

The Religious Toleration Policy of the Mongols and its Diplomatic Significance for Relations with the Holy See in the Thirteenth Century

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The appearance of the Mongols on the world's stage was perceived differently. The Catholic realm obviously had its own attitude towards it. By virtue of the fact that the Mongols put an end to the Islamic Empire of the Khwarazmshahs, this new people won the favour of Europeans and even persuaded them to think about coming together to form an anti-Islamic alliance. Nevertheless, there were still indeed serious suspicions regarding the identity and intentions of the Mongols. In the present article we will attempt to find out what the Pax Mongolica is and what it resulted from as well as how the Mongols' religious toleration policy affected relations with the Catholic realm. The article is also concerned with the role played by Georgia in the establishment of relations between the Holy See and the Mongol Khanate.

Before turning to the reasons for the religious tolerance of the Mongols, it is necessary to address the question of those particular religions towards which the Mongols practiced tolerance. As noted by Christopher Pratt Atwood in his article, there were four privileged religions in the Mongol Empire: Buddhism, Daoism (these two were not distinctly separated from each other), Christianity and Islam (Atwood, 2004, p. 248). Religious toleration of the Mongols manifested itself not only in allowing their free practice, but also in providing tax exemptions for them (Atwood, 2004). Although the right of freedom of worship was commonly exercised in the Mongol Empire, it differs from the policy of bestowing privileges and tax exemption, e.g., though Jews were never forbidden to practice Judaism, they were rarely exempted from taxes or received state patronage (Atwood, 2004, pp. 246-247). In order to explain the above discussed religious attitude of the Mongols, first it is necessary to deal with their spiritual beliefs, about which we learn from the accounts of European travelers to the newly risen empire.

In 1245 the Italian Franciscan Missionary Giovanni da Pian di Carpine along with a multilingual interpreter Friar Benedykt Polak took his journey to the Golden Horde on behalf of Pope Innocent IV. Exactly in consequence of this trip, he wrote his treatise "The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars". In the aforementioned account Pian di Carpine deals with the settlement area, appearance and clothes of the Mongols as well as their spiritual beliefs. He points out two noteworthy things. It should be first noted that two years of his stay in the Mongol Empire enabled Carpine to talk about the Mongols' religious tolerance. According to him: "*They force no one, so we understand, to break their own faith or law¹, with the exception of Michael² discussed above* (Carpine, 1942, p.12)." It is also worth mentioning his interesting report with regard to the religious beliefs of the Mongols. As pointed out by Pian di Carpine: "*The Tartars believe in one God whom they think is the creator of all things visible and invisible, and they believe he gives rewards and punishments in this world. Even so, they do not worship him with praises or ritual* (Carpine, 1942, p.10)." Pian di Carpine is not the only author who puts an emphasis on recognition of the One God by the Mongols. A similar note is found in the account of Willem van Ruysbroeck as well.

On behalf of the King Louis IX of France the Flemish Franciscan Friar Willem van Ruysbroeck set out for eastern countries from 1253 to 1255. The traveler arrived at the Mongol capital of Karakorum and paid a visit to the Khagan Möngke Khan. He is the author of the extensive report entitled "The Account of the Journey of French Brother Willem van Ruysbroeck from

¹ *All underlines* by me, G. E.

² Ref. to *Prince Mikhail Vsevolodovich* of Chernigov. According to the author, when the Prince *came to bow to Batu Khan, he refused to worship the image of* a dead man, *Genghis Khan himself. Hence Batu sent one of his bodyguards to him, who kicked him in the stomach until he died* (Carpine, 1942, p.11).

the Order of Friars Minor in the Year 1253 to Oriental Lands". In his account Willem describes a theological dispute between Christians, Muslims, and Tuins (Buddhists) held at the Khagan's court. Apparently, the author also participated in the debate with the aid of an interpreter. Fascinated by the Friar's discourse, the Grand Khan summoned him and conversation took place between them. Rather interesting is the Khan's reasoning which we learn from the Franciscan Friar's report. "*We Moal [Mongols],*" - said Möngke Khan, "*believe that there is only One God, by Whom we live and by whom we die, and for whom we have an upright heart. But as God gives us the different fingers of the hand, so he gives to men divers ways* (Ruysbroeck, 1942, p.147)."

The journeys of these two Friars to the Mongol Empire are separated by almost ten years. Nevertheless, both authors state that the Mongols believed in one God. According to their belief, God is the One who gives life and takes it away. How did the Mongols imagine God? To answer this question, we can cite Möngke Khan's letter to Louis IX which reads: "*The commandment of the eternal God is, in Heaven there is only one eternal God, and on Earth there is only one lord, Genghis Khan. This is a word of the Son of God, Temüjin, "sound of iron"* (Ruysbroeck, 1942, p.157)." It is evident from the quotation that for the Mongols, the Khan was the supreme Lord of the Earth, Son of God, i.e. the one who brought about God's will on the earth. In view of the foregoing it is easy to identify the cause of the Mongols' tolerance towards different religious beliefs. From our point of view, exactly an Emperor (Khan) is the One who fulfills the words of the Heavenly God referred to by Möngke Khan, while fingers given by God are nothing but divers religions allowed in the Mongol Empire by Genghis Khan, the visible God. Perhaps that is what the British historian David O. Morgan meant when stating that the tolerance of the Mongols resulted not so much from their spiritual dispersion as from their presupposition that one of these religions may have been true and hence it would have been prudent on their part to urge everyone to pray for the Khan (Atwood, 2004, p.238). This is indeed merely a hypothesis that needs further scrutiny.

Yet it would not be just to explain the religious tolerance of the Mongols in terms of religion alone. It would be fairer if, behind this policy, we detect not only religious, but economic and political reasons as well.

First we shall address economic reasons. Discussing about the religious tolerance of the Mongols, we should not lose sight of their trade interests that made the conquerors treat the religious beliefs of subjugated people with respect. In the process of

their conquests, the Mongols captured the Silk Road. This road was of great importance not only to the Catholic West, but to Eastern, Islamic and Buddhist countries as well and hence the holders of the Road tried to make the most of it. It is not unreasonable to think that if the Mongols had pursued an aggressive religious policy with respect to the Catholic West, they would have lost not only an ally in further expansion against the Mamluk Sultanate, but also a trading partner (Rossabi, 2012, p.23). Europeans, on their part, had their eye on. After European travelers and merchants learnt that "the barbarians", instead of banning trade, supported and developed the network of trade routes, their attitude towards the strangers became more favourable. This is particularly true in relation to Venetian and Genoese merchants who had actively traded in territories under the control of the direct descendants of Genghis Khan throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Ciociltan, 2012, pp. 1-2).

As for the political motives behind religious tolerance, the Mongols practiced it towards different religions mainly with a view to ruling the subjugated people more easily. The invaders rapidly seized vast territories, and in order to hold them for a long time, political shrewdness was needed. The Mongols did not pursue a traditional nomadic way of life and did not base their authority merely on military power. This fact was demonstrated, among other things, by a well regulated taxation system as well as diverse and effective military tactics. It is noteworthy that such policy had been pursued by the Mongols since the time of Genghis Khan and continued to be actively implemented during the reign of his successors. This points to the fact that the religious toleration policy was endorsed by the majority of the Khans (Rossabi, 2012, p.40).

Another thing that should not be overlooked when it comes to the religious tolerance is that the Mongols did not affiliate themselves with any confession. They professed neither Christianity nor Islam nor Confucianism and Buddhism. Hence practicing religious intolerance, indeed, would have seemed unreasonable on their part.

To sum up all the above in a few words, the religious tolerance of the Mongols resulted not only from religious, but also political and economic reasons. This can be confirmed once more by the fact that after the conversion of Ghazan Khan to Islam and declaring Islam as the state religion, a conflict between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk Sultanate did not cease. By that time both sides had positioned themselves as true defenders of Islam. For that very reason, the Egyptian Mamluks were suspicious of the Khan's fidelity to Islam (Rossabi, 2012, p.70). Actually it can be said that the religious policy of the Mongols confused

Europe that did not give up hope for the conversion of the Ilkhans and the Golden Horde to the Catholic faith. Before turning to this issue in greater detail, we would like to highlight another significant aspect thanks to which this new people gained the papal favour shortly after manifesting themselves on the international scene.

Since the twelfth century, a legend about the great King Prester John, who set out along with his warriors from a distant eastern kingdom to protect the Holy See and Jerusalem, spread across Europe. The pontiffs of Rome always referred to this legend whenever they found it necessary to spirit Crusaders up in the face of adversities. The Fifth Crusade was no exception, during which Pope Honorius III appealed to this narrative. After the Crusaders began to lose their positions, rumours spread about a certain King David of India. At the same time, word went around about the demolition of the Khwarazmian Empire by the Mongols. This was quite enough for friars to recollect once again the “forgotten” legend of Prester John and identify the legendary King with Genghis Khan (Gogoladze et al. 2015, p.272).

Even Georgians confused the Mongols with Christians (Tabagoua, 1984, p.176-179). At first this might seem surprising, but it is enough to recall rumours concerning Prester John and King David of India, and it will make perfect sense. The Georgians as potential allies for crusaders should have been aware of the Crusader-King Presbyter coming from the East. In view of the foregoing, it should come as no surprise that they took Mongols for the warriors of the aforementioned Prester John or King David, and welcomed them hospitably as their allies in the deliverance of the Holy Land from the Infidels (Mamistvalishvili, 2014, p.96).

Thus Europe was confused by the appearance of the Mongols as well as by reports coming from the East on the Indian King David. Notwithstanding, there should have been no doubt about the falsehood of the rumours regarding the Mongols after they familiarized themselves with the letters of the Queen and the Amirspasalar. It naturally begs the question: Then why did not Europe in general and the Pope in particular view the Mongols as their foes, as was the case with the Mamluk Sultanate?

Let us now move on to the main part of the article and figure out the role of the policy of religious toleration pursued by the Mongols in relations with the Catholic realm. As noted above, when the Mongols first revealed themselves, Europeans regarded them as their allies and Genghis Khan as a hero. However, these misperceptions were soon dispelled after receiving reports from Georgia in 1223. The information provid-

ed by Queen Rusudan and Amirspasalar was coupled with the fact of the vanquishment of the Cumans (Kipchaks) and their brothers in arms from Kyivan Rus'. At that time Europe, like the Islamic world, assumed the position of an outside observer. Who were this new people and what were their intentions? Further westward conquests of the Mongols were temporarily halted due to the death of Genghis Khan. However, in 1235 a new Khagan Ögedei trod in his father's footsteps. In 1235 the Mongols appeared not for conducting reconnaissance, but for the conquest of these lands. In 1240 they vanquished the Ukrainians, Poles and Hungarians at Kyiv, and the following year - near the Silesian city of Liegnitz. At that time the religious and secular leaders of Europe were well aware of the intentions of the Mongols. Nevertheless, Europe was not concerned with the Mongols until 1245 due to the conflict between the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen and Pope Gregory IX. During this period the Mongols invaded Poland, Bohemia, Moravia and Meissen. They ultimately defeated the Hungarian King Béla IV and in 1242 even crossed the frozen Danube, making raids not far from the Austrian border. The Catholic realm was delivered from the Mongol threat mainly thanks to the death of Ögedei Khan and the dearth of pastures for their horses. The threat coming from “the barbarians” was properly assessed in the papacy of Innocent IV. In 1245 he convened an ecumenical council in Lyon. Apart from the excommunication of Emperor Frederick II, the Tartar³ issue and the liberation of the Holy Land were on the agenda of the Council (Bird, 2013, pp.306-308). At the great Council it was decided to urgently send an envoy to the Mongols to deal first with the religious issues. Specifically for this purpose Innocent IV sent Giovanni da Pian del Carpine to the Tartars. This is evidenced by a papal letter the content of which is recounted by the Franciscan himself. According to him, the Pope's only wish was that Tartars and Christians lived together in peace. He wished for the Tartars to rise spiritually and have salvation, i. e. to embrace Christianity (Carpine, 1942, p.48).

Despite great efforts on the part of Europe, the only thing that the Mongols demanded from the Catholic realm was submission and acknowledgement of their superiority. This was demonstrated by a letter that Willem van Rubroek brought from Tartary to Louis IX, wherein Möngke Khan himself unequivocally stated: *“And when you shall have heard and believed [“the commandment of the eternal God”], if you will obey us, send your ambassadors to us; and so we shall have proof whether you want peace or war with us. When, by the virtue of the eternal God, from the rising of the*

³ *Mongols were referred to as “Tartars” in western European sources.*

Sun to the setting, all the world shall be in universal joy and peace, then shall be manifested what we are to be. But if you hear the commandment of the eternal God, and understand it, and shall not give heed to it, nor believe it, saying to yourselves: "Our country is far off, our mountains are strong, our sea is wide," and in this belief you make war against us, you shall find out what we can do. He who makes easy what is difficult, and brings close what is far off, the eternal God He knows (Rubroek, 1942, pp. 158-159)." The Mongol threat is particularly apparent in the last sentence. It is also evident that the Mongols did not regard the West as an equal ally. When was that change made in their foreign policy and what was the reason for it?

We think that the main reason for Europeans to perceive the Tartars as their allies was that they learned about the faith of the Mongols through the envoys sent to them shortly after their appearance (since 1240). The Catholics were informed that the Tartars believed in one God and looked favourably on Christianity. Soon subduing Mamluk Egypt became a common goal for both the Catholic realm and the Ilkhanate (Jackson, 2014, p.256). This was primarily related to the first serious defeat of the Mongols in the way of their westward conquests that took place in the Battle of Ain Jalut. This can be regarded as a starting point for the strengthening of ties between the West and the Mongols (Bird, 2013, p. 310, Aigle, 2005, p.152). *"So, there was a mutual longing for cooperation that stemmed from their willingness to fight against the common enemy."* (Evaniseli, 2019, p.80) It should be noted here that the desire to fight jointly against the Mamluk Sultanate was shared only by the Ilkhanate and Europe. As for the relations between the Golden Horde and the Catholic realm, they were predominantly based on trade and economic cooperation.

From our point of view, the relations between these two worlds were facilitated by virtue of the fact that the Mongols were still pagans and since the reign of Hülegü Khan it had felt like "the barbarians" would soon embrace Christianity. As early as April 1262, the Khan of the Ilkhanate sent his envoy to Europe, who had to deliver a letter to Pope Urban IV, the French king Louis IX and to other European sovereigns. However, as it seems, the letter was lost en route due to the efforts of the Sicilian King Manfred⁴. Nevertheless, John the Hungarian paid a visit to the Pope presented him Hülegü's letter, wherein he expressed his com-

mendation. In this letter the Khan called upon the King to blockade Egypt. As it seems from the letter, Hülegü himself was planning to attack the Mamluks from the east. He recounted all those cases where he spared Christians and even made concessions to them. Evidently, thus he hoped to assure the Catholic sovereigns of his esteem and interest in Christianity (Jackson, 2014, pp. 165-166). Notwithstanding the above, it should be also noted here that the Mongols never renounced their claims to world domination. At that time they positioned themselves as divinely sent friends of Christians who sought to bring the Muslims to their knees and give the Holy Land back to Christian Europe (Aigle, 2005, pp. 152-153). Although this letter was not enough for the Pope to have great confidence in the sincerity of the Mongols' avowed intention⁵, from thence lengthy diplomatic negotiations started that continued up until the fourteenth century, even after the Ilkhans accepted Islam.

Abaqa Khan's letter sent thereafter to the Second Ecumenical Council of Lyons in 1274 was dramatically different from that of Hülegü Khan in the sense that there was no speech about the divinely granted right of Genghis Khan and his heirs to dominate over the world. Accordingly, there was not stated anywhere in the letter that Europe should have acknowledged the supremacy of the Mongols (Aigle, 2005, p. 153). Softening the tone apparently stemmed from the fact that Europe would have never accepted such terms of alliance, that is to say, the acknowledgement of Mongol world supremacy.

The letter also recounted how Hülegü Khan became benevolent towards Christians. It identified Hülegü's wife Doquz Khatun as a daughter of Prester John. Yet the letter is written in such a manner that makes Hülegü Khan himself akin to Prester John and even to Moses in one place. It also duly appreciated the merits of the Dominican Friar David of Ashby, who had been sent to Hülegü's court and stayed there to acquaint the Khan with the Catholic faith. According to the author of the letter, due to the reasons set out above, the Khan started to patronize Christians, which was reflected in tax exemptions, guaranteeing the inviolability of their property and allowing them to conduct religious rites in all churches (Aigle, 2005, pp. 153-154).

Apart from the letter, the Catholics were particularly impressed by witnessing the baptism of two members of the Mongol delegation from the hands of Pierre de Tarentaise, Cardinal Bishop of Ostia and the future Pope Innocent V, at the Second Council of Lyons. Both

⁴ *King Manfred of Sicily* was at *feud with the Pope*, who even proclaimed a *crusade against* him. At the same time, the *offspring of the Hohenstaufen dynasty* had *relations with the Mamluk Sultanate*. Therefore, an *alliance of Christian Europe and the Mongols against them did not play into the hands of Manfred* (Jackson, 2014, p. 166).

⁵ *In July of the same year Pope Urban IV referred to the Mongols as cruel foes of the Christians, putting them on the same level with the Mamluks* (Jackson, 2014, p. 166).

envoys were baptized voluntarily and publicly (Jackson, 2014, p.167). It may be reasonably assumed that this fact would have further solidified the hopes of the Catholics for the conversion of the Mongols to Catholicism. The same was pointed out by George Lane, viewed this baptism as an ostentatious act to win the favour of the Catholic ecclesiastics (Lane, 2005, p.50). This expectation would have been reinforced by the fact that in 1276 the Khan sent his envoys to the West to express his willingness to join a new Crusade that Pope Gregory X had proclaimed back to 1274 (Mann, 1931, p. 40; Jackson, 2014, p.168). A desire for the conversion of the Mongols to Christianity was so strong among the Europeans that there were rumours as if “the King of the Tartars” attended the Second Council of Lyons in the flesh, where he received baptism and the crown from the papal hands. In c. 1280 word was out about the hideous shaggy offspring of Casanus, King of the Tartars, and his wife, the beautiful Armenian princess, who appeared smooth and the most beautiful of infants as soon as he was immersed thrice in the sacred baptismal font. Thereafter the Khan reached out to the Christians and began to prepare for the deliverance of Jerusalem from the hands of the Mamluks (Jackson, 2014, p.172).

Abaqa Khan’s policy of rapprochement with Europe and ostentatious acceptance of Christianity was continued by his successor Arghun Khan. During his reign it felt like the Ilkhanate was about to embrace Christianity. The new the Ilkhanid ruler four times sent his envoys to Europe - in 1285, 1287, 1289-1290, and 1290-1291. Although Hülegü and Abaqa Khan had been also willing to form an alliance with the West, they had not endeavoured in this direction so much. Hence the question naturally arises: Why did the Ilkhanid prioritize this issue? The apparent reason for this was the Second Battle of Homs that took place 29 October 1281. Abaqa Khan’s army led by his brother Möngke-Temur suffered a severe defeat fighting against the Mamluks. This defeat ultimately convinced Arghun Khan that it would be impossible to subdue Egypt without enlisting the support of the Catholics (Jackson, 2014, p. 169). This is exactly why he increased the number of diplomatic missions to the West. The diplomatic journey of the Nestorian Monk Rabban Bar Şawma was of particular significance. He succeeded in convincing Pope Nicholas IV that the Khan’s intention was to bring Jerusalem back to the Christians and receive baptism there, and consequently the Pope became far more optimistic with respect to the conversion of the Mongols (Jackson, 2014, p. 175).

It might seem at first sight that the attempts to bind ties between these two worlds should have been abandoned after Ghāzān Khan’s conversion to Islam.

In reality, however, the situation was rather different. Not a lot changed in the religious policy of the Mongols. Just the fact that two Islamic powers, the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk Sultanate, were still at enmity with each other may be cited in confirmation of the above. Each of the two claimed to be a true defender of Islam. So as we can see, territorial and economic disputes were of greater interest to the Mongols than religious ones (Rossabi, 2012, p.72). To some extent, the Europeans saw their guilt in the Islamization of the Mongols. For instance, the Catalan mystic Raymond Lully claimed that during his journey across Asia Minor he learnt about Ghāzān Khan’s aspirations for Christianity. The Khan wanted to know more about this religion, but he did not get this knowledge and consequently accepted Islam (Jackson, 2014, p.176). Although at first Ghāzān Khan mistreated the Christians, the problem was resolved soon and prior to launching an anti-Egyptian military operation he appealed to the West for aid. A military campaign conducted in 1299-1300, as a consequence of which Ghāzān Khan delivered a crushing defeat to the Mamluks and entire Syria and Palestine bowed beneath the yoke of the Mongols, was perceived by Europe as the triumph of Christendom. Some ascribed this victory to the Jubilee of 1300 proclaimed by Pope Bonifacio VIII, while others associated Ghāzān Khan with Prester John (Jackson, 2014, p.172). The succeeding khan Öljaitü did not abandon the line of policy pursued by his brother and, despite religious differences, maintained the ties with the West. In consideration of this, Peter Jackson arrives at the conclusion that the policy pursued by both Ghāzān and Öljaitü Khan was never influenced by their religious beliefs. To sum it up, Christianity as well as Buddhism was accepted by the Mongols more in practice than in theory. Properly speaking, the conversion of the Ilkhanids to Islam was largely due to the fact that it was deemed the wealthiest and the most culturally refined religion within the territory under their control (Jackson, 2014, pp.177-178).

As we can see, the religious policy pursued in the Ilkhanate, one of the Ulus formed due to the division of the Mongol Empire, enhanced relations between the West and the newcomers. The Catholic realm did not give up hope that the Ilkhanids’ favourable attitude to Christianity would be reflected in both theory and practice, but these hopes were forlorn. The Mongols on their part used their religious policy as an effective tool in forming an alliance with the West. Besides, they understood well that the Silk Road would have lost many of its former functions in case of pursuing an aggressive religious policy.

Here we should briefly touch upon the religious policy of the second power formed after the dissolution

of Genghis Khan's Empire, the Golden Horde, with respect to the Christians. It should be noted at the very outset that the Ulus of Jochi and the West did not have the common enemy represented by the Mamluk Sultanate. The most bitter enemy of the latter was none other than the Ilkhanid Empire. So what set the stage for the cordial relations between the Golden Horde and the Catholic realm?

In spite of the adoption of a line of policy different from that of the Ilkanids, neither did the Golden Horde abandon religious toleration inherited from Genghis Khan's rule, with all that it implies. This refers in particular to the exemption of ecclesiastics and churches from taxation. Furthermore, the proselytizing activities of Catholic missionaries were never restricted within the territory of the Horde. Quite the contrary, they were even encouraged. As was the case after the conquest of Georgia, a population census was conducted throughout the lands of Rus, which was followed by the imposition of taxes. Only the Churches of Rus were exempted from the tax. According to the Laurentian Codex, "*The year 1257. That winter tax-gatherers arrived here and conducted a census in all of the lands: the Principalities of Suzdal, Ryazan, and Murom. They brought here the chiefs of ten, chiefs of hundred, chiliarchs and myriarchs and went back to the Horde. They did not count only hegumens, monks, priests and acolytes, all those who behold the Most Holy Theotokos and the Lord* (Grekov, 1950, p. 218)." There is a similar account regarding the Church of Georgia, which shall be discussed below in greater detail.

Möngke Temür, the first khan of the Golden Horde, was exceptionally tolerant in religious matters of all rulers of the Ulus of Jochi. He did not impose taxes upon the Orthodox churches and the churchmen of Rus. Moreover, he supported the Genoese merchants to set up a trade factory at Theodosia (Caffa) on the Crimean peninsula (Rossabi, 2012, p.72). That having been said, Möngke himself was inclined to Islam. This raises the question of the reason for his favourable attitude towards the Christians.

While discussing the benign relations between the Golden Horde and the West, it would be appropriate to say a few words about the economic ties that bound these two realms to each other. Here it should be noted that before the Mongols took possession of an access to the Black Sea, the local Cumans had actively traded with the Catholics. Not a lot changed in this respect after the appearance of the Mongols, who continued to support the policy of an active trade (Ciocîltan, 2012, pp. 141-147). This is also confirmed by the accounts of Willem van Ruysbroeck who, whilst journeying in the city of Sevastopol, notes: "*In the middle,*

at the summit of the triangle as it were, on the south side, is a city called Soldaia, which looketh across towards Sinopolis: thither come all the merchants arriving from Turkia who wish to go to the northern countries, and likewise those coming from Roscia and the northern countries who wish to pass into Turkia. The latter carried vair and minever, and other costly furs. Others carried cloths of cotton or bombax, silk stuffs and sweet-smelling spices.", "Toward the end of this province are many and large lakes, on whose shores are brine springs, the water of which as soon as it enters the lake is turned into salt as hard as ice. And from these brine springs Baatu and Sartach derive great revenues" (Ruysbroeck, 1942, pp.12-17). Further Ruysbroeck mentions certain Constantinopolitan merchants, who gave him some useful advice. They should have been evidently well acquainted with these places (Ruysbroeck, 1942, p.15). From the above cited extracts we can conclude that the economic exploitation of the Black Sea region was carried on in the Ulus of Jochi only thanks to the once given impetus. Although Batu Khan made greater efforts to gain possession of the City of Tabriz and the trade route along which it lay, than access to the Black Sea, "Pax Mongolica" supported and even advanced trade in this area (Ciocîltan, 2012, pp. 141-148).

The formation of the Ilkhanate and the subsequent annexation of Tabriz by it changed the policy of the rulers of the Ulus of Jochi. A conflict arose between the two Mongol Empires. Soon the third power represented by the Mamluk Egypt became embroiled in the conflict. The root cause of the confrontation, indeed, was of an economic nature. A dream of the Khans of the Golden Horde to take Tabriz, city of huge economic significance, and bring the Silk Road under their control was not destined to come true. The vanquishment of Berke Khan in the 1262 military campaign against Hülegü Khan made the rulers of the Ulus of Jochi abandon their attempts to gain control over the Silk Road and concentrate on trading with the Christian and Muslim realms through the Black Sea (Ciocîltan, 2012, pp.148-150).

Owing to the conclusion of the 1261 Treaty of Nymphaeum, Genoa was the first which entered into serious trade relations with the Golden Horde. The Treaty was concluded between the Most Serene Republic of Genoa and the Nicaean Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus against the Most Serene Republic of Venice. However, Venice soon resumed its former position and made the city of Tana its main outpost in the northern Black Sea region, while Genoese-controlled Caffa was its principal trade rival (Ciocîltan, 2012, pp.150-160). The enhancement of trade relations was followed by setting up missionary activities in the area. Guided by

the principle of religious tolerance, the rulers of the Golden Horde treated the missionaries with courtesy. They never restrained them and even supported them in the course of their arguments with Muslims. A 1287 letter written by Franciscan Friar Ladislaus Custos testifies to this. In his letter the friar tells about Nogay Khan's support for Christians in the Crimean town of Solkhat (Hautala, 2013, p.275). The aforementioned Nogay had married illegitimate daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII, Euphrosyne Palaeologina. Nogay's chief wife Yaylaq even received baptism. However, Nogay Khan himself gave precedence to Islam (Tanase, 2018).

The West had great expectations regarding the conversion of both the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate to Christianity. After the Islamization of the Hülegüids became an irreversible process in the fourteenth century, missionaries refocused their efforts on bringing the Golden Horde to Christianity (Hautala, 2014, pp.82-83).

As we can see, the Europeans hoped to convert the Golden Horde to Christianity just as much as they did with respect to the Ilkhanate, but none of these expectations were eventually met. In historiography there is a widely held view that the conversion of the nomads to Islam was predestined due to a number of social and economic factors. Speaking of the Ilkhanate, the Islamization of the Mongols can be seen as a process of ideological convergence of the Mongol government and the local Persian population. As for the Golden Horde, in this case historians again speak of the inevitability of the conversion of the steppe chiefs by the Muslim merchant elite (Hautala, 2013, p.273). It would be relevant to deal with the territorial issues along with social and economic ones, in particular, to say a couple of words about the geographic area across which the Hülegüid State lay. As is known, the Ilkhanate covered the territories of Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and the eastern part of Asia Minor, where Islam was the dominating religion, and hence the attempts of the Catholic missionaries did not bring the desired results. So it becomes apparent that "Pax Mongolica" had a strategic significance for the Mongols in the establishment of relations with the Catholics. The latter continuously perceived the nomads as their allies, not as their foes.

The role of Georgia in this political context should necessarily be considered here. The question of to what extent Georgia experienced the religious toleration policy of the Mongols that always accompanied their conquests is also a subject of particular interest. "A Hundred Year Chronicle" by the unknown chronicler contains an account of the exemption of the Church of Georgia from taxation. It reads: "*He did not impose the*

tax and qalan upon priests, neither upon monks, nor upon any other ecclesiastics. He also exempted Darwishes, Sheikhs and representatives of all religions" (Kaukhchishvili, 1959, p.235). We find some interesting information regarding the Georgian Church in the accounts of the Persian historian Juwaynī. Thence we learn that Möngke Khan ordered to collect taxes from the weary peasantry in correspondence with the financial situation of each family. It did not apply to those who had been exempted from all taxes under Genghis and Ögedei. "*From the Muslims [they were] the great Sayyids and pious Imams, and from the Christians who are referred to as Arkehums - monks and clergymen* (Juwaynī, 1974, pp.54-55)".

As we can see, Georgia also experienced the religious toleration policy of the Mongols, which was manifested in the exemption of the Church from taxation. Both Georgian and Armenian chronicles testify to this. Unfortunately, due to the dearth of sources, it is hard to know for certain whether the Mongol ruling elite understood the difference between Nestorians, Orthodox Christians and Catholics. Nevertheless, one thing we know for sure is that they had a clear idea of which country was on good terms with the West and which one could be their ally regardless of their understanding of the doctrines of this or that religion. Georgia was among such countries which subsequently began to act as an intermediary between the realm of Western European Catholicism and the Mongols. This can be further confirmed by the fact that in 1276 Abaqa Khan sent Georgian brothers, Johannes and Jacobus Vassalli, to Europe (Evaniseli, 2021, pp.24-28). Georgia had its aim, namely to participate in a crusade against the Mamluk Sultanate for the liberation of the Holy Land. The religious policy pursued by the Mongols made the establishment of relations with them easier. They did not demand a denial of our faith, neither did they burden the Church with payments. Therefore, the Georgians did not regard fighting alongside the Mongols as a betrayal of their identity.

In conclusion it can be said that the religious policy of the Mongols considerably facilitated relations with the West and subjugated peoples. Pax Mongolica not only resulted in the prolonged stay of the subjugated peoples beneath the imperial yoke, but also greatly contributed to the enhancement of trade relations between the West and the East. Exactly from this period the Europeans begun to actively familiarize themselves with the cultural mores of the Oriental peoples. Certainly, it would have been impossible if the Mongols had practiced religious intolerance.

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