
The Assassination of King Het'um II:

The Conversion of The Ilkhans and the Armenians

ANGUS STEWART

On November 17, 1307, the Armenian king, Het'um II, was assassinated by a Mongol, recently converted to Islam, the *noyan* Bularghu.¹ In this paper I will look at this assassination, which has often been seen as significant in the context of the conversion of the Mongols of Persia to Islam, and also at the effects, or perceived effects, of that conversion, especially regarding Ilkhanid foreign policy. I shall consider the attitude of the Ilkhans to the small Armenian kingdom centred on Cilicia, now in south-eastern Turkey, which, by 1307 had shrunk from the size and importance it had enjoyed in the middle of the thirteenth century. First, I intend briefly to describe Armenian relations with the Mongols, from the irruption of the latter until about 1307; then I shall discuss the assassination, the sources and reasons for it; next I shall look at the conversion of the Mongol rulers of Persia to Islam, and any effects that this may have had on Ilkhanid foreign policy; finally I shall consider how both this conversion and the assassination have been interpreted by historians, and what this event actually shows us about the effects of the Mongol Ilkhans' conversion to Islam on their relationship with their subject, Christian, Armenian satellite.

Mongol-Armenian Relations Before 1307

The Armenian kingdom became a loyal ally, or subject, of the Mongols upon their permanent arrival in the region. The willingness of the Armenian kings to subject themselves to the Mongol rulers may not have been merely due to fear, understandable as that would have been. Even in its earliest stages, before the rise of the Mamluk Sultanate, a relationship with the Mongols may have been considered as potentially positive by the Armenians of Cilicia. The opposition of the Seljuk Sultan, Kay-Khusraw II, to the Mongols may have been especially decisive: it was from this point on that the Armenian king was determinedly aligned on the Mongol side, and this was demonstrated by Het'um I's handover of Kay-Khusraw's wife and daughter to the Mongols after the Seljuk defeat at Köse Dagh in 1243. It seems that throughout the first half of the thirteenth century, the Armenians in Cilicia may have felt threatened by the Seljuks to the north. Indeed, even in the early twelfth century, Vahga castle, the original base of the R̥upēnids in the mountains north of Sis, was threatened, and briefly

¹ The idea for this paper grew from my study of the Armenian kingdom in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the period of the conversion of the Ilkhans to Islam: *The Armenian kingdom and the Mamluks – War and Diplomacy during the Reigns of Het'um II (1289–1307)* (Leiden, 2001). Some of the events described here, or mentioned in passing, are more fully analysed and dealt with therein.

occupied (1139–1144/45) by Anatolian Turks.² In the twelfth century, the Seljuks proved willing supporters of anti-Ṛupēnid alliances; after the formation of the Armenian kingdom there were major Seljuk raids in 1208–9, 1216, 1221 and, especially, 1233. Rūmī Seljuk dominance of the Armenian kingdom in Cilicia was demonstrated by the bilingual coins (silver ‘trams’) produced in Cilicia.³ These were produced between about 1220 and 1246 by the Armenians, and, while there has been some debate on the topic, it seems clear that they symbolised some sort of Seljuk overlordship. Indeed, Köse Dagħ may not initially have seemed such a decisive turning point in Anatolian affairs, at least in the short-term aftermath: perhaps in retaliation for the betrayal of his family, Kay-Khusraw II attacked the Armenian kingdom again, and again these coins were produced, in 1245/46 – even before they owed tribute to the Mamluks, it seems that the Armenians had had experience of acknowledging two overlords, one of them, certainly, unwillingly.⁴ By 1246, as the Seljuks, temporarily as it turned out, reasserted their power, it may have seemed not as self-evidently logical as it does with hindsight that the Armenians of Cilicia should align themselves alongside the Mongols.

Nevertheless, King Het‘um I remained committed to the Mongol alliance. After his handover of the Seljuk royal womenfolk, in order to cement the alliance, or to re-emphasise his supportive/compliant status, Het‘um first sent his (elder) brother, the Constable Smpad, to the Great Khan (1247–50), then followed himself (1254–55). A letter written by the Constable Smpad himself describing his journey survives; it was intended for his Cypriot Frankish brothers-in-law, King Henry I and John of Ibelin, count of Jaffa, but was also received by Louis IX of France during his stay on the island preceding his invasion of Egypt. The aim of the journey, in Smpad’s stated opinion, was the general good of Christianity, but more particularly, his brother had sent him to congratulate Güyük at his accession. Smpad obtained a diploma of protection for the Armenian kingdom, and the new Great Khan handed back certain places occupied by the Turks (that is, the Seljuks). Smpad returned via a sojourn with the *noyan* Baju, who was the commander of the Mongol troops stationed at the south of the Caucasus, in order to pass on to him Güyük’s order.⁵ An account of King Het‘um’s eight-month journey to Mongolia, and Möngke Khan, and back, is provided by the contemporary Armenian chronicler and unwilling servant of the Mongols, Kirakos of Ganjak.⁶ This is an important document in terms of geography, natural history, and

² In this case, it was the Danishmendids, rather than the Seljuks, who occupied Vahga, in the aftermath of John II Komnenos’s invasion of Cilicia, and capture of Vahga.

³ M. Canard, ‘Cilicia’, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (Leiden, 1960) II, pp. 34–39; here p. 38a. See also Y.T. Nersessian, *Attribution and Dating of Armenian Bilingual Trams* (Los Angeles, 1983); Paul Bedoukian, *Coinage of Cilician Armenia* (revised ed., Danbury, Connecticut, 1979), p. 84.

⁴ N.G. Rhodes, ‘Some Armenian Notes’, *Spink’s Numismatic Circular* (October 1976), pp. 370–371; on Kay-Khusraw’s invasion of Cilicia in 1245, see Claude Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey* (London, 1968), pp. 270–271.

⁵ For details of Smpad’s journey, as well as a French translation of his letter, see Jean Richard, ‘La Lettre du connétable Smbat et les rapports entre chrétiens et mongols au milieu du XIII^{ème} siècle’, in *Armenian Studies – Etudes arméniennes: In memoriam Haig Berberian*, ed. Dickram Kouymjian (Lisboa, 1986), pp. 683–696. A *noyan* is an important Mongol officer: J.A. Boyle states that the “word means ‘lord’ or ‘chief’ and as an epithet was normally applied only to persons of the highest rank”, and is thus comparable to the Arabic *amīr* (“The Mongol Commanders in Afghanistan and India According to the *Ṭabaqāt-i-Nāṣiri* of Jūzjānī”, *Islamic Studies*, II (1963), pp. 235–247; here p. 243, n. 10).

⁶ J.A. Boyle, ‘The Journey of Het‘um I, king of Little Armenia, to the court of the Great Khan Möngke’, *Central Asiatic Journal*, IX (1964), pp. 175–189. See also J.A. Boyle, ‘Kirakos of Ganjak on the Mongols’, *Central Asiatic Journal*, VIII (1963), pp. 199–214. Het‘um’s own claims for his achievements in Qaraqorum, as revealed through Kirakos’s account, are rather more modest than the dramatic successes ascribed to him by other later

ethnography, but also makes clear Het'um's motives for the journey and how he wished its results to be recorded. His own journey was necessitated by the accession of Möngke, which had made any agreement previously reached by Smpad with Güyük less secure; it was also suggested, or perhaps ordered by Batu, Möngke's Khan-maker in the West.⁷ Het'um was well received by the Great Khan, who, after accepting his presents, "suitably honoured" Het'um. The Armenian king accompanied Möngke for fifty days, and was rewarded with "a rescript bearing a seal saying that none should presume to molest him or his land", and also "a letter of enfranchisement for the churches everywhere".⁸ During the course of his return journey he visited the chief Mongol leaders in the West, Baiju and his lieutenant Khoja.⁹

Het'um I was indeed to be rewarded for his swift and sincere devotion to the Mongol cause. Not only did his kingdom avoid the depredations concomitant with Mongol invasion, but there were also positive benefits. He seems to have gained some prestige and status among the population of the Armenian homelands to the north, in the southern Caucasus and Lake Van regions; he seems to have been the only ruler of the Armenian kingdom in southern Asia Minor to have visited Armenia proper, and was received with honour.¹⁰ Upon Hülegü's arrival in the Middle East, and his determination to invade Syria, Het'um I was prompt in his assistance, and was involved with the invasion. Indeed, it seems that the Armenians participated with some enthusiasm: they acquired a degree of infamy in the Muslim sources for their alleged arsons in Aleppo.¹¹ In return for their alliance, the Armenians received a share of the territorial gains that Hülegü managed to keep hold of even after his general Kitbugha's defeat at 'Ayn Jālūt (1260). These were primarily places to the north of Syria, in the eastern Taurus mountains, often with great strategic importance. Fortresses like Behesni, Marash and Gargaṛ, for example, had roles in controlling communications between Syria and the north, and between the Ilkhanate and the west. The Armenian kingdom was now expanded, thanks to the Mongol alignment, to its greatest extent.

Whatever the origins and reasons, self-interest or self-protection, for the Armenian alignment with the Mongols, they were prominent in their promotion of a Mongol alliance, and a Franco-Mongol *entente*. The northernmost of the surviving Crusader states, the principality of Antioch, was heavily influenced by the Armenian kingdom throughout the thirteenth century, and it should be no surprise that they were the first Frankish state to view the Mongols favourably. In 1260, as the Mongols occupied Syria, and the Mamluks advanced from Egypt to stand against them, while the Franks of Acre espoused a careful neutrality, the Antiochenes participated on the Mongol side. Antioch paid the price, even before the Armenians, for its alliance with the Mongols: the Mamluk Sultan Baybars captured the city, and massacred its population, in 1268. The other Frankish states of the region, nevertheless,

writers such as Hayton (i.e., Het'um of Gorigos, who surely knew better but who had an eye on the intended audience), who claims he converted the Khan and many others to Christianity: see Hayton, "La Flor des estoires de la terre d'orient", in *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents Arméniens*, eds. C. Schefer, L. de Mas Latrie, P.E.D. Riant and E. Dulaurier (2 vols, Paris 1869-1906), II, pp. 113-253 [French], pp. 255-366 [Latin]; here pp. 163-168.

⁷ Boyle, 'Journey' *cit.*, p. 178.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See M. Canard, "Le royaume d'Arménie-Cilicie et les Mamelouks jusqu'au traité de 1285", *Revue des études arméniennes*, IV (1967), pp. 217-259; here p. 219.

quickly came to see the potential benefits of alliance with the Ilkhans – the Mongols may have had a fearsome reputation, but they were rather less immediately threatening than the Mamluks proved to be. The Armenians remained, however, often at the forefront of efforts to establish a coordinated offensive against the Mamluks between the Mongol Ilkhans and the Western Crusading Powers, and this is most readily seen in the *Flor des estoires de la terre d'orient* of Het'um of Goṛigos (known in the West as 'Hayton').¹² This text, written in 1307 at the behest of Pope Clement V, describes the Mongols (and the Middle East) in some detail, as background for a plan for a co-ordinated assault on the Mamluks.

The Armenian kings also remained keen allies of the Ilkhans in their invasions of Mamluk Syria. In the 1260s, doubtless under Ilkhanid command, the Armenians launched several rather unsuccessful raids of their own against northern Syria.¹³ Later on, Armenian detachments participated fully in the campaigns launched by Hülegü's son, Abagha (Ilkhan 1265–82), and great-grandson, Ghazan (1295–1304).¹⁴

In return for both this faithful military support, and for the monetary tribute paid, the Ilkhanid alignment held out the promise of Mongol protection for the Armenian kingdom. Even after the decisive decline of the Seljuks, the Armenians of Cilicia were not free from the threat of the Turks of Anatolia. The Qaramanid Türkmén on Cilicia's western borders to some extent took over from the Seljuks in their opposition to the Armenians. This may have had independent roots from, but was certainly interrelated with, the Qaramanid hostility to the Ilkhanid overlords of Anatolia: the Qaramanids repeatedly offered alliance to both Mongol rebels¹⁵ and to the Mamluks. As with the Qaramanid-backed rebellion of the Mongol governor of Rüm, Sülemish, in 1298, the Armenians of Cilicia were eager to assist the Ilkhanid authorities' reassertion of dominance in Anatolia, and, as I have suggested above, this was not merely because of fear of the Mongols: there was considerable self-interest involved. Strong Ilkhanid control of Asia Minor could imply a lessening of the Türkmén threat for Cilicia.

It is clear that the Mongols could even, on occasion, provide some positive protection to the Armenians of Cilicia from the Mamluks, in addition to the territorial gains they ceded them. A Mongol detachment may possibly have sought to assist the (unsuccessful) efforts of Het'um II to relieve the Armenian Catholicos besieged by the Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil in Hromgla in 1292.¹⁶ A Mongol detachment decisively defeated a Mamluk invasion force, albeit not a major one but merely a raid consisting primarily of Aleppan forces, in Cilicia in 1305.¹⁷ According to Hayton, among other sources, Ghazan provided a protective garrison for Cilicia.¹⁸

¹² See above, note 6.

¹³ For details of these raids, see Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "In the Aftermath of 'Ayn Jalüt: The Beginnings of the Mamlük-İlkhanid Cold War", *Al-Masāq: Studia Arabo-Islamica Mediterranea*, III (1990), pp. 1–21; here pp. 10–12.

¹⁴ For details of the Armenian involvement with the Ilkhanid invasions of Syria, see Canard, *op. cit.*, pp. 243–246, and my *The Armenian kingdom and the Mamluks*, pp. 136–153.

¹⁵ For example: in Balu's rebellion in 1297 and that of Sülemish in 1298; see J.A. Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the İl-Khāns", in *The Cambridge History of Iran, V: the Saljuq and Mongol Periods* ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 303–421, here p. 386; and Cahen, *op. cit.*, pp. 281–282 and 293–301. With regard to the latter example, and the Armenians' involvement in Sülemish's capture, see my *The Armenian kingdom and the Mamluks*, pp. 128–135.

¹⁶ See Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (London, 1986), p. 78; for details of the Mamluk conquest of Hromgla (Rumkale/Qal'at al-Rüm), see my *The Armenian kingdom and the Mamluks*, pp. 73–83.

¹⁷ See my *The Armenian kingdom and the Mamluks*, pp. 164–171.

¹⁸ "Flor des estoires", *cit.*, p. 204.

On the other hand, Cilician Armenian involvement in the Ilkhanid war with the Mamluks did not bring long-term, and only few short-term, benefits. While Hülegü did grant substantial territories to Het'um I, these were claimed by the Mamluks as part of their Syrian 'inheritance' from the Ayyübid, quite apart from their strategic importance in the eastern Taurus mountains, and were wanted back by them. Early Mamluk sources are keen to stress the circumstances of how places such as Behesni, for example, were transferred from Ayyübid, Muslim control, to Armenian possession, by the Mongols. When later Mamluk historians describe the Mamluk (re)capture of these strongholds, they frequently re-tell the story of how the Armenians obtained them.¹⁹ By 1300, the Mamluks had taken all of those castles given by Hülegü to the Armenian king. These short-term gains, as well as the Mongol-directed raids carried out by the Armenians in the 1260s, definitely served to anger the Mamluks. Armenian involvement with Mongol raids on Syria only brought losses of men and resources, and further aroused the wrath of the Mamluks. The Mamluks themselves launched several major invasions against the Armenian kingdom, notably in 1266, 1274–75, 1279, 1283, 1292, 1298, 1302, 1304, and 1305–6; and in 1285 the Armenians were forced to agree to a humiliating truce, and the payment of an annual tribute. When the Armenians were able to defeat Mamluk raiders, as, with Mongol help, they did in 1305, fear of Mamluk reprisals led to the Armenian king desperately buying forgiveness from the Sultan.

The Mongol alignment offered only limited and infrequent protection against these repeated Mamluk invasions, and much of the territory of the Armenian kingdom had been permanently lost by 1307. Along with the loss of lands, and the destruction caused by the raids, the Armenians were additionally forced to pay two annual tributes. These problems were compounded by a lack of clarity in the possession of the throne. King Het'um II had repeatedly abdicated, in order to take vows as a Franciscan; the last time in favour of his nephew, Lewon III. It seems clear, however, that, as 'Grand Baron',²⁰ he remained the power behind the throne. In 1307 the matter of succession was finally decided: both Het'um and Lewon were assassinated.

The Assassination of Het'um II

The perpetrator of the events of November 17, 1307,²¹ was Bularghu, a deputy of the high-ranking Mongol commander in Anatolia, Irenjin, and possibly the leader of the Mongol

¹⁹ For example, in the context of al-Ashraf Khalil's occupation of Marash and Behesni in 1293, several Arabic writers describe how Hülegü had given them to the Armenians: Mufaḍḍal, *Al-Nahj al-sadiḍ*, ed. & tr. E. Blochet as "Histoire des sultans mamlouks", in *Patrologia Orientalis*, XII, XIV, and XX (1919–28), here XIV, pp. 557–558; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, VIII, ed. U. Haarmann (Freiburg, 1971), here pp. 340–341; al-ʿAynī, *Iqd al-jumān*, ed. M.M. Amin (4 vols. to date; Cairo, 1987–92), here III, pp. 151–152.

²⁰ The title is given, for example, by Samuel of Ani (ed. & tr. E. Dulaurier, "Extrait de la Chronographie de Samuel d'Ani", *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents Arméniens*, I, pp. 445–468; here p. 466) and in the manuscript colophons translated by A.K. Sanjian (*Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts: 1301–1480* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 54, 55).

²¹ The date is given in the 'Chronological Table' attributed to Hayton (ed. & tr. E. Dulaurier, "Table Chronologique, de Héthoum, comte de Gor'igos", *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents Arméniens*, I, pp. 461–90; here p. 490); and by the writer of a colophon to a manuscript produced in Cilicia in this year (Armenian era: 756; Sanjian, *op. cit.*, p. 54). The Arabic sources place their accounts in the year 707 (July 3, 1307 – June 20, 1308).

For a more detailed analysis of this event and of our sources for it, see my *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks*, pp. 171–180.

garrison resident in Cilicia, or the Ilkhanid officer sent to receive the Armenian tribute to the Mongols.²² Bularghu invited Het'um to his camp, as if to hold counsel, or possibly as if to a banquet.²³ This seems to have been “beneath the walls of Anawarza”, an important royal stronghold.²⁴ What is meant by this phrase, in two Armenian sources, is unclear. The camp could have been outside of the walls of the ancient city, or perhaps within the boundaries of the city, but beneath the walls of the citadel, the classical acropolis, on the outcrop above. This seems to be the implication of “beneath the walls of the fortress” in another, contemporary, Armenian source, which interpretation is perhaps supported by the colophon to a manuscript produced in Cilicia in 1307 which describes the murders as happening “at the foot of Anazarb”.²⁵ According to the Egyptian writer al-Maqrīzī, Het'um and his companions were under safe-conduct, a significant matter in the region.²⁶ Het'um was accompanied by his nephew, King Lewon, and by a party of important royal officials and nobles.²⁷

²² Bularghu is not consistently named in the sources: I have followed the spelling given by an Armenian colophon mentioning him, written in Cilicia after the event (Sanjian, *op. cit.*, p. 55), and by the two editions of the continuation of Samuel of Ani (tr. M. Brosset, “Samouel d’Ani, Tables Chronologiques”, in *Collection d’historiens arméniens*, II (St. Petersburg, 1876), pp. 339–483, here p. 477; “Extrait de la Chronographie” *cit.*, p. 466); these Armenian sources seem to be supported by our Persian source for the incident, Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qāshānī’s “History of Öljeitü” (ed. Mahin Hambly, *Tārīkh-i Uljāyṭu* (Tehran, 1969), pp. 77–81). Another colophon calls him Pelarghoy (Sanjian, *op. cit.*, p. 54); the continuation of (the Constable) Smpad Sparapet’s “Chronicle of the Kingdom” (ed. & tr. E. Dulaurier, “Chronique du royaume de la Petite Arménie, par le Connétable Sēmpad”, *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents Arméniens*, I, pp. 605–672) calls him Bilarghu (p. 664), as does P.M. Holt in his translation of Abū'l-Fidā, who also states that he was the Mongol commander in Anatolia (*The Memoirs of a Syrian Prince: Abu'l-Fidā, Sultan of Ḥamāh* (Wiesbaden, 1983), p. 47). The contemporary Mamluk general Baybars al-Manṣūrī (*Zubdat al-fikra fi ta'rīkh al-hijra*, ed. D.S. Richards (Beirut, 1998), pp. 394–395) names him Burl[al]ghū, and describes him as the commander of the *tümen* of Mongols resident in Cilicia (as does Mufaddal, *op. cit.*, XX, p. 140); al-Maqrīzī, who gives him the same name (without giving the short vowels), explains that “Het'um the petty-king of Cilicia . . . was paying tribute to the Mongols just as he paid it to Egypt, and every year one of their amirs came to him until he handed over the tribute; and (this year there) came to him from the Mongol amirs Burlaghū” (*Kitāb al-Sulūk*, eds. M.M. Ziyāda and S.'A.-F. Āshūr, (4 vols. in 12 parts; Cairo, 1934–73); here II:i, p. 38). Among the recent writers on the Armenian Kingdom, Robert W. Edwards (*The Fortifications of Armenian Cilicia* (Washington, 1987), p. 10), T.S.R. Boase (“The History of the Kingdom”, *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, ed. Boase (Edinburgh, 1978), pp.1–33; here p. 29), and Sirarpie Der Nersessian (“The Kingdom of Cilician Armenia”, in *A History of the Crusades*, gen. ed. K.M. Setton, II, *The Later Crusades, 1189–1311* (second edition, Madison, 1969), pp. 630–659; here p. 658) all call him Bilarghu.

²³ Samuel of Ani, “Extrait de la Chronographie” *cit.*, p. 466; al-Maqrīzī, *cit.*, II:i, p. 38; al-^cAynī *cit.*, IV, p. 458.

²⁴ Samuel of Ani, “Extrait de la Chronographie” *cit.*, p. 466; “Chronique du royaume” *cit.*, p. 664. The late Antique city of Anawarza is dominated by its citadel, perched on a steep-sided rocky outcrop, dominating the surrounding flat plain of Cilicia. Anawarza was the main city in the eastern part of the Cilician Plain, about 25 km south of Sis and 60 km north-east of Adana. Through much of the twelfth century it was the Ṙupēnid capital; by 1307 the city had suffered from years of Mamluk raids, and the population may have been concentrated in the citadel. For details of Anawarza, including an overview of its history, see Edwards, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–72.

²⁵ Hayton (attrib.), “Chronological Table” *cit.*, p. 490; Sanjian, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *op. cit.*, II:i, p. 38.

²⁷ Al-Maqrīzī states that he was accompanied by “a group of the leading Armenians and two brothers of his”: *op. cit.*, II:i, p. 38. Baybars al-Manṣūrī only mentions his brothers, and names them as “Alinakh, Lewon, and Öshin”: Baybars al-Manṣūrī *op. cit.*, p. 395. Lewon was, of course, Het'um's nephew, and Alinakh and Öshin were the two brothers who survived Bularghu's plot. Qāshānī states that Het'um was accompanied by his grandson the junior king (obviously, his nephew is meant), and thirty servants (*op. cit.*, p. 80). The Armenian sources variously describe an escort of important figures, and the *Gestes des Chiprois* also mentions “several other knights with him who were from Acre, one of them by the name of Gille Antiaume”: *Les Gestes des Chiprois: recueil de chroniques françaises écrites en orient aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles*, ed. Gaston Reynaud (Geneva, 1887), p. 325.

It seems that the meeting did not last long. As soon as the Armenians arrived, or, if it was a banquet, as soon as they began to eat, Bularghu ordered that they should be killed: “swords were drawn on them from every side”.²⁸

The account given in the *Gestes des Chiprois* is slightly different. We are informed that,

As soon as this great Tatar lord lit upon him, . . . he decided to act upon his intentions and requested, on behalf of the great khan, the kingdom of Armenia. Het‘um replied to him that it was not rightly his, as it belonged to this infant, his nephew, who had the name Lewon. This great lord thereupon without delay ordered his man to slay him; so his man struck him with his sword, and all the knights and others who were with him.²⁹

This, of course, reflects the fact that Het‘um had by this time officially abdicated. The new King, Lewon III, was also one of the victims. According to the *Gestes des Chiprois*,

when the infant Lewon the little saw that they had killed his uncle and the others, he fled among the tents of the Tatar women to save his life, but nothing availed him, because the Tatars went to take him and the women betrayed him, and they cut off his head, [he] who was a child who had not 10 years of age.³⁰

The Armenians may have been able to mount at least some resistance: one contemporary Arabic source, Baybars al-Manṣūrī, remarks that Bularghu himself was wounded in the *mêlée*.³¹

Why did Bularghu murder Het‘um and Lewon?

The question of why this assassination happened may seem to be straightforward. The death of Het‘um II – ruler of the Armenians through one of the most dramatic periods of the kingdom’s history – was a momentous event, of considerable significance for the changing nature of the Armenian-Mongol relationship, and was extremely repercussive for the history

²⁸ Samuel of Ani states that “[a]s soon as they had arrived, the Tatar chief, who desired to make himself master of Cilicia, had them stopped and massacred”: “Extrait de la Chronographie” *cit.*, p. 466. Baybars al-Manṣūrī reports that the Armenian visitors “had not become settled” when the murderers pounced on them (*op. cit.*, p. 395). Al-Maqrīzī, persisting in his description of a banquet scene, states that “as soon as they spread their hands to the food, swords were drawn on them from every side” (*op. cit.*, II:i, p. 38). Qāshānī, who consistently depicts Bularghu as a devout Muslim, states that he drew his sword while pretending to pray, “and then while he exclaimed the *takbīr*, he beheaded [Het‘um] at one stroke; as soon as his servants heard his exclamation, they too killed [Het‘um’s] attendants” (*op. cit.*, p. 80).

²⁹ *Gestes des Chiprois cit.*, p. 325–326.

³⁰ *Gestes des Chiprois cit.*, p. 326. According to W.H. Rüdīt-Collenberg (*The Rupenides, Hethumides & Lusignans: the Structure of the Armeno-Cilician Dynasties* (Paris, 1963), diagram III (H2), p. 74, n. 177), Lewon was in fact born in 1289, which would have made him 18; however, he also refers to the alternative age suggested by the *Gestes des Chiprois*. Other Armenian sources record the murder of Lewon (“Chronique du royaume” *cit.*, p. 664; Samuel of Ani, “Tables Chronologiques” *cit.*, p. 477; “Extrait de la Chronographie” *cit.*, p. 466; “the handsome and all-bountiful youth” Lewon is named as a victim by two manuscript colophons that mention the murders (Sanjian, *op. cit.*, pp. 54–55)), and Abū’l-Fidā’ mentions the death of Het‘um’s nephew also, but calls him by his father’s name, T‘oros “the younger” (*op. cit.*, p. 47). Al-^ḤAynī, obviously confused as to which members of the Armenian royal family were in fact murdered, specifically names Alinakh as being killed (*op. cit.*, IV, p. 458).

³¹ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

of the Armenian kingdom. However, it is often swiftly passed over, by recent writers as much as by contemporary Armenian chroniclers.

For example, the continuation of the chronicle of the Constable Smpad, brother of Het'um I, merely states that "Bilarghu cut the throats of the young king Lewon and his paternal uncle the Baron Het'um, beneath the walls of Anazarba [Anawarza]". One continuation of Samuel of Ani's chronicle is even more summary: "Bularghu killed (the king) Het'um and the young Lewon". One contemporary Armenian source is a little more detailed: "On the 17th of the month of November, the Grand Baron of Armenia, Het'um, and the son of the Baron T'oros, brother of Het'um, Lewon, king of Armenia, along with other significant personages, were treacherously put to death, beneath the walls of the fortress of Anawarza". The longest account of the incident in the available Armenian sources is that of another continuation of Samuel of Ani's *Chronography*, but even this source gives precedence in the entries for this year to religious matters, concerning the accession of a new Catholicos, the debate over a union with Rome, and over the dates of Christmas and Easter.³²

Just as the Armenian or pro-Armenian sources are not agreed as to the exact name of Het'um's murderer, nor are they consistent as to his rank, and reason for being in Cilicia. According to one source from Armenia, "the villainous *noyan* Bularghu" merely came "to Cilicia with a hidden plan and under some pretext or other";³³ sources sympathetic to his victims explain Bularghu's actions as stemming from a straightforward desire to acquire the Armenian kingdom for himself.³⁴ Much later Armenian writers, without any source, or, seemingly, basis in fact, additionally blamed anti-Latin elements in the kingdom for inciting Bularghu, because of the changes being introduced by Het'um and the Catholicos to the ritual of the Armenian Church in order to bring it into line with Roman practice.³⁵

In order to get more detailed information on these events, and especially on Bularghu's motivations, we have to make use of another body of sources, hitherto largely neglected in this context: the Arabic histories written in the Mamluk Sultanate. These writers in the Mamluk Sultanate see a less straightforward reason for the murders. Baybars al-Manşūrī, a senior Mamluk and a contemporary, states that the origin of the incident lay in Bularghu's intention to "build a *madrassa* in the town of Adana and to put a minaret in it".³⁶ The later

³² "Chronique du royaume" *cit.*, p. 664; Samuel of Ani, "Tables Chronologiques" *cit.*, p. 477; Hayton's "Chronological Table" *cit.*, p. 490; Samuel of Ani, "Extrait de la Chronographie" *cit.*, pp. 465–466.

³³ Samuel of Ani, "Extrait de la Chronographie" *cit.*, p. 466.

³⁴ *Ibid.*: "the Tatar chief. . . desired to make himself master of Cilicia". The *Gestes des Chiprois* (*cit.*, pp. 325–326) also describes Bularghu asking for possession of the kingdom, "on behalf of the Great Khan" from Het'um. We are unfortunate that the longest account of this episode, that of the *Gestes des Chiprois*, is incomplete, with a section of the manuscript, immediately prior to the incident, missing: we have lost most of the background to the murder, which seems to involve Het'um's receipt of a *ferman* from the Ilkhan.

³⁵ Der Nersessian ("The Kingdom of Cilician Armenia" *cit.*, p. 658, n. 50) and Sanjian (*op. cit.*, p. 54, n. 8) refer to this story. Der Nersessian implies that this story in fact originated in the work of a late eighteenth-century historian Tchamitch (or Tchamtchian), who does not give his source, and states that she had not found any reference to it in her own research in the sources. Nevertheless, Bundy seems to implicitly accept this story in his brief description of the event, without actual citation of a source: David Bundy, "Armenian Relations with the Papacy after the Mongol Invasions", *The Patristic and Byzantine Review*, V (1986), pp. 19–32, here p. 32; see also below, p. 18 [ref to Toumanoff, *CMH2*].

³⁶ Baybars al-Manşūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

writer, al-Maqrīzī, develops this view of Bularghu:

he had surrendered himself [i.e., to God] and was fervent in his Islam, and he was determined to build a *jāmi'* [mosque] in Sis [which would] openly make the call to prayer, just as there the Christians are open about striking the [church] bells.³⁷

In this version, the lord of Sis, the Armenian king, was not keen to go along with this plan, and wrote to the Ilkhan, Öljeitü, to complain about his officer, alleging that Bularghu was in league with the Mamluks.³⁸ According to al-Maqrīzī, Öljeitü “sent his disapproval to Bularghū, and threatened him, and ordered him to attend [the Ilkhan’s court]; and [Bularghu] became furious with Het’um”, realising the source of the complaint against him.³⁹ On the other hand, Baybars al-Manṣūrī states that Bularghu decided to act against Het’um after companions of his, resident at court (“in the *ordo*”), informed him of the Armenian’s letter of complaint to the Ilkhan, which caused him to fear for his life, and to decide to try in some way to “assign the crime [i.e., disloyalty] to the lord of Sis, and deceive him [i.e., Öljeitü]”.⁴⁰ Bularghu therefore sought to eliminate Het’um.

The sources from the enemy Mamluk Sultanate provide more information about the background to the murders, the assassination itself, and the aftermath than do any of the surviving Armenian histories. In fact, there are very few Armenian sources at all for this period of the kingdom’s history, and they tend to be rather brief in their summaries of events. Only the Old French *Gestes des Chiprois*, at this point written by the ‘Templar of Tyre’, resident in Cyprus, give anything like the detail provided by these Mamluk writers: it is very reassuring that the Arabic accounts can largely be easily reconciled with that of the *Gestes*. This is an important point to emphasise: there is a wealth of under-appreciated material available to the historian in these Mamluk histories, encyclopaedias, and geographies.⁴¹

Interestingly, our Persian source for the incident supports both versions of Bularghu’s motives. Qāshānī states that Bularghu’s “intention was to destroy [Het’um] in order to subdue all the fortresses and residences in that province and by this receive the wonderful territory of Sis”: he wanted the land for himself. It was not, however, merely greed that motivated him. He was a devout Muslim, who was offended by the neglect of Muslim shrines in the region, and who sought to restore them, and to build a mosque (in Ayas in this version) with a *muezzin*. He was angered by Het’um’s attempt to incite the Mamluks against him, a plot voluntarily exposed by the Mamluks themselves to their co-religionist.⁴² This version has many echoes of that given in the Arabic sources: Bularghu’s piety provokes Armenian hostility; the Mongol discovers a plot against him, and resolves on assassination. This plot, it must be suggested, seems rather an unlikely one, given that Het’um always

³⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *op. cit.*, II:i, p. 38.

³⁸ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 395; al-Maqrīzī, *op. cit.*, II:i, p. 38.

³⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *op. cit.*, II:i, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

⁴¹ Reuven Amitai-Preiss, in a similar context, makes exactly this point: “Mamluk Perceptions of the Mongol-Frankish Rapprochement”, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, VII (1992), pp. 50–65, here p. 52. See also D. Little, *Introduction to Mamlūk Historiography* (Wiesbaden, 1970).

⁴² Qāshānī, *op. cit.*, pp. 77–81. Qāshānī is our only significant Persian source for this incident; in general, in contrast to the amount of attention paid to the Mongols by Armenian writers, there is very little information regarding the Armenian kingdom in sources from the Ilkhanate. On this version, see also B. Spuler, *Die Mongolen in Iran: Politik, Verwaltung und Kultur der Ilchanzeit 1220–1350* (third edition, Berlin, 1968), pp. 106–107.

sought to avoid, rather than encourage, Mamluk invasions. As has been seen, the Mamluks did indeed correspond with Mongol rebels in Asia Minor: but the absence of any notice in the Mamluk sources of such communication in this case makes Qāshānī's account less credible. Qāshānī does, of course, confirm that Bularghu's conversion to Islam was a factor in the build up to the assassination.

The Conversion of the Mongols and Het'um's Assassination?

It is worthwhile to consider the effects of the conversion of the Mongols to Islam on their relationship with their Christian Armenian satellite. Het'um's assassination, perpetrated by a recent Mongol convert, has often been interpreted as significant in this context by historians of the period.

A rather extreme, and factually and chronologically haphazard, example of the perceived effects of the Mongol conversion to Islam can be found in the first edition of the *Cambridge Medieval History*, of 1923. We are told that, after the death of Ghazan, placed in 1302,

His successor, Uljāitū, far from fulfilling that promise [to reconquer Syria with Het'um], turned Muselman and forswore the ancient alliance with Armenia. The Mongols made war on the Armenians and spent a year reducing Cilicia to a heap of ruins. Turks and Mamlūks then invaded the country three times, and levelled the ruins left standing by the Mongols.⁴³

This is more or less wrong at every point: for example, the Mamluk raid of 1305 here hinted at was actually repulsed with Mongol help. This is clearly out of date, but I would suggest that the basic interpretation is still echoed in recent scholarship, especially relating to the assassination.

Recent writers on the history of the Armenian kingdom, or on related topics, usually skim over the assassination with little more than a sentence: typical is Claude Mutafian's comment: "En 1307, Héthoum et Léon sont assassinés par le général mongol de Cilicie: les temps ont bien changé!". T.S.R. Boase is less pithy, but similar: "In 1307 Hetoum and his nephew, Thoros' son, now king as Leon IV [*sic*], visiting the Mongol emir Bilarghu at Anawarza, were murdered with all their followers. The Il-Khan avenged their death, but their assassination was indicative of the changed position of the Christian communities". Sirarpie Der Nersessian is also brief: "on November 17, 1307 . . . [t]he Mongol emir Bilarghu treacherously killed Heṭoum, king Leon, and about forty of the dignitaries and nobles who accompanied them".⁴⁴ Among those whose focus is not primarily on the Armenian kingdom, even for the most careful writers the temptation to relate the assassination to the conversion of the Ilkhanid Mongols can prove too strong. In his overview of the history of the Armenian kingdom, Norman Housley describes how the hopes for survival engendered by Ilkhanid attacks on Syria suffered with their failure; and then:

[w]orse still, in 1304 Ghazan adopted Islam as the official faith in all his lands, and relations between Cilicia and the Mongols deteriorated: Hetoum abdicated in 1305, and when he and the

⁴³ F. Macler, "Armenia", in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, IV (Cambridge, 1923, corrected ed. 1927), pp. 153–182; here p. 178.

⁴⁴ Claude Mutafian, *Le Royaume Arménien de Cilicie, XII^e-XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1993), p. 73.; Boase, "History of the Kingdom" *cit.*, p. 29; Der Nersessian, "Kingdom" *cit.*, p. 658. Lewon III is often mis-numbered "IV".

new King, his nephew Leo IV [*sic*], visited the Mongol emir Bilarghu in 1307, they and their entourage were massacred. After this, the Kingdom's Mongol overlords became capricious and unreliable . . .⁴⁵

To some extent, this is reasonable enough – Mongol overlords were often capricious and unreliable – but there are problems. Another very recent writer, Sylvia Schein, summarises the events succinctly:

The coup of the Mongol chieftain Bilarghou, a Moslem fanatic, which ended in the assassination of Hetoum II and Leo IV [*sic*], put an end to the friendly relations between Lesser Armenia and the Mongols of Persia which existed under Hetoum II.⁴⁶

The assassination is seen as either indicative of a new state of relations, or as bringing in with it this new relationship. The assassination is also seen as following closely on from the conversion of the Mongols of Persia to Islam. It is this conversion, it seems, that caused the deterioration in relations, of which the murder is emblematic; and this deterioration is definitively placed in the reign of Öljeitü (1304–16).

Some contemporary evidence can be found to support this view. In contrast to the eulogistic obituaries given to Ghazan, the scribes whose manuscript colophons survive as an immediate and contemporary source for Armenians' attitudes have little good to say about his successor, at least after he had reigned for a couple of years. By 1307 one scribe in Armenia wrote that he "looked like the Antichrist"; another recorded the conversion of the Mongols, who, under Öljeitü, were persecuting Christians: "some they molest, some they torture, some they kill . . . they also levied taxes upon all the Christians and made them wear symbols of opprobrium . . . they make every effort to efface Christianity from the earth".⁴⁷

It is also clear that there was, in the first decades of the fourteenth century, a lessening of importance attached by both sides to the Mongol-Armenian alliance. Nevertheless, could there not be other reasons for both these occurrences of Öljeitü's reign – the persecution and the decline of the political relationship – that have little to do with the Ilkhan's faith? It seems very possible that Öljeitü's reign, while a high-point in terms of material culture, marked a lessening of central control in the Ilkhanate, and the traditional rapaciousness of the Mongols, barely suppressed by Ghazan, was allowed to reassert itself in the unimportant backwaters of the empire, such as the Armenian highlands. One symptom of the gradual weakening of the power of the Ilkhan, or at least his gradual turning away from the frontier, was the decline in importance of the whole Mongol-Mamluk conflict, for both sides: Öljeitü, in contrast to all of Ghazan's strenuous efforts, only launched one, rather half-hearted, attempt to conquer Syria (in the winter of 1312–13). As the fourteenth century developed, and the Ilkhan's power withdrew from the extremities of his empire, and his strength, when compared to

⁴⁵ Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades: from Lyons to Alcazar 1274–1580* (Oxford, 1992), p.180. Ghazan, of course, died in 1304; his official conversion was at his accession in 1295. I would date Het'um's final abdication to 1306.

⁴⁶ Sylvia Schein, *Fidelis Crucis: the Papacy, the West, and the Recovery of the Holy Land 1274–1314* (Oxford, 1991), p. 214. Schein dates this to November 17, although three pages earlier she refers to "Hetoum II of Lesser Armenia, murdered on 13 August 1307".

⁴⁷ See Sanjian, *op. cit.*, p. 48ff.

the Mamluks, declined, so the Armenian kingdom became less important to him, and he to it.⁴⁸

The reason I look for other, less dramatic explanations for the change in relationship between the Armenian kingdom and Öljeitü, is that the facts simply do not support the view of a suddenly fiercely Muslim Ilkhan encouraging the persecution of the Armenians. The epilogue to the assassination of Het'um and Lewon is a good example of why this is so.⁴⁹ Het'um's surviving brothers rebuffed Bularghu, and appealed to Öljeitü; angered by the treachery of his general,⁵⁰ the Ilkhan had Bularghu and his co-conspirators executed immediately. This was done "by the sword", which was considered the most humiliating end for a senior Mongol.⁵¹ With Öljeitü's continued support, Het'um's brother Öshin ruled as king.⁵²

There is another problem with the seductively simple progression from conversion, to a sudden change in attitude, to persecution and assassination. The Armenian sources, including, for example, Hayton's *Flor des estoires*, are generally extremely favourable to Ghazan, as are the historians who have followed them. However, some of these historians seem unaware that Ghazan himself had converted to Islam at his accession in 1295: this is

⁴⁸ With regard to the declining military strength and reliability of the Mongols of Persia, possibly accelerated (or even indicated) by Ghazan's defeats in Syria, but especially by Öljeitü's disasters in Gilān, see Charles Melville, "The Ilkhān Öljeitü's Conquest of Gilān (1307): Rumour and Reality", in *The Mongol Empire & its Legacy*, eds. Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David Morgan (Leiden, 1998), pp. 73–125, especially p. 115 and p. 118.

⁴⁹ Another example can be found earlier, in 1305, when Öljeitü's troops had been the backbone of the Armenian king's army that decisively defeated a Mamluk force raiding in Cilicia: see my *The Armenian kingdom and the Mamluks*, pp. 165–167.

⁵⁰ The *Gestes des Chiprois* (*cit.*, p. 326) hints at why this action was specifically treachery against the Ilkhan: Het'um's new heir, Öshin, "sent Alinakh, his brother, to the Great Khan Ghazan [*sic*] of the Tatars, to complain about the death of their brother and of the infant their nephew, that his man [Bularghu] had killed [them] under his [*i.e.*, the Ilkhan's] safeguard, coming from his command, by the presentation of his *ferman*." This last part refers back to a missing section of the manuscript, which seems to have described Het'um's visit to Bularghu as resulting from a *ferman* sent to him. Bularghu's execution is also reported by the "Chronique du royaume" (*cit.*, p. 664), which reports that "the Baron Alinakh, lord of Tarsus, went before Kharbanda Khan [Öljeitü]. He condemned Bilarghu to death, in punishment for the murder which he had committed; after which Alinakh returned before his brother Öshin." See also the slightly different accounts of al-Maqrīzī, *op. cit.*, II:i, p. 38; and Baybars al-Manšūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

Qāshānī has some difficulty in explaining the actions of the Ilkhan: unwillingly to criticise Öljeitü, but keen to present Bularghu as a martyr, he states that the latter was "pardoned and forgiven swiftly", but that later "a few corrupted scoundrels plotted his execution" by arguing that he had harmed the interests of the Ilkhanate (*op. cit.*, p. 81).

⁵¹ According to the *Gestes des Chiprois* (*cit.*, pp. 326–327), the Ilkhan held Het'um's murder whilst apparently under the protection of his safeguard to have been "very grievous and a great disloyalty". He summoned Bularghu, and beheaded him, along with "all the others who had used their sword to kill" Het'um and Lewon, at which point Alinakh returned to Cilicia. Al-^cAynī (*op. cit.*, IV, p. 459) reports that "[w]hen Khar-Banda became acquainted with the news he ordered Bularghu be killed by the sword. He was killed on the spot." Abū'l-Fidā' (*op. cit.*, p. 47) also mentions that Bularghu was "killed with the sword". That Bularghu was killed explicitly with a sword is significant: shedding his blood at his execution was seen as a mark of dishonour for him. The Mongols would inflict death on someone of nobility by some method that would not involve the spilling of his blood, if they wished him an honourable execution. Thus Hülegü's method of killing the Caliph al-Muta^cšim by rolling him in a carpet and trampling him to death, the same way, for example, in which Jamuqa, an erstwhile comrade of Chingiz Khan's, was executed (see, for example, David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford, 1986), p. 152).

⁵² Al-Maqrīzī states that after the execution Öljeitü "appointed Lewon sub-king of Cilicia and he despatched him to it"; Baybars al-Manšūrī, in a similar but more ambiguous vein, reports that the Ilkhan "installed the lord of Cilicia in his kingdom and sent him back to his territory" (*Sulūk cit.*, II:i, p. 38; *Zubdat cit.*, p. 395). Mufaḍḍal (*op. cit.*, XX, p. 140) also states that after Het'um "his son Lewon came to power, and Allah knows best" (all three of these writers confuse the name of Alinakh for Lewon). This perhaps reflects the opinion of those in the Mamluk Sultanate that the Armenian kingdom was wholly subject to the Ilkhanate.

information that Hayton, writing for the Pope, seems to have censored.⁵³ Any change in attitude resulting from this conversion towards the Armenian kingdom was thus far from sudden. In any case, while there were clearly those, such as Bularghu, who saw the benefits in being devout Muslims, it is clear that even in Öljeitü's reign, for many of the Mongols conversion may have been little more than superficial – not long after Het'um's assassination, one very important Mongol general seriously suggested a return from the law of Moḥammed to that of Chinggis;⁵⁴ and Ghazan himself took part in traditional religious practices.⁵⁵

On the other hand, it seems clear that contemporary pro-Armenian sources did not view the assassination in a context of religious contention: Bularghu's actions were not identified as being part of some anti-Christian 'holy war'. Apart from one of the manuscript colophons translated by Sanjian,⁵⁶ no source described Het'um II or Lewon III as martyrs. It is only later – much later – that Armenian sources put the incident in a religious context, and then it is not Christian versus Muslim, but Armenian versus Roman.⁵⁷

The conversion of the Ilkhans and Ilkhanid foreign policy

While it is clear that the turmoil surrounding Ghazan's accession and the increasing instability of Öljeitü's reign allowed anti-Christian (and anti-Jewish) persecution to emerge,⁵⁸ this relates to the situation *within* the Ilkhanate, and in any case seems to have had a limited impact on official Ilkhanid foreign policy, such as with regard to its relations with the Armenian kingdom. The conversion of the Ilkhans to Islam had a negligible effect on their main foreign policy priorities and methods – there was no pan-Muslim, anti-Christian league. The continuity of policy can be shown both with regard to the Ilkhanid enmity for the Mamluks and in their attempts to co-operate with the Christian states of East and West. This is not merely seen in Armenian or Cypriot Frankish involvement in Ghazan's invasions of Syria, but also in the attempts of successive Ilkhans to synchronise attacks on the Mamluks with Western powers.⁵⁹ The first of such contacts followed hard upon the battle of 'Ayn

⁵³ Hayton is very careful to avoid mentioning Ghazan's conversion. He states that the "Saracen party" offered him their support in overthrowing Baidu in return for promising to "renounce Christianity"; there was some persecution at his accession, but as soon as he was secure he began to favour the Christians and to turn against the Muslims: "Mès depuis que il fu ferme en sa seignorie, il comença molt à amer les Crestiens e à honeurer, e haïoit les Sarrazins . . ." ('Flor' *cit.*, II, pp. 190–1).

⁵⁴ The leading Mongol general, Qutlugh-shāh, fed up with the debates at Öljeitü's court between rival Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī scholars, apparently suggested a return from the law of Islam to the "law of Chinggis Khan", in terms that revealed the imprecision of his own knowledge of his new religion. See Morgan, *The Mongols cit.*, pp. 161–163; A. Bausani, "Religion under the Mongols", in *The Cambridge History of Iran: V, The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J.A. Boyle, pp. 538–549, here p. 544.

⁵⁵ See Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the Il-Khāns" *cit.*, p. 392; and also p. 380 for details of Ghazan's distinctly un-Islamic marriages. For an example of Öljeitü considering pagan rituals, see *Ibid.*, p. 402. According to the chronicler of his reign, Qāshānī, Öljeitü did in fact revert to Mongol customary religion for a time: David Morgan, *Medieval Persia* (London, 1988), p. 73.

⁵⁶ Sanjian, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁵⁷ See above, n. 35.

⁵⁸ This is the picture that emerges not only from the manuscript colophons from Greater Armenia discussed above, but also from the more detailed accounts of the main Syriac Christian sources from the centre of the Ilkhanate: see E.A. Wallis Budge (tr.), *The Monks of Kūblāi Khān* (London, 1928), pp. 210–219, 256–257, 261–303; see also, for a slightly different interpretation, David Bundy, 'The Syriac and Armenian Christian Responses to the Islamification of the Mongols', in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, ed. J. Tolan (New York, 1996), pp. 33–53.

⁵⁹ For details of these embassies, summarised in the next three paragraphs, see J.A. Boyle, "The Il-Khans of Persia and the Princes of Europe", *Central Asiatic Journal*, XX (1976), pp. 25–40.

Jālūt: an embassy from Hülegü elicited a response from Pope Urban IV.⁶⁰ Abagha sent as many as six missions to the West, such as that to the Council of Lyons in 1274, which was extended to the court of Edward I of England by an English Dominican long resident in the Ilkhanate, David of Ashby. While it seems other princes could on occasion be directly appealed to by Ilkhanid embassies, most missions took care to contact the Pope and the king of France, the traditional promoters and leaders of the crusading movement, and also the king of England: the closest any plan for joint action came to fruition was when, in 1271, Edward of England, in Acre, sought to synchronise a campaign with Abagha; in the end, nothing came about, as the Ilkhan was distracted by events on his eastern frontier.

The only possible interruption in the flow of friendly embassies from the Ilkhanate to the West came in the short reign of Tegüder (1282–84), who had taken the name Aḥmad and converted to Islam long before his accession. It has often been thought that he sought peace with the Mamluks, but this ‘peace’ was in fact merely the conventional Mongol Imperialist Peace: submission or chastisement.⁶¹ Either way, Tegüder’s reign was merely a very short aberration, and not a presaging of what was to come; whatever they were, nothing came of his plans and he was swiftly deposed. His successor Arghun (1284–91) was “in constant contact with the West”,⁶² and certainly sent four major missions to western Europe, one led by a distinguished Nestorian prelate, Rabban Šāwmâ,⁶³ and two involving a Genoese servant of the Ilkhans, Buscarello Ghisolfi. The replies to these embassies were polite but largely non-committal, at least until the impact of the fall of Acre (1291) was fully felt in the West; by which time, Arghun was dead.⁶⁴

Ghazan, who, it must be recalled, had converted to Islam at his accession in 1295, launched major campaigns against Mamluk Syria and resumed communication with Europe. An embassy of 1302 seems to have presented Western rulers with a detailed plan for the co-ordinated campaign he proposed. His successor, Öljeitü, made not only the last Ilkhanid attack on Syria but also sent the last Ilkhanid appeals to western Europe; one embassy was sent after his accession, and another shortly after his botched invasion of Syria in 1312.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Paul Meyvaert has recently discovered and edited a copy of the letter sent by Hülegü to Louis IX of France (which was probably intercepted by Manfred of Sicily), probably in 1262: “An Unknown Letter of Hulagu, Il-Khan of Persia, to King Louis IX of France”, *Viator*, XI (1980), pp. 245–259.

⁶¹ Adel Allouche, “Tegüder’s Ultimatum to Qalawun”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, XXII (1990), pp. 437–446. See also Reuven Amitai-Preiss, ‘Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War against the Mamluks’, in *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy*, ed. Amitai-Preiss and Morgan, pp. 57–72, here p. 65. Hayton, writing a quarter of a century after the events, states that Tegüder’s accession was followed by considerable persecution of Christians (‘Flor’ *cit.*, pp. 185–187); Bar Hebraeus, a closer source in the sense of both geography and time, and generally much more reliable, gives a much more positive view of Tegüder’s reign. His account of the negotiations between Tegüder and Qalawun supports Allouche’s interpretation of the letters: the Ilkhan suggested that the Mamluks maintain “peace and submission” instead of remaining in a “state of rebellion”: *The Chronography of Bar Hebraeus*, ed. & tr. E.A. Wallis Budge (London, 1932), I, p. 467.

⁶² Boyle, “The Il-Khans of Persia and the Princes of Europe” *cit.*, p. 31.

⁶³ The Syriac account of Rabban Šāwmâ’s journey survives: translated by Budge, *The Monks of Kāblāi Khān cit.*, pp. 165–197.

⁶⁴ Edward I of England did, however, respond seriously, and his own envoys accompanied Arghun’s on their return to the Ilkhanate, where they were received by Geikhatu. See L. Lockhart, “The Relations between Edward I and Edward II of England and the Mongol Il-Khāns of Persia”, *Iran*, VI (1968), pp. 23–31; Jacques Paviot, ‘England and the Mongols (c. 1260–1330)’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3:X (2000), pp. 305–318.

⁶⁵ As far as I am aware, the details of this last embassy, to Edward II of England, have not yet been published: for a reference to a paper given by J.R.S. Phillips, see Amitai-Preiss, “Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War against the Mamluks” *cit.*, p. 58 and p. 59, n. 4.

A letter of April 1305 sent to Philip the Fair (IV of France) – and, there is some evidence, also to the Pope and king of England at least – expresses the Ilkhan’s “desire to maintain the traditional bonds of friendship between the Il-Khans and the ‘sultans of the Frankish people’”.⁶⁶ Referring to the newly-established peace throughout the lands of the House of Chinggis Khan, and to news of concord in Europe, Öljeitü proposed a league against mutual enemies: implicitly, the Mamluks. It is clear from the replies that the Ilkhan also proposed a plan of campaign: significantly, he seems to have suggested that Armenia – that is, Cilicia – would be where western armies would assemble. This was a policy favoured by some western crusade proponents of the time and doubtless was also promoted by the Armenian exile Hayton, whose *Flor des estoires* may have been commissioned by Clement V in the aftermath of Öljeitü’s embassy. It is worth re-emphasising that Hayton does not hide from his papal audience the fact of the Ilkhan’s Islam. Öljeitü’s attempts to arrange a crusader alliance present a rather different view of the Ilkhan’s policy to that presented in the 1923 *Cambridge Medieval History*⁶⁷ and even to that of more recent scholarship on the subject. David Bundy, studying Armenian-Papal relations, suggests that the conversion of the Ilkhans to Islam may have prevented them from seeking such an alliance: “It is doubtful however, that the Islamic Mongols (and their Turkish allies and subjects) were enthusiastic about Papal intervention in the Middle East, even if as proposed by Het’um the Historian [i.e., Hayton], that intervention was to be in cooperation with Mongol political and military designs”.⁶⁸ This doubtfulness is, of course, an assumption not supported by the facts.

Western response to these Ilkhanid envoys was consistent – consistently favourable, consistently non-committal – throughout this period, before and after the decisive conversion of the Ilkhans to Islam. Even after the end of these great embassies, when the Ilkhan was too weak or too distracted to plan a co-ordinated assault on the Mamluks, the West maintained contact: notably through the Papal protection of its interests in the Ilkhan’s territories, but one should not neglect the activities of and commercial treaties concluded by the Italian mercantile republics with the Mongols.⁶⁹ Western rulers were certainly aware of the conversion of the Ilkhans to Islam, but while this meant the Pope ceased to urge immediate baptism, the Mongols were still considered as potential allies against the Mamluks. Perhaps by 1300 the intellectual understanding of Near Eastern politics was more sophisticated than the simplistic ‘confessionalist’ assumptions of some modern writers.

It is also worth noting that the conversion of Ghazan and Öljeitü had little effect on the way the Ilkhanid-Mamluk conflict was viewed by the Mamluks and their civilian historians.

⁶⁶ Boyle, “The Il-Khans of Persia and the Princes of Europe” *cit.*, p. 38.

⁶⁷ See above, p. 54.

⁶⁸ Bundy, “Armenian Relations with the Papacy” *cit.*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ Luciano Petech’s study of the relations between the Italian cities and the Mongols reveals not only the continuation of commercial links beyond the Ilkhans’ conversion, but also confirms the picture of gradually increasing anarchy and the gradual breakdown of firm central control, the *pax Mongolica*, rather than a sudden “event horizon”, an onset of official persecution of Christians. Commercial treaties and mercantile activity continued through the reigns of Ghazan and Öljeitü; it was really only the instability of Abū Sa’id’s reign, and especially the anarchy of the years after, that put a gradual end to the Italian community at Tabriz, rather than the actual conversion to Islam itself. While top-level contacts continued with the pre-Timurid dynasts, as did some commercial activity, the collapse of the Mongol Empire and of the Ilkhanate (and the Black Death) meant that the meaningful interaction of ca. 1250–1340 was not sustained: “Les marchands italiens dans l’empire mongol”, *Journal asiatique*, CCL (1962), pp. 549–574.

The war retained, as far as they were concerned, its ideological character. The Mamluks were still the defenders of Islam from the pagan, or pseudo-Muslim Mongols, and their sultanate was still the *bilād al-islām*.⁷⁰

I hope it is clear that it is too easy either to explain the events of 17 November 1307 as a symptom of the conversion of the Mongol rulers of Persia to Islam; or to see that assassination as representative of a sudden transformation in Mongol-Armenian relations caused by the conversion. So: why have these been the common interpretations? Partly it can be explained by a neglect of certain sources, and certain categories of sources, such as those from the Mamluk Sultanate. But there may be other reasons. Take the following passage in the revised Cambridge Medieval History, from 1966:

Armenia [*sic*] was incessantly battered by Muslims. Between 1274 and 1305 this Christian bastion in the Near East was continuously invaded, pillaged and laid waste by the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria and the Seljuqs from the north. [...] The Ilkhans had ceased to offer protection and were themselves rapidly succumbing to Islamic influences. [...] And, in 1304 the Ilkhans definitively espoused Islam: Armenia's protectors became its enemies, and the Muslim ring around it grew narrower. Armenia had now to sustain the added Mongol pressure, whilst treachery at home, as in 1308 [*sic*] incited the new foe to new attacks.⁷¹

Consider the language used here: Armenia, a *Christian bastion*, was *battered* by *Muslims*; the Ilkhans *succumbed* to *Islamic influences*. What we have here is a rather simplistic view of Middle Eastern history: Islam is a malignant force, always opposed to Christians; conversion to Islam leads inevitably to irrational persecution of the poor Christians – a new Muslim is a 'new foe'. Even contemporary propagandists like the Armenian Praemonstratensian Hayton of Goṛigos or the Dominican Guillaume Adam had a more realistic attitude, one they did not hide from their audience – Öljeitü was a 'Saracen', but would help the crusade both Hayton and Guillaume proposed to win back the Holy Land.⁷² The Mongol Ilkhans may have converted, but while Islam might have been used by some Mongols to excuse anti-Christian actions, it is clear that the conversion did not have such an immediate and drastic effect on official Ilkhanid foreign policy, the objectives of which remained largely constant.

Bularghu's actions and motivations must be seen as those of an individual, rather than as representative of official strategy. There was no sudden Ilkhanid anti-Christian policy. Nevertheless, the recent conversion of Bularghu and his followers, as our Ilkhanid source, Qāshānī, makes clear, may indeed have been used as a pretext, or may have sparked his actions. What we can suggest is that, while the assassination can be put in the long context

⁷⁰ See Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "Northern Syria between the Mongols and Mamluks: Political Boundary, Military Frontier, and Ethnic Affinities", in *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700–1700*, eds. Daniel Power and Naomi Standers (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 128–152, especially p. 143.

⁷¹ Cyril Toumanoff, "Armenia and Georgia", in the revised *Cambridge Medieval History*, IV:i, ed. J.M. Hussey, (1966), pp. 593–637; here p. 635.

⁷² The Dominican Guillaume Adam, author of the *De Modo Sarracenos Extirpandi*, was aware that Öljeitü was Muslim himself, yet nevertheless was favourable to Christians (and would therefore assist in a reconquest of the Holy Land; *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents Arméniens*, II, pp. 518–555; here p. 534). This echoes Hayton's view ('Flor' *cit.*, p. 238).

of the conversion of the Mongols of Persia to Islam, it cannot be used as an example of sudden official hostility following the official conversion. Het'um's murder, along with the return of casual persecution and turmoil at the fringes of the Ilkhanate such as the Armenian Caucasus, are perhaps indicative of a more general trend of attitudes and affairs: not merely the Islamisation of the Mongols, but also the decline in power of the Ilkhans.

I do not wish to understate the significance of the conversion of the Mongols of Persia to Islam; there were, doubtless, many long-term consequences – and very serious short-term ones if one happened, for example, to be a Buddhist resident in Iran – even if the conversion, at first, may, for some, not have been that deep. It is also, I would suggest, a mistake to look at the conversion of the Mongols in Iran as a 'top-down' process. It seems likely that many (or even most) of the Mongol soldiers in Persia had converted to Islam before 1295: Ghazan converted in order to ensure the support of his followers; the Muslim Tegüder Aḥmad's accession in 1282 was perhaps too early, and not so acceptable to the still pagan Mongol élite.⁷³

It is clear, nevertheless, that the Ilkhans did decline in importance for the Armenian kingdom, and provided less protection for it against the Mamluk attacks. I would suggest that this was because of the general decline of the Ilkhans themselves (the last, Abū Sa'īd, died in 1335), and of the importance that they were able to attach to their own conflict with the Mamluks, which their conversion did nothing to resolve. While Tegüder Aḥmad may have sought some sort of peace with the Mamluks after his conversion in 1282, and this is itself doubtful, this was not the case with Ghazan or Öljeitü. Indeed, the adoption of Islam could even provide a new incentive, or excuse, for Ilkhanid expeditions against Mamluk Syria.⁷⁴ The view that it was the Muslim Öljeitü's accession that marked a new turn in Mongol-Armenian relations, exemplified by the assassination of Het'um, is a view much overstated. The conversion was earlier, its effects – certainly outside the Ilkhanate – were not so sudden, and official relations seem to have remained cordial.

With a more sophisticated understanding of the consequences and actualities of the Mongol conversion to Islam, it is clear that we need to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the course of Ilkhanid-Armenian relations, and their place in the wider context of Middle Eastern history. The Arabic sources from the Mamluk sultanate can be much better used to provide this context, but we must ensure we maintain an open mind, not only with regard to potential sources, but also with how we interpret them.

⁷³ See Charles Melville, "Pādshāh-i Islām: The Conversion of Sultan Maḥmūd Ghāzān Khān", *Pembroke Papers*, I (1990), pp. 159–177, especially p. 166; and Reuven Amitai, "The Conversion of Tegüder Ilkhan to Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, XXV (2001), pp. 15–43.

⁷⁴ For example, Ghazan's *fatwā* after the army of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad sacked Mārdīn, which served as a pretext for his invasion of Syria, and capture of Damascus, in 1299; see Abū'l-Fidā', *op. cit.*, p. 35; and Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the Īl-Khāns" *cit.*, p. 387.

