



## ИЗ ИСТОРИИ ВОСТОКА HISTORY OF THE EAST

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### Investigating the relations between the Mongols and Christians and its role in the collapse of Islamic governments. From the beginning of the Mongol conquests until Abaqa Khan's death

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**Abstract.** The emergence of the Mongols and their invasion of Islamic lands is the most important phenomenon of the thirteenth century which dealt a severe blow to the Muslim governments present in the Islamic world and shook and sometimes uprooted their political-military as well as social and economic structures. At this time, the Christians of Europe and the Catholic Church, as well as the Christians living in the Eastern and Islamic lands, who saw the Muslims as their long-time enemy, tried to accompany the Mongols and interact with them from various religious, political, and military aspects to suppress and destroy the existing Islamic governments in the region, including the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, the Ayyubids the Levant and the Mamluks in Egypt. The present research, with theoretical analysis and review of historical events of this time and evaluating the available data, emphasizes not only the effective role of Christians in the Mongols' confrontation with Islamic governments. It also explains their relations with the Mongols, taking into account the ruling families of the Mongols.

**Keywords:** Mongols, Christians, Islamic governments, Egyptian Mamluks

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## Отношения между монголами и христианами и их роль в падении мусульманских государств от начала монгольских завоеваний до смерти Абака Хана

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**Аннотация.** Появление монголов и их вторжение на исламские земли – важнейшее явление тринадцатого века, которое нанесло серьезный удар по мусульманским правительствам, присутствующим в исламском мире, и потрясло, а в некоторых случаях и уничтожило их военно-политические, а также социально-экономические структуры. В это время христиане Европы и католическая церковь, а также христиане, живущие на восточных и исламских землях, которые видели в мусульманах своих давних врагов, пытались заключить союз с ними и обратить их в свою веру, используя для этого различные религиозные институты. Это сыграло определенную роль в падении мусульманских государств в регионе, включая Аббасидский халифат в Багдаде, Айюбидов в Леванте и мамлюков в Египте. Настоящее исследование подчеркивает не только значительную роль христиан в противостоянии монголов с мусульманскими государствами, а также объясняет отношения христиан с монголами с учетом правящих семей монголов.

**Ключевые слова:** монголы, христиане, исламские правительства, египетские мамлюки

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### Introduction

The governments in the Islamic lands were destroyed or collapsed one after another by the Mongol invasion in the early 7th-century A.H / 13th-century A.D. Khwarazmian dynasty, which was adjacent to the Mongol lands, did not survive the attack and was destroyed. The Mongols then invaded Iran and other Islamic regions and challenged other Muslim powers, including the Abbasid Caliphate, The Rum Seljuk Sultanate, and the Egyptian Mamluks. The popes and Kings of Europe, as well as the Eastern Christian governments, including Armenia, saw Muslims as potential enemies of themselves and their religion. In the past, they had not achieved much success against them, either in the Crusades or in the Muslim invasion to the Caucasus, and they saw Islam as a strong barrier to the spread and promotion of Christianity. Hence, they tried to eliminate other Islamic powers, especially the Abbasid Caliphate, the Rum Seljuk Sultanate, and the Mamluks of Egypt, by being close to the Mongol leaders and using their military

force to marginalize Islam and make Christianity the dominant religion of the conquered lands. For this purpose, by sending delegations to the Mongol court in Mongolia and then the Ilkhans in Iran, they tried to communicate with them and achieve their goals by concluding political and military alliances. Although the Mongols did not have a religious goal, in later periods, especially during the Ilkhanate period, they felt an urgent need to seek the support of Christians to confront the Muslims, including the Egyptians. This cooperation and bilateral relations were successful in cases such as the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate and the blow to the Ayyubid governments in the Levant. But no lasting results were achieved against the Mamluks of Egypt, and with the military decline of the Mongols and the re-emergence of the Muslims, this connection between the Christians and the Mongols gradually faded, although some of its former holdings were preserved.

### **Relations between Christians and Mongols from the beginning to the rise of the Ilkhans**

Christianity was introduced to Mongolia by Nestorian Christian missionaries before the rise of Genghis Khan and through the border between Muslim lands and Central Asia, and some Mongol tribes, including the Naimans, converted to the religion [1. P. 176].

By influencing the Mongols, the Christians were able to convert a significant number of their rulers and officials to Christianity and use it to achieve their political goals. After the rise of Genghis Khan (1), the Mongols' first encounters with Christians were unfriendly. The Christian princes of Russia and Ukraine were attacked by the Mongol armies and defeated at the Battle of the Kalka River [2. P. 81].

The Christian rulers of Georgia were also attacked by the Mongols and they sought help from the Pope and the Catholic Church [3. P. 352].

In the post-Genghis period, the Mongol armies conquered large lands from Eastern Europe from the borders of Russia to Poland and Hungary and even advanced to Austria [2. P. 88].

This period is interpreted as the time of Christian terror and hatred of the Mongols because they themselves were attacked. But the death of Ögedei Khan, the son, and successor of Genghis Khan in 1241, caused the Mongol armies to retreat from Europe. From this time until almost the end of the thirteenth century, relatively good relations were established between the Mongols and the Christians, especially the Christians of Europe, as well as those living in the Caucasus and Iran. Pope Innocent IV, after the fever of the Mongol invasions in Europe, had subsided, formed a council in Lyon, France in 1245 A.D. / 643 A.D. Next, they have sent ambassadors to the Christian possessions in Europe. So they sent an Italian priest named Giovanni da Pian del Carpine to head a delegation to the court of the Mongol khan [4. P. 115].

One of Carpine's main goals in carrying out this mission, to which he refers, was to incite the Mongols to attack the existing Islamic states while preventing their aggression against the Christians [5. P. 18].

Carpine and his entourage attended the accession of Güyük Khan (2) to the throne and presented pure and first-hand accounts of the social, political, and military situation of the Mongols, which awakened Europe and led to a prudent policy against them [6. P. 15].

In general, despite the differences among Christians in Europe, they saw Muslims as staunch rivals and potential enemies and because they saw their position against the Islamic states as unstable after successive defeats in the Crusades, they thought of finding a solution and opened the door to deal with the Mongols [1. P. 173].

The obvious point is that at the same time things were going in favor of the Christians. Because unlike Carpine and his companions, who were treated warmly, the Muslims did not have such a situation and the representatives of the Islamic governments of the Abbasid Caliphate and the Ismailis, who were also present in the Mongol court, were treated with contempt [7. P. 445].

Meanwhile, a significant number of Mongol princes and officials had converted to Christianity. Güyük Khan's mother, Töregene Khatun, and Chinqai of Uyghur origin, who was the chief minister of his court, were Christians, and during their time many Christians from Europe and Russia, as well as Islamic lands, came and entered the Mongol court [8. P. 154].

The Christian rulers also played a role in the rise of power of the Möngke Khan (3), and Christianity flourished throughout the Mongol realm, and the right time came for their political goals against the Muslims [1. P. 187].

Of course, the point that should not be forgotten is that the Christians' relations with the Mongols in the form of religious delegations and the spread and promotion of Christianity in the Eastern lands also serve their political and military goals and attract the Mongols to use their power against Muslims. The Christians of the region, including Armenia, approached the Mongols along with the Christians of Europe to confront and strike at the Islamic governments. For this purpose, the king of Armenia, Haytom, personally went to Möngke Khan's court, in addition to protecting his country from Mongol invasion, to incite them to attack the Islamic governments of the Abbasid caliphate and Egypt [8. P. 161].

This operation of Haytom had a good result: Möngke Khan in addition to ordering the prevention of attacks on Christians in the territory of the Mongols and issued orders to build churches and spread Christianity, also promised the King of Armenia that soon the Mongol armies will destroy the existing Islamic states, including the Abbasid caliphate [7. P. 452].

The Mongol khan also promised that if the Christian kings of Europe cooperated in the war against the Muslims in the Levant, he would give the Holy Land and Jerusalem to the Christians after their liberation [9. P. 451].

Of course, before the reign of Möngke, the Mongols made progress against the Muslims, and in the Battle of Köse Dağ in 1243 AD / 641 AH, they inflicted a great defeat on the Rum Seljuk Sultanate and made it their tribute. One of the reasons for the Mongols' victory in this war was the Christian incitement and the lack of military support of the Christian Byzantine empire for the Seljuk sultan [10. P. 309].

Between the first Mongol invasion and the rise of the Ilkhans, the activities of Islamic governments such as the Ismailis and the Abbasid Caliphate were worrying for the Mongols, and reports of them reached the Mongol court. Hence, Möngke Khan sent his brother Hulagu Khan at the head of a large army to expand the Mongol conquests and conquer Iraq, Syria, and Egypt [11. P. 685].

### **Mongol Christians and Ilkhans against Islamic Governments Christian – Hulagu Khan the Mongol alliance (654–663 AH /1256–1265 AD)**

The establishment of the Mongol Ilkhanate dynasty by the Hulagu Khan in Iran led to the concentration of the Mongols in the region and provided the ground for more confrontation with the Muslims than before and the Christians who pursued such a goal also drew closer to the Ilkhans. King Haytom of Armenia formed a union of Eastern Christian governments including the crusaders in the Levant, the Georgians, and the Kingdom of Trabzon, a small Greek-Georgian government under his chairmanship and all of them served Hulagu with all their might and prepared to confront the Muslim governments [2. P. 112].

The Islamic states did not get along well with each other at this time, and the differences between them were significant. Disagreements between the Ayyubid governments and with the Mamluks of Egypt, as well as the rejection of the Ismailis by the Islamic community, which had its own unique military weight and the lack of efforts of the Abbasid Caliphate as a spiritual leader to unite the Islamic states, developed the situation in favor of the Mongols and their Christian supporters. The Christians made many preparations and efforts during the confrontation of the Mongol Hulagu Khan with the Abbasid Caliphate, and as we have said, they formed a union and joined the Mongols. The Ismailis were the first Islamic government to be overthrown by Hulagu, that they lacked significant political, military, or even religious prestige in the Islamic world. But the Abbasid caliphate was in a different situation. As the center of the caliphate, Baghdad was the spiritual center of Muslims with diverse populations of different races and nationalities, as well as in terms of the religious context. Apart from Muslims, there were Iranian religions such as Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, as well as Christian minorities [12. P. 174].

It was natural that any change in the political and even military structure of the caliphate, which had functioned as a politically charged Islamic state since the caliphate of Nasser al-Din Allah (4), would have led to a wave of change throughout the Islamic lands. The Mongols were also fully aware of the importance of Baghdad and the Abbasid caliphate. Hence, even before the time of Hulagu, they fought in the years 628 to 647 AH with the forces of the Abbasid Caliph to pave the way for the obedience of the enemy or at least the analysis of its forces and the faster fall of the city. However, they did not achieve significant success in these attacks [11. P. 605].

Christians were also aware of this importance and considered the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate a great step in the victory over Islam and Muslims. Thus, Hulagu Khan's invasion of Baghdad gave them the enthusiasm and hope that they

had been powerless for six centuries under Muslim rule [2. P. 108]. In addition, Central Asian Christians, including Turks, Georgians, and Armenians, returned to their homeland under the pretext of the campaign [11. P. 678].

The Christians of the Eastern lands, especially the King of Armenia, considered it necessary to confront the Abbasid Caliphate in retaliation for the Muslim attacks led by Jalal ad-Din Mingburnu, which was accompanied by the approval of the Caliph of the time and for this purpose, they placed themselves in the company of Hulagu [2. P. 110].

In addition, with the fall of Baghdad as the spiritual center of the Islamic world, Christians found a good opportunity to spread and promote their religion in the eastern lands and Islamic countries. Therefore, they helped the Mongols with all their might against the Abbasid caliphate, and even the Christians living in Baghdad joined them and accelerated the fall of the city [13. P. 193].

After the fall of Baghdad, which led to the overthrow of the Abbasid Caliphate and the assassination of the Caliph Al-Musta'sim in 1258 AD / 656 AH, Christians rejoiced hard and tried to kill Muslims and destroy the city. A large number of Christians living in the city also gathered in a church and were safe from harm [2. P. 111].

The collapse of the Abbasid state, in addition to paving the way for the emergence of the Mongol dynasty, paved the way for attacks on the Ayyubid governments of Syria and the Mamluks of Egypt, the last defenders of Islam. Overcoming these governments was also important to Christians. Because they could conquer the holy lands with hundreds of monasteries and important churches and achieve goals that were not achieved in the Crusades. Therefore, the relations between Christians and Ilkhans became more intense. The Christians, led by King Haytom of Armenia, with sixteen thousand men along with the Mongol army, prepared to conquer Syria and fight the Ayyubids and then Egyptian governments. Bohemond IV, the Christian king of Antioch, sent an army for this purpose [2. P. 112].

Therefore, there can be no doubt that the incitement of Christians was effective in the Hulagu invasion of Syria and Egypt [7. P. 581].

It was clear that the Mongols had no religious purpose and exploited historical hatred with religious roots between Muslims and Christians. During the invasion of Syria, allied forces, including an army of Georgian and Armenian Christians led by a Christian general named Bruch, captured the city of Mayyafariqin (5), massacred its inhabitants and the King Kamel, the zealous and powerful ruler of the city, was killed [7. P. 587].

After that, the important and large city of Aleppo falls after the escape of King Nasser, the ruler of the city, and the attacks of the invaders. The conquerors will receive great spoils, most of which will go to Haytom and Bohemond, and they will own the lands that have long been in the hands of the Muslims [7. P. 590].

Haytom burned the big mosque of the city and tried to build the church. The Ayyubid government of Aleppo had come to an end. With the escape of King Nasser and the joining of King Ashraf, the ruler of Hummus to Hulagu, Ilkhan, in addition to retaining him in his position, handed over the rule of other regions to him [14. P. 432].

Later, the Mongols and the Christians who supported them took over Damascus, which was the most important city of Syria and the center of its Ayyubid government. The people of the city, who considered the resistance being pointless, surrendered. The Christian Mongol general, Kitbuqa, along with Haytom and Bohemond, went to Damascus to assess the situation in the city. They have entered the city victoriously and destroyed and desecrated the mosques [2. P. 113].

Of course, it should be noted that the weakness of the Ayyubid governments and the differences between them have not only prevented them from seriously supporting the Abbasid Caliph during the fall of Baghdad, but also have prevented their cohesive and united resistance against the Mongols and their allied Christians. Thus, the important cities of the Levant fall one after another, paving the way for the overthrow of the Mamluk government of Egypt, which was the last remaining Islamic state. The analysis of the events also confirms that the main factor in the success of the Mongols in their attacks on Islamic lands was the lack of unity and cohesion necessary for Islamic governments and Muslim rulers. If the Mongols experienced the first taste of defeat after the conquest of Syria, it was due to the consensus and action of the Egyptian people. Upon receiving the news of the death of Möngke Khan and the return of Hulagu with most of his troops to Iran, his commander, Kitbuqa, stayed in the Levant with about ten thousand soldiers, who demand obedience from the Egyptians. But the Mamluks of Egypt, led by Amir Saif ad-Din Qutuz, achieved a decisive victory over the Mongol army in the great Battle of Ain Jalut in Palestine on 3 September 1260 (25 Ramadan 658 AH). As a result, all the achievements of the Mongols in the Levant were lost in a short time, and the Christians were angered by their cooperation, and many of them have been killed [14. P. 432].

The defeat of Ain Jalut, which stopped the conquests of the Mongol patriarchs on the Levant and Egypt fronts, made them feel more united and closer to the Christians. So Hulagu sent a delegation to the court of popes and kings of Europe to find allies among the Christians of Europe for themselves against the Mamluk government of Egypt. The delegation was captured in Sicily and only one person was able to reach Rome and deliver Hulagu's message to Pope Innocent IV. Meanwhile, Hulagu died and no results were obtained from this embassy [15. P. 146].

### **The Mongol Abaqa Khan and his alliance with the Christians against the Islamic State of Egypt (Mamluks) (663–680 AH / 1265–1282 AD)**

Hulagu's son and successor, Abaqa Khan, was incited by the Christians and Crusaders of the Levant to retake the Holy Land and attack the Levant, and on the other hand, he intended to avenge the defeat of Ain Jalut. Haytom, King of Armenia, therefore sided with the Crusaders against the Mamluks of Egypt. On the other hand, Abaqa Khan entered into a relationship with the Byzantine government to gain the support of the Christians, and the emperor's daughter married him to improve her position in every way [7. P. 600].

He also tried to use the power of the Christian kings of Europe and the Pope and attempted to unite with them against the Egyptian Mamluks [9. P. 455].

In 1267/666, Abaqa sent a delegation to Pope Clement IV and asked the Christian world for help in attacking Egypt, but to no avail [16. P. 220].

In 1274, with the encouragement of Leo III, son and successor of King Haytom of Armenia, Abaqa sent a sixteen-member delegation to Europe to attend the Second Lyon Assembly. By order of Pope Gregory X, the delegation attended the meetings of the Assembly, and two of them converted to Catholicism. This was the only result of this delegation. The kings of Europe also apologized for participating in the war against the Islamic State of Egypt and have only submitted a letter [17. P. 174].

Although Abaqa tried again, he did not succeed. It is quite clear that the Mongol khan, like his father, did not pursue any religious goals. On the one hand, he befriended the Orthodox Byzantine Empire, and on the other hand, he approached the popes and kings of Europe, who believed in Catholicism and were strongly opposed to Orthodoxy. But the important thing was that he never got the desired result from these actions and no military alliance between Europe and the Mongols was achieved against the Egyptians. There were two main reasons for this: First, the Europeans did not fully trust the Mongols and were afraid that by strengthening the Mongol front and conquering Egypt, the Ilkhans would invade Europe next time [15. P. 145].

In analyzing this cause, it should be said that to a large extent the Europeans were right and there was no guarantee that the Mongol patriarchs would not invade Europe after the overthrow of the Egyptian Mamluks. Because the Mongols had already fought bloody wars in Eastern Europe and the lands of Poland and Hungary and showed no commitment to the Christians. Even now, their friendship request was only because they felt the need for European troops. Another example of this European distrust of the Ilkhans was when Abaqa's delegation arrived at the French court for negotiations. The French historian William Nanjis, who was originally a monk in one of the monasteries north of Paris, states: "Are these (Mongol ambassadors) really official envoys or have they infiltrated us as spies" [18. P. 27]?

The second reason was that Europe no longer had the previous determination to fight the Muslims and liberating the holy lands, and the fervor of the Crusades had diminished [17. P. 174].

This is also important. Despite their great military and economic costs in the Crusades, the European kings did not achieve the desired results, and the distance and lack of sufficient facilities made it possible for Europe to take another military action. When the Mongol Ilkhan could not benefit from the help of the Europeans, he decided to fight the Egyptians with the help of the Christian allies in the region. Hostilities between the two sides eventually led to a great war in the Hoti Desert of Elbistan On April 15, 1277, according to Rashid al-Din Hamadani, 3,000 Georgian Christian troops were also present in the Mongol army during the war [11. P. 778].

In this war, the Mongols were severely defeated by the Egyptian army and many of them, including Christians, were killed along with them [14. P. 632].

With this apparent victory, the Sultan of Egypt was able to diminish the influence of the Ilkhans in the Levant and Asia Minor. The Mongol Abaqa Khan made great efforts to avenge the previous defeats of the Mamluks of Egypt, but no



significant action was taken until 680 AH / 1281 AD. This year, Abaqa Khan's troops encountered Egyptian troops near Hummus, Syria. The Christians also took action this time and came to the aid of the Mongols with a considerable number of Georgian and Roman armies [19. P. 196].

But once again the outcome of the war was unfortunate for the Mongols and their Christian allies. They suffered a severe defeat and have lost their influence in the Levant and shortly after, Abaqa Khan died [19. P. 200].

From that date on, the Ilkhans continued to send numerous ambassadors to the European courts to find allies to counter the threat posed by the Egyptian government, which had always been a top priority of their foreign policy but still failed to achieve their desired goals. The culmination of these exchanges was during the time of Arghun Khan, which did not lead to any military alliance between the two sides. Ghazan Khan's efforts and his attacks on Syria, despite his initial victory, did not bring good results and lasting results for him and his supporters. The next Ilkhan Öljaitü, who launched the last fruitless attack on the Egyptian government, extended a helping hand to Europe, but again did not lead to a military alliance. The Christians of the region also lost some of their former military might under the pressure of the Mamluks of Egypt, and the Mongol Ilkhans were unable to achieve decisive and lasting victories against the Egyptian government. Eventually, when Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan, the last powerful Mongol Ilkhan, made peace with the Mamluks of Egypt, the plan of uniting the Mongols and Christians to confront the Islamic states was forgotten.

## Conclusion

With the advent of Islam and the presence of Islamic governments, Eastern Christians and Europe faced a serious obstacle to the promotion and spread of their religion. Christian governments in the region such as Armenia and Georgia, as well as the Byzantine Empire, were defeated by Muslim rulers such as the Seljuk Turks and Jalal ad-Din Mingburnu and in the Crusades, despite the widespread participation of European kings and the efforts of the pope, the desired result of Christian income was not achieved. But the emergence and invasion of the Muslims by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, caused the collapse of Muslim powers and so there was a good opportunity for Christians, with the help of the invaders, to free themselves from the yoke of the Muslims and to promote their religion in their lands and to achieve their political goals. For this purpose, they opened the door to extensive contacts under the auspices of religious delegations and official ambassadors, and in general with political and military goals, about the Mongols and then the Ilkhans of Iran. They knew very well that Islamic states such as the Abbasid Caliphate, the Rum Seljuk Sultanate, the Levantine Ayyubids, and the Mamluks of Egypt existed, they cannot achieve their goals, that one of which was to reach the holy lands. Hence, they tried to overthrow these governments by using the Mongol military force. Although the Christians of Europe did not send troops in this regard, along with the Eastern Christians, they expected the fall of these states and were pleased with the Mongols' attention to the Christians and their actions against the Islamic states.

Eastern Christian governments such as Armenia, Trabzon, and Antioch, on the other hand, provided forces to the Mongols and waged war against the Muslims governments. The result was that the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad fell with all its spiritual power and greatness, and other lands in that area were occupied by the Allies. The Ayyubid states were also defeated in Aleppo and Damascus, paving the way for the conquest of Egypt, the last stronghold of Islam. However, with the defeat of the Mongols in the battle of Ain Jalut against the Mamluks of Egypt, the war machine of the Mongols and the Christians against the Islamic governments ceased to function in the past, and in the later period suffered other defeats from the Egyptians. Abaqa Khan the Mongol, despite his extensive efforts to make up for the defeat of Ain Jalut and his dealings with European Christians, was defeated by the Mamluk government of Egypt in the Battle of Elbistan and Battle of Hummus, despite the participation of his Georgian and Armenian allies in these wars. From this date onwards, the Mongol Ilkhans became more defensive, and despite extensive efforts and contacts with European Christians, which were often fruitless, did not achieve significant and lasting success against the Egyptians. Finally, with the peace treaty concluded by Abu Sa'id, the last powerful patriarch with the Egyptian government, the Mongol patriarchs and their Christian allies, whose activities had diminished at that time, openly acknowledged the authority of the Islamic State of Egypt.

### Notes

- (1) Death in the year 624 AH / 1227 AD.
- (2) The period of rule from 644 to 645 AH / 1246 to 1248 AD.
- (3) The period of rule from 649 to 657 AH / 1251-1259 AD.
- (4) The period of caliphate and rule from 575 to 622 AH / 1179-1225 AD.
- (5) Today this city is called Silvan that is located in the Diyarbakir Province of Turkey.

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