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

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

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, Ghażān, Özbek, politique religieuse

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

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**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 segregated. 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 scholars, 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-ʿUmari 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.
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).

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

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). 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 Riccolo 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-Jazari confirms da Montecroce’s claim, emphasising that many Mongols had adopted Islam before Ghāzān’s conversion.

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 Mongols rulers, who favoured all faiths.
existing in their domains, without exception, in order to maximise their political support\(^8\). 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 Ghâzân on that basis. According to Banakati, they placed in him their hopes for a renewal of Islam in Iran\(^6\).

In contrast to khan Özbek’s rise to power in the Jochid ulus, it is possible to precisely identify the Mongol factions that supported Ghâzân thanks to an eyewitness report. The Sufi shaykh Sadr al-Dîn Ibrâhîm (b. Sa’d al-Dîn Hammûya al-Juwaynî) appeared in Ghâzân’s camp shortly before the confrontation with Baidu and carried out Ghâzân’s conversion. Sadr al-Dîn’s report — transmitted by al-Jazari — is of paramount importance as it describes the atmosphere in Ghâzân’s camp on the eve of the conflict. Sadr al-Dîn explicitly mentions that Muslim Mongols were numerically abundant amongst Ghâzân’s supporters and influenced the future Ilkhan’s conversion to Islam in order to enlist their support in the impending conflict (evidently, Ghâzân’s conversion to Islam was based on more than just religious conviction [Melville, 1990 : 171 ; Amitai, 2007 : VI, 1]). Sadr al-Dîn also made the important observation that the main instigator of the conflict against Baidu was the Muslim amîr Nawruz, who was married to Ghâzân’s aunt, Tughan Khatun. Nawruz and Tughan Khatun are both mentioned to have influenced Ghâzân’s religious beliefs\(^7\). Rashid al-Dîn, Hayton, and Marino Sanudo highlight the consequences of Ghâzân’s official conversion to Islam: the Muslim amirs 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 Ghâzân’s orders\(^8\).

Ghâzân’s victory marked the beginning of the repression of non-Islamic religions in the Ilkhanate. According to Rashid al-Dîn, Ghâzân 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, Ghâzân sought to eradicate the Buddhist presence in his domain. If we take al-Jazari’s assertion as fact, Ghâzân 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 Ghâzân in order to please the amirs that had supported him. Bar Hebraeus and Stepanos Orbelian state that Amîr Nawruz had launched the persecution of Christians before the proclamation of Ghâzân’s edict: the new Ilkhan only confirmed the legality of these persecutions after they had started\(^9\). 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, Rashid al-Dîn claims that the same day that Ghâzân converted to Islam, all Iranian Mongols followed his example. According to Vașsâf, the number of these proselytes amounted to 200,000 nomads. These statements by Persian chroniclers are extremely questionable as Ghâzân’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 Vașsâf and Hamdallâh Mustawfî Qazvînî’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 Ghâzân planned the forced conversion of local Mongols immediately after establishing his power\(^10\).

Not all of the Ilkhanid Mongols accepted Ghâzân’s new religious policy. In 1296, the Oirat noygons 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».

Ghazān also faced open resistance. The first resistance by Iranian Mongols was headed by Hülegü's grandson, Süke, who conspired against Ghazān because he feared that Ghazān planned to subject his people to Amir Nawruz. In spite of the political nature of this conspiracy, Süke and some of his supporters, such as Amir Barula, emphasised its religious underpinnings. The conspirators blamed Nawruz for Ghazān's recent conversion, which had led to a deterioration of their relationship with the new Ilkhan. The disclosure of Süke's conspiracy and his subsequent execution were followed by other revolts. After the suppressed uprising of the amirs Issen Temür and Kurmishi, Ghazān was faced with the rebellion of prince Arslan, a descendant of Chinggis Khan's brother. During Arslan's rebellion, Ghazān's life was endangered, but like the others, the revolt was suppressed thanks to Amir Nawruz's timely assistance. In response to these disturbances, Ghazān resorted to mass repressions in March 1296, during which 5 blood princes and 38 amirs were executed.

There is no conclusive evidence that Ghazān 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, Ghazān promised Hetʿum 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 Amir Nawruz's troops. Ghazān 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 Arslan.

Dissatisfaction amongst Iranian Mongols resulted in Amir 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 amirs and Ghazān'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 amirs in the Ilkhanate hindered his attempts to convert local Mongols. Ghazān took these charges at face value as some of them appeared to have some foundation: Nawruz indeed faced open resistance by pagan noyons.

Christian sources state that the final shift in Ghazān's religious policy occurred in connection with Nawruz's execution. According to Hayton and Marino Sanudo, Ghazān 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 Ghazān regretted persecuting Christians, which Ghazān expressed in his letters to the king of Cyprus. However, this remorse may have had much to do with Ghazān'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 Ghazān's favourable attitude towards his Christian subjects. Ghazān also requested Rashīd al-Dīn to compose a special theological treatise (contained in Rashīd al-Dīn's al-Majmūʿa al-Rashidiyya) that justified the Ilkhan's policy of religious tolerance and rejected the forceful conversion to Islam of his subjects.

In sum, Ghazān'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 Amir 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 Öljeitū’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 Öljeitū’s reign, just as they had done under Ilkhans of the second half of the 13th c. (Amitai, 2007 : VII, 41 ; Aigle, 2015 : 114).

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 shāri’a law. Al-Šafādi states that Tārmāshīrīn completely abrogated the yasa of Chinggis Khan and Ibn Baṭṭūta, who met with Tārmāshīrīn a few months before his removal from power (in the spring of 1335, according to a detailed dating of Ibn Baṭṭūta’s journey presented by Hrbek [1962]) eloquently describes the devastating consequences of the religious and social reforms of Tārmāshīrīn. According to Ibn Baṭṭūta, 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 Baṭṭūṭa’s statement that as a result of the uprising in the eastern regions of the Chagatayid ulus, Tārmāshirī also lost the favour of the Islamised Mongols of Transoxiana. Apparently, Ilkhan Ghāzūn 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

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 conflict. 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 1250s) during Toqta’s reign, although the sources contain somewhat contradictory information about the religious sympathies of Özbek’s predecessor. Apart from al-Maqrizī, 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 nāḥīb 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 succession. 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 Khalūdūn, 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 Amir Nawruz had had on Ilkhan Ghâzân’s religious decisions nearly two decades earlier.21

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 Qâshânî provides the earliest report, which directly influenced the work of Ḥâfiz-i Abrū at the beginning of the 15th c., on the circumstances surrounding Özbek’s ascension. He describes how Özbek forced the Tatar amîrs to abandon the Mongol yasa in favour of shari’a law (or Islamic religion according to Ḥâfiz-i Abrū’s later interpretation). According to Qâshânî, Golden Horde amîrs 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 elite. It should be noted that according to Qâshânî and Ḥâfiz-i Abrū, Özbek’s conflict with the Mongol amîrs took place before his rise to power. However, it would be more logical to assume that Özbek was only able to demand the Mongol amîrs’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-Birzâlî and other Arab authors reported that Özbek slew a large number of Buddhists and shamans at the same time he executed several Mongol amîrs. However, later 15th c. sources clearly indicate that Özbek’s most important and most violent confrontation with the Mongol amîrs took place following the new khan’s inauguration. According to Ibn Duqmâq, Ibn Khalîlî, and al-Āyînî, the Mongol amîrs 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

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 amîrs’ 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 (Ciocîltan, 2012 : 170). According to the Mamluk chronicler al-Nuwayrî, 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.

Franciscan sources written in the Golden Horde, containing valuable information about the religious situation in both the urban centres and steppe regions of
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 *yarlïq* (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 life. 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 legislation.

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 Ghâzân almost two decades earlier, due to the fierce resistance this policy sparked amongst nomads.

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**Notes**


23 Tiesenhausen, 1884: 174 [al-Birzālī], 197 [Mufaḍḍal ibn Abī l-Faḍā’il], 206 [al-Dhahabi], 277 [Ibn Kathīr], 323-324 [Ibn Duqmāq], 384-385 [Ibn Khaldūn], 515-516 [al-‘Aynī]; Moule, 1923: 111 [Franciscans].

24 For further discussion of Khan Toqta’s alleged conversion to Christianity and his rule in general, we refer the reader to Tanase’s article in this volume.


26 Golubovich, 1913: 125; Moule, 1923: 107; Bihl, 1924: 66-68.

27 Golubovich, 1913: 125; Moule, 1923: 107, 111; Bihl, 1924: 66.
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