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Outlines of the Mongolian supremacy in Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus

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The period of Mongol invasions and domination in the history of the Middle East and the Caucasus which lasted about two hundred years, still keeps causing the discussions and controversial evaluation so far. This is not just by chance. The phenomenon of Genghis Khan and *Pax Mongolica*, the universal empire he established, is one of the key phenomena of world history. After the Mongol conquests the world could no longer return to the state that existed before, since the Mongols fundamentally changed the historical destiny of many regions and peoples; no less important is that the Mongols appeared on the historical arena so unexpectedly. They emerged from the depths of Inner Asia and within a short time conquered the most powerful empires of Eurasia, where few had heard of them before. For many conquered nations, including those in the Caucasus, the Mongols were so unfamiliar, exotic, different in culture, way of life and appearance, that they composed a plenty of legends and myths about them.¹ In this respect, a number of aspects related to the ethnic, cultural and religious consequences of the Mongol conquests of Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus are of interest.

The Mongolian conquest of the Middle East and the Caucasus occurred at a time when the confrontation between Islam and Christianity in the region reached its peak. Crusades and bloody wars for the Holy Land between Western European knights and Muslim rulers have lasted for more than a century. The peoples of the Caucasus, despite their remoteness from Palestine, were also involved in this struggle on different sides of the front. The Christian kings of Georgia and the Armenian rulers

¹ In fact, the first encounter with the Mongols caused a shock among the Christian nations of the region as well as in the Muslims. The Armenian monk Grigor Aknerts'i wrote the "History of Tartars" (or Mongols) and called them the "Nation of Archers". He described them in the following way: "The first who came against our country were not like [ordinary] people. They were awful to see and impossible to describe. They had large heads, like a buffalo, narrow eyes like a chick, short noses like a cat, protruding chins like a dog, narrow waists like an ant, and short legs like a pig. They are completely beardless, possessing the strength of a lion and a screeching voice like an eagle. Death does not appear among them, and so they can live for three hundred years". (Grigor Aknerts'i. P. 3)

of Cilicia repeatedly assisted the Latin principalities of the Levant, while the Turkic Atabeks of Azerbaijan were in league with the main fighters against the Crusaders – the Atabeks of Aleppo and Mosul, and the Saljuq Sultans of Asia Minor. And representatives of the North Caucasian peoples found their place in the ranks of the Mamluk army in Syria and Egypt, fighting with the Latin principalities. During these years of intense confrontation between Islam and Christianity an unexpected event occurred that reversed the entire history of the Middle East and the Caucasus. It is a question of the formidable Mongols who emerged from the steppes of Inner Asia, conquered a multitude of peoples and tribes in the first half of the 13th century and created on the wide expanses of Eurasia the most extensive empire in the history of mankind that stretched from China to Eastern Europe.

The history of the Mongol conquest of the Caucasus is quite well known. After the defeat of the most powerful state of the Muslim world – the Empire of Khorezmshahs, the Mongolian expeditionary corps led by the military commanders Jebe and Subutay in the persecution of the last Khorezmshah invaded Iran and attacked Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus in 1220. Undoubtedly, it is impossible to deny the terrible destructive consequences of the first Mongol conquests for the local peoples, which finds many confirmations in authentic sources, including the Mongolian ones. Rashid ad-Din, the grand vizier and historian of Ilkhanids, admits that since the time of the emergence of mankind “*no sovereign has been able to conquer as many countries as Genghis Khan and his family conquered, and as many people as they killed, no one killed*”.² This fate did not bypass the territory of the Caucasus. Among the cities of Azerbaijan, whose population was exterminated by the Mongols during the campaign of Jebe and Subutay, sources point to Zanjan, Qazvin, Maragha, Ardebil, Bailaqan, Barda, Ganja.³

Passing with fire and sword through the territory of Azerbaijan the Mongols stopped at winter pastures in the Mughan steppe. According to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, they accumulated all the seized treasures in a swampy area located between Barda and Bailaqan, most likely at the confluence of the Kura and Araks rivers, from where they made swift raids to various regions of the country for robbery.⁴ In early 1221, Jebe and Subutay moved towards Georgia, apparently having received information about possible joint actions against them by the Atabek of Azerbaijan Muzaffar ad-Din Uzbek, the Ayyubid ruler of Akhlat Malik Ashraf and the Georgian King Giorgi

² Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 556-557 (Persian text), P. 320 (Russain translation)

³ According to A. Alizade, Ganja did not suffer during the first campaign of Jebe and Subutay, having paid off them, and was destroyed by the Mongols during the “second Mongolian invasion” under the command of Chormagun in 1231 (Alizade. p. 102-103).

⁴ Kirakos Gandzaketsi. p. 166

Lasha.⁵ According to Vardan, “*some unknown hordes, speaking in an unknown language, called Mugal and Tatars*”, came from the countries of Chin and Machin, and with 20,000 people they penetrated to the Gugark plains from the side of Agvania; having destroyed all life on their way, they quickly turned back; King Giorgi Lasha with all his strength rushed to pursue them and overtook them on the banks of the river Kotman, but defeated by them sought salvation in flight.⁶ Indeed, in January or February 1221, a fierce battle took place between the Mongols and the Georgian army, led by the Giorgi Lasha. The Georgians and Armenian detachments which were the part of their army were defeated and forced to retreat.⁷ After that, the Mongols again approached Tabriz and got a ransom from the city, seized and destroyed Maragha in late March, moved towards Diyarbakr and Erbil. The Mongols stayed in the spring months of that year in Hamadan, where they were supposed to suppress the uprising of the townspeople, and then again returned to Azerbaijan, engaged in seizing new lands and mass destruction of the population.⁸ Jebe and

⁵ Alizade. p. 98-99

⁶ Istoriya mongolov. p. 2.

⁷ It should be noted that, in general, assessments of the events of the Mongol conquests of the South Caucasus in local sources are quite contradictory. Even in the Georgian chronicles of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” there is no agreement about the results of the battle between the Georgians and the Mongols. Thus, the author of the “The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and his time”, without naming the Mongols and speaking of them as “foreign troops”, writes about the victory of the Georgian king over the latter in two battles – first in the battle of Somkhiti and Hereti, where George received the first wound, but “*the enemy fled King Giorgi, and those who tried to escape were exterminated*”, and then, when “*next year (the enemies) came again and pitched their tents on the bank of the Bardavi* (i.e. Barda, here Kura River – Sh.M.)” he again defeated them, and they “*retreated, passing through Darubandi* (Derbend – Sh.M)” (Kartlis Tskhovreba. P. 204-205). Certainly, the context of the story leaves no doubt that it deals with the first raid of Jebe and Subutay. It is important that the author of the chronicle is a contemporary of the events described, as he raises a prayer for the health of the reigning queen Rusudan, the sister of Giorgi Lasha, who ruled after his death (Ibid.) At the same time, the “The Hundred Years’ Chronicle” says about the catastrophic defeat of the Georgian army in the battle near the river “*Berduji, which is now called Sagimi*” (most likely, Zegam-chay in the territory of Azerbaijan), and the author writes about how “*the wrath of the Highest fell upon us for all our sins and lack of faith, and the Georgians took flight, their soldiers and King Lasha as well. Many Christian souls perished that day*” (Kartlis Tskhovreba. P. 321). After that, according to the chronicle, the Mongols reached Samshvilde, “*then turned back and did something wonderful: they went by the road of Daruband*” and passed the “gates” of Derbend and entered the “Qivchakia”, i.e. the North Caucasian steppes, which the Kipchaks owned at the time (Ibid.).

⁸ Alizade. p. 100

Subutay sent a message to Genghis Khan about the advisability of continuing one or two years of conquest and returning to Mongolia through the Caucasus Mountains.⁹

Indeed, the Mongols at that time seized and plundered Ardebil, Nakhichevan, Khoy, Salmas, Bailaqan, then passed through the territory of Shirvan to Derbend, so that the areas between them, including the capital of Shirvan, Shamakha, were completely devastated, and the population was killed or fled.¹⁰ The Mongols failed to seize Derbend by force, and they had to make their way along the mountain paths through the Caucasian ridge, where many battles with local tribes occurred. Nevertheless, they were able to make their way to the North Caucasus steppes, where they faced the united army of Alans and Kipchaks. Jebe and Subutay managed to come to terms with the Kipchaks and inflict a heavy defeat on the Alan forces, thereby putting an end to the existence of the Alanian Kingdom in the North Caucasus. A lot of Alans were killed, many disappeared in mountainous and inaccessible places. Then the Mongols ravaged the camps of the Kipchaks, forcing them to leave the North Caucasus steppes and move to the northern Black Sea steppes. Jebe and Subutay returned to Mongolia through the Volga region, reporting to Genghis Khan about their victories and the opening of new lands for conquest.

The contemporary of these events Ibn al-Athir drew a vivid picture of the terrible devastation and destruction that accompanied the rapid raid of the Mongolian corps crossing the Caucasus from the south to the north. The author reports that the Mongols *“rushed to the cities of Azerbaijan and Arran, destroyed them and killed most of their inhabitants. Only a few of them survived, remaining homeless. And all this in less than a year! This has never been known. Having finished with Azerbaijan and Arran, they went to Derbend of Shirvan and captured its (Shirvan’s) cities. Only one fortress survived, where the king of Shirvan was. From there they crossed into the country of the Alans and Lakzes and various other peoples who lived in this area, fiercely exposing them to slaughter, robbery and destruction. Then they rushed to the country of the Kifchaks, and this is among the most numerous Turkic tribes. They killed everyone who came to them, and the rest fled to the thicket and to the tops of the mountains, leaving their country. Tatars seized it as soon as possible”*.¹¹

The next stage of the Mongol conquests of the Caucasus is connected with the name of the closest associate and military commander of Genghis Khan Chormaghun Noyon, “a wise and learned man, successful in warfare”, according to Kirakos Gandzaketsi.¹² The expedition of Chormaghun to the east was undertaken by the

⁹ The Cambridge History of Iran. Vol. 5. p. 311

¹⁰ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 557-558 (Persian text), P. 320; Alizade. P. 102-103

¹¹ Ibn-el-Athiri Chronicon. p. 234

¹² Kirakos Gandzaketsi. p. 195

order of the great Khan Ögedey against Jalal ad-Din, the last representative of the Khorezmshah Anushteginid dynasty, who fled Khorezm because of the Mongolian threat, but was able to create his own realm in the Middle East with the center in Azerbaijan. However, in 1231 Jalal ad-Din was defeated by the combined forces of the Saljuqs of Asia Minor and Ayyubids and was soon killed. Thus, Chormaghun did not encounter a serious resistance in the east, as Jalal ad-Din could have done to him, for it was “Jalal al-Din and his army formed a wall between Islam and the Tartars. That wall had now been breached and neither Ayyubid nor Saljuq was capable of stemming the flood”.¹³

After the capture of Khorasan, Rey and Isfahan, the Mongols invaded Arran (or the “Agvania” or “Agvank” – Caucasian Albania, as this area is called in Armenian-language sources) and broke their tents in the fertile Mughan steppe, making it their winter base and a springboard for conquest of the entire South Caucasus. “*In springtime they spread out in various directions, looting and destroying, and again returned [to Mughan] and settled*” there.¹⁴ Soon Ganja, Shamkhor, Lori, Dumanis, Tiflis, Ani, Kars and other cities were taken, where Mongols were “*taking everything as booty, destroying or enslaving, spreading their raiding expeditions everywhere with merciless attacks, ravishments and destruction*”.¹⁵ The conquered areas, according to Vardan, were divided between Mongolian commanders. In particular, Chormaghun captured the areas of Ani and Kars, Chaghata was given possession of the Lori district, Dolat – the fortress of Kaen, Gataga took over the northern regions of Mountainous Karabagh and Gedabek, Molar received the Shamkhor fortress and the district.¹⁶

The South Caucasus finally became a part of the Mongolian realm when these territories were incorporated into the Ilkhanid Empire, established in 1256 by Hulagu Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan.

The main principle of the Mongolian governance in the conquered lands was the establishment of a balance of power that would guarantee their political dominance. As a rule, the Mongols resolutely destroyed all traces of the previous authorities and created their own control system on the lands where they established direct rule. The consequences of such a policy are well traced in Azerbaijan, where direct Mongolian

¹³ The Cambridge History of Iran. Vol. 5. p. 335

¹⁴ Kirakos Gandzaketsi. p. 197

¹⁵ Kirakos Gandzaketsi. p. 216

¹⁶ Istoriya mongolov. p. 5-6; Grigor Aknerts'i writes that the Mongols “*held a quriltai and great meeting by the command of Chormaghun and divided the countries among the one hundred and ten chiefs. This land was divided into three parts: one extending northward, one to the south and one through the middle of the country, which they still hold*” (Grigor Aknerts'i. P. 5).

rule has gradually erased all evidences of the political system of the previous Saljuq era. At the same time, Azerbaijan occupied the metropolitan position within the Ilkhanid realm, and the vast possessions of the Mongol Empire in the Middle East were managed from Maragha and then from Tabriz. In the areas where the vassal and tributary relations were established, they practiced a gradual and consistent undermining of the system of pre-Mongol political relations through the creation of a dual power or competitive relations between local rulers. This time-tested method was used in many subordinated countries, for instance, in the Saljuq Sultanate of Asia Minor, which eventually led to the complete collapse of the latter. In the Caucasus this practice was applied in Shirvan and Georgia. Thus, the Mongols refrained from completely destroying the Georgian statehood, while retaining the reign of the local dynasty of the Bagrationi. However, two kings were erected in the throne in the 1240's, and both of them Davids. One of them, the son of Queen Rusudan, was nicknamed David Ulu ("Elder"), and the second, her nephew and the son of her brother King Giorgi Lasha – David Narin ("Junior"). Subsequently, this dual power led to the disintegration of Georgia into two parts – the eastern (Kartli), led by the senior David, and the western – to Imeretia, led by the younger David. At the same time, as was customary in Mongolian political practice, the right to rule could only be granted by the supreme ruler of the whole empire; the Great Khan in the period of the existence of a single empire, for which the candidates for the throne had to personally visit Karakorum, or for Ilkhans in Tabriz, after the collapse of the empire into different "*uluses*".

The Armenian political existence at that time was represented by the Cilician kingdom, located in southern Anatolia. The dynasties of the Rubenids, and then of the Hetumids were at the head of this state. The Cilician ruler Hetum I quickly realized that only an alliance with the Mongols could save him from the Mongol threat. Therefore, in 1247 he sent his brother Sempad to Karakorum to the court of the Great Khan Guyuk. And in 1253 Hetum himself went to Mongolia, where he appeared before the next Great Khan Mongke. He was given a guarantee of the integrity of the Cilician kingdom, and the Great Khan also promised to exempt all Armenian churches and monasteries from taxes on Mongolian domains.¹⁷

Generally speaking, the Christian nobility of the Caucasus and Anatolia, represented by the Georgian kings, Armenian rulers of Cilicia and the princes of the ancient Caucasian Albania or Khachen principality quite quickly submitted to the Mongol suzerainty, demonstrated loyalty to them and tried to use the protection of the highest Mongolian Christian nobility to strengthen their own political positions as well as positions of the Christian church. Another Christian ruler, the Prince of Khachen

¹⁷ A History of Crusades, Vol. II, p. 652-653

area in Mountainous Karabagh Hasan Jalal ad-Dawla was also forced to acknowledge his vassalage to the Mongols. Around 1257, Hasan Jalal ad-Dawla accompanied Sartak, the son of Golden Horde Khan Batu, and made a trip to the court of Batu. And, the Mongols acknowledged Hasan Jalal ad-Dawla's power in Khachen and drafted a document "*guaranteeing freedom for Lord Nerses, Catholicos of Albania, for all his properties and goods*".¹⁸ Hasan Jalal ad-Dawla and his wife Mama Khatun are also famous for the construction of the church in the Gandzasar monastery in Karabagh, which is a fine example of Christian architecture of Karabagh in the Mongol period. It was consecrated in 1240, in the presence of many priests including Nerses, the Catholicos of Albania. The monastery went on to become the residence and sepulcher of the Hasan Jalal ad-Dawla's family as well as the house of the catholicoses of Albania.

Christian nobility of the South Caucasus sought to strengthen its alliance with the Mongols also through the establishment of matrimonial ties. We know many cases of marriages between members of the Christian dynasties and the Mongol nobility. For instance, Hasan Jalal ad-Dawla's daughter Ruzukan was wed to Bora, son of Chormaghun; king David Lashaeen married lady Khawand Esugan, a relative of Chormaghun; Georgian king Demetre's sister Tamar was married to Mongol emir Arghun's son; Demetre's daughter Rusudan, to the son of emir Bugha; king Vakhtang married Arghun Khan's sister, Oljat, who subsequently was wed to Vakhtang's successor king David, and so on.¹⁹

The South Caucasus and especially Azerbaijan had a special, metropolitan position within the Ilkhanid Empire. The founder of the empire Hulagu has chosen Maragha and later Tabriz as the capital of the state, and as the wintering grounds – Arran in northern Azerbaijan, or Karabagh of Arran, as it is called in Persian sources. Indeed, most often the Ilkhanid court spent the winter months in Karabagh. There were also some ceremonies of inauguration of the supreme khans according to the Turkic-Mongolian steppe custom. For example, Ghazan Khan settled on the Ilkhanid throne in Karabagh in November 1295. According to Rashid ad-Din, "*all the court ladies (khavatin), princes, warlords (umara), pillars of power and court magnates gathered*

¹⁸ Kirakos Gandzaketsi. p. 296

¹⁹ Bedrosian. p. 189-190. However, eventually even matrimonial alliances did not always guarantee the safety and power of Christian rulers, as well as, Muslim ones. For example, the same Hasan Jalal ad-Dawla became the victim of hostility of the Mongolian Emir Arghun, he was arrested, severely tortured and executed in Qazvin in 1260. The same fate befell some other Christian rulers of the Caucasus, who expressed their obedience to Ilkhanids.

in Karabagh of Arran and without pretense and hypocrisy they agreed to the reign of the sovereign of Islam (Ghazan Khan - Sh.M.) and gave that commitment”.²⁰

Indeed, the Mongols preferred Azerbaijan, or rather the territory of Arran and Karabagh of all the regions of the South Caucasus, and also Shirvan, where they spent most of the winter months. They found there the usual entertainment, especially during hunting. So, Ghazan Khan spent the winter months of 1301-1302 in Karabagh, but he did not stay there for long and went to the mountains of Shirvan and southern Daghestan, where he was hunting for several days. He went from there to the district of Gavbari, which is near Derbend, for hunting birds, especially swans, and fishing. There is a bay in this area, which the Mongols called in Turkic “Kush-koyun”, and the former habitat of numerous migratory birds. The rulers of the neighboring mountain tribes of Daghestan arrived at the rate of Ghazan Khan and expressed their obedience at that time. They were ordered to catch and execute those fugitives from Azerbaijan who had taken shelter from the Mongols in the inaccessible mountains of the South Caucasus, which was done. After finishing the hunting for birds and fishing, Ghazan Khan went with his bet through Bilasuvar to Talish and Ispahbad regions, where a grandiose hunting for wild animals was also undertaken. There he ordered to build a long hedge from the poles and brushwood (*divar ez chub ve khashak*) in the form of a wide wedge and a length of one day’s journey. After that, his warriors began to drive game – mountain buffaloes, wild goats and donkeys, jackals, foxes, wolves, bears and other predatory and wild animals, which were trapped being between two hedges. Ghazan Khan and his beloved wife Bulghan Khatun sat on a platform built in the middle and admired this spectacle of a huge “zoo”. Then, some of these animals were killed, and the rest were released to freedom.²¹

The region of the South Caucasus retained their attractiveness for the Mongolian elite in the post-Ilkhanid period as well. In particular, the summer pastures of the Emir Choban, the famous regent of the last great Ilkhan Abu Said, were located in the Gökche-deniz region (the present Sevan Lake), “which in the summer was truly an extremely beautiful place”.²² As is known, after the fall of the Hulaguid dynasty, the large Mongolian clans began to challenge from each other the power in the former Ilkhanid realm, and this struggle was fought, among other things, in the territory of northern Azerbaijan. Thus, in 1344 in the Akhstabad steppe, a bloody battle took place between the troops of Chobanid Malik Ashraf and his rivals the emirs Yagibasty and Sorgan, in which the first won and secured his supremacy in

²⁰ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. P. 301-302 (Persian text), p. 170

²¹ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. P. 344-345 (Persian text), p. 193

²² Zayn ad-Din ibn Hamdallah Qazwini. p. 96

Azerbaijan for a full 13 years. As was the custom with the Mongol rulers, Karabagh remained their favorite wintering place, and Malik Ashraf did not change this tradition. From the reports of the chroniclers we learn that in the winter of 1344-45 his rate was again located in Karabagh, where the ruler of Shirvan Kavus arrived to him with the expression of obedience. Malik Ashraf gave him many honors. However, his stern temper and cruelty frightened the Shirvanshah so much that he secretly escaped from Karabagh. Since the end of winter was coming and it was time to leave Karabagh, Malik Ashraf did not dare to take military action against Shirvanshah and departed for Tabriz. But in 1346-47 a terrible epidemic of cholera, an echo of the "black plague" of Europe, erupted in Tabriz. The plague also led to a multitude of deaths in Azerbaijan, and the Mongolian court hid from it in the mountains. Before the winter Malik Ashraf was again in Karabagh, from where he decided to attack Shirvan and punish the unruly Kavus. However, Kavus took time with his troops to cross the coast of the Kura River. Malik Ashraf was forced to conclude a truce with the Shirvanshah and retreat. In the winter of 1347-48 years Malik Ashraf, nevertheless, achieved his goal. Once again in Karabagh he sent an army led by his vizier to Shirvan. Kavus could not organize resistance, took refuge with his entourage in mountain fortresses, and the Mongolian troops subjected the country to terrible ruin.²³

First of all, the significant impact of the Mongol conquests on the ethnic situation in Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus should be noted. The predominant ethnic element in the flat areas of Arran and Mughan was the Turkic population on the eve of Mongolian expansion, as evidenced by some authentic sources, in particular the Persian geographic work "Aja'ib ad-dunya" and the chronicle of Nasawi. A more mixed population lived in some territories of Shirvan, Derbend, where there was also a significant Caucasus-speaking and Iranian-speaking component, as well as in the mountainous part of Karabagh, in particular, in the principality of Khachen, where the Christian population predominated. During the campaigns of Hulagu and in the subsequent times of the Ilkhanid rule new numerous tribes (*aymaks*) of the Mongols and Turks came to these territories from Central Asia, a considerable part of which settled and took root there. Significant changes in the ethnic composition of the population as a result of the Mongol conquests in the Caucasus can be obtained from sources. Firstly, it was already said about the extermination of large masses of the population as a result of the Mongol conquests, when whole cities and regions were physically devastated, their inhabitants were either destroyed or left their places. At the same time, the number of Turkic and Mongolian population increased manifold, as they represented the victorious party, and they were assigned new places to live. For example, to strengthen the borders in the north of the empire against the Golden

²³ Zayn ad-Din ibn Hamdallah Qazwini. p. 96-102

Horde, Hulagu Khan transferred the Kipchaks, who were the former Turkic guard of the caliphate, to the areas of Derbend and Shirvan to settle there. They moved to the Caucasus from Baghdad with their families. However, after crossing the Euphrates, they turned in the direction of Syria in order to join the Mamluks, to their relatives and the enemies of the Mongols.²⁴ It is also known that the first Ilkhanid governor of Arran and Shirvan was Yushumut, the son of Hulagu Khan, who arrived in these regions and settled there with subordinate troops.²⁵

These processes, on the whole, contributed to a significant strengthening of the Turkic element both in Azerbaijan and other areas of the South Caucasus, since, as is known, most of the Mongols quickly became Turkicized and integrated into the local Turkic milieu after the conversion to Islam. So, during his trip from Kuhistan to the Caucasus in early 1281 the poet Nizari observed a large concentration of Mongolian troops on caravan routes. On the way from Saray to Baku for ten days the way was blocked by a Mongol army led by Abaka Khan who was heading against Mengü Timur, the ruler of the Golden Horde. As Nizari noted, the Arran valleys were full of people “from the army of the Turks” (i.e., the Ilkhanid warriors), and the whole army crossed the Kura River for a month.²⁶ There are many evidences in the sources of how the Mongol commanders (*noyons*) appointed in the region were sent to the place of service with their own troops, which often consisted of tribal warriors accompanied by numerous families. According to the researchers, in the XIII-XIV centuries about 20 large Mongol tribes settled in the territory of Azerbaijan, among which the *Suldus* and *Jalair* tribes stand out.²⁷

Nowadays abundant Mongolian toponyms on the territory of Azerbaijan are clear traces of the Mongol tribes in these lands, and their impact on the ethnic formation of modern Azerbaijani nation. Even without going beyond the rather small Absheron peninsula where the capital city of Baku is located, it is evident how deeply the Mongolian element had penetrated into the ethnic and cultural layers of Azerbaijan.²⁸ Thus, the name of one of the largest cities in the country Sumgait is coming from the

²⁴ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. P. 92-93 (Persian text), p. 62-63

²⁵ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. P. 91 (Persian text), p. 62

²⁶ Ashurbeyli. p. 159

²⁷ Piriyeu. p. 261

²⁸ It should be noted that the Ilkhanid rulers chose Absheron peninsula as one of the winter pastures. For instance, Gazan Khan spent the winter months of 1297-98 in Baku. He moved there from Tabriz with his camp on November 7, 1297. On the way he sent Emir Kutlugshah to Georgia, from where rumors of an uneasy situation were heard, and soon Kutlugshah brought with him Vakhtang, the brother of King David. Vakhtang received an award from the Ilkhan and was sent back. Gazan Khan stayed in Baku for about four months and in April left via Bilasuvar for Tabriz (Fazlallah Rashid al-din. P. 324-325 (Persian text), p. 182-183).

name of the Mongolian tribe *Sugaut* (*Sagait*). And it is located in the distance of only 30 km from Baku. Close to Sumgait the Jorat settlement is situated (from the Mongolian tribe *Joyrat*). There is also Saray settlement in their neighborhood (it is sufficient to remind the name of the capital of the Golden Horde Saray-Berke, etc.). South of Baku the town of Alat is gradually turning into a major port and industrial center, and its name also comes from the Mongol tribe *Alat*. Such a concentration of Mongolian toponyms in the territory of Absheron is not accidental, since the peninsula was a regular place of winter pastures of many Mongolian tribes, which gradually settled there.

In general, a wide stratum of Mongolian toponyms spread to Azerbaijan not only due to the settlement and rooting of Mongol tribes there led to the appearance of new names of places. Very often the old toponyms were either replaced or started to be used alongside with new Mongolian toponyms. For example, Rashid ad-Din talks about the battle between the Ilkhanid and the Golden Horde armies in the territory of Arran on the bank of the Aksu River, whose name in Mongolian sounded as “Chagan Muran”. In fact, the Mongolian name was a calico from the Turkic toponym and translated as “white water” or “white river”.²⁹ Or in South Azerbaijan, the Persian name of the Zarinarud River in Mongolian sounded as Chaghatu and Naghatu.³⁰ This toponym is still preserved in the region of Urmia.

It should also be noted that along with the terrible destruction that accompanied the Mongolian expansion at the initial stage, grandiose construction work began to be carried out later in the region under the Ilkhanid rule. In particular, there is an extensive literature on the rise of Maragha, Tabriz, the foundation of the empire’s new capital – Sultania. Most likely the Mongols also founded in Arran a new city called Saray-Mansuriye. At least, the Ilkhans often spent the winter months there. One can assume that this may be a modern settlement of Saray near the city of Sumgait, which was mentioned above. The fact that Saray is not located on the territory of the historical Arran, but on Absheron peninsula, should not be confusing, since Mongols often considered the territory of Shirvan as a part of Arran. However, this hypothesis requires additional research. In any case, the city of Saray-Mansuriye was popular among the Ilkhanid rulers, who often visited it. The Mongols founded other large settlements in the territory of modern Northern Azerbaijan. Rashid ad-Din reports that on March 31, 1294, Geihatu Khan founded a large city on the bank of the Kura River and gave it the name Kutlugh-Balygh, which in Turkish means

²⁹ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. P. 104 (Persian text), P. 69

³⁰ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. P. 90 (Persian text), P. 62

“Happy (or blessed) city”.³¹ Undoubtedly, the task of modern historians and archaeologists is to seriously look for traces of this city.

Speaking about the participation of the Mongols in shaping the modern image of the Azerbaijani people, we must take into account not only the profound influence of the Ilkhanid period on the political and economic processes in Azerbaijan, but also the evolution of the ethnic and cultural traditions of the Azerbaijani people. Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to assume that without the Mongolian period in the history of the Middle East and the Caucasus, we could hardly have the ethnic and cultural panorama of today in the whole region and in Azerbaijan in particular. It is sufficient to mention that the rapid development and spread of literature in the Azerbaijani Turkic language is precisely the consequence of the Mongolian period. Turkic ethnic consciousness and culture flourished during the reign of the Ilkhanids and the post-Mongol states, which inherited their traditions.

The Mongolian domination had an equally profound impact on the spiritual and religious life of the local peoples. In general, the Mongol conquest of the Middle East had mixed consequences for the Muslim and Christian communities, not only in the Caucasus, but in the entire Middle East. For Islam, the capture by the Mongols of Baghdad in 1258, the assassination of the last caliph and the destruction of the Caliphate was a catastrophe of universal proportions. It led to the disintegration of not only the political system of the Muslim world, inherited from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, but also of its entire ideological and spiritual format. The Islamic world was shocked and depressed by the loss of the legitimate center of Muslim power in the person of Caliph. This catastrophe had an extremely long-lasting impact on the fate of the Muslim world, which was not able to restore its former power and integrity until the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the early 16th century. At the same time, ideological and spiritual ferment after the fall of the Caliphate opened and cleared the way for the spread of unorthodox currents in Islam, the progress of Shi’a, and, finally, the formation of the Shiite Safavid state in the central Muslim lands.

For Middle Eastern Christianity the Mongolian period was a time of inspiration and hopes at first, but no less severe disappointment at the end. Most of the Mongols, like Genghis Khan himself, were pagans and adherents of the Turkic-Mongolian shamanism.³² There were also a number of followers of Buddhism among them, spread by the Uyghurs, Tibetans, Chinese, Indians. However, a number of the Mongol tribes, such as Kerait, Naiman, Merkit, Ongut and a large part of the Kara-

³¹ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 238 (Persian text), p. 136

³² See: Boyle J.A. Turkish and Mongol Shamanism in the Middle Ages.

Khitays, and many influential people among them professed Nestorian Christianity.³³ In the initial period after the conquest of the Middle East and Caucasus, the Mongols for political purposes relied on the Christian and, in general, non-Muslim element in the management of the conquered lands, as these groups were for a long time under Muslim dominance and were inclined to support the new Mongolian power. Thus, Cilician Armenians, Georgians and Nestorian Christians in Azerbaijan and Persia were pro-Mongolian.³⁴

It is not by chance that the first appearance of the Mongols in the Caucasus, previously unknown to the local peoples, was accompanied by a multitude of contradictory rumors that brought confusion and indecision to the local Christian milieu.³⁵ The fact that the Mongols were not Muslims and rather quickly defeated the Khorezmshahs, the most powerful rulers of the Muslim world, instilled in Christians the hope of finding in their person allies in the struggle against the “Saracens”. In the historical chronicles of both Armenian and Georgian origin there is certain benevolence towards the Mongols. For example, an Armenian historian called them a people who are “*acquainted with the religion of Christ and greatly love Christians*”.³⁶ Or the Georgian “The Hundred Year’s Chronicle” says: “*All kinds of wisdom resided amongst them, and they were in full possession of reason and self-control. There was no place for lies among them; they were servile in the face of no man, neither great, nor small, or even before a council; they submitted to the good order created by Genghis Khan*”.³⁷

Moreover, according to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, “*False information arrived concerning [the Mongols], to the effect that they were mages and/or of the Christian faith, wonder-workers, and that they had come to avenge the Christians from the tyranny of the Tachiks*”, or Muslims. These rumors actually disarmed the Christians against the Mongolian blows, and they did not take serious measures to protect themselves, so that “*one lay priest took his people and even went before them with hooded crosses. The enemy put them to the sword, one and all*”.³⁸

³³ Kadirbaev. p. 57

³⁴ A History of Crusades. Vol. II. P. 720. Stepannos Orbelean confessed that as Hulagu Khan, who established the Ilkhanid Empire, “*greatly loved Christians, all the nations of believers willingly submitted to him and gave him active assistance*” (Step’annos Orbelean. p. 208).

³⁵ On the historical dynamics of the perception of the Mongols and the Mongolian authorities by the Caucasian Christians, see: Pogossian.

³⁶ Step’annos Orbelean. p. 207

³⁷ Kartlis Tsokhvreba. p. 318

³⁸ Kirakos Gandzaketsi. p. 166

The Mongols themselves, despite their power and the shock they caused to the peoples of the Middle East and the Caucasus, were only a huge chunk in the millstones of the historic confrontation between the two civilizations in the Middle East – Christianity and Islam. Sooner or later they had to be “grinded” by these millstones. The question was only in which direction. The sharp rivalry between local Christians and Muslims for the conversion of the Mongols into their religion was to determine, as a result, the historical destiny of the region. In the writings of Christian and Muslim authors there is much evidence of this acute rivalry. For instance, the appearance in Europe of the legend of the Presbyter John, in fact, was an expression of the ardent desire of Christians to find in the face of the Mongols unexpected, but so desired allies that would bring the mission of the crusades to a logical conclusion and re-erect a cross in the Holy Land.

Thus, the religious policy of the Mongols and their relations with various religious groups in the Middle East are essential for understanding the role of Mongolian supremacy in the history of the Caucasus in the 13th-14th centuries. As Barthold notes, “In all Mongolian possessions there was a struggle between Christians, Buddhists and Muslims who tried to attract the khans to their side; but the enmity between Christians and Buddhists was much weaker than their common hatred of Islam, the struggle with which they often led by the combined forces. The first khans, remaining shamanists, stayed neutral in this struggle and interfered with it only when it too severely violated public peace; only some of them, subject to the influence of their Christian and Buddhist advisers, issued orders directed against Muslims. There were some news about every Mongolian khan who showed hatred towards Muslims, that he was a Christian (Chagatay, Guyuk, Kubilay, Baidu); we find similar news even about those khans who equally patronized all religions (Mongke)”.³⁹ Indeed, for example, Stepannos Orbelean reported that the Great Khan Mongke was supposedly a legitimate Christian, and therefore, he had at his palace a church and priests who were continually offering mass and services without interruption, and that he loved Christians and his country entirely practiced the Christian faith.⁴⁰

The formation of the Ilkhanid Empire in 1256 did not at first change the character of the Mongolian government’s relations with local Christians. The latter were still full of hopes for the acquisition of a powerful patron in the face of the Mongols in their struggle against Muslims. The favor of the first Ilkhanid rulers towards Christians was noticed already during the rule of Hulagu Khan. Many authors see the reason for this in the influence on Hulagu’s elder wife Dokuz Khatun. According to Rashid ad-Din, Dokuz Khatun was the granddaughter of Ong Khan, the ruler of Keraites. She

³⁹ Bartold. p. 263

⁴⁰ Step’annos Orbelean. p. 210

was ambitious and powerful lady, and being Nestorian provided strong support to Christians who achieved high positions and influence in the Ilkhanid realm thanks to her patronage.⁴¹ In particular, one of the Christian rulers who achieved a high position thanks to the protection of the Ilkhanids was the Syunik prince Smbat. He was a vassal of the Georgian King David, and according to Stepannos Orbelean, “*in all faithfulness served him, and showed many acts of kindness toward him in the presence of Hulagu Khan and the grandees, and even more so at the great court*”, as Hulagu “*so heeded him that whomever he wanted could be put to death, and whomever he chose could be granted life*”.⁴² Hulagu followed the advice of Dokuz Khatun and built churches in all his possessions, and at her court he always erected a marching church where they constantly beat the bell.⁴³ This testimony of Rashid ad-Din is confirmed by Vardan’s information. According to the Armenian historian, Dokuz Khatun was a Christian of Syriac, or Nestorian doctrine. Although she did not know all of its subtleties, however, like Hulagu himself, sincerely loved and caressed all Christians, and asked for their prayers. Behind them they carried everywhere a tent made of canvas in the form of a church, priests and deacons served the mass every day at the sound of bells and singing; they also had schools in which they freely taught children the doctrines of the Christian church. In the same place, the clergy of various Christian countries, who came to ask for peace, found shelter. They often received it, and being satisfied returned home with presents.⁴⁴ The same author notes that after the capture of Baghdad by the Mongols, the Christian population of the Muslim caliphate’s capital was spared by the intercession of the “great queen” Dokuz Khatun.⁴⁵ She was able to survive her husband by only three months, and after her death the Christian subjects of Ilkhanid realm plunged into deep mourning, as she “was the culprit of all the blessings rendered to Christians”, and her hopes were connected with the fact that “Christianity will live to a more blossoming state”.⁴⁶

Stepannos Orbelean calls Abaka Khan (1265-1282) who ascended the throne after his father Hulagu, a good, mild, peace-loving person and a lover of Christians.⁴⁷ Indeed, this Ilkhan also provided protection to Christians. In particular, Tarsayich, the brother and successor of the Syunik prince Smbat, enjoyed his confidence. In any case, the same Stepannos Orbelean trying to exalt his relative and falling into obvious exaggeration declared that Abaka Khan supposedly so honoured Tarsayich

⁴¹ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 7 (Persian text), P. 16

⁴² Step’annos Orbelean. p. 215

⁴³ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 7 (Persian text), P. 16

⁴⁴ Istoriya mongolov. p. 11

⁴⁵ Istoriya mongolov. p. 12

⁴⁶ Istoriya mongolov. p. 25

⁴⁷ Step’annos Orbelean. p. 215

that on many occasions he removed his own royal garments and dressed Tarsayich in them from head to toe and put around Tarsayich's waist a belt of pure gold adorned with precious stones and pearls.⁴⁸

The short-term rule of the next Ilkhan Tekudar (1282-1284) disconcerted the Christian population of the South Caucasus, which saw this as a bad sign, as he was the first of the Ilkhanid rulers who converted into Islam. At the same time, he received the Muslim name Ahmad. Most likely, Tekudar's religious views were far from orthodox Islam, for according to Rashid ad-Din, he revered the Sufi sheikhs, especially Abd ar-Rahman, whom he called "father", and brought very close to himself Ishan Mengli, follower of another Sufi sheikh Baba Yaqub from Arran. The house of Mengli was close behind the camp of Tekudar, who often came to him, calling him "brother" (*karyndash*), and there he indulged along with the dervishes with music and dances (*sema*).⁴⁹ However, as a result of the internecine struggle, Tekudar was overthrown, and Arghun (1284-1291), the son of Abaka Khan, ascended the Ilkhanid throne in Tabriz. Armenian historians unanimously say laudatory words about him and note that "*he was a good, mild, and peace-loving man, and a lover of Christians*".⁵⁰

Perhaps one of the most vivid examples of cultural interpenetration in this period is the history of two Nestorian monks who made the journey from the Far East to the Middle East in the second half of the 13th century. It is about Rabban Bar Sawma and Rabban Marcos. According to Bar Habraeus, they were both of Uyghur origin,⁵¹ although, according to the Chinese tradition, they could have been from the Christian Onguts, the Turkic tribe that had joined the Mongols.⁵² Bar Sawma and his young disciple Marcos during the pilgrimage to the holy places were warmly received by the head of the Nestorian Church Mar Denha I in Maragha in Azerbaijan. Soon Marcos was ordained bishop, and after the death of Mar Denha in 1281 he took his throne under the name of Mar Yaballaha III. The real reason for the rapid rise of Marcos was not so much his ardent and sincere devotion to the faith, as his Uyghur or Turkic-Mongolian origin and his arrival from Khanbalyk (Peking), the center of the Mongolian (Yuan) Empire. An experienced Nestorian patriarch Mar Denha could reasonably have assumed that the ethno-cultural closeness of the young monk to the Mongols could bring considerable benefit to the Nestorian Church and the spread of Christianity among them. Indeed, Bar Sawma and Marcos were favorably received by Ilkhan Arghun in Maragha, Marcos was approved as the new patriarch of the

⁴⁸ Step'annos Orbelean. p. 216

⁴⁹ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 173 (Persian text), P. 104

⁵⁰ Step'annos Orbelean. p. 215

⁵¹ Nöldeke. p. 249-250

⁵² Phillips. p. 82

Nestorian Church, and Bar Sawma was sent in 1287 with the embassy to Europe to establish a Franco-Mongolian alliance against the Mamluks. In Europe he negotiated with Pope Nicholas IV, King Philippe of France, King Edward I of England and other European monarchs. Thus, the first Ilkhanids were so benevolent towards their Christian subjects, especially the Nestorians, that the years 1258-1295 were considered a period of prosperity for the Nestorian Church.⁵³

The general anti-Muslim attitude of Mongolian politics in the initial period after the conquest promoted the nomination of other non-Muslim elements in the Ilkhanid realm, including the Jews. In particular, the example of Saad ad-Dawla, who professed Judaism and was the chief financial officer and then the grand vizier during the reign of Arghun Khan, is widely known. In the new state apparatus of the Ilkhanid Empire organized by him a significant number of officials were Jews and Christians. Thus, his brothers Fahr ad-Dawla and Amin ad-Dawla became governors (*hakim*) of the largest cities of the empire – Baghdad and Diyarbakr, and his cousin was appointed chief financial inspector (*mushrif*) in Tabriz. However, this could not but cause rejection and protests from the Muslim bureaucracy. Therefore, after a sudden illness and the death of Arghun, Saad ad-Dawla was accused of poisoning Ilkhan and executed. All his protégés were removed together with him.⁵⁴

At the same time, the prevailing Muslim milieu in the Middle East and, in particular, in Azerbaijan, the metropolis of the Ilkhanid Empire, should sooner or later outweigh the scales in the competition between Islam, on one hand, and other religions, on the other, in favor of the former. Ilkhanids could not stay long outside the influence of Muslim culture. This fundamental trend of the cultural transformation of the Mongols in the Middle Eastern milieu is well illustrated by the history of Ilkhan Baidu, who took the khan's throne after Geihatu, again as a result of internecine struggle. Being originally a Christian, he converted to Islam. It is not by chance that Stepannos Orbelean notes that by the end of the 13th century all the Mongols “*generally, had abandoned their native faith and had come under the faith of Muhammad*”.⁵⁵ The beginning of the reign of Ghazan Khan (1295-1304) in 1295 marked the final conversion of the Mongols in the Middle East and the Caucasus to the Muslim religion, which had a decisive influence on the evolution of the entire cultural and political image of the region.

In general, the Mongol conquest led to the emergence of a surprisingly diverse ethnic, cultural and religious panorama in the region. Mosques traditionally neighbored there with Christian churches of various congregations, and synagogues.

⁵³ Phillips. p. 79

⁵⁴ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 217-226 (Persian text), p. 125-130

⁵⁵ Step'annos Orbelean. p. 238

However, the Mongols brought to this picture a completely new element that was not previously characteristic of the religious life of local peoples – these are Buddhist temples. Information on the construction of numerous Buddhist temples has been preserved in the sources. For instance, Rashid ad-Din reports on the construction by Hulagu Khan “idol houses” (*butkhane*), i.e. Buddhist temples, in the city of Khoy in Southern Azerbaijan.⁵⁶ It is also known about the existence of a Buddhist temple in Maragha. During the religious ceremony here in the presence of the entire Mongolian court Abaka Khan announced major state decisions.⁵⁷ We can assume that the same temples were erected in Arran, places of long wintering of the Ilkhanid court. However, as we know, Buddhism did not take root on the soil of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus and remained only the religion of a certain part of the conquering Mongols. During the reign of Ghazan Khan and Oljaitu in the late 13th – early 14th centuries the positions of Islam were restored again, and all Buddhist temples were burnt in the fire of the Muslim “revenge”.

It should be noted that Buddhist monks had an extremely strong influence on the first Ilkhans. For example, according to the testimony of Vardan, Hulagu himself so blindly believed the so-called *Toins*, who in fact were Tibetan lamas who arrived in Azerbaijan together with the Mongols, that according to their instructions he “went or did not go to war”.⁵⁸ Vardan had a personal meeting with Hulagu Khan, who received him benevolently during the *kurultay* or *khurultay*, i.e. “a holiday of meetings”, as the Armenian historian translates this word. Although, as Vardan observes, Hulagu treated Christians with respect and affection, he himself was not a Christian. On the contrary, he relied too much on the Buddhist monks – *Toins*, these “*astrologers and priests of the idol*”, called Shakmonia, who allegedly deceived the Great Khan and assured him that “*he will long abide in this body, and when he grows old, he will put on another body*”.⁵⁹ Certainly, these words of Vardan are caused by the negative reaction of the medieval Christian monk to one of the fundamental concepts of Tibetan Buddhism – the doctrine of rebirth or reincarnation. However, Vardan involuntarily recognized the “strong” sides of Buddhist lamas who were adept at divination and deception and even allegedly could force to say “*felted images and horses*”, but “*were restrained in food and clothing, chaste and moderate in marital relations*”.⁶⁰

Arghun Khan respected Buddhism as much as his grandfather Hulagu. According to Rashid ad-Din, he very much trusted Buddhist monks (*bakhshi*, in the Muslim

⁵⁶ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 90 (Persian text), P. 61

⁵⁷ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 160 (Persian text), P. 97

⁵⁸ Istoriya mongolov. p. 22

⁵⁹ Istoriya mongolov. p. 22-23

⁶⁰ Istoriya mongolov. p. 23

tradition) and their rules, constantly giving them patronage and support. Rashid ad-Din also links the death of this ruler with excessive confidence in this *bakhshis*. He writes that one day a certain *bakhshi* from India arrived in Azerbaijan to the court of Arghun and assured him that he (*bakhshi*) was durable, i.e. he lived a long life thanks to the reception of a special drug. Arghun asked him to prepare this drug, which included a large amount of sulfur and mercury. And then Arghun took it for eight months. As a result, it caused a serious illness in him, from which he died some time later.⁶¹

In general, during the reign of the first khans, Buddhism spread fairly quickly on the Ilkhanid lands, of course, mainly among the Mongols themselves. Rashid ad-Din reports that Buddhism has found such widespread use, because it was the belief of the ancestors of the Ilkhans. A large number of Buddhist monks from India, Kashmir, China, Eastern Turkistan and Tibet were invited to the country, and they were preachers of this teaching in the Middle East.⁶² The number of Buddhists there was great before the religious reform of Ghazan, since Rashid ad-Din writes about “*idolaters (butperestan), infidels (kuffar) and Mongols, whose number was more than grains of sand*”.⁶³ Meanwhile, both Muslims and local Christians perceived Buddhists only as idolaters, whose faith had nothing to do with monotheism. Kirakos Gandzaketsi wrote, referring to the stories of the Cilician king Hetum, about “*a land of many idol-worshippers who worship extremely large clay idols named Shakmonia*”, that is, Shakyamuni Buddha.⁶⁴

The upbringing of the Ilkhanid princes was also in the hands of Buddhist *bakhshis*. Rashid ad-Din indicates that when the future Ilkhan Ghazan was five years old, his grandfather Abaka directed him to the Chinese (Uyghur) *bakhshi* Yaruka, so that he brought him up and taught Mongolian and Uyghur letters, sciences and “their good methods”.⁶⁵ Sources show that Ghazan in his youth was a zealous Buddhist. In Khorasan, which he ruled in his youth, he built many “magnificent idol houses”, i.e. Buddhist temples. So zealously he fulfilled the precepts of this religion, engaged in mortification of the flesh and religious asceticism that struck even the monks. However, after the adoption of Islam in June 1295 Ghazan began to authorize the construction of Muslim religious centers – mosques, *madrassas* and *khanakas*. By the autumn of that year a decree was issued that “*in the capital city of Tabriz, Baghdad and other cities of Islam, all the temples of bakhshis (ma’abed-e*

⁶¹ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 223-224 (Persian text), P. 128-129

⁶² Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 373 (Persian text), P. 209

⁶³ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 377 (Persian text), P. 211

⁶⁴ Kirakos Gandzaketsi. p. 307-308

⁶⁵ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 252 (Persian text), P. 143

bakhshiyan), *idol houses, churches and synagogues were destroyed*".⁶⁶ Initially all Buddhist monks were ordered to convert to Islam, but soon it was realized that many of them, doing that under duress, did not adhere to the prescriptions of the new religion and secretly remained adherents of their faith. Then Ghazan Khan allowed those who did not want to become a loyal Muslim, to leave the borders of the Ilkhanid realm and return to their homeland – India, Kashmir, Tibet, and all others under threat of death in no way remain hidden Buddhists, and sincerely profess Islam.⁶⁷

Even after the conversion of the Mongols en masse to Islam under Ghazan Khan, it is believed that part of the supreme nobility, the spouses of Ilkhan (*khatuns*) and the higher warlords (*emirs*), who had a significant influence on government's affairs, was dissatisfied with this radical change in the religious and cultural orientation of the Mongols. In any case, we see attempts to preserve at least a small part of Buddhist monuments and architecture. The fact is that even the Buddhist temple built by Ghazan's father Arghun for himself was destroyed. The interior walls of the temple were decorated with murals, on which Arghun himself was captured. After the demolition of the roof and some walls of the temple, these murals with Ilkhan's images began to be exposed to weather conditions. Representatives of the highest nobility appealed to Ghazan Khan with a request to reconstruct this former building so that snow and rain did not damage the portraits of his father, and thus his spirit would find comfort. However, Ghazan refused to do so. Then his courtiers asked him at least to restore this building in the form of a palace, which was also followed by a firm refusal. Ghazan answered them that if this temple would be restored in the form of a palace, but with images of people on the walls, it will still be like a temple, which it is not proper to do. And if he needs a new palace, it can be erected elsewhere.⁶⁸

At the same time, it can be assumed that Ghazan's conversion to Islam still did not completely erase from his soul the traces of Buddhism, to which he was so zealously committed in his youth. In any case, towards the end of his life, especially after the death of his young wife Keremun Khatun, he fell into thoughts on the meaning of life and the sacrament of death and confessed to his associates that "*the salvation of the soul*" passes through deliverance "*from the narrow nature*", for "*no fetters and prisons, hell and pain are not worse than ignorance and love for world, if only because the world is the hell of the people of God, and the afterlife is paradise*".⁶⁹ Is there no trace of acquaintance with the fundamental ideas of Buddhist philosophy,

⁶⁶ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 300 (Persian Text), P. 168-169

⁶⁷ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 397 (Persian text), P. 224

⁶⁸ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 397 (Persian text), P. 224

⁶⁹ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 366 (Persian text), P. 205

in particular, the doctrine of the denial of “Maya”, as an expression of material life, condemning man to the eternal circle of suffering, the salvation of which consisted in detachment from material life and the attainment of nirvana? Apparently, it was not just by chance that Rashid ad-Din considered it necessary to emphasize especially that “*the surrender to God and the faith of the sovereign of Islam Ghazan Khan were sincere, free and clean from the mud of pretense*”.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the adoption of Islam by Ghazan Khan and the ardor of the neophyte manifested by him in the fulfillment of the prescriptions of the new religion could not completely tear him from his ethno-cultural roots, beliefs and spiritual customs of the Mongolian steppes. He still remained faithful to some ancient pagan Turkic-Mongolian cults and did not see this as a contradiction with the demands of Islam. By the way, some of these cults have survived to this day in the Turkic milieu of the Caucasus and Central Asia, and those who traveled to these regions, probably met the so-called “Sacred trees”, the branches of which are tied with numerous multicolored ribbons. Rashid ad-Din reports that during the rebellion of the Emir Nowruz, Ghazan Khan was very worried by these events and once, together with several people he had to spend the night without a tent in the open field, where a large shady tree grew. To get rid of spiritual anxieties, he surrendered himself in the shadow of this tree to deep thoughts, and a joy came into his soul from the other world (*‘alem-e gheyb*). After much time, when Ghazan Khan visited again those places with his retinue, he remembered that event and came to that tree. There he told the people about the incident, was touched and burst into tears, again surrendering to the prayers of the Almighty God and promised to do good deeds. After that, he and all present attached ribbons to the tree, and this tree became revered as sacred becoming a place of pilgrimage. It is noteworthy that after this ritual “buffoons” have played music, and the emirs started to dance. Ghazan also indulged in this dance and music together with them. For sure, this ritual was part of the ancient tradition of the Turkic-Mongolian shamanism. Emir Pulad Chingsang, who was present at the event and arrived earlier from Mongolia, told an identical case about Kubilai Khan. During the campaign against his enemies, the Merkites, he reached one tree, dismounted and offered a prayer to the “ancient god” (*khoda-ye qadim*), asking for his help and intercession. After the victory over the enemy, he came back to that tree on the way back and decorated it, as he promised, with “colored robes”, turning it into a place of pilgrimage. Then he offered a thanksgiving prayer to the Almighty God, and along with the warriors he set off under a tree for

⁷⁰ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 296 (Persian text), P. 167

ritual dancing. As Pulad Chingsang recounted, they so stamped their feet that the earth around the tree was in potholes.⁷¹

Be that as it may, the establishment of Islam as the official religion of the Ilkhanid Empire at the end of the 13th century was a turning point in the history of the Mongols in the Middle East and the Caucasus which conduced to their gradual assimilation in the Turkic milieu of Azerbaijan and Anatolia and the restoration of the positions of Muslim culture in the region, including the South Caucasus. At the same time, the Mongolian rule has left an indelible and profound trace in the history of Azerbaijan and the peoples of the South Caucasus. The Mongols put an end to the political structure of the Islamic world, in the center of which the institute of the caliphate actually or nominally was standing. In fact, these renovations changed the whole political philosophy of Islam and the evolutionary line of Islamic statehood in the late Middle Ages. All the subsequent Muslim state entities centered in Azerbaijan, which dominated the history of the Middle East for two centuries after the fall of the Ilkhanid Empire – the Jalairids, the Qaraqoyunlu, the Aqqoyunlu, the early Safavids – were political heirs of the Ilkhanids. Since then they developed without much care on the political traditions of Islam that preceded the Mongols. Mongolian rule at the initial stage gave to the Christian principalities of the South Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia unrealistic hopes for newcomers to revenge on Islam, to revive the Christian church and enhance it in the region. Having come from Inner Asia, strongly influenced by the Far Eastern culture, and carried steppe traditions, the Mongols, in general, brought new elements to the religious and cultural panorama of the region that had not previously been inherent in local peoples. The brief existence of Buddhism under the shadow of the Mongolian authorities in Azerbaijan and Iran, the practice and dissemination of the Uyghur alphabet at the state level for almost two centuries, the penetration of Chinese painting traditions into the artistic and applied creativity of the Muslim and Christian peoples of the region, as a whole, contributed to the formation of a more pluralistic culture in Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus.

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⁷¹ Fazlallah Rashid al-din. p. 350-351 (Persian text), P. 196-197

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Summary

Outlines of the Mongolian supremacy in Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus

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The Mongolian conquest has changed abruptly the historical evolution of the peoples of Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus. The political, economic, ethnic and cultural consequences of Mongolian supremacy in the region were so significant that they were felt for several centuries. So, the traditions of the Ilkhanid Empire, established by the Mongols with the center in Azerbaijan in 1256, largely determined the appearance of the entire Middle Eastern region in the 13th and 14th centuries and in the subsequent period. This time also marked the resurgence of political and trade ties between the Middle East and Far East along the ancient Silk Road, which gave a powerful impetus to the cultural exchange between the peoples of the two regions. It is quite natural that many elements of Chinese, Mongolian and Uighur cultures penetrated in this and subsequent periods into the culture of Azerbaijani Turks, Armenians and Georgians.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Mongols, Buddhism, Arran, Karabagh