

THE CHURCH AT THE COURT OF ARGHUN IN SYRIAC AND ARMENIAN SOURCES

In historiographical Syriac and Armenian literature there survives the memory of an important-religious and political episode involving the Mongol sovereigns of Iran. It concerns the founding of a Christian church at the «camp» (*ordu*) by Arghun, the third Ilkhan (r. 1284-1291)¹. We shall begin by considering Syriac documentation and then that in Armenian, and we shall conclude with an analysis of the institutional and political aspects of this event².

1. THE SYRIAC ACCOUNT

Among the numerous diplomatic missions sent by the Ilkhans to Europe in the thirteenth century, one is particularly worth noting because, aside from having unique features, an account by one of its members, Rabban Sauma, has come down to us in the

1 It is a known fact that Mongol sovereigns, beginning with their progenitor, Genghis Khan, considered it natural not to interfere in the religion of their own subjects, with the agreement that their authority was recognised by the hierarchies of the various religions, held to be engaged with their worshippers in prayer for the ruler's welfare. On this attitude and on its political and religious significance see JACKSON, P., *The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered*, in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. by AMITAI, R. – BIRAN, M., Leiden 2005, pp. 245-290. See also BIHL, M. – MOULE, A.C., *Tria nova documenta de missionibus Fr. min. Tartariae Aquilonaris annorum 1314-1322*, in *Archivium Franciscanum Historicum* 17 (1924), pp. 55-71.

2 The present article takes up the substance of a previous study by BORBONE, P.G. – ORENGO, A., *Stato e Chiesa nell'Iran ilkhanide. La chiesa alla corte di Arghon nelle fonti siriane e armena*, in *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 29 (2006), pp. 325-337.

Western realms. However, it neglects to go into particular details about the political aspect of the embassy. How the Pope and sovereigns actually replied is not said⁶. Evidently the person who recounts this is not interested in this aspect. Having communicated Arghun's satisfaction, he intends above all, to let it be known how the sovereign wanted to recompense Rabban Sauma, and his expressive choice of direct speech is significant here. Arghun apologises for the labours imposed upon an old man⁷ and he reveals his own esteem for him by proposing, or rather, ordering him, to stay at the court in a newly founded church. Rabban Sauma accepts but asks if it is rather the Catholicos, patriarch of the Eastern Church, who should found the church; also because it is his duty to deliver to him the gifts the Pope expressly sent to him⁸. The concluding sentence («and these things took place in this way») – if not

6 From precedent accounts of the respective hearings we found that both the Kings of France and England declared themselves well disposed (*Taš'īnā*, op. cit., 2009, pp. 33*-34*; 2010, pp. 33-34) and the former had promised to send one of his «most important emirs» with Rabban Sauma so he could personally bring his reply to Arghun (*Taš'īnā*, op.cit., 2009, p. 35*; 2010, p. 35). One should note, however, that in his account Rabban Sauma refers also to his own personal opinion on this: he does not hold that the Western sovereigns were truly in favour of a concrete commitment. As the procession of events demonstrated, Rabban Sauma managed to capture them perfectly. One sees that if Rabban Sauma had expressed himself so negatively in his account written in Persian, as the text makes us think, it would be difficult to imagine that his account would have been directly destined to the sovereign.

7 Rabban Sauma then was 63 years old since he was born around 1225 (BORBONE, P.G., *Storia di Mar Yahballaha e di Rabban Sauma. Un orientale in Occidente ai tempi di Marco Polo*, Torino 2000, p. 55; ID., *Storia di Mar Yahballaha e di Rabban Sauma. Cronaca siriana del XIV secolo*, Moncalieri 2009, p. 51).

8 At the moment of Rabban Sauma's departure from Rome the Pope gave him for the Catholicos «a crown for his head which was of fine gold and was inlaid with precious stones, sacred vestments made of red cloth through which ran threads of gold, socks and sandals on which real pearls were sewn and the ring from his finger». Rabban Sauma asked if he was also given some sort of relic and the Pope, while expressly emphasising the exceptionality of the case, conceded to him «a small piece of the apparel of our Lord Christ, and a piece of the cape, that is to say, kerchief of our Lady Mary, and some small fragments of the bodies of the saints that were there» (*Taš'īnā*, op. cit., 2009, p. 39*; 2010, p. 39).

treated as a simple transitional formula – appears to indicate that what was foreseen did actually take place.

From the final paragraph we can see that what precedes it, from the moment of Rabban Sauma's departure for Europe, derives from the account personally written by him in Persian. However, it is a rather free reconstruction, for the author expressly affirms that he was not asked to relate everything that Rabban Sauma did and saw. Even if some passages written by the narrator in the first person (Rabban Sauma alone or with his companions⁹) allow us to believe that the author at times directly used Rabban Sauma's expressive form, these are isolated cases; the declaration to have «very much abridged» the account should be interpreted literally. Thus, the passage now being examined, and with it the dialogue between Rabban Sauma and Arghun, ought to have been a part of Rabban Sauma's account, or, at the least, ought to have been communicated orally by him to the author.

Plausibly, the part reported in the form of direct speech is the one to which Rabban Sauma attributed the most importance, i.e. the founding of the church at the court explicitly wished for by the sovereign as a recompense for services rendered, and the intention of having the elderly prelate with him. It appears Rabban Sauma was adamant in stating that he had asked for the Catholicos, his superior, to intervene. He showed himself to be not only disciplined and respectful of the hierarchy, but above all, we suggest, an able politician. If the foundation of the church had involved the Catholicos, head of the Church of the East, this would not have involved a personal and private recompense but rather a public gesture which favoured the Christian population. The meeting between the Ilkhan and the Catholicos (i.e.: the highest powers of the State and the Church) would have given lustre to the Catholicos since it would have placed in evidence his good relations with the Ilkhan Arghun and the Pope.

9 *Taš'īlā*, op. cit., 2009, pp. 34*, 35*; 2010, pp. 34, 35.

(or praise) of the Christians, both Orientals and Occidentals, increased until at length with one mouth they cried out, "Blessed is the Lord Who hath made us rich! The Lord hath visited His people, and hath made for it redemption!"

And when the Camp moved, the priests moved the church and all that belonged to it. And Rabban Sauma became the director of that church, and its chief, and steward, and he distributed food and the things necessary for the priests, and deacons, and visitors, and caretakers of the church. And King Arghun commanded by reason of his great affection for Rabban Sauma, that the recital of the Eucharistic Office for his benefit, and of prayers said on his behalf, should never cease».

From here on we may observe a structural variation in the *History* which is noteworthy from a literary aspect, and which transforms it into something analogous to a chronicle. While previously one rarely comes across chronological indications (and these are always inserted into the narrative context), now the account begins with mention of the year of the events narrated. From this point onwards it assumes a new informative modality and a new point of view, which is no longer that of Rabban Sauma (even though «abridged» by the author) but that of the author alone.

We would expect from this account a report of how the wishes of Arghun and Rabban Sauma's request were put into effect and in fact the motivation of the affection Arghun had for Rabban Sauma returns, but only at the end. Indeed, he was ordered to remain near him and to pray for him. But Arghun's decision to set up the church at court is explained at the beginning with reference to a variety of reasons. These are: 1) honouring the Catholikos, 2) «supporting the hearts of all the Christians who confessed Christ» thereby 3) «increasing their love for him (the Ilkhan) among them».

These reasons, which are political in nature, differ from those of the previous passage. The author¹¹ demonstrates here that he

11 Certainly he was a high-ranking ecclesiastic. As has been stated, he could have been the Catholikos Timothy II (see above, note 3).

has well understood the sovereign's intentions – be they implicit or explicit. As we shall see, the way the project was carried out confirms its political character. However, we must now turn our attention to the date of this event.

The Syriac account speaks of the year 1598 (of the Greeks)¹², which corresponds to 1286-1287 A.D. (to be more exact: from the 1st October 1286 to 30th September 1287). We do know, however, that Rabban Sauma and his colleagues did not leave Rome before 13th April 1288. Rabban Sauma celebrated Easter of 1288 in Rome which fell that year on 28th March. Furthermore, the eleven papal letters entrusted to him, among which were those intended for the Ilkhan Arghun and the Catholicos Mar Yahballaha, are all dated in Rome from 2nd–13th April 1288¹³. Thus it is not possible that the founding of the church took place in «1598 of the Greeks». The wrong date in the Syriac text could have derived from a copying error of an original «1599 of the Greeks».

We cannot, however, exclude that the wrong date derived from a mistake committed by the author. In the next paragraphs of the *History* we find another date correlating to this. In the «following year, which is the year of the Greeks, 1599, in the month of Ilul», Arghun visited the Catholicos in Maragha with his son who had been baptized in the month of August¹⁴. The month of Ilul is

12 Such is the Syriac definition of the Seleucid era which begins on 1st October 312 B.C. Correspondence with the Christian era is obtained by subtracting 311 from the year of the Greeks for the dates between the 1st January and 30th September included, and subtracting 312 for those between the 1st October and 31st December.

13 LUPPRIAN, K.-E., *Die Beziehungen der Päpste zu den islamischen und mongolischen Herrschen im 13. Jahrh. anhand ihres Briefwechsels*, Città del Vaticano 1981, pp. 247-250; LAURENT, M., *Un évêque nestorien à Veroli en 1288*, in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale sul tema: l'Oriente cristiano nella storia della civiltà (Roma 31 marzo – 3 aprile 1963, Firenze 4 aprile 1963)*, Roma 1964, p. 336.

14 «And in the following year, which is the year of the Greeks, 1599, in the month of Ilul, King Arghun went to the Cell in the city of Maragha to see Mar Catholicos. He had had his son baptized in the month of Ab, and he commanded him to receive the Mysteries which gave pardon» (*Taš'itā*, op. cit., 2009, p. 40*; 2010, p. 40). This son (baptised in August 1289) was the one born in 1281 from Uruk Khatun, a Christian Kereyit princess. She was seized by labour pains during a journey in the Turkme-

equal to September. Therefore the year «1599 of the Greeks» exactly corresponds to 1288 A.D. However, it is impossible that the events narrated took place in 1288. In a diplomatic note by Buscarello Ghisolfi (ambassador to Arghun in Europe in 1289) addressed to the King of France and dated at the beginning of summer 1289 («the year of the Oxen», probably in the month of May)¹⁵, there is no mention of Arghun's son's baptism. Buscarello lists Arghun's various good deeds for the Christians, among which is the fact of having had his sister baptised at the same time of giving her as wife to the King of Georgia. Had the son's baptism also already occurred, Buscarello certainly would not have neglected to mention it in this context. Therefore, the month of Ab when Arghun's son was baptised should be August 1289, a date following Buscarello's departure for Europe¹⁶.

nistan desert. Since she was forced to halt her trip and at the same time suffering for lack of water, her retinue were worried about her plight. But just as soon as her son was born it began to rain abundantly, which spread joy among the group. Because of this the newborn received the name of Ölgeitü-buqa (Oh Fortunate One) (D'OHS-SON, A., *Histoire des Mongols*, La Haye - Amsterdam 1834-1835, V, pp. 480-481). When he was baptised, he was named Nicholas (the same name of the Pope whom Arghun corresponded to, Nicholas IV), but later on he became a Muslim and took on other names. On the faces of the money coined during his life he was named *Ghiyāṭ al-dunyā wa al-Dīn sultān Ūlgāytū Muhammad Hudābandah* (BORBONE, *Storia... Un orientale*, op. cit., p. 238; ID., *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., p. 224).

- 15 MOSTAERT, A. – CLEAVES, F.W., *Les lettres de 1289 et de 1305 des Ilkhans Arghun et Ölgeitü à Philippe le Bel*, Cambridge, Mass. 1962, p. 18: Buscarello's note is published in ancient French in CHABOT, J.-B., *Notes sur les relations du roi Arghun avec l'Occident*, in *Revue de l'Orient latin* 2 (1894), pp. 566-629: 610-613 and in BORBONE, P.G., *Un ambassadeur du Khan Arghun en Occident. Histoire de Mar Yahballaha III et de Rabban Sauma (1281-1317)*, Paris 2008, pp. 309-311.
- 16 We know the Pope was aware of the baptism of Ölgeitü/Nicholas in 1291. In this year the Pope expressly wrote to the child (who at that time was about 10 years old) congratulating him and exhorting him to live an inspired Christian life; but also telling him not to abandon the customs of his own people (letter dated 21st August 1291 in Rieti: LUPPRIAN, *Die Beziehungen*, op. cit., pp. 272-273). Probably Nicholas IV was informed of the prince's baptism by the Mongol ambassadors who visited him in 1290 (cfr. SCHMIEDER, F., *Europa und die Fremden. Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. bis in das 15. Jahrhundert*, Sigmaringen 1994, p. 332). It is curious that Arghun's official letter which reached Rome on that occasion

The certainty of an erroneous date in this instance confirms that the previous year expressly mentioned, the one in which the church of the court was consecrated, was 1288. There are, therefore, two errors, and it is more probable that the author is to blame rather than the manuscript tradition¹⁷.

Having confirmed the consecration of the church in 1288, we can plausibly situate that event towards the end of the year 1599 of the Greeks, which would mean around August-September 1288. In fact, as has been said, Rabban Sauma left Rome after 13th April and, although the account of his return journey is extremely generic¹⁸, the time employed to travel from Persia to Rome would suggest roughly three months for the return journey¹⁹.

-does not mention at all his son's baptism. On the contrary, most of the message consists in the polite explanation of Arghun's refusal to be personally baptized. This letter is dated in Urmia, the year of the Tiger, the first month of summer, the fifth day, or rather: 16th May 1290 (LUPPRIAN, *Die Beziehungen*, op. cit., pp. 265-266). Probably this information was provided by the ambassadors. Indeed, Arghun's merits expressly cited by Buscarello were not mentioned by the Ilkhan in his official letter of 1289 to Philip IV. Furthermore, the Ilkhan Ölgēitü, while still writing to Philip IV in 1305, held trust in the oral speech of his messengers on the most relevant aspects of the embassy. This is revealed in the Italian translation written on the back of the letter in Mongolian, which concludes thus: «E per cio vo mando Tomaso mio iulduci con questa imbasciata, e Mamalac, e lo rimanente del nostre paraule, elli ve la dirano a bocha» («And for this reason I send Thomas my *iulduchi* with this embassy, and Mamalac, and the remainder of our words they, from their mouth, shall utter to you»). It is not surprising that the written message is accompanied by the oral one, more detailed and maybe less ambiguous (BORBONE, *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., p. 242).

- 17 Note that in the *History*, when the dating indicated is comparable to other sources, especially the *Compendium of Chronicles* by Rašid al-Dīn, these dates are exact.
- 18 The text simply says that Rabban Sauma «crossed the sea which he crossed when he came».
- 19 The account of the departure, scant in chronological information, allows us to suppose that the journey from the Ilkhanid Court (localised in contemporary Azerbaijan, in Tabriz or in Maragha) to Rome via Constantinople and Naples lasted not less than three months (*Taš'itā*, op. cit., 2009, p. 39*; 2010, p. 39; BORBONE, *Storia... Un orientale*, op. cit., pp. 76, 79, 184; ID., *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., pp. 69-72, 170).

2. THE ARMENIAN ACCOUNT

The consecration of the church at Arghun's camp is also reported by two Armenian sources, one of which was drafted by an eyewitness who participated in the event being described.

At chapter LXXI of the *Patmut'iwn nahangin Sisakan* [History of Siwnik'] by Step'anos Ōrbelean²⁰, we read the following²¹:

Դարձեալ ի գալն մեր ի Կիլիկիոյ՝ յետ աւուրց ինչ գնացաք առաջի աշխարհակալ արքային Արղունին [...] եւ հրամայեաց մեզ կալ եւ արհմել գեկեղեցիմ ի դրանն արքունի զոր առաքեալ էր մեծ պապն Հռոմայ: Անդ էր եւ կաթողիկոսն Նեստոր երկոտասան եպիսկոպոսաւք, որք եւ արհմեցաք ի միասին մեծաւ հանդիսի: Եւ ինքն Արղունն զգեցուցանէր իւրով ձեռամբն զգգեստն հայրապետական, զոր ինքն էր սահմանեալ կաթողիկոսին եւ մեզ եւ ամենայն եպիսկոպոսացն: Եւ առեալ ի ձեռն զԺամահարն շրջէր ի մէջ բանակին եւ հարկանէր եւ արհմէր գամենայնն:

«Then, upon returning from Cilicia, we went to King Arghun, lord of the world, a few days later [...]»²² and he ordered us to remain at his camp and consecrate the church at the King's court, a church sent by the great Pope of Rome. Catholicos Nestor²³ too was present, with twelve bishops, and we consecrated the church together, with great pomp. And Arghun himself with his own hands dressed the Catholicos, us and all the bishops

20 For convenience, in our narration (but not in the bibliographical references) we generalise this form of the name, even if the first name is sometimes written Step'annos and the family name can appear as Ōrbēlean.

21 STEP'ANNOS ŌRBĒLEAN, *Patmut'iwn nahangin Sisakan* [History of Siwnik'], Tiflis 1910, pp. 481-482. French translation in STEPHANNOS ORBELIAN, *Histoire de la Siounie*. Traduite de l'arménien par BROSSET, M., Saint-Petersbourg 1864, pp. 265-266.

22 At this point there is a section in the text that we omit since it is not pertinent to the subject matter of this paper.

23 «Nestor» in the sense of «Nestorian». This is so also in another passage of Ōrbelean (ŌRBĒLEAN, *Patmut'iwn*, op.cit., p. 448) and in a passage by Step'annos Episkopos which we shall discuss a little further on.

with the patriarchal clothing that he had prepared for us. He picked up the clapper, walked in the camp, beat it and blessed everyone».

Another Armenian chronicle narrates this same episode. It is found in a passage in the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* (Chronography) by Stepanos Episkopos, a continuator of Samuēl Anec'i for the period extending from 1194 to 1290²⁴.

The passage that interests us appears to be strongly corrupted in the only manuscript that has preserved this text for us²⁵. For reasons we set forth in another work²⁶, we feel it is prudent to acknowledge some lacunae and reconstruct only the following parts:

– Ի սոյն ամի եւ դեսպանս մեծամեծս եկեալ ի Հոռմա<յ>, հր<ա>մանաւ պապին քարոզեցին զՔրիստոս եւ կանգնեցին եկեղեցի <մե>ծ, բազում ծախիւք ի դրան արքունի: Եւ սահմանեցին անխափան կատարել զպաշտաւն փառաբանութեանն Աստուծոյ եւ մեծ խնդութիւն ամենայն բրիստոնէից: Եւ յաւծանելն կանգնեալ կ<ա>յ ան>հուն հանդիսիւ ինքն Արղունն

24 This Armenian text, sometimes referred to with the title *Taregrut'iwn* [Annals], is taken from HAKOBYAN, V.A., *Manr Žamanakagrut'yunner XIII-XVIII dd.* [Brief chronicles of the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries], I, Erevan 1951, p. 50. Partial translation in Russian in GALSTJAN, A.G., ed., *Armjanskije istočniki o Mongolakh. Izvlečenija iz rukopisej XIII-XIV vv.*, Moskva 1962, p. 43.

25 It is the manuscript 8481 of the Matenadaran of Erevan, copied in the 14th century (cfr. EGANYAN, Ö. – ZEYT'UNYAN, A. – ANT'ABYAN, P., *C'uc'ak jeragrac' Maštoc'i anuan Matenadarani* [Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Matenadaran entitled to Maštoc'], II, Erevan, 1970, p. 754). Also STEP'ANNOS ÖRBĒLEAN, *Žamanakagrut'iwn* [Chronography], edited by ABRAHAMYAN, A., Erevan 1942, pp. 3-4). As we mentioned in ORENGO, A., *On a Passage in the Žamanakagrowt'iwn by Step'annos Episkopos* (in print), this Matenadaran manuscript is the same one that is found in the Sanasarean Varžaran of Karin (Erzerum) just before the first world war and which has been described by Y. K'ōsean (K'ÖSEAN, Y., *C'uc'ak hayerēn jeragrac' Sanasarean Varžarani i Karin* [Catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts of the Sanasarean College of Karin] in *Handēs Amsōreay* 35 (1921), coll. 176-181, manuscript n. 62).

26 ORENGO, *On a Passage*, op. cit.

եւ արքեմեալ կողակիցն իւր Ու<ը>ու<կ> խաթունն,
զաւուրս Գ ի Խաչի տանին. <ա>ւծողն մեծ կաթողիկոսն,
որ ի Բաղդատ Նեստոր ԲԺ <եպիսկոպոսաւ ...եւ> ի հայոց
եպիսկոպոսն <...> եւ կացուցին զոմն այ<ը> իմաստուն եւ
կուսակրան քահանայ <աստուածա>քան էրէց Ռապան
Սումա կոչեցեալ. այդ այդպէս եղեալ:

«In this year distinguished ambassadors came from Rome and by order of the Pope they preached Christ and erected a big church, at great expense, at the King's court. And [the Mongols] decreed that the holy office of the glorification of God must be freely performed, thus filling all the Christians with joy. And Arghun himself and his blessed wife Uruk Khatun were present at this consecration, which took place, in great pomp, for three days, on the Feast of the Cross. The consecrator was the great Catholicos of Baghdad, Nestor, with twelve <bishops ... and>, from the Armenians, the bishop of <...>, and they appointed a wise man, a celibate clergyman, a priest, connoisseur of theology, named Raban Suma. These things took place in this way»²⁷.

27 As we say in ORENGO, *On a Passage*, op. cit., in a couple of cases we intervened upon the text availing ourselves of the photography of pages 213^v and 214^r of the manuscript where this section of the *Žamanakgrut'iwn* is found. The second editor of the text by Step'annos Episkopos, Hakobyan (HAKOBYAN, V., *Manr žamanakgrut'yunner*, op. cit., p. 50), reconstructs this passage in the following manner: ի սոյն ամի եւ դեսպանս մեծամեծս եկեալ ի Հռոմա<յ>, հր<ա>մամաւ պապին քարոզեցին զՔրիստոս եւ կանգնեցին եկեղեցի <մե>ծ, քազում ծախիւք ի դրան արքունի: Եւ սահմանեցին անխափան կատարել զպաշտուն փառաբանութեանն աստուծոյ եւ մեծ խնդութիւն ամենայն բրիստոնէից: Եւ յաւժանելս կանգնեալ կ<այ> ան>հուն հանդեսի իմքն Արղունն եւ արքեմեալ կողակիցն իւր Ու<ը>ու<կ> խաթունն, զաւուրս Գ ի Խաչի տանին. <ա>ւծողն մեծ կաթողիկոսն, որ ի Բաղդատ Նեստոր ԲԺ <եպիսկոպոսաւ ...> ի հայոց <եւ> եպիսկոպոսն Վ<ա>րազաւ <...> եւ կացուցին զոմն այ<ը> իմաստուն եւ կուսակրան քահանայ <աստուածա>քան էրէց Ռապան Սումա կոչեցեալ. այդ այդպէս եղեալ: «In this year distinguished ambassadors came from Rome and by order of the Pope they preached Christ and erected a big church, at great expense, at the King's court. And [the Mongols] decreed that the holy office of the glorification of God must be freely performed, thus filling all the Christians with joy. And Arghun himself and his blessed wife Uruk Khatun were present at this consecration, which

Regarding this passage we make the following observations:

1. The integration *Էպիսկոպոսաւք*, proposed by Hakobyan on the basis of the passage by Step'anos Ōrbelean reported by us above, is extremely likely, and we maintain it. However, Ōrbelean's text does not say that these twelve bishops were Armenian.
2. After the word *Էպիսկոպոսն*, the original text in all likelihood referred to the presence of Step'anos Ōrbelean, bishop of Siwnik'. The mention of the bishop of Varag proposed by Hakobyan, who bases his conjecture on a few letters that are barely legible, appears to be the result of an error or at any rate improbable²⁸.

Comparison with the Syriac text clears up a few points that the Armenian one leaves open, beginning with the personage of Rabban Sauma (Ռապան Սումա in Armenian). On the other hand, the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* furnishes more information compared than the Syriac chronicle. For example, mention is made of the presence of Arghun's wife, Uruk Khatun (the integration of the text appears to be quite likely) at the consecration feast of the church.

Finally, in the same *Žamanakagrut'iwn* there are dates that appear to conflict with what was said in other sources, beginning

took place, in great pomp, for three days, on the Feast of the Cross. The consecrator was the great Catholicos of Baghdad, Nestor, with twelve bishops <...> from the Armenians, and the bishop of Varag <...>, and they appointed a wise man, a celibate clergyman, a priest, connoisseur of theology, named Raban Suma. These things took place in this way».

- 28 In effect the bishop of Varag was the primate of a diocese which was geographically rather far from the place where events we are discussing took place (Varag is near the lake of Van). The only possible connection between the events which took place at Arghun camp and Varag appears to be that the church was consecrated on the day of the Feast of the Cross (as is reported in the *Žamanakagrut'iwn*) and the Holy Cross was venerated in the monastery of Varag. It would, on the other hand, be strange if the chronographer forgot to explicitly mention the presence of Step'anos Ōrbelean, newly elected bishop of Siwnik', who as such held one of the highest charges of the ecclesiastic Armenian hierarchy of the epoch. We cannot doubt the presence of the latter, given that it is he himself who says it.

with the fact that the church was erected by ambassadors sent by the Pope to preach among the Mongols. This is a strange equivocation if, as recent criticism wishes, the two Armenian authors were really one and the same person: Step'anos Ōrbelean. As a metropolite, and eyewitness of the facts, he would have been certainly able to recognise ambassadors sent by the Pope. On the question of the two Step'anos, however, we shall return shortly.

Now we shall attempt to date the accounts, considering each of the Armenian sources independently.

We shall begin with the *Patmut'iwn* by Step'anos Ōrbelean. In this work information reported in chapters LXVI and LXXI is particularly relevant for our ends. The former is dedicated to the history of the Ōrbelean family, the second is more strictly autobiographical²⁹. The dates contained in these chapters can be summarized in the following way. Step'anos goes to Sis to be consecrated as metropolite of Siwnik', but having arrived there he discovers that the Catholicos is dead. Therefore, he goes to Adana, meets the King of Cilicia, Lewon³⁰, and stays with him for three months, until the Council (which has gathered in the meantime) elects the new patriarch in the person of Kostandin, after a period of forty days. He is consecrated at Sis in the presence of Step'anos³¹. It is the day before Easter (*h ւեծի օրացալուցի Չսուկիմ*)³². The day after, still at Sis, Step'anos is in turn consecrated as metropolite of Siwnik' by the newly elected Catholicos. Step'anos returns to his

29 ŌRBĒLEAN, *Patmut'iwn*, op. cit., pp. 427-429, ch. LXVI, and pp. 479-482, ch. LXXI. For a translation see ORBĒLIAN, *Histoire*, op. cit., pp. 238-239; 265-266.

30 This is Lewon II, sometimes indicated as Lewon III: Lewon II, if we consider only the members of the dynasty who had the title of king: Lewon III if we also consider their predecessors.

31 Cfr. ŌRBĒLEAN, *Patmut'iwn*, op. cit., pp. 436-437, ch. LXVIII and ORBĒLIAN, *Histoire*, op. cit., p. 243.

32 According to Armenian historiography Kostandin was consecrated as the Catholicos on 13th April 735/1286. See ŌRMANEAN, M., *Azgapatum. Hay ullap'ar ekelec'woy anck'erə skizbēn minč'ew mer ōrerə yaracic' azgayin paraganerov patmuac* [National history. The history of the Armenian orthodox church from the beginning to our days narrated with related national circumstances], reprint, II, Ējmiacin 2001, col. 1984, § 1168.

country in 736³³. However, «soon after» (յիս սուկանւոց, p. 429) his return, envy against him explodes. So «after a few days» (յիս սուկոյց ինչ, p. 481) he is forced to go to Arghun, who receives him warmly. Step'anos explains the problem to him, setting forth the documentation relating to his nomination. Arghun has the documents translated and read in his presence. Then he makes a decree be written in favor of Step'anos confirming his election. At this point, in chapter LXXI, one comes to the episode relating to the consecration of the church.

As we can see, precise chronological detail is missing. For some reason the author appears here to exclusively trust his own memory and he ends up by leaving vague the date of the episode we are discussing. The only thing we can say is that the sequence of facts seems to point to the date's 1287 or the subsequent year.

Let us pass now to the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* by Step'annos Episkopos. In his account, the reference to the «Feast of the Cross» almost certainly indicates the exaltation of the Cross, one of the five major festivities of the Armenian liturgical calendar which is celebrated mid-September³⁴. It would be otiose to determine if such a feast is calculated on the basis of the liturgical Nestorian or Armenian calendar. The difference would be only a matter of a day. Moreover, Episkopos speaks of three days of celebrations. In any case, we note that according to the Nestorian liturgical calendar, such a feast was celebrated on the 13th of Ilul (= 13th Septem-

33 The year 736 of the Armenian era corresponds to the period from 9th January 1287 to 8th January 1288.

34 The present liturgical Armenian calendar contemplates four festivities dedicated to the Cross: 1) the apparition of the Cross of Jerusalem (*Erewman Xač', Xač'i Erewman tōn*), which is celebrated 28 days after Easter; 2) the exaltation of the Cross (*Xač'verac', S. Xač'i Verac'man tōn*), which is the most important of these festivals and is celebrated on the Sunday nearest to 14th September; 3) the apparition of the Varag Cross (*Varagay S. Xač'i tōn*), which is celebrated 15 days after the exaltation of the Cross on a Sunday between 25th September and 1st October; and 4) the discovery of the Cross (*Giw't Xač'i, Xač'giw't*), which is celebrated between 23rd and 29th October. For these feasts, founded in ancient times, see LAZARYAN, *Xač'i toner, Xač'verac'* [Feast of the Cross, Exaltation of the Cross], in *K'ristonya Hayastan. Hanragitaran* [Christian Armenia. An Encyclopaedia], Erevan 2002, pp. 429-430; 431-432.

ber)³⁵, as the Syriac chronicle also tells us expressly in a subsequent passage³⁶. According to the Armenian liturgical calendar, on the other hand, the feast is celebrated on 14th September³⁷. It is worth adding that the feast of the consecration of the Church of the Resurrection of Jerusalem³⁸ was celebrated on the previous day. This is a feast that sometimes appears to be indicated in reference to the Feast of the Cross³⁹.

This regards the day on which the consecration of the church would have taken place. On the other hand, establishing the year is less easy, and now we shall see why.

In his chronicle Step'annos initially supplies a comparative table in which a series of events, indicated in summary form, are dated on the basis of four chronological references. These are: the Christian era, beginning at 2 B.C.⁴⁰; the year of the reign of the

35 Cfr. BERNHARD, P.L., *Die Chronologie der Syrer*, Wien 1969 (Sitzungsberichte der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse, 264, 3), p. 109.

36 BORBONE, *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., p. 105. In this passage the author speaks again of the consecration of a church.

37 See the synaxarium of Tēr Isrā'el (*Le synaxaire arménien de TER ISRAEL, publié et traduit par G. BAYAN avec le concours de MAX de SAXE. II. Mois de Hori*, Paris 1911 [Patrologia Orientalis VI/2], p. 247 according to the overall numeration of the synaxarium): Հաստատեցին յայսմ ամի յերեքուսամն Սեպտեմբերի կառարել զոմն մաւկառեացն, եւ ի չորեքուսամն՝ զոմն վերացման սրբոյ խաչին: «They decided in this year to celebrate on the thirteenth of September the feast of dedication, and on the fourteenth, that of the exaltation of the Cross». *Ibid.*, pp. 217; 253; 254.

38 Նաւակառիք սուրբ Յարութեան մեծի կկեղեցոյ: *Ibid.*, p. 212.

39 An example in this sense, we believe, can be found in Kirakos Ganjakec'i, when, in chapter LVIII of his *Patmut'iwn Hayoc'* [History of the Armenians] he describes Het'um's journey to Karakorum at Mangu Khan. The arrival of the Armenian mission takes place ի չորս հոռի ամսոյ, յերեքուսամն սեպտեմբերի, ի տոմի մաւկառեաց խաչին, «on the fourth of the month of Hori on the 13th of September, for the feast of dedication (մաւկառիք) to the Cross». For this passage see KIRAKOS GANJAKEC'I, *Patmut'iwn Hayoc'* [History of the Armenians] edited by MELIK'-ÖHANJANYAN, K.A., Erevan 1961, p. 367.

40 This dating of the beginning of the Christian era to 2 B.C. is common to many medieval Armenian historians, among whom one finds also Samuël Anec'i, of whom Step'annos is a continuator (cfr. XAC'IKYAN, L. – HAKOBYAN, V., *Incipēs ēpetk'*

King of Cilicia and of the Catholicos currently in power; and, lastly, the Armenian era. In particular, as regards the death of a King or a Catholicos, in the cases where this account is not omitted, this is reported in the table as corresponding to the last year of the reign of the deceased. The following year is considered the first of his successor. Each table is followed by a more detailed description of various other facts. The episode being considered here is placed together with other events after the last table, which concludes in 739 (= 1290)⁴¹ with the first year of the reign of Het'um and of the Catholicos Step'annos.

A long section follows this table, occupying almost two-and-a-half pages in the Hakobyan edition and containing events, most of which should have occurred «in this same year» (յայսմ ամի, p. 48) as we read at the beginning of the section itself⁴², even if we later see that things are not at all like that. The events in question are:

1. The Bugha (Բուղայ) rebellion, the River Kura (Կուր) battle and the defeat of the rebel.
2. The killing of Demetre (Դեմետրե), King of Georgia and Bugha's father-in-law.
3. The death of King Lewon of Cilicia.

ē hratarakvel patmakan skzbnalbyurnerə [How not to edit historical sources], in XA-Č'IKYAN, L., *Ašxatut'yunner* [Works], III, Erevan 2008, pp. 873-895 [originally published in *Telekagir* 1949/2], p. 884 note 20 and BADALYAN, H.S., *Ōracuyci patmut'yun* [History of the calendar], Erevan 1970, pp. 76-77). Such a dating was extraneous not even to Step'anos Ōrbelean, who, in chapter LXXIII of his *Patmut'iwn* (the colophon of the work, owed to the author's penmanship), utilised these dates among the various chronological indications with which he indicates the conclusion of the drafting of the work itself (see ŌRBĒLEAN, *Patmut'iwn*, op. cit., p. 507 and ORBĒLIAN, *Histoire*, op. cit., p. 279). The dating of the birth of Jesus Christ to 2 B.C. was also known to the Syrians. See BERNHARD, *Die Chronologie*, op. cit., pp. 119-125 and PALMER, A., *Les chroniques brèves syriaques*, in *L'historiographie syriaque*, volume éditée par M. DEBIÉ [Études syriaques, 6], Paris 2009, p. 58.

41 739 corresponds to the period of 8th January 1290 to 8th January 1291.

42 The same word, յայսմ ամի, is found also in the first edition of the chronicle. See ŌRBĒLEAN, *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, op. cit., p. 30.

4. In spring the siege and conquest of Tripoli by the Sultan of Egypt⁴³.
5. In Khwarezm, the Nawruz (Նաւրւզ) rebellion and the flight of Ghazan (Գազան), son of Arghun.
6. The consecration of the church, which is the subject of the present contribution.

The deposition of the Catholicos Kostandin is collated in the following year. On the other hand, Tarsayič Ōrbelean's death is collated in 739 (= 1290), which we imagine to be the following year. The *Žamanakagrut'iwn* terminates with this event.

Now it is immediately evident that the first six events reported above cannot refer to the year of the last event taken from the table, 739 (= 1290). Consequently, the indication «in this same year» must be considered either generic in content or erroneous in form since we have to interpret or correct it as «in these same years». But this is, all in all, a minor problem. Let us see rather if the compiler of the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* also speaks elsewhere of these events. It appears evident that, in order to date the consecration of the church, it is not so important to say when the events actually take place but rather we should try to establish the dates for these events proposed by the compiler. Naturally, there emerges from this comparison no chronological indication that has any historiographical value, but a subjective indication that will have to be compared to the dates to be had from other sources. Obviously, regardless of alterations due to the manuscript tradition of the text, the hypothesis of authorial error in dating events distant from him (at least geographically, if not temporally) should also be taken into consideration.

Now of the first six events reported, the Bugha rebellion and the killing of Demetre appear in the table and are dated at 737 (=1288)⁴⁴. The table also attributes to this year the death of Lewon and the deposition of Kostandin, facts which are reported in a sin-

43 In the text the sultan is called Alp'i.

44 737 corresponds to the period from 9th January 1288 to 7th January 1289.

gle account. Here, however, something is not right, because Lewon's death is made to correspond with his eighteenth year of reign as well as the second year of the Catholicos Kostandin's reign. The problem is that the same table also computes a nineteenth year of Lewon's reign and a third year of reign of the Catholicos Kostandin, corresponding to the year following the one we are considering. Corresponding to this nineteenth year of reign (738 = 1289)⁴⁵ it is said that Lewon's son Het'um takes his place. While the election of the new Catholicos is placed, as has already been said, in the following year. Therefore, 738 must be the year of Lewon's death according to the chronographer. Thus, there is a deep suspicion that in the manuscript the reference to the death of the sovereign appears to be incorrectly placed. Indeed, the editor informs us⁴⁶ that, in the above manuscript the news is placed a little above the indication of the year, and a conventional sign matches it to the date according to the Armenian era. However, if this is how things stand, it does not explain the fact that in the comment following the table Lewon's death is dated together with events which the compiler dates to 737. What emerges from a reading of this part of the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* is just a lot of confusion about the chronological indication of the facts. This may probably be due to the manuscript tradition of the text. The consecration of the church seems to be dated by the compiler in 737/1288, however, we do not feel we can attribute any credibility to this date.

Furthermore, if we again take into consideration the events whose description concludes the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* and verify the dates as far as possible, we still find that something is wrong in the *Patmut'iwn* of Step'anos Ōrbelean. This historian dates the Bugha rebellion and the killing of Demetre to 738 (one year later compared to what Episkopos says), and he also dates to this same year Lewon's death, Kostandin's deposition and the taking of Tripoli – which did effectively take place that year. The death of Tarsayič

45 738 corresponds to the period from 8th January 1289 to 7th January 1290. Armenian historiography dates the death of Lewon at 6th February 738/1289.

46 HAKOBYAN, *Manr žamanakagrut'yunner*, op. cit., pp. 63-64, note 116.

Örbelean (who was the author's father) is also dated to 739⁴⁷. If we were allowed to use these dates to establish the year in which, according to the *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, the consecration of the church at Arghun's camp took place, we should date this event as taking place in 738/1289.

A part of contemporary Armenian historiography⁴⁸ has wished to identify Step'anos Örbelean as being the Step'annos Episkopos, author of the *Žamanakagrut'iwn*. We feel that the very

47 For these facts see ÖRBĒLEAN, *Patmut'iwn*, op. cit., pp. 430; 430; 437; 439; 441; 430 and ORBĒLIAN, *Histoire*, op. cit., pp. 239-240; 240; 243; 244; 245; 240. It should be noted, however, that the taking of Tripoli for this historian is dated to 738, but immediately after this indication one reads: իսկ յետ միայ ամի, ի 740 թուականին, «then, after one year, in 740».

48 This hypothesis was proposed by Nersēs Akinean. See his note in K'ÖSEAN, *C'uc'ak*, op. cit., coll. 177-178 and AKINIAN, N., review to HAKOBYAN, V.A., *Manr žamanakagrut'yunner XIII-XVIII dd., Erevan, A hator, 1951, B hator, 1956* [Brief chronicles of the the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Erevan, vol. I, 1951; vol. II, 1956], in *Handēs Amsōreay* 71 (1957) coll. 503-510: 504-505. It was favoured and sustained by the first editor of the *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, Ašot Abrahamyan, who already in the title page of his book attributed the work to Örbelean (see ÖRBĒLEAN, *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, op. cit.). But it was confuted by Levon Xaç'ikyan and Vazgen Hakobyan in the already mentioned article published in *Telekagir* in 1949 and reprinted in XAČ'IKYAN, *Ašxatut'yunner* (see note 40) and taken up again for its main arguments in the introduction to the second edition of the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* (HAKOBYAN, *Manr žamanakagrut'yunner*, op. cit., pp. 32-34). Despite it being said that Levon Xaç'ikyan changed his opinion regarding this, in the course of his life (see BAĽDASARYAN, Ē., *XIII dari mi žamanakagrut'yan helinaki masin* [On the author of a chronicle of the 13th century], in *Patma-Banasirakan Handes* 2 [53] (1971), pp. 210-216: 211 and the editorial note in XAČ'IKYAN, *Ašxatut'yunner*, op. cit., p. 895), the arguments developed in the work of these two authors and taken up again in the second edition of the text appear to us still today as being worthy of consideration, even while bearing in mind Ēdvard BaĽdasaryan's attempts to counter them (BAĽDASARYAN, *XIII dari mi žamanakagrut'yan*, op. cit.) and the fact that, in the most recent work on Samuēl Anec'i and his continuators, the attribution of the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* to Örbelean is taken for granted (cfr. MAT'EVOSYAN, K., *Samvel Anec'u Žamanakagrut'yan jeragrera ev norahayt irac'unnera* [The manuscripts of the Chronography of Samuēl Anec'i and the recently found additions], Erevan 2009, pp. 86-97).

existence of the discrepancies we have noted show this to be unlikely, or at least in need of rethinking⁴⁹.

3. THE EVENT

It has been proved that the three accounts refer to the same event, and that despite the difficulties that each text has regarding dates they should be dated to 1288. In particular, the information supplied by the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* allows us to specify the month and days in which the church was consecrated, i.e. 13th-14th September 1288. As we have seen, this date is compatible with the plausible length of Rabban Sauma's return journey. These three accounts show aspects which are agreed upon, complementary and alternative.

The connection of the founding of the church with the arrival of someone, or something from Rome is found in all the examined accounts.

According to the Syriac account, the church was founded on Rabban Sauma's return from the embassy in Europe. He brings with him as gifts furnishings and liturgical hangings from the Pope. Ōrbelean, to be exact, does not speak of the presence of persons who came from Rome when he says that the Pope «sent» a church. According to Step'annos Episkopos, «distinguished ambassadors» arrived from Rome, principally with the papal charge of preaching, and they erected the church at «great expense». The text appears to imply that the church was paid for by the papal ambassadors themselves.

49 While admitting that a certain confusion is present in the passage of the *Žamanakagrut'iwn* as it has been transmitted to us, a possible explanation of a few of these discrepancies could be seen by the fact that Ōrbelean would have acquired new and more correct information between the end of layout of the chronicle which (as readers will remember) arrives at 1290 and the end of the drafting of the *Patmut'iwn*, dated by himself to 1297 (ŌRBĒLEAN, *Patmut'iwn*, op. cit., p. 507 = ORBĒLIAN, *Histoire*, op. cit., p. 279). We must nevertheless admit that an explanation of this sort does not appear to be very convincing or capable of resolving the question fully.

In order to know who arrived from Rome we must look for information beyond the three accounts examined. Rabban Sauma did not leave alone, as the *History* itself says⁵⁰, which turns out, however, to be a little reticent on the fact that he and his colleagues went back together with some envoys from the King of France: the knight Gobert of Helleville, master Robert of Senlis, master William of Bruyères and the crossbowman Odard (or Odin)⁵¹. They were, therefore, «distinguished ambassadors», but not sent by the Pope to proclaim the Gospel or found a church. None of the eleven papal letters, of which Rābban Sauma and his companions were bearers⁵², mentions that the papal messengers sent accompanied Mongol ambassadors. The account by Step'annos Episkopos appears to be, in this case, the product of a partial misunderstanding. It is, on the other hand, sound knowledge that the hangings, liturgical furnishings and relics were brought on behalf of the Pope from Rome, since the Syriac account expressly says so. This appears to be a plausible interpreta-

50 «There went with him eminent priests and deacons of the (patriarchal) residence» (*Taš'tiā*, op. cit., 2009, p. 25*; 2010, p. 25) and also «a Frank», that is an European (*Taš'tiā*, op. cit., 2009, p. 28*; 2010, p. 28). The copy of the letter sent by the Pope to Arghun in reply to the embassy, preserved in the Vatican Archives, allows us to know the names of some of these: the «nobilis vir Sabadinus», «Thomas de Amfusus» and «Uguetus interpres» i.e.: an eastern Christian, a Frank (Tommaso Anfossi, Genoan) and a Mongol interpreter (LUPPRIAN, *Die Beziehungen*, op. cit., pp. 244-246; 254; BORBONE, *Storia... Un orientale*, op. cit., p. 183; ID. *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., p. 169).

51 Regarding them a bill of monies on 2nd February 1288 is spoken of. This was found in the book-keeping records of the Templar Knights (CHABOT, J.-B., *Compte-rendu de P. Bedjan, Histoire de Mar Jab-alaha...*, Leipzig 1895, in *Revue de l'Orient latin* 4 [1896], pp. 414-421: 416-417). Evidently the French envoys left Paris after that date and reached Rabban Sauma along the way, for Arghun, while writing to Philip after he had received them (letter dated «first month of summer» of the year of the Ox, 1289) expressly says that they arrived together with Rabban Sauma (MOSTAERT – CLEAVES, *Les lettres*, op. cit., p. 18; BORBONE, *Storia... Un orientale*, op. cit., p. 255; ID., *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., pp. 241-242) and these were confirmed by the contents of the diplomatic note of Buscarello Ghisolfi.

52 Their copies are preserved in the Vatican Archives (BORBONE, *Storia... Un orientale*, op. cit., pp. 206-207; ID., *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., pp. 191-192).

tion of the «sending» of the church as described by the words of Ōrbelean⁵³.

Regarding the carrying out of the ceremony the Syriac account and Step'annos Episkopos both agree on the length of time: three days. The *History* and Ōrbelean do not mention the presence of Arghun's wife. However, albeit in a very different fashion, they report more precisely than Step'annos Episkopos the Mongol sovereign's participation.

Ōrbelean cites a gift, given in person, of garments prepared for such a purpose. The conferral of precious vestments as a sign of honour, and at the same time so as to manifest dependence upon the sovereign of the honoured personage and his position in the Mongol state hierarchy, is a well documented custom in western and eastern sources⁵⁴. In the Syriac account in this case we have no mention of it⁵⁵. There is, however, another gesture that is

53 The gift of a tent-church from a western King to a Mongol ruler was indeed not unprecedented: in 1248 Louis IX had sent to the Great Khan from Cyprus a tent to be used as a chapel: «Whilst the King was tarrying in Cyprus, the great King of the Tartars sent messengers to him, greeting him courteously, and bearing word, amongst other things, that he was ready to help him conquer the Holy Land and deliver Jerusalem out of the hand of the Saracens. The King received them most graciously, and sent in reply messengers of his own, who remained away two years, before they returned to him. Moreover the King sent to the King of the Tartars by the messengers a tent made in the style of a chapel, which cost a great deal, for it was made wholly of good fine scarlet cloth. And to entice them if possible into our faith, the King caused pictures to be inlaid in the said chapel, portraying the annunciation of Our Lady, and all the other points of the Creed. These things he sent them by two Preaching Friars, who knew Arabic, in order to show and teach them what they ought to believe» (*The Memoirs of the Lord of Joinville. A New English Version* by WEDGWOOD, E., New York 1906, pp. 58-59).

54 See ALLSEN, TH.T., *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire. A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 46-70; 79-94; also ID., *Robing in the Mongolian Empire*, in *Robes and Honor. The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. by GORDON, S., New York 2001, pp. 305-313.

55 In other circumstances also the *History* recounts gifts of precious garments from the sovereign to the Catholicos (*Taš'itā*, op. cit., 2009, p. 39*; 2010, p. 39; BORBONE, *Storia...Un orientale*, op. cit., pp. 96, 118, 119, 120, 123; ID. *Storia...Cronaca*, op. cit., pp. 87, 107, 108, 111). In one case, however, the regal act is carried out by the

absent from Ōrbelean's report, viz. the offer of the cup by the sovereign «to the Catholicos ... and thus to all his retinue»⁵⁶.

Like the offering of precious garments, the cup offer is also a symbolic gesture of the Mongol Court tradition. Usually the latter accompanies the former and it is likely that both happened, even if the two accounts both cite only one of the two.

Ōrbelean, who was an eyewitness, later describes Khan Arghun's intent on playing or beating the clapper («semandron») for the whole camp. This is usually a gesture reserved for the clergy or sacristans. In the Syriac account the phrase «the King took care ... that the clapper should never be idle in that church» describes in a less direct way Arghun's action, and it appears he is not involved as a principal participant⁵⁷.

It is important to define the Christian denomination to which the church at the court belongs. Syriac and Armenian documents agree on the presence and preeminence of the Nestorian Catholicos and on the fact that a «Nestorian» priest, Rabban Sauma, was to be in charge of maintaining the church. The *History* mentions the presence of bishops, priests, deacons and monks, without saying that they were exclusively «Nestorians». Moreover, the expression «all Christians who confess Christ» reveals that the author has in mind the whole range of Christian denominations. Thus, according to the Syriac account the sovereign wishes «to increase the love for him» among *all* the Christians of the realm. When it speaks of the «glory of the eastern and western Christians», the definition, understood in the technical sense, maybe alludes to the «Nestorian» (eastern) and «Jacobite» (western) Churches. However, in view of

Catholicos himself. He gives to the builders of the new convent of Maragha precious garments «each worker receiving such clothes according to his condition and the work carried out», after having «offered the cup» to them (*Taš'itā*, op. cit., 2009, p. 39*; 2010, p. 39).

56 On the offer of the cup see BORBONE, *Storia... Un orientale*, op. cit., pp. 208-209; ID. *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., p. 194.

57 The comparison with Ōrbelean's account impedes the connecting of this phrase to the one following it, which talks of the Ilkhan's *later* attention *after* the consecration and could make us think of this clapper-beating as a continued act in that church.

the Armenian evidence, it would seem more likely that this expression is to be understood more broadly as referring to the whole range of Christian churches, perhaps even including the Greek or Latin Christians present in the realm and court of the Ilkhan. Therefore, the outlook of the Syriac author appears to be broadly ecumenical. In the same sense Step'annos Episkopos informs us by saying that «[the Mongols] decreed that the holy office of the glorification of God must be freely performed, thus filling all the Christians with joy».

The Syriac account is perhaps the one which more accurately gathers and describes the authentic motive behind the foundation of the church. It gives the political view of the Mongol sovereign, when it attributes to the Ilkhan the desire to «increase the love for him among them». Arghun seizes upon the occasion of the return of the embassy from Rome, with gifts from the Pope, for purposes that we may define as those of foreign policy: impressing the French with such a manifest exhibition of his own good disposition towards the Christians⁵⁸. Regarding political domestic affairs he increases the affection of all Christians towards himself by introducing the ritual of donating garments and offering the cup, thus publicly incorporating the heads of all the Christian denominations of the realm who are considered in the same light as functionaries of the state⁵⁹. In this perspective, it was important that the initiative was not limited only to the «Nestorians». The occasion of

58 A point that Arghun and his emissaries in Europe (such as Buscarello Ghisolfi) never fail to exaggerate. See the already mentioned diplomatic note (see note 15). As has already been said, Arghun had his third son baptised after about a year, in August 1289 (see note 14).

59 As Thomas Allsen observes (ALLSEN, *Commodity*, op. cit., p. 94), William of Rubruk shows he is aware that the receiving of the gift of garments from the Khan implicates the incorporation of and the need for loyalty with respect to the donor. For this reason the Franciscan refused to accept such a gift. To this example we can also add the case of the Armenian monk Vardan who refused a golden garment that Hülegü offered him (VARDAN VARDAPET, *Hawak'umn patmut'ean* [Compendium of History], Venetia 1862, p. 158; DULAURIER, É., *Les Mongols d'après les historiens arméniens*, in *Journal Asiatique*, 5^e série, 16 [1860], pp. 273-322: 304).

the founding of the church at the court even involved the Pope, since he fulfilled the role of donator of liturgical furnishings. After the return of Rabban Sauma from Europe, Arghun probably convinced himself that the hope for military alliance with western sovereigns was about to be realised, not so much because of Rabban Sauma's account, but rather because of the messages arriving from the French ambassadors⁶⁰.

The presence of churches at the court (*ordu*) of the Mongol princes (or princesses, as we will see) in Iran was not a novelty. We are informed about this not only from Christian sources. In fact Rašīd al-Dīn relates that in order to please his wife Doquz Khatun, a Kereyit Christian princess, Hülegü (r. 1258-1265) manifested benevolence and consideration for the Christians, so much so that «they build churches throughout the realm. A church was always built at the gate of Doquz Khatun's *ordu*, and the *naqus*⁶¹ was sounded»⁶². After the death of Doquz Khatun (17th June 1265) the church came to be set up in his *ordu*, because the *History* narrates that the newly elected Khan Geikhatu «in the middle of the month of Ab (August 1291) had entered into the church founded by Doquz Khatun in the blessed camp – now they were at that time on the mountain known as Ala Tagh – while our father Catholicos celebrated mass»⁶³. But this date is also gleaned from the testi-

60 Arghun, writing in 1289 to Philip IV reminds him that his envoys, one year before (at the moment of the founding of the church), told him among other things: «If the troupes of the Ilkhan were to begin their campaign against Egypt, then we also shall leave here and will jointly attack» (MOSTAERT – CLEAVES, *Les lettres*, op. cit., p. 18; BORBONE, *Storia... Un orientale*, op. cit., p. 255; ID., *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., p. 241).

61 The Persian word *naqus* derives from the Syriac *nāqōšā* «semandron, clapper».

62 English translation: RASHIDUDDIN FAZLULLAH, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh. Compendium of Chronicles. A History of the Mongols*. Translated and Annotated by THACKSTON, W.M., Harvard 1999, p. 472, for the Persian text, see RASCHID-ELDIN, *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse*. Texte persan publié, traduit en français accompagné de notes et d'un mémoire sur la vie et les ouvrages de l'auteur par QUATREMERRE, É., Paris 1836 (repr. Amsterdam 1968), pp. 94-95.

63 *Taš'īlā*, op. cit., 2009, p. 39*; 2010, p. 39; BORBONE, *Storia... Un orientale* cit., p. 96; ID., *Storia... Cronaca*, op. cit., pp. 86-87.

mony of Rašīd al-Dīn who distinctly and precisely refers to those princesses to whom the *ordu* of the deceased Doquz Khatun was transferred⁶⁴.

Thus in one of the most prestigious princely Mongol *ordus* a church was constantly being set up. Nevertheless, Arghun's decision to build one at this own court, was relevant since it admitted the Christian cult into the sovereign's *ordu*. This idea is well expressed in the Armenian document: «[the Mongols] decreed that the holy office of the glorification of God must be freely performed». The *History* precisely states that the church-tent was located right next to Ilkhan's tent employing as it does so an evocative image: «the ropes of the curtains of the church intermingled with those of his house».

The church at the *ordu* of the Ilkhan lasted at least up until 1291. Regarding this, the *History* informs us that during the reign of Geikhatu, the old Rabban Sauma, for whom «the hard life of the Mongols and lodging in the open air had become tedious», asked for permission to build a church in brick at Maragha to which he would transfer the liturgical furnishings of the church-tent of the court. Authorised to do so, he dedicated himself to the construction

64 Abaqa, successor of Hülegü, conferred it first upon Doquz Khatun's niece (daughter of her sister), Tuqtani Khatun. She, who «had been a concubine of Hülegü ... maintained the same habits (of her deceased aunt)». We may derive from this that the church-tent remained in function, as is seen in the *History*. Tuqtani Khatun died on 21st February 1292 and the *ordu* of Doquz Khatun passed to Kōkāchi Khatun (the princess destined by the Great Khan Qubilai as the bride of Arghun, whom Marco Polo accompanied from China to Iran – a wedding which could not be concluded due to the death of Arghun, which took place before the arrival of the princess, who therefore married his son Ghazan). Kōkāchi Khatun died in June 1296 and the *ordu* passed to other two princesses. It was still set up at the time in which Rašīd al-Dīn was writing (probably before 1304). The last princess cited, Qutluğšāh Khatun was the niece of the emir Irinjin, who, in his turn, was related to Doquz Khatun and was a Christian. Given the familial relations between the individuals in question and the fact that a few of them belong to the Christian Kereyit tribe, there is reason to believe that the church remained active also after 1292 (RASHIDUDDIN FAZLULLAH, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, op. cit., p. 472; Persian text: RASCHID-ELDIN, *Histoire*, op. cit., pp. 94-97).

of the church of Maragha dedicated to St. Mari and St. George⁶⁵. We believe that there he found a use for the furnishings sent by the Pope (which were "manufactures of western art) and for the relics brought from Rome.

We have no evidence that the moving church-tent in the Ilkhan's *ordu* was substituted by another. Probably this did not happen not only because of the advanced age of the rector, Rabban Sauma (as the Syriac text indicates), but also because for the Ilkhans there was no need at this point to have a «Church of the State» at the court.

PIER GIORGIO BORBONE
ALESSANDRO ORENGO

65 *Taš'itā*, op. cit., 2009, pp. 41-42*; 2010, pp. 41-42.

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

ԱՐՂՈՒՆԻ ԱՐՔՈՒՆԻՔԻ ԵԿԵՂԵՑԻՆ ԱՍՈՐԱԿԱՆ ԵՒ ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ԱՂԲԻՒՐՆԵՐՈՒ ՄԷՋ

ՓԻԷՐ ՃԻՈՐՃՈ ՊՈՐՊՈՆԷ - ԱԼԵՍՍԱՆՏՐՈ ՕՐԷՆԿՈ

Ասորական եւ հայկական պատմագրութեան մէջ պահպանուած է Ժրանի մոնղոլ կառավարիչին առնչուող կրօնական եւ քաղաքական դրուագի մը հետեւեալ հետքը. այն կը վերաբերի երրորդ մոնղոլ իլխան Արղունի (1284-1291) բանակատեղիի մէջ քրիստոնէական եկեղեցի մը օծելու մասին:

Բազմաթիւ նման տեղեկութիւններ կարելի է գտնել ասորական Մար-Թաբալահայի եւ Ռաբան Սառմայի պատմութեան մէջ, Ստեփանոս Օրբէլեանի «Միսական նահանգի պատմութեան» 32-րդ գլուխին մէջ, ինչպէս նաեւ Սամուէլ Անեցիի «Ժամանակագրութիւն»-ը շարունակող՝ Ստեփանոս Եպիսկոպոսի երկասիրութեան մէջ:

Այս յօդուածով հեղինակները նախ կ'ուզեն ապացուցել, որ երեք աղբիւրի հաղորդումները կը վերաբերին միեւնոյն իրադարձութեան, այնուհետեւ կը քննեն եկեղեցւոյ օծման թուականի խնդիրը եւ նշուած աղբիւրներու առկայ որոշ տարաձայնութիւնները: