the late Ilkhan Arghun, a more suitable heir to the throne. In addition, the Mongol elite was dissatisfied with Baidu due to the religious beliefs of the Mongol amīrs, who had come increasingly under the influence of Islam since the rule of Ilkhan Tegüder (1282-1284)³. The Christian chroniclers Bar Hebraeus, Stepanos Orbelian, and Hayton clearly indicate that many Mongols converted to Islam at the time of the conflict between Ghāzān and Baidu. The Dominican Riccoldo da Montecroce lamented that his missionary activities in the Middle East took place at a time when a considerable part of « the Tartars became Saracens ». The Mamluk author al-Jazarī confirms da Montecroce's claim, emphasising that many Mongols had adopted Islam before Ghāzān's conversion⁴.
- 7 Christian sources paint a very contradictory picture of Baidu's beliefs and religious policies. Hayton and Marino Sanudo argue that Baidu was a Christian and tried everything to prevent the spread of Islam amongst the Mongols. Bar Hebraeus and Stepanos Orbelian entertained more moderate views and state that Baidu sought to appease Muslims and even converted to Islam to do so. However, this latter assertion is questionable. Perhaps more reliable is Bar Hebraeus' claim that Baidu behaved as a Christian amongst Christians and as a Muslim amongst Muslims. In doing so, he probably followed the example of previous Mongol rulers, who favoured all faiths

existing in their domains, without exception, in order to maximise their political support⁵. Baidu's flexible policy appears to have been considered unacceptable by Muslim Mongols. According to Bar Hebraeus, Hayton, and Marino Sanudo, most Muslim Mongols did not approve of the tolerance that Baidu showed towards Christians and decided to support Ghāzān on that basis. According to Banakati, they placed in him their hopes for a renewal of Islam in Iran⁶.

8 In contrast to khan Özbek's rise to power in the Jochid ulus, it is possible to precisely identify the Mongol factions that supported Ghāzān thanks to an eyewitness report. The Sufi shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm (b. Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥammūya al-Juvaynī) appeared in Ghāzān's camp shortly before the confrontation with Baidu and carried out Ghāzān's conversion. Ṣadr al-Dīn's report – transmitted by al-Jazarī – is of paramount importance as it describes the atmosphere in Ghāzān's camp on the eve of the conflict. Ṣadr al-Dīn explicitly mentions that Muslim Mongols were numerically abundant amongst Ghāzān's supporters and influenced the future Ilkhan's conversion to Islam in order to enlist their support in the impending conflict (evidently, Ghāzān's conversion to Islam was based on more than just religious conviction [Melville, 1990 : 171 ; Amitai, 2007 : VI, 1]). Ṣadr al-Dīn also made the important observation that the main instigator of the conflict against Baidu was the Muslim amīr Nawruz, who was married to Ghāzān's aunt, Tughan Khatun. Nawruz and Tughan Khatun are both mentioned to have influenced Ghāzān's religious beliefs⁷. Rashīd al-Dīn, Hayton, and Marino Sanudo highlight the consequences of Ghāzān's official conversion to Islam : the Muslim amīrs who had continued to support Baidu switched sides. Baidu lost most of his military forces. He attempted to flee to Georgia, was caught, and executed on Ghāzān's orders⁸.

9 Ghāzān's victory marked the beginning of the repression of non-Islamic religions in the Ilkhanate. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Ghāzān entered Tabriz on 5 October 1295 and immediately decreed the destruction of churches, synagogues, and Buddhist temples in his domain. Christian authors confirm numerous attacks on churches in Baghdad, Mosul, Hamian, Tabriz, Maragha, and other Ilkhanate's cities, emphasising that Buddhists were subjected to the most severe persecution. Apparently, Ghāzān sought to eradicate the Buddhist presence in his domain. If we take al-Jazarī's assertion as fact, Ghāzān personally took part in the destruction of a Buddhist temple in Baghdad. However, of greater interest are Hayton's and Marino Sanudo's comments regarding the persecution of Christians. Apparently, these were initiated by Mongols that had recently converted to Islam and were allowed by Ghāzān in order to please the amīrs that had supported him. Bar Hebraeus and Stepanos Orbelian state that Amīr Nawruz had launched the persecution of Christians before the proclamation of Ghāzān's edict : the new Ilkhan only confirmed the legality of these persecutions after they had started⁹. Thus, newly-converted Mongols appear to have been the main persecutors of Buddhists, Christians, and Jews living in the Ilkhanate. Christian authors such as Stepanos Orbelian suggest that all the Mongols of Iran converted to Islam under Nawruz's influence. Similarly, Rashīd al-Dīn claims that the same day that Ghāzān converted to Islam, all Iranian Mongols followed his example. According to Vaṣṣāf, the number of these proselytes amounted to 200,000 nomads. These statements by Persian chroniclers are extremely questionable as Ghāzān's supporters (at the time of his conversion) were quite limited in number. The majority of the Mongols did not take part in his military actions. More reliable would appear Vaṣṣāf and Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī's claims that the new Ilkhan declared that all Mongols in his domain should become Muslim after his enthronement in Tabriz. These claims suggest that Ghāzān planned the forced conversion of local Mongols immediately after establishing his power¹⁰.

10 Not all of the Ilkhanid Mongols accepted Ghāzān's new religious policy. In 1296, the Oirat *noyons* came to the paradoxical decision to move to the Mamluk Sultanate together with their subjects in order to avoid forced conversion. Mamluk chroniclers

claim that the number of Oirat migrants amounted to 10,000 or even 18,000 families. However, even more important is the claim that these refugees from the Ilkhanate were « pagans »¹¹. Ghāzān also faced open resistance. The first resistance by Iranian Mongols was headed by Hülegü's grandson, Süke, who conspired against Ghāzān because he feared that Ghāzān planned to subject his people to Amīr Nawruz. In spite of the political nature of this conspiracy, Süke and some of his supporters, such as Amīr Barula, emphasised its religious underpinnings. The conspirators blamed Nawruz for Ghāzān's recent conversion, which had led to a deterioration of their relationship with the new Ilkhan¹². The disclosure of Süke's conspiracy and his subsequent execution were followed by other revolts. After the suppressed uprising of the amīrs Issen Temür and Kurmishi, Ghāzān was faced with the rebellion of prince Arslan, a descendant of Chinggis Khan's brother. During Arslan's rebellion, Ghāzān's life was endangered, but like the others, the revolt was suppressed thanks to Amīr Nawruz's timely assistance. In response to these disturbances, Ghāzān resorted to mass repressions in March 1296, during which 5 blood princes and 38 amīrs were executed¹³.

11 There is no conclusive evidence that Ghāzān abandoned his policy to forcibly Islamise his non-Islamic subjects following these uprisings. However, Christian authors provide significant, albeit indirect, evidence that this was indeed the case. As early as October 1295, during a personal meeting with the Armenian king of Cilicia, Ghāzān promised Het'um II that he would leave the Armenian Church unharmed and carry out reprisals only against the Ilkhanate's Buddhists. Apparently, the Ilkhan's decision was a response to the fierce resistance by the Armenian population of the Nakhichevan region against Amīr Nawruz's troops. Ghāzān afforded the Armenian Church protection but continued the persecution of Nestorians living in his domain. Persecutions of Iranian Christians continued for several months and ended by Easter 1296 – that is, immediately after the suppressed uprisings by Süke, Issen Temür, and Arslan¹⁴.

12 Dissatisfaction amongst Iranian Mongols resulted in Amīr Nawruz's gradual removal from power, ultimately leading to his execution in the summer of 1297. Undoubtedly, Nawruz's fall from grace had to do with growing resentment amongst the Mongol amīrs and Ghāzān's closest advisers, resulting from his desire to seize control of the entire Ilkhanate. Nawruz was charged with treason on the basis of forged correspondence with the Egyptian sultan. According to these fabricated documents, Nawruz requested military assistance from his co-religionist, the Mamluk sultan, on the grounds that a number of Mongol amīrs in the Ilkhanate hindered his attempts to convert local Mongols. Ghāzān took these charges at face value as some of them appeared to have some foundation : Nawruz indeed faced open resistance by pagan *noyons*¹⁵.

13 Christian sources state that the final shift in Ghāzān's religious policy occurred in connection with Nawruz's execution. According to Hayton and Marino Sanudo, Ghāzān provided Christians in his domain traditional Mongol protection after the death of Nawruz, who had been the main proponent of forced Islamisation. Templar of Tyre even mentions that Ghāzān regretted persecuting Christians, which Ghāzān expressed in his letters to the king of Cyprus. However, this remorse may have had much to do with Ghāzān's desire to obtain the military support of the Near Eastern Franks in his fight against the Mamluks. On the other hand, Armenian sources written within the Ilkhanate confirm Ghāzān's favourable attitude towards his Christian subjects. Ghāzān also requested Rashīd al-Dīn to compose a special theological treatise (contained in Rashīd al-Dīn's *al-Majmū'a al-Rashīdiyya*) that justified the Ilkhan's policy of religious tolerance and rejected the forceful conversion to Islam of his subjects¹⁶.

14 In sum, Ghāzān's reign was of paramount importance in the spread of Islam amongst the Iranian Mongols. A significant portion of Mongols practiced Islam

before Ghāzān's rise to power and a significant number of Mongols followed their new ruler's example to convert to Islam. Possibly, following Ghāzān's edict that all Mongols should become Muslims, the new Ilkhan began to nominally consider all Iranian Mongols adherents of Islam (Melville, 1990 : 172). In practice this would mean that they did not all fully convert to Islam to the same degree or in the same ways. Their Islamisation probably took place along the same pathways through which a substantial part of the Iranian Mongols had converted to Islam before Ghāzān's rise to power, having to do with personal convictions, proselytic influences of Sufi and other Muslim spiritual leaders, and prolonged contacts with the local Turks who served the Mongols (Amitai, 2007 : V, 42-43). One can state with some confidence that a substantial part of the Mongol nomads continued to uphold traditional Mongol beliefs and could even afford to maintain sympathy for non-Islamic world religions. The anonymous author of the *History of Mar Yabalaha III* mentions measures under Amīr Irinjin, a grandson of Hülegü's senior wife, Doquz Khatun, to protect Nestorian Catholics. This led Petrushevsky (1960 : 245) to argue that this highly influential amīr of Ilkhan Öljeitü's reign was a Nestorian Christian (Borbone, 2000 : 109-110, 132). Qāshānī also highlights the perseverance of traditional religious practices amongst Iranian Mongols and states that shamans continued to play an important role in the religious life of the nomads during Öljeitü's reign, just as they had done under Ilkhans of the second half of the 13th c. (Amitai, 2007 : VII, 41 ; Aigle, 2015 : 114).

15 Ghāzān was not disturbed by the idea of allowing traditional rituals amongst his nomadic subjects as these rituals were considered integral elements of the Iranian Mongols' ethnic identity. In 1302, Ghāzān himself took part in the traditional nomadic ritual to express his gratitude to Tengri for the support this supreme Mongol deity had given him during his struggle for power (sources imply that Ghāzān performed this ritual annually). Ghāzān's commitment to Islam also did not prevent him from taking part in the White Festival – the celebration of the Mongol New Year (Boyle, 1968 : 396 ; Borbone, 2000 : 107 ; Amitai, 2007 : VI, 1, 9 ; Broadbridge, 2008 : 67 ; Amitai, 2013 : 71 ; Aigle, 2015 : 114). It is evident that regardless of their personal beliefs, the 14th c. Mongol rulers had to participate in collective nomadic celebrations in order to affirm the loyalty of nomadic groups. Non-compliance with Mongol traditions or attempts to obstruct nomadic rituals could lead to a ruler being overthrown, as was the case with Khan Tārmāshīrīn, the first Islamiser of the Chagatayid ulus in Central Asia. With regard to the Chagatayid ulus, the term Islamisation implies a mass conversion to Islam by Mongol nomads only, because the vast majority of the settled populations of Central Asia had been Muslim long before the Mongol conquest of Transoxiana. According to the Mamluk author al-'Umarī, a significant part of the local nomads practiced Islam before Tārmāshīrīn's rise to power in 1331. He also states that the overwhelming majority of the Transoxianian Mongols responded to the new ruler's call to convert to the Muslim faith. However, it is important to emphasise a clear qualification of al-'Umarī here : the local Mongols did not convert to Islam over night, rather they did so gradually under the influence of missionary activities by Muslim shaykhs and imams (Lech, 1968 : 117, 119 ; Ibragimov, 1988 : 64-65 ; Biran, 2002 : 744 ; DeWeese, 2009 : 131). It is likely that Tārmāshīrīn significantly restricted the religious autonomy of local Christians and Buddhists and replaced the traditional legislation of the Chagatayid ulus with *sharī'a* law. Al-Ṣafādī states that Tārmāshīrīn completely abrogated the *yasa* of Chinggis Khan and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, who met with Tārmāshīrīn a few months before his removal from power (in the spring of 1335, according to a detailed dating of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's journey presented by Hrbek [1962]) eloquently describes the devastating consequences of the religious and social reforms of Tārmāshīrīn. According to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Tārmāshīrīn's repeated refusal to convene the annual nomadic *quriltai* (culminating in a collective banquet) caused great

resentment amongst the Mongols dwelling in the eastern regions of the ulus, who were less affected by the Islamisation of Transoxiana. In this context, one should emphasise Ibn Baṭṭūta's statement that as a result of the uprising in the eastern regions of the Chagatayid ulus, Tārmāshīrīn also lost the favour of the Islamised Mongols of Transoxiana¹⁷. Apparently, Ilkhan Ghāzān proved to be a more far-sighted ruler, who did not see any practical objection against the entanglement of Mongol traditions and beliefs with Islamic religion (Amitai, 2007 : VI).

The Islamisation of the Golden Horde Mongols during the reign of Khan Özbek

¹⁶ Özbek came to power in the Golden Horde at the beginning of 1313, following a relatively long struggle for succession after Khan Toqta's death in August 1312. This struggle had a definite political background that was not necessarily linked to the religious sphere. Khan Toqta came to power in 1291 after a coup d'état and the execution of his brothers, who had jointly ruled the Jochid ulus, headed by Khan Tula Buqa. Amongst the executed brothers was Özbek's father, Togrulcha. Consequently, Özbek's victory in the struggle that raged in the second half of 1312 is likely to have been presented as the legitimate return to power of Toqta's brother's heir. Contemporary sources report that Toqta's younger son (or sons) took part in the fight for succession and were executed by Özbek in the course of the conflict¹⁸. Despite this political background, the majority of written sources state that the conflict had a distinct religious character. Islamic sources in particular point to the crucial role of Özbek's Islamic supporters in his rise to power. Their comments suggest a strengthening of the pro-Islamic nomadic faction (that had emerged in the Golden Horde under Berke's rule in the 1250s¹⁹) during Toqta's reign, although the sources contain somewhat contradictory information about the religious sympathies of Özbek's predecessor. Apart from al-Maqrīzī, who claimed that Khan Toqta was a Buddhist, other Mamluk sources report that Toqta adhered to traditional nomadic beliefs and favoured Buddhism, but « respected Muslims more than others ». Raymond Lull, a medieval theologian and missionary, confirmed the khan's Islamic sympathies and complained in 1308 that Toqta (Cotay) surrounded himself with Muslim secretaries and contributed to the spread of Islam in the Jochid ulus. Mufaḍḍal ibn Abī l-Faḍā'il, a Coptic author, even claimed that Toqta became a Muslim himself. In fact, the appointment of Amīr Qutluq-Temür, who undoubtedly practiced Islam, to the supreme office of *nā'ib* pointed to the growing influence of Islam during Toqta's reign. Mamluk sources furthermore report the conversion to Islam of Il-Basar, the eldest son of Khan Toqta, who died 2-3 years before the death of his father and hence did not take part in the fight for succession²⁰. Thus, a large and influential newly-converted faction of Muslim nomads seems to have formed in the Golden Horde before Özbek's ascension. 15th c. Mamluk authors such as Ibn Duqmāq and al-'Aynī report that this faction, which supported Özbek's ascension, was led by the senior amīr Qutluq-Temür along with Özbek's stepmother and future wife, Bayalun Khatun. However, historians should be careful not to take these later Middle Eastern sources at face value. The influence enjoyed by Qutluq-Temür and Bayalun Khatun during Özbek's reign may well have prompted Mamluk historians to ascribe to them an important role in Özbek's rise to power and the formation of his religious beliefs. According to Ibn Duqmāq, Ibn Khaldūn, and al-'Aynī, Qutluq-Temür made Özbek promise that he « would become a Muslim and adhere to Islam » before providing him with crucial support. This statement by Mamluk authors was obviously made under the influence of Persian sources and was also

inspired by the decisive influence that Amīr Nawruz had had on Ilkhan Ghāzān's religious decisions nearly two decades earlier²¹.

17 One can only guess whether Özbek became a Muslim immediately following his enthronement or long before that, or how much Muslim support he received during his struggle for succession. Özbek's inauguration was followed by an immediate clash between the new ruler and the adherents of traditional nomadic beliefs. The Persian chronicler Qāshānī provides the earliest report, which directly influenced the work of Ḥāfiz-i Abrū at the beginning of the 15th c., on the circumstances surrounding Özbek's ascension. He describes how Özbek forced the Tatar amīrs to abandon the Mongol *yasa* in favour of *sharī'a* law (or Islamic religion according to Ḥāfiz-i Abrū's later interpretation). According to Qāshānī, Golden Horde amīrs conspired to murder Özbek after receiving this demand, but their plot was exposed after which Özbek ordered the execution of more than one hundred representatives of the Mongol elite²². It should be noted that according to Qāshānī and Ḥāfiz-i Abrū, Özbek's conflict with the Mongol amīrs took place before his rise to power. However, it would be more logical to assume that Özbek was only able to demand the Mongol amīrs's conversion to Islam after he had become khan (Lapshina, 2013 : 112). Mamluk sources confirm this assumption. The Mamluk sources of the early 14 c. paid no attention to the vicissitudes of the struggle for succession, focusing instead on the consequences of Özbek's ascension. Al-Birzālī and other Arab authors reported that Özbek slew a large number of Buddhists and shamans at the same time he executed several Mongol amīrs. However, later 15th c. sources clearly indicate that Özbek's most important and most violent confrontation with the Mongol amīrs took place following the new khan's inauguration. According to Ibn Duqmāq, Ibn Khaldūn, and al-'Aynī²³, the Mongol amīrs were angry with Özbek for his commitment to the Muslim faith and started a revolt led by the Jochid princes Tunguz and Taz, who had enjoyed increased influence under the previous khan. One should also mention here a letter sent by the Franciscans of Caffa to the West in May 1323, briefly describing the conflict that had erupted in the Golden Horde ten years earlier. The Franciscan author informed the leadership of his Order that two unnamed sons of the late Khan Toqta (probably referring to the sons of Kutukan, the younger brother of Toqta ; Hautala, 2014 : 89-90) abandoned Christianity in favour of « paganism » in the hope of garnering support amongst Özbek's opponents. Pointing to the subsequent death of both sons, the Franciscan author implies that the Mongol princes' revolt erupted after Özbek's inauguration.²⁴

18 Khan Özbek apparently introduced a policy to forcibly Islamise nomad populations immediately after his inauguration and as a consequence he faced the fierce resistance of these subjects. After suppressing the Mongol amīrs' revolt and executing his main opponents, Özbek focused his attention on the Mamluk sultan. In 1314, Özbek dispatched an embassy to Egypt with the intention of restoring the previously friendly and allied relations with the Mamluk Sultanate, which had suffered from the actions of the previous khan, Toqta, seven years earlier (Ciociltan, 2012 : 170). According to the Mamluk chronicler al-Nuwayrī, Özbek's ambassadors arrived in Cairo in March or April of 1314 with a congratulatory message for the Egyptian sultan. The message proclaimed « the spread of Islam from China to the most distant lands of the west », adding that « there had been one remaining party in his realm which adhered to a religion other than Islam », that Özbek « had offered them the choice between conversion to Islam, or war », and that « they refused conversion and fought » after which Özbek had « attacked them and annihilated them, slaying or capturing them »²⁵. Thus, the Golden Horde ambassadors informed the sultan not only of the suppression of all political opposition in the Jochid ulus, but also of the conversion of all of its nomadic populations to Islam.

19 Franciscan sources written in the Golden Horde, containing valuable information about the religious situation in both the urban centres and steppe regions of the

Jochid ulus, completely contradict the assertions made by Özbek's ambassadors. In March 1314, in parallel with the arrival of Özbek's embassy in Cairo, the Golden Horde khan granted *yarlıq* (protection or *protectiua* in the Latin translation) to the Franciscans of Caffa, confirming a number of privileges and exemptions from military duties and taxes. Özbek allowed the Franciscans complete freedom of movement in the Golden Horde to preach « Christian law ». He also gave them the right to complain to the khan's chancellery if they were inhibited in any way while carrying out their missionary activities (Bihl, 1924 : 65). Catholic missionaries in the Golden Horde immediately took advantage of this policy. In 1320 the Hungarian Franciscan Johanca wrote in his letter to the General Minister of his Order that he had travelled to modern Bashkortostan in 1314 to preach the Gospel. In his description of Catholic missionary activities throughout the Jochid ulus, Johanca exalted his fellow missionaries, who had spared no efforts to preach the Gospel in the steppe « following the Tartar camps ». Johanca does not mention experiencing any obstructions by the Golden Horde administration, which he encountered in person « in Bascardia » after publicly questioning the legitimacy of Islam. The aforementioned letter by the Franciscans of Caffa, written in 1323, also reports significant missionary activities and achievements through daily preaching of the Gospel in the steppe. Umbrian Minorite Giovanni Elemosina's *Chronicon*, written in 1336, mentions how Christian rituals were integrated into nomadic everyday life²⁶. Clearly, Franciscan authors were inclined to exaggerate their missionary achievements in order to stimulate the sending of more brothers from the West, presenting the Jochid ulus and their missionary activities to them in the most favourable light (quoting Peter Jackson [2005 : 261], these reports were « frequently designed to elicit the dispatch of reinforcements for the missionaries »). Nevertheless, even if this bias is taken into account, Franciscan sources point to a sizeable expansion of Christianity in the Jochid ulus. However, they also mention that a significant part of the local nomads remained adherents of traditional steppe beliefs. Importantly, these written sources make no mention of administrative obstacles or disincentives to their activities and point to the continued adherence to Chinggisid traditional principles of religious tolerance during Özbek's reign. Johanca, the anonymous Franciscan from Caffa, and Giovanni Elemosina paint a picture of complete religious freedom that was extended to all religious communities of the Jochid ulus. They also emphasise the strict compliance with these rights by the Golden Horde administration insofar religious groups did not violate local legislation²⁷.

20 It is most likely that Özbek's ambassadors to the Egyptian sultan claimed the bloody suppression of non-Islamic opposition in the Jochid ulus to present the area as a mature Islamic state with a predominantly Muslim population (Ciocîltan, 2012 : 175). Muslims were indeed numerically abundant in Golden Horde urban centres. However, Latin sources show that a significant portion of the area's nomadic inhabitants, who continued to have major political and military power, maintained traditional steppe beliefs and were sympathetic to Christianity or Islam to differing degrees. Khan Özbek apparently tried to enforce the Islamisation of his domain but was forced to return to the traditional policy of religious tolerance in the second year of his reign, as was Ilkhan Ghāzān almost two decades earlier, due to the fierce resistance this policy sparked amongst nomads.

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Notes

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