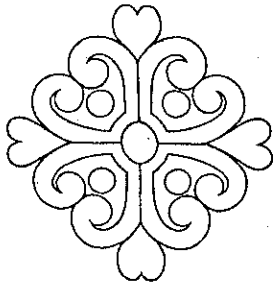


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Mission to Asia



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II. THE MISSION OF JOHN OF PLANO CARPINI (1245-7)

This was recognized by the new Pope, Innocent IV, and the first of the missions described in this volume was despatched by him in 1245 to avert the threatened danger.

For this purpose he chose two Franciscans, Lawrence of Portugal and John of Plano Carpini. "Men proved by years of regular observance and well versed in Holy Scripture, for we believed that they would be of greater help to you, seeing that they follow the humility of our Saviour. If we had thought that ecclesiastical prelates or other powerful men would be more profitable and more acceptable to you we would have sent them." Thus Innocent IV concludes the first of the two bulls to the Emperor of the Tartars, which will be found on pp. 73-6 of this volume, and it is difficult to say whether his words are an expression of naïve simplicity or statesmanlike imagination. Perhaps the Mongol princes were no less disconcerted by these barefooted emissaries of the lord of the Christian world than were the Russian princes by the sorceress who brought the Tartar ultimatum to Riazan in 1237. At least we cannot fail to be impressed by the courage of this disciple of St. Francis who, at the age of sixty-five, without any knowledge of oriental languages or any resource except his faith, embarked on this tremendous journey to the heart of the barbarian world. It is true that John of Plano Carpini was familiar with Northern Europe; and his companion, Benedict the Pole, who joined him at Breslau, had contacts with the Christian princes of Eastern Europe, Wenceslas of Bohemia, Boleslas of Silesia, Daniel of Galicia and Vasilko of Volhynia. But the information that they gave him cannot have been reassuring. As he writes in his prologue: "We feared that we might be killed by the Tartars or other people, or imprisoned for life, or afflicted with

hunger, thirst, cold, heat, injuries and exceeding great trials almost beyond our powers of endurance—all of which with the exception of death and imprisonment for life fell to our lot in various ways in a much greater degree than we had conceived beforehand."

After spending the greater part of the winter in Poland and Galicia, they set out into the steppe "not knowing whether they were going to death or life" at the beginning of Lent, 1240, and immediately fell in with the Tartar outposts, who "came rushing upon us in a horrible manner, wanting to know what kind of men we were". But at least they met with no obstruction; the outpost despatched them to his commander "Corenza", who sent them to Sartak, who sent them on without delay to his father the great Batu, the ruler of the Western Ulus who held his camp on the lower Volga. Even here they remained only a few days, for Batu decided that they should be sent to the Great Khan Guyuk himself, in time to be present at the inauguration ceremony at the Golden Horde. They were forced to ride at top speed with five or six relays of horses every day. "We were so weak we could hardly ride. During the whole of that Lent our food had been nothing but millet with water and salt, and it was the same on other fast days, and we had nothing to drink except snow melted in a kettle."¹ And so they continued month after month for thousands of miles through a desert land without rest or intermission. It would have been an ordeal for the toughest of horsemen, but for an elderly clergyman who was extremely fat and in poor health, it is one of the most remarkable feats of physical endurance on record.

Travelling through Central Asia north of the Caspian and the Sea of Aral, they reached the camp of Orda, the elder brother of Batu, in the region of Lake Ala Kul in Dzungaria, at midsummer, and after a single day's rest they went on faster than ever, "rising early and travelling until night without eating anything and often we came so late to our lodgings that we had not time to eat that night, but were given in the morning the food we should have eaten the previous night".² Thanks to this relentless haste they

¹ See pp. 57-8.

² See pp. 60-1.

arrived at the camp of Guyuk near Karakorum on July 22nd in time to be present at the great assembly at which Guyuk was proclaimed and enthroned as Great Khan. And thus we have a first-hand record by a Western observer of this historic occasion which had brought together not only the leaders of the Mongols but the representatives of all the subject peoples of the Empire from Russia and Georgia to Manchuria and China.

Although their reception seemed churlish enough to the Friars, it is clear that their coming was welcome, and that the Mongols were anxious to establish relations with the great priest who ruled the Christians of the Far West. Their motives, however, are not so clear and it is possible that John of Plano Carpini was right in believing that a great campaign was being planned against the West and that their main object was to prepare the way for a formal offer of submission. However this may be, the Friars remained firm in their refusal to take back the Mongol envoys with them and finally on November 17th they were dismissed with the Khan's letter to the Pope, which we still possess and of which a translation is given below. They travelled back over the open steppes all through the winter with incredible hardships, sleeping in the snow "save when in the open plain when there were no trees we could scrape a place with our feet".

They reached Batu's camp on the Volga on the feast of the Ascension (May 9th, 1247), and after staying there a month, they at last received safe conducts for their return to Kiev. "We reached Kiev fifteen days before the feast of St. John the Baptist, and the men of Kiev when they heard of our arrival came out to meet us rejoicing and congratulating us as if we had risen from the dead, and so they did throughout Russia, Poland and Bohemia." And when Daniel of Galicia and his brother Vasilko had heard their account of the embassy, after taking council with their bishops, they sent their own letters to the Pope by the Friars, accepting his supremacy and that of the Roman Church. This was the first reunion between the Russians and the Western Church, and since Daniel at this time was the most powerful of the remaining Russian princes, it was perhaps the only positive and concrete result of this heroic venture.

Meanwhile Mongol policy was at a standstill owing to the strained relations between the Great Khan and his cousin Batu. There had been a bitter quarrel between the two princes during the invasion of Hungary five years earlier and it was impossible to undertake any large-scale expedition to the West so long as this issue was undecided. Thus what actually happened was not a war between the Mongols and the West but a breach between the two leading branches of the family of Chingis Khan—the house of Ugedey represented by Guyuk, and the house of Juchi represented by Batu. Civil war was only averted by the death of the Great Khan under very suspicious circumstances at the moment when Batu was advancing to meet him in Central Asia, and during the following three years (1248–51) Batu succeeded in bringing about the fall of the house of Ugedey and the election of his own candidate, Mongka the son of Tuluy, to be the supreme Khan.

III. THE MISSIONS OF THE DOMINICANS, ASCELIN AND ANDREW OF LONGJUMEAU

It is possible that this change of government and the semi-independent position which Batu had achieved in the West saved Europe from further peril. For with the coming of the new dynasty, the drive of Mongol aggression turned southwards so that the existence of Islam rather than that of Christendom was endangered.

But the Christian West could not know this. Nothing could be more alarming than the report of John of Plano Carpini or more menacing than the letter of the Great Khan to the great Pope. And the result of the second mission which Innocent IV sent two years later was at first even more discouraging. This time the envoys were Dominicans,¹ Fr. Ascelin, Simon of Tournai and three others, and they were ordered to visit the camp of the nearest Mongol army on the frontier of Asia Minor and to demand the

¹ There is some obscurity about the relation of this mission of 1247 to the earlier Franciscan one. Lawrence of Portugal, the Franciscan who was charged with the original mission, does not seem to have visited the Mongols. But we are told that in 1247 he was sent by the Pope as legate to Asia Minor, and it was in this year that the mission of Ascelin and his companions to the Mongol leader in Asia Minor took place.

cessation of hostilities against Christendom. Ascelin reached the camp of Baiju, west of the Caspian Sea, on May 24th, 1247, but as he refused the usual act of homage and behaved in a somewhat uncompromising manner he met with a very harsh reception, so that at one moment the exasperated Mongol threatened to have them all executed. The situation seems to have changed with the coming of a higher officer, Aljigiday, the envoy of the Great Khan, who realized the importance of establishing relations with the Christians of the West. Accordingly Ascelin was sent back with an answer similar to that which had already been brought by John of Plano Carpini, together with two Mongol envoys—one of them, Sargis or Sergius, a Christian—who were received by Pope Innocent IV in Italy in the following year—1248. At the same time Aljigiday took steps to establish friendly relations with St. Louis, who had set out on his crusade against Egypt. Aljigiday's envoys, David and Mark, met King Louis in Cyprus and delivered a letter which declared that the Great Khan intended to protect all Christians, Latin and Greek, Armenian, Nestorian and Jacobite, and offered his help against the Saracens for the recovery of Jerusalem.

The fact that Guyuk Khan was no longer alive and that the house of Ugedey was tottering to its fall deprived this embassy of real authority, but the King of France could not realize this and he was naturally overjoyed to hear such "good and gracious words" from the East, which seemed to justify all that the legends of Prester John had promised. In reply he sent back with the Mongol envoys the most important mission that Christendom had sent hitherto. It was led by a Dominican, Andrew of Longjumeau, who knew Persian and had already visited the camp of Baiju, apparently as a member of Br. Ascelin's mission. With him went two other Dominicans, two clerks and two sergeants-at-arms, together with rich presents—above all a wonderful tent-chapel of scarlet cloth in which all the mysteries of the Christian faith were depicted for the instruction of the Tartars. This is the embassy which is described at some length by Joinville and other contemporary historians, so that it seems to have made more impression on public opinion than either of the Franciscan missions recorded

in this volume. The envoys set out from Antioch early in 1248, "and from Antioch it took them a full year, riding ten leagues a day, to reach the great Khan of the Tartars. And they found all the land subject to the Tartars and many cities that they had destroyed and great heaps of dead men's bones". Nevertheless the journey of Andrew and his companions was not so long as that of the two Franciscan missions, since the Regent, Ogul Gamish, the widow of Guyuk Khan, was not in Mongolia but held her court on the River Imil south-east of Lake Balkash, at the point which John of Plano Carpini speaks of as "the first orda of the Emperor".

The Regent received the embassy in the normal Mongol and Chinese fashion as an act of homage and their presents as tribute, but she seems to have treated them honourably enough and sent them back with gifts and the remarkable answer recorded by Joinville as follows:

"Peace is good; for when a country is at peace those who go on four feet eat the grass in peace, and those who go on two feet till the ground, from which good things come, in peace.

"This we send you for a warning, for you cannot have peace if you are not at peace with us. Prester John rose against us, and such and such kings (giving the names of many) and all we have put to the sword. We bid you, then, every year to send us of your gold and of your silver so much as may win you our friendship. If you do not do this we shall destroy you and your people, as we have done to those we have named."¹

St. Louis was naturally disappointed with the results of this mission, and Joinville says that he greatly repented having sent it. Nevertheless the accounts that he had received of the existence of a large Christian population in "Tartary" were not altogether discouraging, and these were confirmed by the reports of the Armenian missions led by the Constable of Armenia, Sempad, who was the brother of King Hethum I and the brother-in-law of the King of Cyprus.

The little kingdom of Cilician Armenia formed a valuable link between the crusading states of Syria and the interior of Asia,

¹ Joinville, *Life of St. Louis*, trans. R. Hague (Sheed and Ward), pp. 149.

owing to its strategic position on the highway from Antioch and Syria to Asia Minor and the Caspian. The coming of the Mongols had been a godsend to the Armenians, since it had delivered them from the continual threat of the Seljuk sultans of Iconium, and after the defeat of the latter by Baiju in 1243, King Hethum of Armenia had become a loyal and favoured vassal of the Great Khan. The embassy of Sempad the Constable took place in 1247 and 1248, so that it coincided with those of Ascelin and Andrew of Longjumeau, and the letter which he wrote from Samarkand in February 1248 to his brother-in-law in Cyprus stressed the importance of the Christian element among the Mongols. From these sources St. Louis learnt that Sartak, the son of Batu, was himself a Christian, and this fact or report encouraged the French King to send a further mission of a more definitely religious character than that of Andrew of Longjumeau to establish relations with the Christians in Central Asia.

IV. THE MISSION OF BROTHER WILLIAM OF RUBRUCK

This is the mission of the Franciscan William of Rubruck, which forms the greater part of the present volume and provides the fullest and most authentic information on the Mongol Empire in its pre-Chinese phase that we possess. The mission consisted of two Franciscans, William of Rubruck and Bartholomew of Cremona, a clerk named Gosset who was in charge of the King's presents to the Khan, and an interpreter or dragoman—"turgemannus"—called Homo Dei (i.e. Abdullah) who proved inefficient and unreliable.

In contrast to the earlier missions, this one was purely religious in character, for though they carried letters from St. Louis to Sartak, they were careful to insist that they were not ambassadors but men of religion whose sole work was "to preach the work of God and to instruct men to live by His will".

In many respects William of Rubruck was better equipped for his mission than John of Plano Carpini had been. Apart from the knowledge already acquired from the earlier missions, he had the great advantage of beginning his journey from the East, from

the court of St. Louis at Acre, where he was in touch with Armenians, Syrians and Greeks, so that he was able to have his letters of credence translated into Persian (or "Arabic" as he calls it) and Syrian. Instead of entering the Mongol world through the Iron Curtain of Eastern Europe and Russia, he travelled by the old highway to Central Asia through Constantinople and the Crimea, and at Constantinople he was able to get further information and letters of safe conduct from the Emperor Baldwin II to the commander of the Mongol outposts. The party left Constantinople on May 7th for Sudak (Soldaia), the great merchant port in the Crimea which was the terminus of the land route to Russia and Asia. They left Sudak on June 1st and reached the Tartar outposts on the third day. "And when I came among them," writes Friar William, "it seemed to me, indeed, as if I were entering another world." From this point Brother William's journey and his experiences correspond very closely with those of Brother John of Plano Carpini eight years before. Both of them went to the great camp of Batu on the Volga, the centre of Mongol power in the West. Both were sent on by Batu to the court of the Great Khan in Mongolia and both experienced the same intense hardships in their travel through the steppes and the same difficulties and misunderstandings in their dealings with the arrogant Mongol chiefs and their greedy and unscrupulous underlings. Nevertheless the contents and manner of the two narratives are very different. Brother John was chiefly concerned to make a full report to the Pope on the Mongols and their empire considered as an immediate danger to Christendom, and with special reference to their methods of making war and how their attacks could best be met. Brother William's book (with the exception of the nine short introductory chapters which deal with Mongol manners and customs) is a straightforward account of his journey and his personal experiences in full detail. He was an exceptionally observant man with the temperament and eye of an artist. "In fact," he says himself, "I would have made you" (St. Louis) "pictures of everything if I only knew how to paint."

The result is that he has written one of the most living and

moving narratives in the whole literature of travel, even more direct and convincing than that of Marco Polo in his own time or Huc and Gabet in the nineteenth century. In spite of his writing in a "learned" language, we still see sharp and clear through his eyes the scene when the Friars at last came before the terrible Batu, on his high seat "long and wide like a couch", with his lady beside him. "We stood there in our habits, barefooted and heads uncovered, and we were a great gazing-stock for their eyes. . . . So we stood there before him for the space of a *Miserere mei Deus* and they all kept the deepest silence." We see the endless drinking parties at Karakorum and the men of every race and religion who met together there. We have a most vivid account of the great disputation held between the representatives of the three religions, Christians, Moslems and Buddhists. And finally we have the account of his last meeting with the Great Khan himself at Pentecost, which is surely one of the most remarkable interviews in history.

V. THE MONGOLS AND CHRISTENDOM

Here, we feel, we are standing at one of the great crossroads of history. For the new world-empire which stretched from the Pacific to the Black Sea and the Baltic and which ruled over Confucianists and Buddhists and Moslems and Christians was still uncommitted to any particular religion and culture. The primitive Shamanism of the Mongols was incapable of providing any principle of spiritual unity, just as their original tribal organization provided no basis for an imperial administration.¹ Nevertheless the Great Khans, in spite of their lack of culture, were fully aware of the importance of the religious factor and followed a broad policy of general toleration. Chingis Khan himself laid down as part of his law that all religions were to be respected

¹ Nevertheless we must not underestimate the persistence and strength of this primitive religious tradition. It seems clear from Marco Polo's discussion with Kubilai Khan that the latter adhered to Buddhism in a Shamanist spirit, and even in our own time (in 1913), Miss Czaplica has described how a Siberian of thoroughly European ancestry and Nordic type preferred the spiritual ministrations of the local Tungus Shaman to that of the Russian priest, on the ground that the latter could not master the local spirits in the way the Shaman did (Czaplica, *My Siberian Year*, pp. 190-193).

without favouritism and that the priests and holy men were to be treated with deference, a principle to which all his descendants adhered faithfully both in the East and the West for successive generations.¹

This attitude is probably due to the fact that Mongolia and Turkestan were the meeting place of the world religions, and the Mongols themselves as newcomers found Buddhism and Christianity and Manicheism and Mohammedanism already established among the peoples from whom they acquired the rudiments of civilization. The oldest and most civilized people of Mongolia, the Uighur Turks, had adopted Manicheism when they were the ruling people of Mongolia in the eighth and ninth centuries, and now that they had withdrawn south of the Gobi to the oases of Turfan and Hami they had become Buddhist and Christian. Their successors in Western Mongolia, the Kerait and the Naiman, who were most closely allied to the Mongols by culture and political relations, were mainly Christian, as were also the Ongut Turks on the northern frontier of China. The other ruling peoples, the Kara Khitay or Khitan and the Jurjen or Chin, who had been subjected to the influence of Chinese culture, were Buddhist or Taoist, while the Western Turks, from Trans-Oxiana to Asia Minor, were Moslems who came into the orbit of Persian culture. Thus the position of Christianity in Mongolia was relatively a strong one and offered even greater opportunities for missionary activity than Western Christendom realized. Owing to their intermarriages with the Kerait royal house many of the wives and mothers of the Great Khans were Christians, including some of the most influential of them all, like "Seroctan"² or Soyorgatani, Baigi, the mother of Mongka, Kubilay and Hulagu and the chief wife of Hulagu, Dokuz Khatun, who is described by the Armenian chroniclers as a second St. Helena.

In the same way many of the leading Mongol officials under the early Khans were Christians, like Chinkay, the Kerait

¹ "A singular conformity may be found," writes Gibbon, "between the religious laws of Zingis Khan and of Mr. Locke"!

² Whom John of Plano Carpini describes as more renowned than any among the Tartars except the mother of the Emperor and more powerful than any except Batu.

chancellor of Guyuk Khan, who received John of Plano Carpini; Bolgay, the chancellor of Mongka, who received William of Rubruck; and Kitbuka, the Naiman lieutenant of Hulagu. It is true that this Nestorian Christianity of Central Asia had been cut off for centuries from the centres of Christian culture and William of Rubruck's account of the Nestorian monks and clergy, mainly Syrians, whom he met at the Mongol court, is a very unfavourable one. Nevertheless this outlying province of Christendom experienced a brief period of revival and expansion during the Mongol period, which was due not only to the general Mongol policy of toleration but still more to the fact that they were determined to destroy the temporal power of Islam which they saw as the main obstacle to Chingis Khan's idea of world empire. Already while William of Rubruck was at Karakorum plans were being laid by Mongka and his brother Hulagu for the destruction of the two leaders of the Moslem world—the Khalif of Bagdad, the head of orthodox Islam, and the Grand Master of the Assassins, who was the chief of the Ismailian or Shi'ite sect.

Later in the same year (1254), when King Hethum of Armenia visited the Khan, he was informed of the projected expedition, and received assurances from Mongka that the Mongols would protect the Christians and their churches and would restore Palestine and the Holy Places to the Christians. In fact Hulagu, though he was himself a Buddhist, was genuinely favourable to the Christians owing to the influence of his wife, the Kerait princess Dokuz Khatun, who was devoted to her ancestral faith. This princess, like so many of the ladies of the family of the Mongol Khans, enjoyed great political influence. Indeed Rashid al-Din, the official historian of the Mongols, states that Mongka expressly charged his brother to consult her in every circumstance and to follow her advice.

Consequently when in the autumn of 1257 the Mongol armies advanced into Mesopotamia, after destroying the strongholds of the Assassins which had hitherto been impregnable, the Christians benefited by the great disaster that fell upon the Moslem world.

They hailed the fall of Bagdad and the destruction of the Abbasid Khalifate, which took place in February 1258, as a just

retribution for the oppression that they had suffered for so many centuries. The Armenian chronicler Kirakos of Kantzag writes of the catastrophe in the spirit in which the Hebrew prophet described the fall of Nineveh. For five hundred and fifteen years the city had ruled all the nations and sucked the blood and treasure of the whole world. Now at length the measure of her iniquity was fulfilled and she was punished for all the blood she had shed and the evil she had done.¹

Never had the prospects of Islam seemed darker than at this moment. All the Eastern Moslem sultanates west of the Indus had already been destroyed, and the Turks of Asia Minor had been forced to acknowledge the Mongol supremacy. Only Egypt remained, and after the fall of Baghdad Hulagu was determined to make an end of her. In the following year (1259) he advanced into Syria, capturing Martyropolis and Edessa and Harran, the home-lands of Syrian Christianity. In the following year Hulagu's Christian general, the Naiman Kitbuka, assisted by the King of Armenia and Bohemond of Antioch, captured Aleppo and Damascus, the two capitals of Moslem Syria. At this moment the whole future of the Middle East was at stake. The only remaining bulwark of Islam, the Mameluk sultanate of Egypt, was rich and possessed an efficient army, but it was an alien and artificial power controlled by foreign mercenaries and possessed no national roots, so that it could hardly have survived a combined push from the Mongols and the Franks in Syria. A Christian reconquest in the Near East, like that which was taking place at the same period in Andalusia, was by no means impossible. Rubruck remarks that not one-tenth of the inhabitants of Turkey were Moslems, almost all were Armenians and Greeks; and in the same way in Mesopotamia and Northern Syria the Syrian Christian element was still numerous.

In fact it was at this period that the Nestorian Church enjoyed its greatest prosperity and became for a time a real factor in world affairs. It enjoyed the favour not only of Hulagu and his successors Abaga and Argun, the Khans of Persia, but also of their suzerain Kubilai and his successors in China and the Far East. Under the

¹ Grousset, *Histoire des Croisades*, iii, p. 575.

patriarchate of Mar Denha (1265-81) its hierarchy was reorganized and extended from the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean to the Caspian and the Pacific. An archbishopric was established in 1275 at Kubilai's new capital of Khanbalik or Peking and churches were founded by Christian officials and merchants in many of the principal cities of China.

Nor were these friendly relations confined to the Nestorian Christians of the East. In the second half of the thirteenth century the Mongol Khans of Persia regarded the Christians of the West as their natural allies against Egypt and Islam and made a serious effort to establish diplomatic relations with them and to organize a common front in Syria. Thus the policy of St. Louis and the initiative of William of Rubruck at last bore fruit, and though Antioch, the strategic key to the Middle East, had fallen to Beybars in 1268, there was still a possibility of saving the crusading states in Syria with the help of the Mongols. Unfortunately St. Louis, who was now a dying man, allowed his last crusade to be diverted from Palestine to Tunis, perhaps owing to the sinister influence of his brother Charles of Anjou, who was intent on his selfish ambition to create a Mediterranean empire,¹ and Edward I of England was left with insufficient resources to carry on the tradition of the Palestinian crusade. He alone of the Western princes seems to have realized the importance of the Mongol alliance, and so long as he lived there was no cessation in the negotiations between the Mongols and the West. As soon as he arrived in Palestine in the early summer of 1271 he sent his envoys, Reginald Russel and John Parker, to Abaga and arrangements were made for a joint campaign against the Egyptians. Unfortunately at this moment Abaga was forced to turn his attention to Central Asia owing to the civil war that had arisen with Jagatay Khan of Turkestan, so that he was only able

¹ This is denied by Bréhier and Grousset (*Hist. des Croisades*, iii, 651-2) on the ground that the crusade interfered with Charles of Anjou's plans for an attack on the Byzantine Empire. And granted that Charles would have preferred an expedition against Constantinople, the conquest of Tunis was quite in accordance with the traditional policy of the Sicilian monarchy which had always aimed at the control of Tunisia. And Grousset fully recognizes the disastrous character of the decision, which he compares with the diversion of the Fourth Crusade from Egypt to the conquest of Constantinople.

to send a token force of Mongol horsemen to Syria. Nevertheless, as Grousset says, in spite of the lack of man-power which caused its failure, this crusade of Edward I was one of the most intelligently planned of all the later crusades, both from the strategic and the diplomatic point of view.¹

In spite of the failure of Edward I's crusade, the Mongols continued to pursue negotiations for a Western alliance. In 1274 Abaga sent his envoys to the Council of Lyons, where they were present at the Act of Union between the Eastern and Western Churches which took place on July 6th. In 1277 he sent six envoys to England with apologies to Edward I for his failure to give adequate support to him when he was in Palestine. Finally in 1286 his son Argun Khan sent the most important of all the Mongol embassies to the West under the leadership of Rabban Sauma, a monk, who was the intimate friend of the Nestorian patriarch and in close relations with the Mongol court. We have a detailed account of this embassy in the contemporary biography of the patriarch Mar Yaballaha III, of which a Syriac version has been preserved,² and it provides a Mongol counterpart to William of Rubruck's narrative of his embassy from St. Louis to Mongka Khan.

Rabban Sauma, in spite of his Syriac name, was a Mongolian Turk, probably an Ongut, who had been born at Peking and who had come on pilgrimage with his fellow-countryman Rabban Markos to visit the Holy Places, about the year 1278. When they were still in Syria, the head of the Nestorian Church, Mar Denha, died, and Markos was elected to take his place under the name of Mar Yaballaha III in 1281. After the accession of Argun in 1284 the new patriarch, who was no mere Syrian, but a representative of the ruling race and came from the capital of the Mongol empire, acquired considerable influence at the court of the Il Khan. Consequently when Argun decided to send a new embassy to the West, the friend of the patriarch,

¹ Grousset, *op. cit.*, p. 662.

² *History of the Life and Travels of Rabban Sauma, Envoy of the Mongol Khans to the Kings of Europe, and Markos, Patriarch of the Nestorian Church in Asia.* Trans. from the Syriac by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, 1928. See also A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before 1550* (1930).

Rabban Sauma, was chosen as its leader since he represented not merely Argun himself but the larger international unity of the whole Mongolian world. The mission reached Rome in 1287 soon after the death of Honorius IV and stayed in Western Europe for about a year, visiting Philip IV, Edward I and the newly elected Pope Nicholas IV. Thus the account of his experiences is a document of incomparable importance for the religious history of the Mongol empire and its relations with Western Christendom. In the first place it shows that the ancient theological antagonisms which had divided Eastern and Western Christendom had now become half-forgotten. Rabban Sauma celebrated the East Syrian liturgy in the presence of the Pope and the cardinals, and received Communion from the Pope. And at Bordeaux he did the same and Edward I received Communion from him.¹ Secondly it shows, even more than the embassies that preceded and followed it, how close were the relations between the Eastern Christians and the Mongols and how genuine were the Khan's efforts to establish a common front in Syria against the Saracens. Thus, when the cardinals expressed surprise that a Christian priest, attached to the patriarchate, should have come as an envoy from "the King of the Tartars", Rabban Sauma replied: "Know ye that many of our fathers in times past entered the lands of the Turks, the Mongols and the Chinese and have instructed them in the faith. To-day many Mongols are Christian. There are queens and children of kings who have been baptised and confess Christ. The Khans have churches in their camps. They honour Christians highly and there are many and faithful among them. And as the King is united in friendship with the Catholics and purposes to take possession of Syria and Palestine, he asks your aid for the conquest of Jerusalem." Fortunately the new Pope, Nicholas IV, who was elected in February 1285 soon after Rabban Sauma had

¹ "It was on this occasion that Edward I made the following remarkable reply to Rabban Sauma's request that he should be shown the shrines and holy places so that 'when we go back to the Children of the East we may give them descriptions of them'. And the King replied, 'Thus shall you say to King Arghon and unto all the Orientals: We have seen a thing than which nothing is more wonderful, that is to say that in the countries of the Franks there are not two confessions of Faith, but only one confession of Faith, namely that which confesses Jesus Christ; and all the Christians confess it.'" E. A. W. Budge, *The Monks of Kublai Khan*, pp. 186-7.

returned to Rome, was a man who was well aware of the importance of the East, since he was the head of the Franciscan Order, Jerome of Ascoli, who had conducted the negotiations at Constantinople which had prepared the way for the Council of Lyons. He treated Rabban Sauma with the greatest cordiality and sent him back with letters to Argun and to the Christian widow of Abaga and with a letter to Yaballaha "confirming his patriarchal authority over all the Orientals".

Argun seems to have been well satisfied with the results of this mission. He made Rabban Sauma his chaplain and made a chapel for him communicating with the royal tent, and he had his son Oljaitu baptized Nicholas in honour of the Pope. Moreover it seems from the Pope's letter of April 2nd, 1288, that he had himself promised to receive baptism at Jerusalem when it had been won by the allied forces of the Mongols and the West.¹

Finally, in the following year he sent further letters to the West, making concrete proposals for a joint campaign in Palestine in 1291. This letter, written in Mongol in the Uighur script, still exists and offers convincing proof of the serious character of the Mongol proposals.

"By the power of the Eternal God under the auspices of the supreme Khan [Kubilay] this is our word: King of France! By the envoy Mar Bar Sauma you have announced 'when the troops of the Il Khan open the campaign against Egypt, then we will set forth to join him'. Having accepted this message on your part, I say that, trusting in God, we propose to set forth in the last month of winter in the year of the Panther [January 1291] and to camp before Damascus on about the fifteenth day of the first month of spring. If you keep your word and send troops at the appointed time and God favours us, when we have taken Jerusalem from this people, we will give it to you. But if you fail to meet us, our troops will have marched in vain. Would that be becoming? And if afterwards we do not know what to do, what use will it be?"²

¹ Chabot, "Relations du roi Argoun avec l'occident", in *Revue de l'Orient Latin* (1894), p. 584. Grousset, *Hist. des Croisades*, iii, 722.

² Chabot, *op. cit.*, p. 604; and A. C. Moule, *Christians in China*, p. 117.

At the same time the Khan offered to provide provisions for the crusading army and remounts for upwards of 20,000 horsemen. But on the Western side these offers met with little response. The powers of the West were absorbed in the miserable quarrel over Sicily which was the bitter fruit of the unfortunate alliance between the Papacy and Charles of Anjou. The only Western prince who was genuinely concerned with the crusade and who realized the possibilities of the Mongol alliance was Edward I of England, who again took the cross in 1289 and laboured for years to bring about a settlement by arbitration of the Sicilian conflict and to unite Western Christendom for the crusade. But his efforts were frustrated by the intransigence of the Papacy. There was no crusade, and Acre, the last Christian stronghold in Palestine, fell before the Egyptians on May 18th, 1291—almost at the moment when Argun had planned to recover Jerusalem. By this time Argun himself was dead and the opportunity was lost. Argun's son, Oljaitu, who had been baptized Nicholas in the name of the Pope himself, became a Moslem and thenceforth the Mongols in Persia, as well as in Russia and Turkestan, were gradually absorbed by the environment of Moslem culture.

VI. THE MISSION OF JOHN OF MONTE CORVINO TO THE FAR EAST

Nevertheless, on the religious side the work of William of Rubruck and Rabban Sauma was not altogether fruitless. The year after the latter's return Pope Nicholas IV sent further letters not only to Argun but also to Kubilay, the Great Khan, and to Kaidu, the last great representative of the house of Ugedey in Central Asia.¹ The bearer of these letters, the Franciscan John of Monte Corvino, had already spent years working in the East, and this last expedition, from which he never returned, was destined to be the longest and the most successful of all the missionary journeys of the Friars. Setting out from Rome in 1289 he first visited Argun at his capital at Tauris or Tabriz. He set out again in 1291 to visit the Great Khan, Kubilay, in China; and as he

¹ Kaidu was the most long-lived of all the house of Chingis Khan, since he had taken part in Batu's invasion of Hungary in 1241 and survived until 1301.

was unable to cross Central Asia owing to the great war between Kubilay and Kaidu, which had also interfered with the return of Marco Polo from China to Europe, he decided to go by way of India and spent more than a year at Mylapur in Madras, whence he sent back to Rome the first reliable account of the "Christians of St. Thomas" to reach the West. Owing to this immense detour he did not reach China until after the death of Kubilay.

This was a tragedy, for of all the Mongol Khans, Kubilay alone possessed the imagination and the breadth of mind which would have enabled him to use this opportunity. Early in his reign in 1266 he had despatched the uncles of Marco Polo to Rome with a request for a hundred men of learning, devoted to the Christian faith, and acquainted with the liberal arts, who would be capable of "proving to the learned of his dominions by just and fair argument that the faith professed by Christians is superior to and founded on more evident truth than any other".¹

It staggers the imagination to consider what might have been the results if such a mission had actually been sent and if the Great Khan had used Western scholars instead of the Tibetan lamas whom he actually employed to lay the foundations of higher culture in Mongolia. But the Western response was too little and too late. John of Monte Corvino met with a favourable reception from Kubilay's successor, Timur (1294-1307), but he had to carry on his mission alone for twelve years with no helper save a friendly Italian merchant, Pietro de Lucalongo. Even so, he met with remarkable success. The year after his arrival, he converted one of the most important men in the Mongol Empire, the Nestorian prince, Kerguz or George, the son-in-law of the emperor and the ruler of the Ongut Turks of north-west China, the people to which the patriarch Mar Yaballaha belonged. George himself was killed soon afterwards in the great war with Kaidu, so that this promising beginning was uncompleted. But John of Monte Corvino continued his work alone at the capital, and succeeded in establishing an active centre of Tartar Catholicism at the heart of the empire in spite of every kind of difficulty and opposition.

¹ Of course we have only Marco Polo's word for this, but there can be no doubt that the Polos were actually sent to the Pope from Kubilay and that this is how they understood their mission.

Finally in 1307 Rome at last became aware of the existence of John of Monte Corvino and appointed him Archbishop of Khan-balik, as well as sending him the helpers whom he had so long desired.

Thenceforward the Chinese Mongol mission flourished for twenty years under John of Monte Corvino and continued for another forty years under his successors. We have a valuable account of the situation at the end of his episcopate in the journal of the Blessed Odoric of Pordenone in Friuli (1265-1331), who went to China by way of India about 1321 and returned by the overland route through Central Asia about 1328 to 1330. At that time he found the Franciscans established with a cathedral and two houses at Zaytun, the great medieval port of Southern China near Amoy, as well as at Yang Chow, where there were also three Nestorian churches. But it is clear from his narrative that the success of the Franciscan mission was mainly with the ruling class of Turco-Mongols¹ and the foreign population, which consisted of many different races, including large contingents of troops from Russia and the West. One of the most important of these groups, the Alans from the region of the Black Sea, were converted by John of Monte Corvino and sent an embassy to Rome in 1338, asking for a bishop and complaining that they had been left without spiritual help and without a superior since the death of John of Monte Corvino, though they were well instructed in the Catholic faith. This led to the last important medieval mission to the Far East of which we have a record, that of John of Marignolli, who left Avignon in 1338 and reached Peking by the land route in 1342, bringing as a gift from the Pope to the Emperor a great Western war horse which is recorded in the Chinese annals as a great horse from the kingdom of Fulan (=Farang =Frankland), 11½ feet long and 6 feet 8 inches high.²

¹ When the Western missionaries speak of Tartars it is impossible to say whether they mean Mongols or Turks. Naturally enough they failed to distinguish the two races. In the same way, when John of Monte Corvino speaks of his translation of the breviary, etc., into the "Tartar" language he may mean Uighur or Jagatay or Mongol.

² The Chinese seem to have been more impressed by the horse than by the mission, for M. Pelliot has discovered a curious poem on it entitled "An Ode to the Supernatural Horse".

John of Marignolli left China in 1347 and returned by way of India, reaching Avignon in 1353, after having been plundered of all his gifts in Ceylon by "a certain tyrant, Coya Jaan, a eunuch and an accursed Saracen".¹ By this time the Mongol empire in China was in a state of advanced decline, and the Christians, both Catholic and Nestorian, were involved in its fall. In 1362 the last Catholic Bishop of Zaytun, James of Florence, was martyred when the Chinese nationalists recovered the city, and a few years later, in 1369, the Christians were expelled from Peking, not to return until the coming of the Jesuits at the end of the sixteenth century.

At the same time the revival of Islam and the growth of Moslem intolerance were making the work of the Friars increasingly difficult in the rest of Asia. As early as 1321 Thomas of Tolentino and his companion were martyred at Tana near Bombay on their way to join John of Monte Corvino in China. In 1340 the Franciscan, Richard of Burgundy, who had been sent by the Pope to be bishop of Almalig near Kuldja in the sultanate of Jagatay was massacred with a number of Friars, one of whom was an "Indian", and an Italian merchant.

Finally, in the second half of the century, the whole of Central Asian Christianity and the eastern provinces of the Nestorian Church were destroyed by the conquests of Tamerlane or Timur, a conqueror who combined the ruthlessness of Chingis Khan with the religious intolerance and exclusiveness of an Aurangzeb. Timur was no illiterate barbarian, like the primitive Mongols, but a civilized oriental sovereign, the splendour of whose court aroused the admiration of the Spanish envoy, Clavijo. Nevertheless he was one of the great destroyers in history, and his career was like a tornado which passed across Asia from the Ganges to the Aegean, leaving ruin behind it. The Mongols, for all their atrocities, had a sense of their world responsibilities and performed a definite service to civilization. They drove a broad road from one end of Asia to the other, and after their armies had passed they opened the way to the merchant and the missionary, and made it possible for the East and the West to

¹ Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither* (1866), ii, p. 394.

communicate both economically and spiritually. But everything that they had done was undone by Tamerlane, and from the fifteenth century the East and the West were more cut off from one another than they had been at any period in the Middle Ages.

No doubt some of the responsibility must fall on Western Christendom for its failure to take advantage of the opportunity when it was offered. But the following narratives show that the failure was not a complete one, and that an heroic effort was made by a few men with small resources in the face of enormous material difficulties to use the new road which had been so unexpectedly opened for the service of Christ and the Church. The spirit in which these earliest emissaries of Western Christendom approached their mission was stated with admirable simplicity and directness by William of Rubruck in his interview with the Great Khan. "My lord, we are not men of war. We wish that those should have dominion over the world who rule it most justly, in accordance with the will of God. Our office is to teach men to live after the will of God. For that we have come here and willingly would we remain here if it pleased you." If there had been more men of similar courage and faith to carry on this work in the same spirit, the whole history of the world, and especially of the relations between Europe and the Far East, might have been changed. But at least a beginning was made, so that the story of the expansion of medieval Christendom is not to be found only in the bloody history of the Crusades or in that of the forcible conversion of the pagan peoples of Eastern Germany and the Baltic provinces.

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