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## The revival of the crusading idea in the context of the Mongols' Palestinian campaigns (1299-1300 AD) and the issue of the Christians reclaiming the Holy Land

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**Abstract:** *This paper offers a novel interpretation of the military campaign led by Ghazan Khan in 1299-1300 in the Holy Land. It presents the authors' hypothesis regarding the reasons why this campaign was perceived as a Christian victory by Europeans.*

**Key words:** Mongols, the Holy Land, Ghazan Khan, Crusades, Georgia, Armenia

### Introduction

In April and May of 1291, the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt, Al-Ashraf Khalil Ibn-Qalawun (1290-1293), managed to capture the final Crusader strongholds in the Holy Land, most notably the city of Acre, following a large-scale military campaign.<sup>1</sup> This event is widely regarded as marking the end of the classical Crusading era.<sup>2</sup> Christian Europe reacted with concern to the news of Acre's fall, however, this event did not provoke as strong a response as the conquest of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187. The Christian world had long anticipated these news, and it was not unexpected. Moreover, European political circles had already lost the motivation to launch a new Crusade campaign.<sup>3</sup> With absence of resources and moreover, a substantial political will, the clerical and intellectual circles of Catholic Europe did not even pursue a theoretical development of the crusading idea. While Crusading concepts related to the Holy Land were no longer politically pragmatic, they retained

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<sup>1</sup> Riccold de Monte Croce, 210-252; Ibn al-Furāt, 228-237; Holt, 1986: 104-106; Housley, 1992: 17; Tyerman, 2019: 372.

<sup>2</sup> Edbury, 1999: 291.

<sup>3</sup> Housley, 1992: 22.

their sacred significance in the eyes of the European world, even in the face of defeat. This idea remained intact in the eyes of Western religious and intellectual circles, even as the primary actors changed. The duties of the European Christians were seen as needing to be fulfilled by Eastern powers.

In the 13th century, the Mongol conquest of the eastern territories actively seized the attention of the European world.<sup>4</sup> The Mongolian phenomenon was conceptualized in a dual plane within European thought. The Latin world failed to fully comprehend the nature of this novel and alien threat. It sought to elucidate the factors contributing to the emergence of the Mongols on the global political stage by relying on hypotheses informed by local traditions and accounts from the Eastern Christians,<sup>5</sup> which were replete with prophecies, legends, and misinformation.

The objective of the scientific work in question is to reinterpret and provide fresh explanations regarding the reactions of Europeans that followed the 1299-1300 military expeditions of Ghazan Khan. We tried to explain the thesis of contemporary Latin authors, namely, that Holy Land was still in Christians' possession, by the fact that eastern Christian forces were participating in the aforementioned expedition. Those Christian forces were Georgians and Armenians.

### **The attempts at creating an anti-Egyptian alliance of Mongols and Latins**

In 1241-1242, when the Mongols crossed the eastern borders of the European world by launching a campaign into Polish territories and then advanced deeper, into Hungary,<sup>6</sup> discussions of launching a crusade against the Mongol invader emerged in Europe.<sup>7</sup> Since the 60s of the 13th century, the situation shifted. While an alliance with the Latins had not been deemed appealing by the Mongols prior to this period, their perspective towards Western Christians changed significantly following their heavy defeat at the Battle of Ain Jalut in 1260.<sup>8</sup> According to Jean Richard, "the idea of an alliance against this common enemy (the Egyptian Mamluks) dominated political affairs between 1264 and 1307."<sup>9</sup> The Il-khans sought to establish diplomatic relations with the historical adversaries of the Mamluks. "Beginning in 1262, Hulegu Khan and his successors initiated a series of efforts to find common ground with the Latins in their conflict against the Mamluks".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Aigle, 2014: 44-49.

<sup>5</sup> Grant, 2018: 119.

<sup>6</sup> Berend, 2016: 205-206.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, 1991: 18.

<sup>8</sup> Jackson, 2005: 165.

<sup>9</sup> Richard, 1977: 68-69.

<sup>10</sup> Jackson, 2005: 165

The Papal Curia actively dispatched Dominican and Franciscan missionaries to the East.<sup>11</sup> The news that the Mongols remained pagans fueled the papacy's hope that they could be converted to Catholicism through persistent proselytizing. The Mongols themselves contributed to these expectations, particularly after their defeat in 1260, by implying that they were open to embracing Christianity. A letter sent by Hulegu Khan to Louis IX in 1262 served a similar purpose.<sup>12</sup> The Ilkhan Khan diligently attempted to portray himself as a defender of Christians.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the baptism of the ambassadors sent by Abaqa Khan of the Mongols to the Second Council of Lyon may have been intended to serve the same purpose.<sup>14</sup> The presence of a common enemy in the form of the Egyptian Sultanate, coupled with the Mongols' policy of religious tolerance and shared goals of economic cooperation, motivated both sides to pursue an alliance.

The Latins considered a key condition for this alliance the Christianization of the Mongols and the Mongols sought recognition of their supreme political authority by the Latins.<sup>15</sup> Despite the frequent exchange of letters,<sup>16</sup> a military alliance and a coordinated campaign against the Egyptian Mamluks could not be established in the 13th century.<sup>17</sup>

Naturally, following the fall of Acre, European interest in the Levant region only intensified. In the final years of the 13th century, the concept of anti-Mamluk alliances reemerged with renewed vigor. Confronted with the diminishing prospects of the Crusades in Europe, the papacy sought assistance from the Eastern Christians. In September 1291, Pope Nicholas IV (1288-1292) sent letters to the Georgian kings Demetrius II<sup>18</sup> and David VI Narini.<sup>19</sup> Urging the Georgian kings to exert all their power to liberate the Holy Land:

In the name of Christ... I beseech and entreat thee, Your Highness, as a cherished child of God, to engage in this holy endeavor. Arm thyself with all thy realms and dominions... And with the aid of other Catholic kings, may this cause be brought to a prosperous and joyful end.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Richard, 1977: 87; Delacroix-Besnier, 1997: 17; Tanase, 2013b: 165.

<sup>12</sup> Richard, 1979: 299; Meyvaert, 1980: 245-260; see also Osipian, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Amitai-Preiss, 1995: 96.

<sup>14</sup> Lane, 2003: 50; Evaniseli, 2021: 24.

<sup>15</sup> Aigle, 2008: 434.

<sup>16</sup> Pelliot, 1923: 4-28.

<sup>17</sup> Tanase, 2013a: 79.

<sup>18</sup> Demetrius II was already dead at this time, although they did not seem to know about it in Rome.

<sup>19</sup> Papashvili, 1995: 88.

<sup>20</sup> Tamarashvili, 1902: 21; *Les Registres de Nicolas IV*, 393.

## Military expedition of Ghazan Khan in Palestine and its reinterpretation

At the end of the 13th century and the dawn of the 14th century, Syria and Palestine emerged as the focal point of an extensive conflict between the Mongols and the Mamluks. In December 1299, the new Ilkhan Ghazan Khan (1295-1304), known for his continual warfare in Syria,<sup>21</sup> launched an incursion into the Homs region with a substantial military force.<sup>22</sup> The Mongols inflicted a decisive defeat upon the Egyptian Mamluk army, commanded by the sultan's son, Nasir ad-Din Muhammad.<sup>23</sup> The remaining Mamluk military contingent fled to Egypt, with the Egyptian garrisons stationed in Syria and Palestine also withdrawing in haste.<sup>24</sup> The Mongols occupied a substantial portion of Syria and captured the strategic city of Damascus.<sup>25</sup> Following this conquest, Ghazan Khan dispatched his commander, Mulay, with 10,000 horsemen to Palestine, where the Mongols reached the city of Jerusalem.<sup>26</sup> However, the Mongols did not establish a permanent presence in Palestine; instead, they conducted a raid before commander Mulay returned to the Khan in Syria.<sup>27</sup> Information regarding the Mongol raid on Jerusalem, as mentioned, is also preserved in Georgian sources in addition to the Eastern accounts.<sup>28</sup> According to the author of the *Hundred Years' Chronicle*: "The [Mongol] army reached the holy city of Jerusalem, where it did slay many Christian souls, chiefly Persians."<sup>29</sup>

The Mongol campaigns in Syria and Palestine were not overlooked by the European world. Prior to the commencement of this expedition, on October 21, 1299, Ghazan Khan dispatched letters to King Henry II of Lusignan (1285-1324) of Cyprus, as well as to Jacques de Molay (1292-1314), the Master of the Templar Order<sup>30</sup> and Guillaume de Villaret, Master of the Hospitaller Order (1296-1305).<sup>31</sup> In the aforementioned letters, Mongolian Khan outlined his plans to the Christian military and political leaders and extended an invitation for their participation in the expedition.<sup>32</sup> The information preserved in the so-called *Chronicle of the Templar of Tyre* recounts the events as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> Boyle, 1976: 37.

<sup>22</sup> Amitai, 2002: 225.

<sup>23</sup> Japaridze, 2016: 48.

<sup>24</sup> Jackson, 2017: 377.

<sup>25</sup> Marino Sanudo Torsello, 282; Aigle, 2014: 255.

<sup>26</sup> Amitai, 1987: 244.

<sup>27</sup> Schein, 1979: 805; Amitai, 1987: 244; Japaridze, 2016: 50-51.

<sup>28</sup> According to Japaridze (2016: 51). Another Georgian source describes the Mongol raid in Palestine, in particular, the removal of the gate of Jerusalem and its transfer to Damascus by the Mongols. See also the testament-note of the Chelysh manuscript of *moktsevay kartlisay* (Conversion of Kartli) by Germane Eztavelidze (c.f. Lerner, 2004: 132).

<sup>29</sup> *The Hundred Years' Chronicle*, 316.

<sup>30</sup> Demurger, 2002: 143.

<sup>31</sup> Riley-Smith, 2012: 215-216.

<sup>32</sup> Knobler, 1996: 182, 188.

In the same year (1299 AD), a messenger from the Tatar king Ghazan arrived in Cyprus, informing that Ghazan planned to advance westward during the winter and wished for the king [referring to the Lusignan ruler of Cyprus, Henry II – B.K., G.E.] and all the Franks to join him in Armenia. Consequently, the king and his followers prepared to undertake this mission.<sup>33</sup>

Following Ghazan Khan's campaign in Syria and the Mongol raid on Jerusalem, numerous records emerged in Europe describing the restoration of the Holy Land by the Mongols.<sup>34</sup> Clearly, the European world observed the events in the East and the Holy Land with keen interest. According to Tanase, "The news of the Mongol victory shocked the Latin West. There was a prevailing sense that the path to Jerusalem was still open. This information also carried prophetic significance, as it coincided with the year 1300."<sup>35</sup>

From February to September 1300, the majority of written reports sent to Europe from the East conveyed that the Mongols had expelled the Muslims from the Holy Land and liberated the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>36</sup> The Mongols were not only credited with the occupation of the Holy Land but also with the conquest of Egypt. It was reported that the Ilkhan Khan had freed Christian captives who had been imprisoned in Damascus and Egypt following the fall of Acre and Tripoli. Additionally, there were accounts suggesting that the Ilkhans invited the Hospitallers and Templar Knights to return to the Holy Land and rebuild their fortresses.<sup>37</sup> There were even reports that Ghazan Khan (1295-1304), the great Khan of the Ilkhanate, had, converted to Christianity following his entry into Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

A clergyman serving in the church of Trier offered an intriguing explanation for the Mongols' "restoration" of the Holy Land:

God desired to end the war and suffering in the Holy Land and to exact vengeance for the blood of his servants. Since He could not find among His sons [i.e., the Christian rulers – B.K., G.E.] one worthy to lead this war, He bestowed the honor of the battle upon the pagan Mongol Khan.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, this perspective allows for numerous conclusions. It reflects the cleric's mindset, illustrating a dismissal of the practical feasibility of a crusade by Christian Europeans, despite acknowledging the theoretical and sacred validity of such

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<sup>33</sup> *Templar of Tyre*, 157.

<sup>34</sup> Schein, 1979: 805.

<sup>35</sup> Tanase, 2008: 341-342.

<sup>36</sup> Willelmi Rishanger, 189-190; *Annales Monastici*, 546; *Chronique de Guillaume de Nangis*, 307.

<sup>37</sup> Schein, 1979: 807.

<sup>38</sup> *Chronique de Guillaume de Nangis*, 307; Willelmi Rishanger, 189; Knobler, 1996: 188; Grant, 2018; 158.

<sup>39</sup> Lopez, 1933: 214; Schein, 1979: 806.

an endeavor. This perspective also clearly reflects the providential worldview of the era, which held that the course of world history was governed by divine order. According to this view, the supremacy of divine law has been restored, not through the efforts of the Crusaders, but through the actions of the Orientals.<sup>40</sup> Given that the Mamluk military contingent was no longer present in Syria and the Holy Land, “the subsequent months were filled with hope for the Christians.”<sup>41</sup>

Despite the first great success, taking into account a number of factors, the Mongols did not manage to settle in the occupied region. Ghazan Khan actively tried to deepen ties with the Western world.<sup>42</sup> It is chronicled that on April 12, 1302, Ghazan Khan wrote a letter to Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303).<sup>43</sup> The rather brief letter, written in Mongolian, suggests prior correspondence:

Your offers, kind words, and letter have reached us... We are now in the process of preparations... You should also prepare your forces, and notify the rulers of all states to ensure their actions align with the agreed timeline. By the will of heaven, we will achieve the great goal (the defeat of the Mamluks). Pray to heaven and assemble your troops as well.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the Pope, Ghazan Khan’s diplomatic contacts are documented with King James II of Aragon (1291-1327), King Edward I of England (1272-1307),<sup>45</sup> and King Philip IV of France (1285-1314).<sup>46</sup>

By 1303, the Mamluks had regained control of Syria and Palestine and expelled the Mongols from the region. A decisive battle occurred near Marj al-Sufar, near Damascus, on April 20, which resulted in a severe defeat for the Mongols.<sup>47</sup> On May 11, 1304, Ghazan Khan passed away, which hindered and significantly delayed the Mongols’ planned retaliatory military actions.<sup>48</sup> As observed, even the brief occupation of the Holy Land by the Mongols prompted European religious and political circles to discuss a multitude of truths and falsehoods.

It is intriguing to consider why the European world perceived the Mongol campaigns in Syria and Palestine as a restoration of the Holy Land to Christians. Historian, Sylvia Schein notes: “When reading these accounts, one gets the impression

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<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that the encounter of two civilizations invariably necessitates an understanding of the sudden appearance of “foreigners” in relation to one’s own history, requiring an effort to find a “niche” for these events within existing traditions and religious frameworks; see Pikov, 2009: 4-10.

<sup>41</sup> Housley, 1992: 21.

<sup>42</sup> Richard, 1969: 55: “He reported his successes to the Latins, invited them in accordance with the promises made by his predecessors, and offered them the Holy Land.”

<sup>43</sup> Pelliot, 1923: 5.

<sup>44</sup> Mostaert & Cleaves, 1952: 471.

<sup>45</sup> Lockhart, 1968: 29; Paviot, 2000: 316-317.

<sup>46</sup> Sinor, 1975: 535-536.

<sup>47</sup> Boyle, 1976: 38; Japaridze, 2016: 61.

<sup>48</sup> Jackson, 2005: 170.

that the Holy Land is still in the hands of Christians, as in the time of Godfrey of Bouillon, but not through the Crusades.”<sup>49</sup>

If Europeans had previously harbored hopes of converting the Il-khans to Christianity, these illusions were likely dispelled following Ghazan Khan’s conversion to Islam.<sup>50</sup> The ruler of the Ilkhanate, Ghazan Khan, officially embraced Islam in 1295.<sup>51</sup> This development would have been known in Europe as well, as evidenced by Spanish theologian Ramon Llull (1232-1315), who noted it at the beginning of the 14th century.<sup>52</sup> The Spanish theologian expressed concern that the Mongolian Khan had not received adequate information about Christianity, which led him and his entourage to embrace Islam.<sup>53</sup>

To address the question more precisely: Why did the European world perceive the Mongol campaign of 1299-1300 in Syria and Palestine as a restoration of the Holy Land to Christians? The notion that Europeans believed the Mongols were Christians is unlikely to be the correct explanation. It is more plausible that the perception of the Mongol campaign of 1299-1300 in Syria and Palestine as a restoration of the Holy Land to Christians can be attributed to the involvement of the Eastern Christians, particularly Georgians and Armenians, in the campaign.

In both Georgian and foreign historiography, it is well-documented that Georgians and Armenians participated alongside the Mongols in the military campaign of 1299-1300.<sup>54</sup> According to Professor Gocha Japaridze, the participants in this campaign alongside the Mongols included: “Armenians led by King Hethum II of Cilicia, Georgians under the command of King Vakhtang III, and the selected army of Atabag Beka of Samtskhe.”<sup>55</sup> According to Hayton, a contemporary Armenian chronicler of the events:

He [Ghazan Khan – B.K., G.E.] called upon the Mongols, the kings of Armenia and Georgia, and other Christians to arm themselves, as he was preparing to march against the Sultan of Egypt.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Schein, 1979: 808.

<sup>50</sup> Melville, 1990: 162; Amitai-Preiss, 1996: 1-10; Aigle, 2014: 259; see also Jackson, 2024: 116.

<sup>51</sup> Aigle, 2007: 93.

<sup>52</sup> Jackson, 2005: 176.

<sup>53</sup> Raimundi Lulli, 267.

<sup>54</sup> Silagadze, 1968: 92-93; Gocholeishvili, 1978: 108-109; Schein, 1979: 805; Aigle, 2014: 274; Jackson, 2017: 378; see also Amitai, 2023.

<sup>55</sup> Japaridze, 2016: 48; See also *Histoire Générale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mogols*, 1757: 271: “The kings of Georgia and Armenia, as well as other Christians, were summoned for this campaign.”

<sup>56</sup> *History of the Tartars*, 70.

Information regarding the participation of Georgians in the Battle of Homs in 1299 is also preserved in a Georgian source:

Vakhtang and his army fought valiantly. And when many perished on both sides, the Egyptians and Sultan Nasser Malik (al-Nasir Muhammad) did flee.<sup>57</sup>

The involvement of the Eastern Christians, specifically Georgians and Armenians, in the conflicts between the Ilkhans and the Mamluks was known in Europe as early as the 1280s. This is evidenced by a letter dated 1282, written by Joseph de Cancy, a member of the Order of Saint John in Acre, to King Edward I of England (1272-1307).<sup>58</sup> The letter contains information that Georgian and Armenian troops fought alongside the Mongols in the Battle of Homs in October 1281.<sup>59</sup>

The involvement of Georgians and Armenians in the 1299-1300 campaign, alongside the Eastern forces, must have been well-known in Europe, as indicated by numerous records from that period. The *Flores Historiarum*, a Latin-language chronicle compiled in Britain between 1306 and 1326, reports that

in this year [1299 AD – B.K., G.E.], the king of the Tatars, together with the kings of the Armenians and Georgians, assembled an army a million-strong, and 40,000 horsemen to fight against the Saracens in the name of Christ. Many Saracens were hunted down in Tripoli, Acre, and other holy places to avenge the bloodshed of Christians.<sup>60</sup>

According to the Petri Cantinelli Chronicon, an Italian chronicle from the 1320s, in 1300, Christ performed great deeds against the enemies of the cross through the actions of the Tatars. According to the chronicle, the king of Armenia sought assistance from the ruler of the Tatars to combat the Saracens, who had seized his lands.

The king of the Tatars encouraged him to remain hopeful, promising to avenge the blood shed by Christians. Subsequently, the king of Armenia assembled an army and reclaimed the lands taken by the Saracens. The king of the Tatars, accompanied by a cavalry force of 10,000 horsemen led by the Christian king of Georgia, advanced into Syria with 10,000 riders.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *The Hundred Years' Chronicle*, 316.

<sup>58</sup> Tabaghua, 1984: 192-200.

<sup>59</sup> Tabaghua, 1975: 172.

<sup>60</sup> *Flores Historiarum*, 107, 300.

<sup>61</sup> *Petri Cantinelli Chronicon*, 93.

In the Swedish chronicle *Chronica Erici Olai, Decani Upsaliensis*, it is recorded that:

in that year (1300) the Tatar emperor defeated the Sultan and converted him, took Jerusalem, and subdued the entire Holy Land, where he prayed together with the Eastern Christian rulers.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to their participation in the campaign, Georgian historiography also maintains that Georgians entered Jerusalem too.<sup>63</sup> According to G. Japaridze, King Vakhtang of Georgia was undoubtedly in Jerusalem in January 1300, when he donated a substantial sum of money to the monks of the Cross Monastery in Jerusalem.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, sources provide information about the Armenians' entry into the holy city. According to the Armenian author Nerses Balients, King Hethum of Armenia entered Jerusalem, where he remained for 15 days and conducted a Christian service.<sup>65</sup>

The entry of Georgians and Armenians into Jerusalem is likely referenced in a letter dated October 3, 1301, written by the Egyptian Sultan Al-Malik An-Nasir (1299-1309) to the Ilkhan Khan:

The High God commanded that evil be punished with similar evil; He will not tolerate the fact that Islam was attacked by an army composed of followers of different religions. Our holy territories and the sacred city of Jerusalem were defiled by the Crusaders. The city that is the most holy, second only to the city where the tomb of the Holy Apostle lies.<sup>66</sup>

Given the fact that the sources do not mention any European military contingent alongside the Mongols during the Syrian campaign of 1299-1300, Sylvia Schein suggests that the "Crusaders" referenced in the letter likely refer to Armenians and Georgians.<sup>67</sup> Orientalists Denis Aigle<sup>68</sup> and G. Japaridze also identify the Georgians and Armenians as the "Crusaders" mentioned in this section of the letter.<sup>69</sup>

The participation of the Eastern Christians in the campaign and their presence in Jerusalem is well-documented by sources and was widely known both in the Islamic world and in Europe. However, some accounts go even further, claiming that after a successful military campaign, the Ilkhan Khan handed over the Holy Land to the Christians.

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<sup>62</sup> *Chronica Erici Olai*, 76.

<sup>63</sup> Metreveli, 1963: 42; Tsurtsuniamia, 2013: 317; Japaridze, 2016: 54.

<sup>64</sup> Japaridze, 2018: 69.

<sup>65</sup> *Armianskiye istochniki o mongolakh*, 98; Dashdondog, 2011: 199-200; Japaridze, 2016: 52.

<sup>66</sup> *Histoire des Sultans Mamlouks De l'Egypte*, 299.

<sup>67</sup> Schein, 1979: 810.

<sup>68</sup> Aigle, 2014: 274.

<sup>69</sup> Japaridze, 2016: 54.

Information about the transfer of the holy places to King Hethum of Armenia is preserved in the chronicles of Nerses Balients<sup>70</sup> and the *History of the Tartars*.<sup>71</sup> In the work of Grigol Feradze, a European account is cited,<sup>72</sup> stating that “Ghazan Khan returned to the king of Armenia the lands that had previously been taken from him by the Sultan, gave Syria to his brother to rule, and Jerusalem to the Georgians.”<sup>73</sup> The chronicle *Memoriali Historiarum*, created by a French clergyman in the first half of the 14th century, contains similar content.

Then the sailors heard and told us the news from the lands beyond the sea. The news was about the victory of the Tatar king Ghazan, who was joined by the kings of Armenia and Georgia to fight against the Muslims in Babylon and Damascus. Additionally, it recounts how Ghazan Khan bestowed the lands taken from the Muslims to the Armenian king and the lands of the kingdom of Jerusalem to the Georgian king. Thus, a large part of the Holy Land was in the hands of Christians this year (1300) with the help of the Tatars, from which the King of Cyprus and other Christians had been driven out by the Sultan a short time before.<sup>74</sup>

The Eastern Christians played a significant role in the conflict between the Mongols and the Mamluks, which greatly affected their compatriots on the territories under the Mamluk rule. It is known that in the early 1270s, the Mamluk Sultan Baybars I (1260-1277) confiscated the Jvari Monastery (Monastery of the Cross, Deir as-Salib) from the Georgians.<sup>75</sup> The justification given was that the Georgians and Armenians residing around the Jvari Monastery were accused of acting as spies for the Mongols, providing them with information about the internal political situation in Egypt.<sup>76</sup> In the years 1299-1300, in the victory of the Mongols, their Christian allies must have played an important role, which is evidenced by a number of facts. In this context, the information noted in Denise Aigle’s article is particularly relevant: after the defeat of the Mongols, their Christian allies were the subject of a “Fatwa,” a special Islamic legal ruling in Egypt.<sup>77</sup> The renowned Arab encyclopedist Shihab ad-Din al-Umar wrote that “they [the Georgians] represent the strength and wealth of the Hulaguian army, and [the Hulaguians] trust and rely on them.”<sup>78</sup> According to Al-Nuwayri,

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<sup>70</sup> *Armyanskiye istochniki o mongolakh*, 98; Gocholeishvili, 1978: 109; Japaridze, 2016: 52.

<sup>71</sup> *History of the Tartars*, 74.

<sup>72</sup> Peradze, 1995: 35-36.

<sup>73</sup> Röhrich, 1881: 649, n. 7.

<sup>74</sup> *Excerpta e Memoriali historiarum*, 636.

<sup>75</sup> Müller & Pahlitzsch, 2004: 271.

<sup>76</sup> Japaridze, 2018: 69.

<sup>77</sup> Aigle, 2007: 101.

<sup>78</sup> Al-‘Umari, 78; Japaridze, 2016: 61.

a Egyptian historian, the Georgians “are the most powerful allies and supporters of the Mongols, as well as the unceasing enemies of the Muslims.”<sup>79</sup>

The role of the Georgians in the Mongol and Mamluk wars was regarded as a significant and sometimes decisive factor in the Christian world. Notably, a 1318 note by the French Dominican Guillaume Adam is particularly illuminating in evaluating the contribution of Georgians to the military campaigns of the Ilkhans.

they are the most powerful warriors in the East, they thirst for the blood of the Saracens, and their hearts aspire to crusade. Without their mighty sword, the Persian emperor [Il-khan – B.K., G.E.] would never have achieved victory against the Saracens.<sup>80</sup>

The Byzantine historian Georgii Pachymeris remarked that

Ghazan Khan took pride in the number of his allies and primarily relied on the Iberians, noted for their bravery and Christian integrity, in his military endeavors. Pachymeris further noted that Ghazan Khan launched an assault on Jerusalem, aiming to capture it to win the favor of the Iberians due to the significance of the life-giving tomb.<sup>81</sup>

The Mamluks soon succeeded in regaining control of Syria and Palestine, leading to a decline in European enthusiasm. As Sylvia Schein observed,

“The turmoil and frenzy subsided as quickly as it had arisen.” False reports and fabricated stories contributed to the spread of misinformation. Remarkably, even as late as 1900, an inscription on an old wall in Florence read “for eternal memory.” It is evident to all how powerful and merciful the Lord is. In 1300, He bestowed special grace upon Christians. The Holy Sepulcher, previously held by the Moors, was captured by the Tatars and subsequently restored by the Christians. This event occurred during the papacy of Boniface VIII (1294-1303).<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is pertinent to recall a passage from Sylvia Schein’s article: “When reading these records, one gets the impression that the Holy Land is still in the hands of Christians.”<sup>83</sup> The transfer of the Holy Land to the Georgians and Armenians is not corroborated by Eastern sources and is not supported by Georgian or foreign historians.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, while Eastern sources do not confirm the transfer of the Holy Land

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<sup>79</sup> Al-Nuwayri (c.f. Quatremère, 1845: 56, n. 52); Pahlitzsch, 2003: 41.

<sup>80</sup> William of Adam, 58-59; Tsursumia, 2019: 239.

<sup>81</sup> *Georgii Pachymeris*, 457; See also Tsursumia, 2013: 318.

<sup>82</sup> Schein, 1979: 819.

<sup>83</sup> Schein, 1979: 808.

<sup>84</sup> Schein, 1979: 805-819; Donald, 2001: 14; Japaridze, 2016: 54.

to Georgians and Armenians, European reports from the period reflect such claims. The perception in Europe that the Holy Land had once again come under Christian control can largely be attributed to the involvement of the Eastern Christians, particularly Georgians and Armenians, in the Mongol campaign. Moreover, it is historically confirmed that Georgians and Armenians were indeed present in Jerusalem during the campaign. Given that Ghazan Khan and his entourage converted to Islam in 1295, it is more plausible that European authors of the time, who were aware of this conversion, did not consider the Mongols (now Muslims) as Christians. Instead, they likely viewed the Georgians and Armenians, who were involved in the campaign and remained Christian, as the key figures in the conquest and subsequent restoration of the Holy Land.



Fig. 1. Ghazan Khan ordering the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia to accompany Kutlushah on the 1303 attack on Damascus. 15th century *Le Livre des Merveilles* (BNF Fr2810) folio 251v [Public Domain: This file comes from Gallica Digital Library and is available under the digital ID btv1b52000858n/f506].

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