



Mobility, Empire and Cross Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia

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To whom it may concern,

I hereby confirm that Lorenzo Publici's chapter "The Mongols, Georgia and the Caucasus" has been accepted for publication in *The Cambridge History of The Mongol Empire*, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming in 2022), of which I am the editor.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information.

With very best wishes,



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The Mongols, Georgia and the Caucasus

Abstract

The Mongols embarked on an explorative incursion in the Caucasus in 1220 before fully invading the area in 1235-6. Due to their organized and well-thought-out campaign, they managed to subdue in a few years the region from present day Armenia to Ossetia. Since the beginning of their rule, the Mongols relied upon an indirect administrative model, without replacing the preexisting institutions of the area.

The formation of the Ilkhanate in the 1250s moved the focal point of power southwards and the political conduct of Caucasia became more indirect and relied on the local aristocracy. The decline of the Ilkhanate in the 1330s, opened a process of political re-adaptation whose more immediate outlook was the fragmentation of power and the disappearance of a hegemonic center.

In this chapter the phases of the Mongol conquest, as well as the huge consequences it had on Caucasia, will be discussed.

Keywords: Medieval Caucasus, Caucasia, Kingdom of Georgia, Greater Armenia, Cilicia, Black Sea, Mongols, Mongol Empire.

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Before the Mongols

Caucasia is a region that extends north and south of the parallel mountain ranges known as the Caucasus. It is a vast isthmus that separates the Black Sea from the Caspian Sea and Europe from Asia, and is located - from north to south - between the Sea of Azov and northern Armenia. At the widest point, only 500 km separates the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.

The natural barrier formed by the mountains, which on the summit of Mt. Elbrus reach 5,642 meters in height, has divided the region into two areas whose historical evolution

has been very dissimilar over the centuries: the north, North Caucasus or Ciscaucasia and the south, Subcaucasia or Transcaucasia. Since antiquity, North Caucasus – innervated in the Eurasian steppe belt - experienced close contact with nomad peoples. Since the mid-11th century, the Turkic confederation of Qipchaqs spread in the North-Pontic and Caucasian area, attaining a dominating position in the region.¹ South Caucasus benefited from connections with the Fertile Crescent first, then with the Hellenic, Roman and Iranian civilizations. The geographical location of Subcaucasia favored the birth of centers of collective power influenced by neighboring states.

In the Caucasian region, local identities have survived and sometimes have thrived despite the efforts of the three major monotheistic religions that have actively tried, in vain, to dominate it.² Since their Christianization in the early 4th century, Georgia and Armenia together with the Albanians (in the eastern part of Subcaucasia, on the Caspian coasts), have formed the Christian Caucasia.³ Islam penetrated part of the Caucasus in the 7th century, accentuating the role played by the two Christian states as the eastern frontiers of the Byzantine Empire. For centuries the Caucasus was neatly divided between Christian and Muslim, and only from the second half of the 9th century could Armenia and Georgia take advantage of the decline of the Arab Caliphate to expand and consolidate their borders.

The Turkic nomad infiltrations in Caucasia throughout the 11th century⁴ started disintegrating the political unity of the Caucasian kingdoms. If, on the one hand, Armenia suffered heavily from the nomad invasions and in particular the Seljuk ones, Georgia came out stronger because of the new political changes.⁵ In particular, the Bagratid house of

¹ Golden, 1992 and 2011.

² See on this Tosi 1996.

³ Toumanoff 1963.

⁴ See Golden 1984, 46-7.

⁵ It was as a consequence of the Seljuk invasions that at the end of the 11th century and after the disastrous Byzantine defeat at Manazkert, Armenian nobles settled on the Gulf of Alessandretta on the Mediterranean

Georgia concentrated most of its efforts on strengthening their power over the high aristocracy, which was eager to erode the royal house's political hegemony.

The Battle of Manzikert (1071), where the Seljuk Turks defeated the Byzantine army, precipitated a massive exodus of Armenians towards Cappadocia, Cilicia, and Georgia. The Rupenids, a minor branch of the Bagratid dynasty, founded a new kingdom on the Gulf of Alexandretta (present-day Southern Turkey), and declared its formal independence from Byzantium. During its three centuries of life – from 1080 to 1375 - this kingdom (Cilicia, or Lesser Armenia), represented both a central outlet for the Mediterranean trade system with its ports, i.e.—Korikos, Ayas, Mamistra, and a military stronghold for Western Christianity, being itself a close ally, even if not always, of the Crusaders since the first expedition to the Holy Land in 1098.⁶

The First Mongol invasion in Caucasia: 1220

In the early 1220s, on the eve of the first Mongol invasion, the kingdom of Georgia represented the focal point of power in the Subcaucasian region. The sovereignty of Georgia stretched, west to east, from the eastern coast of the Black Sea to Derbend and West Shirvan. The Seljuks ruled over Asia Minor from their capital Konya. Their dominion extended as far as the cities of Erzurum and Erzinjan. The Ayyubids controlled the Eastern Mediterranean Shores and the very south of Caucasus, down to Aleppo. Armenian princes (*ishkhans*) ruled over the central Subcaucasia to the borders of Azerbaijan.

Sea and founded the small principality of Cilicia, which in 1199 became a kingdom with the coronation of Lewon the Magnificent.

⁶ Mutafian, 2002; Gahzarian, 2000. Ayas (*Laiazzo* for the Venetians, for whom it was a prominent hub in their Mediterranean commercial system) is modern Yumurtalik, in southern Turkey.

The Mongols arrived in the Caucasus in the fall of 1220 from the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, passing across Tabriz, then the steppes of Mughan, in southeastern Azerbaijan.⁷ According to Armenian historian Kirakos Gandzakets'i (early 13th century-1271-2), the Georgians and the Armenians were misinformed, believing the Mongols to be Christians.⁸ Kirakos also describes the ferocity of the Mongols.⁹ A courier sent by the *atabeg* Ivane,¹⁰ came to the Georgian King George IV ("The Resplendent", r. 1212-1223) warning him about the arrival of this new, violent people that were ravaging all the countries.¹¹ The Armenian cleric Vardan Arevelts'i (ca.1200-1271/2) confirms the information given by Kirakos and states that there were some 20,000 men in the Mongol army who destroyed everything and then quickly retreated.¹² We find the same account in the *History of the Nation of Archers*, written by the Cilician scholar Grigor of Arkner (ca. 1250-ca. 1335).¹³

The territorial nobility tried to mount a defense. George IV attempted to assemble a robust resistance. General Ivane (described by Kirakos as *hazarapet*, i.e. commander of 1,000)¹⁴ was in charge of halting the enemy's advance, and the clash occurred on the plain of

⁷ Ibn Al-Athir, tr. Richards 2008, 214; Rashid ad-Din, ed. Thackston, tom. 1, part II, 107; also in Dashdondog 2011, 45.

⁸ Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 166.

⁹ Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 165-6.

¹⁰ Ivane was the brother of Zakare Zak'arian. Both military leaders and very successful during the expansionistic campaign of Tamara against the Turks in northeastern Armenia, the two brothers were rewarded with the administration of many districts they had liberated. See on this Bedrosian 1997, 254.

¹¹ According to the Georgian chronicler the Mongols are "a strange people, speaking a strange language".¹¹Brosset 1849, 492. The "territory of Gag" is more probably the area of Mount Gag in Modern Azerbaijan, at the northeastern border with Armenia, where can be found the ruin of the Saint Sargis Monastery. See on this Korobeinikov 2014, 174.

¹² Vardan Arewelts'i, tr. Bedrosian 2007, 141-2.

¹³ Grigor Arknerts'i, tr. Blake and Frye 1949, 293.

¹⁴ Kirakos, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 167. Brosset 1849, 493-4; Ibn al-Athir, tr. Richards 2010, 214.

Khunan, near the river Kotman and fortress of Terunakan, i.e. in northern Armenia.¹⁵

George IV was defeated and only saved himself by fleeing the battle.¹⁶

After the defeat, Georgia was placed under harsh control. The aristocracy was forced to pledge an oath of allegiance to the new rulers and a regimen of heavy taxation was imposed on the people. The ruling dynasty of Cilician Armenia preferred to surrender without fighting the Mongols, opting instead for a bloodless acceptance of subservience. The kingdom was thus spared from destruction by the Mongol invasion.

It is still unclear if the invasion of 1220 was a well-engineered operation intended for permanent conquest of the Caucasus,¹⁷ as a part of Chinggis Khan's mission of world conquest,¹⁸ or if instead it was a preparatory invasion aimed at acquiring a better understanding of the Caucasian region before committing their main armies.¹⁹

In May 1223, the Mongols advanced to the north, pursuing the nomadic union of the Alans.²⁰ After defeating them, they proceeded and entered Kievan Rus'. Here they outflanked a Russian-Cuman army in the noted Battle of the Kalka River, where many Russian princes perished. After their victory, the Mongols headed back to their lands.²¹

The first Mongol expedition that ended in the Caucasus left quite a few refugees, who now moved southwards: the Qipchaqs broke into Georgia and were defeated by an Armenian-

¹⁵ The location of this place is still problematic today. According to Manandian (1952, 183), both the toponyms "can be found along the banks of the river Kur" (see Dashdondog 2011, 48). B. Dashdondog quotes the work of Galstyan (1976, 114), who states that the river Kotman "is the modern river Touz, which passes through the fortress of Terunakan" in northern Armenia (Dashdondog 2011, 48 n. 36).

¹⁶ Vardan Arewelts'i, tr. Bedrosian 2007, 142. Grigor of Akner writes that the king of the Georgians confronted the enemy with 60,000 cavalries. Grigor Arknerts'i, tr. Blake and Frye 1949, 293-5.

¹⁷ Dashdondog 2011, 44.

¹⁸ Amitai-Preiss, 2000 and Allsen 1987.

¹⁹ Bedrosian 1979, 94.

²⁰ On the Alans see Alemany 2000 and Bachrach 1973.

²¹ The battle of the Kalka River is described in the Chronicle of Novgorod, Leningrad 1950, pp. 63, 266 (English edition tr. Michell and Forbes 1914, 65-66). See also P.P. Tolochko, 2003, 116; Martin, 2007, 146-8; Jackson, 2005, 39 and Spinei, 2003, 298-99.

Georgian army.²² Jālāl al-Dīn, the son of Khwārazm Shāh Muḥammad, who had fled to India, invaded part of eastern Georgia, and defeated a composite army made of Alans, Lazs, Cumans and others and headed by the Georgians. In March 1226 he captured and pillaged the capital Tiflis, massacring its population.²³

In 1223, George IV had died from the wounds he suffered in battle the previous year. Power in Georgia was placed in the hands of his sister Queen Rusudan (r. 1223-1245). The political situation in the Caucasian State was rapidly deteriorating. The Mongol invasion had damaged the power structure in the region, but few realized how seriously. The conquest of Tiflis by Jalāl al-Dīn was just one episode in a wider context; he poured a mass of troops and civilians (14,000 according to the author of the Georgian chronicle²⁴) into the eastern borders of the Caucasus, specifically in the region of Ganja, which was devastated.

The final conquest of Caucasia

The Mongol incursion of 1220, as well as the invasion of Jalāl al-Dīn in 1225-1226, further weakened the Caucasian leadership's ability to restore an efficient military system. At this point, Azerbaijan was almost entirely in the Mongols' hands. In the late 1220s, the kingdom of Georgia - the last bastion of defense against foreign attacks - was just beginning to re-organize its military structure.

²² Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 168-9; Ibn Al-Athir, tr. Richards 2008, 237-9; Dashdondog 2011, 51. On the Cumans in Georgia Golden 1984, 84-6 is very informative.

²³ Ibn al-Athir, tr. Richards 2008, 269; Brosset 1849, 504-5.

²⁴ Figures are of course not reliable for these times, especially when the sources are so scarce, but these numbers can give us an idea of the perception that the author of the chronicle had of the historical events. Brosset 1849, 495.

In 1231, Sultan Jalāl al-Dīn was murdered under mysterious circumstances.²⁵ With no more serious opponents around, the Mongols planned to complete the conquest. General Chormaghan (d. 1241) was entrusted with operations.²⁶ The Mongol commander arrived in Caucasia in 1235 with three *tümen*, supposedly 30,000 men,²⁷ and devastated the whole region up to the Derbend gate. The Mongols started to ravage the territories of Georgia from the Caspian coast, then moved on to menace the kingdom directly.²⁸ Queen Rusudan fled Tiflis and went to Kutais in the northwest. The takeover of Georgia was violent and the impression left on its contemporaries significant.²⁹

The Georgian aristocracy in general did not react to the Mongol attack, but rather retreated to their fortresses, leaving the conquerors free rein.³⁰ The Mongols took the districts one-by-one, and occupied them permanently. Chormaghan summoned a *quriltai* (assembly) to divide the “countries” among the “one hundred chiefs”.³¹ In fact, the conquered lands were divided into three parts, each one given to a Mongol military leader (*noyan*).³²

In 1242, Ögödei Qa’an (ca. 1185-1241) replaced Chormaghan, who, according to Armenian sources, had gone deaf.³³ In his place, Baiju *noyan* (fl. 1230-1260) was appointed.³⁴ Baiju recruited men from all the territories under his rule and all able-bodied males were enrolled in a military machine created to conquer the West.³⁵ The conquest

²⁵ Dashdondog 2011: 53.

²⁶ On Chormaghan see May 1996.

²⁷ Kirakos Ganjakets’i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 194.

²⁸ Brosset 1849, 513-4, where the source says that as soon as the Mongols came close to Georgia “the country was exposed to extreme and cruel situations than ever before”.

²⁹ “Bodies were everywhere: the cities, the villages, the plains, the forests, the mounts, the valleys, everything, except for the fortresses, that could escape”. The fortresses that “could escape” were the ones of the nobles who had preferred to negotiate their surrender. Furthermore, Kirakos adds that “one could see swords mercilessly cutting down men and women, youths and children, old men and old women, bishops, priests, deacons, and clerks”. Kirakos Ganjakets’i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 201.

³⁰ Likely they hoped to avoid a massacre of civilians. Kirakos Ganjakets’i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 200-201.

³¹ Grigor Arknerts’i, tr. Blake and Frye 1949, 301-3.

³² Grigor Arknerts’i, tr. Blake and Frye 1949, 303. On the Mongol conquest of Gandzak (Ganja) the debate is still open. In particular, it is not certain when Chormaghan captured the city. The most probable date is 1231 (680 Armenian). See on this Dashdondog 2011, 53-4.

³³ Kirakos Ganjakets’i, tr. Bedrosian 1986 240.

³⁴ On Baiju see Melville 2009.

³⁵ Dashdondog 2011: 60.

continued. In 1242, the Mongols attacked Erzurum, which had been in the hands of the Seljuq sultans since the Battle of Manzikert of 1071. The densely populated city³⁶ was destroyed and all of its inhabitants put to death in a siege that lasted two months and devastated many districts.³⁷

After a short break, probably due to the cold season, military action started again. In the spring of 1243, Baiju decided to attack the Sultan of Rūm Ghiyāth al-Dīn. According to Kirakos, the sultan spread rumors about an imminent attack on the Mongol camp in Mughan. The Cilician monk Hayton states that when the sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn heard about the coming of the Mongols he recruited an army of mercenaries.³⁸ In fact, the nobility of Aleppo, Trebizond, Nicaea and Cilicia, as well as the Franks of the Latin Empire, were in the army of the Sultan.³⁹ The battle occurred in June 1243 near the village of Köse Dag, ⁴⁰ and the Mongols achieved a decisive victory, after which, the sultanate of Rūm was subdued.⁴¹ After the success in Asia Minor, Baiju himself became the representative of the Great Khan in Caucasia, Syria, Rūm and Western Iran.⁴²

The Mongol conquest of Subcaucasia pushed thousands of people westwards in the hope of finding safe haven. Many fled to Cilician Armenia, where King Hethum I, probably encouraged by the nobility, chose to submit to the Mongols and entered into an alliance with them.⁴³ The negotiations in Ceasarea began in 1243 between the Armenian noble baron Kostandin on one side and Baiju, with Altuna Khatun (Chormaghan's wife) on the other.⁴⁴

³⁶ "Filled not only with Christians and Tachiks, but everyone from the entire district had assembled there". Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986 241.

³⁷ Grigor Arknerts'i, tr. Blake and Frye 1949, 309.

³⁸ *History of the Tatars* (written before 1307 with the Latin title *Flores historiarum terrae orientis*), Hayton, tr. Köler 1906, 154-5.

³⁹ Dashdondog 2011, 62.

⁴⁰ Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 244-6.

⁴¹ Vardan Arewelts'i, tr. Bedrosian 2007, 88.

⁴² Dashdondog 2011: 63. See also Cahen 1968: 138.

⁴³ On this point the analysis of B. Dashdondog (2011, especially chapter 2 and 3) is excellent.

⁴⁴ Dashdondog 2011, 66.

The Mongols in Caucasia: Rule and cooperation

Early Mongol rule in Caucasia can be divided schematically into four main phases. The first, from 1236 to 1243, was a preparatory period of domination. The second phase started with the measures adopted by the new qa'an Güyük (r. 1246-48). A third phase began after the election of Möngke Qa'an in 1251.⁴⁵ The fourth and last stage of this period can be situated between 1256 and 1261.

In the first phase, the ongoing and widespread war was violent and the whole region had been brought to its knees. Massive human loss, economic stagnation and a devastated countryside caused irreparable damage to agriculture and entire villages were destroyed.

During the second phase, functionaries were sent throughout the empire in order to reorganize the fiscal system and take a census for military purposes. Sources depict this period as harsh; the population was in the hands of the Mongol officers, who applied levies and taxes arbitrarily, imposing very onerous constraints on the Caucasian aristocracy. But nonetheless, under certain conditions, it was also beneficial. The nobles who had voluntarily submitted to the Mongols maintained their territories and collected taxes for the Qa'an. In exchange, they had to deliver armed forces to the Mongols, provide relay stations (*yam*) and personally visit the Mongol court. The third period was marked by Möngke's unified vision of the empire and the massive effort for a general census and more regular taxation (1252-1259). The Qa'an entrusted the Amir Arghun Aqa (ca. 1210-1278)⁴⁶ to establish the fiscal system in Caucasia.⁴⁷ The fourth and last phase can be placed roughly between the aftermaths of the creation of the Ilkhanate up to its first clash with the Golden Horde.

⁴⁵ On Möngke Qa'an see Allsen 1987.

⁴⁶ On Arghun Aqa see G. Lane 1999; see also Publici 2010; Landa 2018.

⁴⁷ Lambton 1987, 97-123; Lane 1999, 459-82.

Caucasia did not belong to the ulus of Jochi. In the period that preceded the creation of the Ilkhanate (1236-1256), Subcaucasia was put under the control of a military governor, the first of which was Chormaghan. The Mongols organized Caucasia into five districts/*vilayets*: Georgia (Gurjistan), Greater Armenia, Shirvan, Arran, and Mughan.⁴⁸ Georgia was divided into eight *tümen*.⁴⁹ Greater Armenia was composed of “quasi-independent” Armenian principalities, and included the territories of Sasun and Vaspurakan, with Karin/Erzurum at the center.⁵⁰ Cilicia was fundamentally a single unit under the control of its king, Hethum, who, as mentioned above, secured an alliance with the Mongols in 1243 and became a vassal of the Qa'an.

The Armenian and Georgian aristocracy chose to concede to the Mongols largely to protect their people from annihilation and to preserve their personal interests. Furthermore, the local aristocracy needed to preserve as much power as possible in times of war: protecting land and resources and, when possible, even increasing their territories. In order to do so, an oath of submission was required. The Mongols rarely planned to entirely replace the local aristocracy with a new power, especially early on in their domination.

Thus, the Armenian and Georgian nobles developed relations with the Mongol noyans *in loco*, and the Gran Khanate in Karakorum, to protect themselves and their patrimony.⁵¹ Nonetheless, voluntary submission did not always preserve cities from destruction nor civilians from liquidation.⁵² For the local nobility, submission to the Mongols entailed

⁴⁸ Dashdondog 2011, 102-3.

⁴⁹ The *tümen* (Mongol 10,000) was the military unit of, nominally, 10,000 men. In the early administration of Caucasia, the Mongols divided the conquered lands into districts (*vilayets*), each one divided in turn into *tümen*, i.e. sub-districts capable of providing 10,000 men to the army.

⁵⁰ Bedrosian 1979, 125.

⁵¹ It occurred, for instance, when the Armenian noble Awag, ruler of Kayen, offered his loyalty to Chormaghan and was welcomed with honor by the Mongols. Brosset 1849, 516.

⁵² For instance in 1236, during the siege of Kars, the city surrendered to Chormaghan. However, the inhabitants were massacred, others were enslaved and the city was destroyed. Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 220; Dashdondog 2011, 58.

accepting the status of *injü*⁵³ (Qa'an's personally owned people), which carried with it a certain autonomy of government and tax exemptions.

Submission to the invaders by the single Armenian nobles facilitated Mongol rule in Caucasia.⁵⁴ The relations among the Armenian aristocracy had always been troubled and this played into the hands of the Mongols, who did not want a strongly united leading class in the territories. They increased tensions by distributing land and rights unequally amongst the aristocracy.

In Cilicia, as already mentioned, King Hethum I attempted to prevent the Mongol conquest. In 1243, he sent his brother and his father to Baiju to offer him obedience and submission. Baiju demanded that he should be delivered the mother, wife and daughter of Kay-Khusraw, who were in Cilicia escaping the Mongols and protected by the Armenian court. Hethum accepted. The Cilician king travelled with a Mongol delegation to the Great Khan, and Hethum's brother, Sparapet Smbat, visited the court of Güyük in 1248.⁵⁵ Smbat brought back to Cilicia the Khan's commitment to preserve the territorial integrity of the Cilician Kingdom and a promise of his support against the Seljuks.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, Güyük demanded that Hethum appear in person in order to pay tribute and the Armenian king acted accordingly. The journey was fruitful. The Great Khan Möngke – who succeeded

⁵³ The term originally comes from the Mongol word *emchü*, meaning "private property". In the *Secret History*, this includes those who belonged to Mongol aristocrats. According to Vladimircov (1948, 128), in traditional Mongol society the word designated the patrimony of the princes. According to the Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol empire (ed. Atwood, 2004, 240) in the Ilkhanate the word *inje* came to refer to the khan's entire household, including inherited people, landed property, and subjects levied from his outer subjects. The same meaning is in Dashdondog, (2011, 75, n. 19) who quotes Rashid al-Din.

⁵⁴ Dashdondog 2011: 59.

⁵⁵ Dashdondog 2011, 81-2; Jackson 2005, 98-99 and n. 100. On the journey see Boyle 1964.

⁵⁶ Hethum's journey to the Great Khan is also attested in a colophon, originally from the monastery of SS. Apostles in Muš, dated 1256, and published by Anna Sirinian: 2010, 510: "[The pious Armenian King Het'um] after having made himself a vassal [of the Mongols], taking on himself the Cross of Christ, traveled for the Good of the Christians. And he remained there for four years".

Güyük – gave Hethum full protection.⁵⁷ The agreement was settled with Möngke's decision to exempt all churches and monasteries from taxation.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, Georgia was going through a complex political phase. In order to secure the throne for her son David (Narin, The Younger, 1225-1293), Queen Rusudan sent him to Batu Khan to formally submit.⁵⁹ At the same time, the Georgian nobles chose the illegitimate son of George IV, Lasha, David (Ulu, the elder, 1215-1270) as king, because they thought Rusudan's son was dead. Lasha's son was crowned king in the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral and sent to the Great Khan's camp in Karakorum to obtain official recognition. David Ulu was held in the Mongol capital for five years, where he met his cousin, David Narin. Güyük nominated David the Elder for King of the Georgians, and Narin for his co-ruler.⁶⁰ In fact, Georgia found itself with two sovereigns who ruled together for a while.⁶¹

In this phase of the Mongol domination in Caucasia, the unequal position of the nobles under the new rulers together with heavy and arbitrary taxation caused increasing social tensions. A first rebellion by the Armenian and Georgian aristocracy against the Mongols was planned for late 1248, but prince Awag Zak'arian (d. 1250), son of *atabeg* Iwanē, intercepted the plot and informed the Mongols, who promptly suppressed the initiative.⁶² The failure of the plot did not discourage the Caucasian nobility from wanting to dismantle the new political order. In 1259-61 another plot was arranged. Since 1254, the Mongols had started a general, extensive fiscal reform throughout the empire (see below).⁶³ The Caucasus was one of the areas most at the mercy of the local officers, who imposed taxes

⁵⁷ Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 301-8; Boyle 1964, 175-89; Dashdondog 2011, 86.

⁵⁸ De Nersessian 1962, 653; Dashdondog 2011, 86.

⁵⁹ Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 262-3.

⁶⁰ Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 264.

⁶¹ Queen Rusudan had died in 1245. "First Dawit', son of Lasha Giorge, the elder of the two; then following his death, his father's sister's son, the other Dawit', son of Rusudan, should he still be alive". Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 264.

⁶² Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian, 267: "The T'at'ar army happening to be in the place was informed about it and the army notified its chiefs".

⁶³ Lane 1999, 459-82; Pubblici 2010, 531-50.

without having any precise rules. The introduction of *qubchur* (on this tax see below) in Georgia and Armenia in 1259-60, was a final affront. Part of the Caucasian nobility was involved in the revolt.

Arghun Aqa quelled it with bloodshed. But, since he failed to capture King David, leader of the rebels, Arghun lashed out against the nearest Georgian provinces. The damage was extensive.⁶⁴ It was an Armenian noble, Prince Smbat Orbelian, who finally stifled the revolt, after having received the support of Arghun.

The Mongols' punishment for the revolt was severe. The Georgian queen, Gontsa (wife of David Ulu), and Zak'are, son of another Armenian prince, Shahnshah, were executed. Shahnshah himself was liberated only after a ransom payment.

If tensions existed between the Mongols and the local aristocracy, it is also true that there were numerous cases of marriage between Georgian and Armenian nobles and the Mongols. It was often the Great Khan in person who arranged the intermarrying.⁶⁵ The Armenian Church never opposed these alliances. The partnership between the Armenian and the Georgian nobility on the one hand, and the Mongols on the other were, in this phase, the result of a precise, well-studied strategy, which benefitted both sides. The creation of the Ilkhanate gradually altered the situation.

Mongol administration in Caucasia

In all the conquered lands, the Mongols found themselves needing to transform their military domination into a political government. In Caucasia, years of war had left widespread destruction, from which it took decades to recover. According to Grigor

⁶⁴ Dashdondog 2011, 92.

⁶⁵ As was the case of the daughter of the Georgian King Demetre, who married Bugha Noyan. Prince Awag and Smbat Sparapet both married Mongol wives. The former was given his wife directly by Güyük in person. The son of Chormaghan married the daughter of Hasan Jalal. See on this Dashdondog 2011, 94-5.

Arknerts'i, the Mongols arrived in the Caucasus with an idea for a fiscal and administrative structure.⁶⁶ After the death of Chinggis Khan in 1227, all the lands west of the Irtys River that were conquered became the Ulus Jochi, appanage of Chinggis Khan's elder son. The Caucasus was excluded and was put under the control of Chormaghan, the representative of the Great Khan, who held both military and administrative authority, and was provided with a permanent garrison, the *tammachi*.⁶⁷

As stated above, the whole of Caucasia was divided into five districts/*villayets*, and one of these, Gurjistan (Georgia), was divided in eight *tümen*, that is eight districts capable of each providing 10,000 men to the Mongol army. Of these *tümen*, five were Georgian and three were Armenian. Initially, the Mongols did not replace the local ruling class. This happened later, gradually and sporadically beginning from the second half of the 13th century, when some of the conquered lands were taken by the Mongol nobility as *enchu/injü* (private lands of the royal family).⁶⁸ The Mongols needed to control, even if indirectly, the subjugated lands in order to take advantage of their resources and to be able to rely on an always-available army.

Before the creation of the Ilkhanate, Mongol administration of Caucasia varied, but, in general, the new ruler did not intervene directly in local affairs. The *vilayet* of Gurjistan was run by the Georgian crown that now depended directly upon the Great Khan and governed it through the Zaka'arid princes (*ishkhans*), which commanded the *tümens*.⁶⁹ The rest of Greater Armenia was administered, on behalf of the Great Khan, by a Mongol governor, which could be a general (*tamghachi*), or, below him, a *darughachi* (or *basqaqs*), who also

⁶⁶ "[The Mongols] give us *tzghu*, *mal*, *t'aghar*, and *ghp'ch'ur*": Grigor Arknerts'i, tr. Blake and Frye 1949, 301. The *tzghu* was a tribute in the form of a gift (Cleaves 1949, 442). The *Mal* (Mong. "cattle/livestock") was a tax on property in Caucasia calculated by measurement (see on this Dashdondog 2011, 117. The *t'aghar* was a tax paid in grain "for the military caste and the army in a given district" (Petrushevsky 1968, 533). The *qubchir/qubchur* was a general tax imposed on property (see on this Petrushevsky 1968, 533; Lambton 1986; Masson-Smith 1970).

⁶⁷ Dashdondog 2011, 101-2 and n. 14 and 15.

⁶⁸ As was the case, for example, of Greater Armenia. See Petrushevsky 1968, 487; Dashdondog 2011, 102-3.

⁶⁹ Dashdondog 2011, 106-7.

exercised wide powers.⁷⁰ The tablet of authority (*paiza*),⁷¹ granted the Mongol governor official legitimacy through the central political authority. These administrators could command *in loco* every kind of obligation from the local aristocracy: food, herds, and even military service. The abuses suffered by civilians, and not only in the Caucasus, induced the Great Khan to limit the prerogatives and privileges enjoyed by the local nobility.

Güyük Khan had tried to revamp the fiscal system in the Mongol empire already in the mid-1240s. However, it was Möngke Khan who decided to codify the political, economic and administrative state through a general institutional reorganization. As stated above, a census was necessary. It is not known if this was the first initiative that the Mongol court took in Caucasia, but it is certainly the best documented by sources. In 1254, when Möngke sent the amir Arghun Aqa to Caucasia, a systematic census was assigned as one of his tasks.⁷² Mongol officers visited cities and villages, and registered all the male inhabitants from the ages of 11 to 15.⁷³ They imposed harsh taxes, which heightened the process of general impoverishment experienced in the region. Soon after, the local aristocracy began to collect taxes on behalf of the Mongols. Kirakos Gandzakets'i writes that the nobles of the districts collaborated in levying taxes with too much zeal and for their own profit.⁷⁴ Artisans in both villages and cities were taxed.⁷⁵ The Mongols demanded precious metals for themselves, and the tributes were calculated annually.⁷⁶ They also taxed the merchants and arrogated all the salt mines, but nothing was taken from the clergy.⁷⁷ Fiscal exemption was an instrument the Mongols used regularly as an incentive

⁷⁰ On the meaning of the terms and functions of these offices, see Atwood 2004, 134; Morgan 2007, 94-5.

⁷¹ A tablet of authority. See Morgan 2007, 91-2; Atwood 2004, 433-4 and Lane 2009, 34.

⁷² On the life and career of Arghun Aqa see above, note 51.

⁷³ Grigor Arknerts'i, tr. Blake and Frye 1949, 319-20.

⁷⁴ Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 299.

⁷⁵ «They began recording everyone from age eleven up exempting the women. And they demanded the most severe taxes, more than a man could bear; and people became impoverished»: Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 299.

⁷⁶ Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 300.

⁷⁷ Brosset 1851, 308; Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 300.

to insure the church's collaboration.⁷⁸ Taxation was a means of feeding the administrative apparatus, the army foremost because of the urgent military needs of the period.

In 1256, the Caucasus was put under the command of Hülegü (ca. 1218-1265), grandson of Chinggis Khan and brother of both Möngke and Qubilai. Hülegü had been sent westward to stabilize the Middle East. After Hülegü had taken over Baiju, the administrative situation gradually changed. The peripheral *uluses* developed increasing political autonomy from the Great Khan and the administrative machinery was, year after year, molded to local requirements; the census soon became an instrument of the Ilkhanid Treasury and was organized according to local urgencies.⁷⁹

Records of the taxation system adopted by the Mongols in the Caucasus are insufficient to reconstruct a clear picture of the situation. Nonetheless, it is possible to track a general framework of what taxes were imposed and when and how the fiscal pressure affected the local economic structure. In the first decades following the conquest, taxation was arbitrary, harsh and exacerbated the crisis already evident in the 1220s. In general, the Mongols overturned the fiscal system of Subcaucasia, imposing new levies and at times modifying existing ones. Control over resources and productivity was a priority for the Mongols, and they soon learned how to build and organize the administrative machinery.⁸⁰ Throughout the decades, the fiscal pressure was essentially unchanged; however, the system of taxation became more regimented and systematic.

Between the 1220s and the final conquest of the Caucasus, a continuous realignment of the boundaries in the whole region, together with the destabilization of the centers of power directly related to the battles, was exacerbated by the lack of a centralized power able to exert its supremacy in the rural areas. For decades following the Mongol conquest,

⁷⁸ Allsen 1987, 121; Dashdondog 2011, 109.

⁷⁹ After 1254, there were few other censuses taken in Armenia and Georgia. Probably in 1273 and 1314. Dashdondog 2011, 110.

⁸⁰ Allsen 1987, 121.

the condition of the countryside worsened and agrarian production diminished as agricultural lands reverted to pastures.⁸¹ The cities also were involved in the decline and demographic collapse, especially impacting the male population.

Military cooperation

Subcaucasia was directly affected by the dynastic troubles occurring inside the Mongol empire after the death of Möngke in 1259. The fragile political equilibrium between the Jochids and the Toluids, i.e. the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate, was shaken and forced the Caucasian aristocracy to recalibrate its alliances with the Mongols. The relations between the Golden Horde and the local aristocracy were, all-in-all, peaceful and they became even better when Batu died (1255) and his Christian son Sartaq (r. 1255-7) succeeded him. The situation changed again when Sartaq died, under suspicious circumstances, and his Muslim uncle Berke (r. 1257-67) assumed power. Finally, it was Hülegü who changed the political situation by putting Iran under his direct rule and creating the Ilkhanate. The Georgian and Armenian aristocracy now was bound tightly to the Mongol leading class and the military became of primary importance.

As a matter of fact, the Mongols forced their subjects to participate in their military campaigns. For the local aristocracy, it was sometimes necessary to contribute in order to get some immediate advantages from them. Therefore, the intervention of Armenian and Georgian forces in Mongol military operations was not an isolated incident. In general, it was profitable for both the Caucasian aristocracy and the Mongols themselves. The benefits mostly accrued to King Hethum I of Lesser Armenia, who needed backing against

⁸¹ Even if extensive and methodical research on land administration during the Mongol rule in Caucasia does not exist, there are some very important studies on the same topic, but specifically for the Ilkhanate, that can help draw a picture of the general situation and better understand the main issues. See for example Petrushevsky 1968; Lambton 1991 and Lane 2003.

the Islamic powers in the region. Greater Armenia and Georgia were in a more complex position. They both suffered heavily during Hülegü's campaign of the 1250s in Iraq and Syria and especially later on, during the war between the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde. Around mid-1200, the whole Caucasian region was gripped by Mongol power on one side and the Muslim independent States on the other; the Isma'ilis (Assassins), in the territory between Syria and Northern Iran, and the Caliphate of Baghdad. When Hülegü began the military campaign in the Middle East against the Caliphate, the Armenian and Georgian aristocracy took the opportunity to eliminate the menace and joined the Mongol armies. The attack on the stronghold of the Assassins in Alamut – which ended with the fall of the city in November 1256 - was planned and executed with the aid of David Lasha. Prince Zak'are, son of Shahanshah, participated in the operations against Baghdad in 1258⁸² and the Armenian aristocracy was fully involved, as well.⁸³ Eastern Christianity embraced the conquest of Baghdad by Hülegü's army as divine revenge.⁸⁴ The Mongols massacred the Muslim population of the city but spared the Christians.⁸⁵ Hülegü gave the palace of the vice chancellor to the Nestorian patriarch Makhika. Kirakos describes the fall of Baghdad in joyful terms and states that all the Oriental Christians were exulting because after 647 years the "Muslim tyranny" had finally ended.⁸⁶

In the summer of 1258 in Maragha (Azerbaijan), Hülegü received all his principal vassals including the Armenian and the Georgian princes. It was probably on this occasion that Hethum I asked Hülegü to intervene in the liberation of the Holy Land, and Hülegü accepted.⁸⁷ By 1259, the Mongols started a campaign against Syria.⁸⁸ The Armenian

⁸² Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 315.

⁸³ "[Hulegu] sent the valiant Prhosh and others as emissaries to the caliph, so that he would come out obediently and pay taxes to the Khan": Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 316; Dashdondog 2011, 129.

⁸⁴ Grousset 1965, 430; Gilli-Elewy 2011, 356.

⁸⁵ Gilli-Elewy 2011, 367.

⁸⁶ Kirakos Ganjakets'i, tr. Bedrosian 1986, 315-6.

⁸⁷ Dashdondog 2011, 136; Amitai-Preiss 2004, 24-5.

⁸⁸ Amitai-Preiss 2004, 16-7.

Prince Prosh Khaghbakian, together with units of the Cilician army, participated in the siege of the fortress of Mayyafariqin in the spring of the same year.⁸⁹ David Ulu, King of Georgia, refused to participate. Hethum, instead, zealously participated in the operations and triumphally entered Damascus on March 1, 1260. The rewards from this military victory were enormous for the little kingdom of Cilicia as Hethum received land and fortresses in Cappadocia, Mesopotamia and Syria, all fruits of the Mongol booty.

By mid-1260 Hülegü and the Mongols appeared invincible. But on September 3, 1260 a decisive battle occurred in `Ayn Jālūt (in north Palestine).⁹⁰ Many Georgians and Armenians died in the conflict.⁹¹ The defeat suffered by the Mongols in Syria also marked the end of Hethum's dreams of expansion. The Cilician king had to withdraw and fight to contain the Mamluk power in the region, especially after his repeated attempts to conquer the territories in northern Syria all ended in failure.

The constant need for money to fund the military campaigns in Syria and Egypt prompted hard levies and continuous requests for troops. These factors were at the heart of the revolt of the Georgian nobility against the Mongols, which started in 1259 and was settled in 1262, when the Georgian king, David Ulu, went back to Tiflis and accepted Mongol sovereignty.

This same year marked the clash between the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate. Berke's claim on Transcaucasia, especially on the rich pastures of Azerbaijan, ended in a forceful attack in the north of the country. The Georgians were compelled to grant military support and a garrison was sent to preside over the fortress of Siba (today in the Iranian district of

⁸⁹ Rashid al-Din, tr. Tackston 2012, 360-1; Dashdondog 2011, 134.

⁹⁰ On the event see Amitai-Preiss 1992.

⁹¹ Amitai-Preiss 2004, 26-48 and especially 1992.

Kukherd) in 1263 and in 1265 an army formed by Georgians and Armenians defeated Berke in Shirvan.⁹²

Hülegü died on February 8, 1265. His son Abaqa succeeded him. Hülegü's death gradually altered the conditions of the Caucasian aristocracy. Abaqa's foreign policy was less aggressive than that of his predecessor. He focused mostly on defending and consolidating the Ilkhanate's borders than on expansion. The new Ilkhan nominated the son of Chormaghan, Shiremün, as supervisor of Georgia and Greater Armenia; Shams al-Dīn Juvainī, brother of the historian Ata-Malik, remained as treasurer (*vizier*). The new policy of Abaqa Ilkhan corresponded with the decline of the influence, at court, of the Armenian Zak'arian family, who failed to collect the required amount of taxes. On the other hand, the Artsrunids - one of the oldest Armenian noble families that had its own district in Vaspurakan – increased its influence.⁹³ Sadun Artsruni (d. 1284) was the military commander of Awag Zak'arian and had fought with the Mongol army in Syria.⁹⁴

The Armenian and Georgian aristocracy were always involved in the war between the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate. However, a new menace emerged from the Orient; the khanate of Chaghatay, led by Baraq Khan (r. 1266-71), had attempted to penetrate Iran and take advantage of the conflict between the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate. The latter now had to confront two dangers simultaneously.

The only non-Toluid army in Iran was at this time under the command of the Chaghadayid prince Tegüder, who had accompanied Hülegü during the campaign in Iran and had received an appanage in Georgia. After Hülegü's death in 1265, Tegüder joined the cause of the Chaghadayids. Trying to join Baraq via Derbent, Tegüder asked to return to his appanage in Georgia. King David V refused and Tegüder remained stuck there. David

⁹² Dashdondog 2011, 154.

⁹³ Dashdondog 2011, 166.

⁹⁴ Dashdondog 2012, 21.

Narin sheltered him in Imereti, but his behaviour in Georgia – pillaging villages and caravans and insulting the clergy – provoked the rage of the local population, who urged Abaqa to summon him back. When Tegüder refused (or because he had found out about his plans) Abaqa attacked him, defeating him in 1270, with the help of the Georgian and Armenian troops headed by King David V.⁹⁵

In 1270 both Hethum I and David Ulu died. The politics of the Cilician kingdom did not change and continued with Lewon II (r. 1269-1289), the successor of Hethum. Since the mid-1270s the Mamluks made several raids into Cilicia, especially near the coasts, inflicting huge damage to its economy.

In 1277, 3,000 Georgians participated in the battle of Abulistan, where the Mamluk army defeated the Mongols.⁹⁶ Again, Caucasian forces played an important role in the Ilkhanid army that fought the Mamluks in Battle of Homs in 1281.⁹⁷ Abaqa could not participate in the battle since he was fighting against the army of the Golden Horde in the area of Derbend.⁹⁸ The Mongol-Caucasian army suffered a harsh defeat at Homs. Abaqa received the news and decided to counterattack as soon as the political and military situation of the Ilkhanate allowed him to do so. In March 1282, Abaqa moved the army to Hamadan, but on April 1 he died.⁹⁹ Abaqa's death marked the end of the collaboration between the Ilkhanate and the Caucasian powers, especially the Armenians.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ See on episode Biran 2002, 187-8. *Kartlis Tskhovreba* 2014, 364. Grigor Arknerts'i, tr. Blake and Frye 1949, 377. Jackson 2017, 148-9.

⁹⁶ "And there were present with the Tatars three thousand Iberians, and as the result of the great resistance which they offered, two thousand of them were killed": Bar Hebraeus 1932, XI, 536. Tsursumia 2014: 105-106.

⁹⁷ Amitai-Preiss 2004, 195.

⁹⁸ Dashdondog 2011, 174.

⁹⁹ Amitai-Preiss 2004, 201.

¹⁰⁰ This is the opinion of Dashdondog 2011, 175 that I agree with.

The Mongols and the Caucasus in the later part of the Ilkhanate

On May 6, 1282, Tegüder (r. 1282-1284), Hülegü's younger son and Abaqa's brother, was elected Ilkhan. Tegüder was a zealous Muslim, but not always hostile towards Christians. He adopted the title of Sultan in addition to Ilkhan and took the name of Ahmad.¹⁰¹ The Armenian aristocracy supported Tegüder's rival, Arghun, the elder son of Abaqa. The majority of the Georgian aristocracy, except for King Demetre (r. 1270-89) was bound to Alinaq,¹⁰² son-in-law of Tegüder, and supported the latter. Tegüder was executed on August 10, 1284. The party of Arghun, championed by the Armenians, had won. The Ilkhanate of Arghun (r. 1284-91) was favorable to the Armenian nobles and to the church in particular. According to Stepannos Orbelian, 150 monasteries were tax exempt.¹⁰³ On the other hand, the situation became difficult for the Georgians; in 1289, Arghun executed the Georgian King Dmitri the Devoted (r. 1270-1289). The new king of Georgia was Vakhtang II (1289-1292), grandson of Queen Rusudan and chosen by the Ilkhan in person in collaboration with Khutlu Bugha, son of the Armenian noble Sadun Artsruni. Arghun was succeeded by his brother and viceroy in Anatolia Geikhatu (r. 1291-95).¹⁰⁴ In the same period, Lewon II (r. 1269/70-89) died in Cilicia and power devolved to Hethum II (r.1289-93). Since the Mamluk conquest of Syria and Palestine, Ayas had become one of the most important hubs for long-range commerce and a fundamental link between Central Asia and the Western European markets.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it became a target of the Mamluks, who attacked it many times with varying results since 1275. Particularly in the 1290s, Cilicia suffered from the increasing expansion of the Mamluks in the Mediterranean.

¹⁰¹ Rashid al-Din, tr. Thackston 2012, 389.

¹⁰² According to Rashid al-Din (tr. Thackston 2013, 47), Alinaq was son of Tügür Bitigchi, commander of a hundred at Hülegü's service.

¹⁰³ Stepannos Orbelian, tr. Brosset 1864, 229-30. See also Dashdondog 2011, 181.

¹⁰⁴ Rashid al-Din, tr. Thackston 2012, 408; Boyle 1968, 372.

¹⁰⁵ De Nersessian 1962: 655.

The Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate achieved peace in 1294. In 1295, Geikhatu died¹⁰⁶ and his successor was Baidu, whose rule lasted for just nine months.¹⁰⁷

The election of the next Ilkhan deeply affected the economic and social picture in the Caucasus: after having eliminated Baidu, the Muslim Ghazan Ilkhan took power in 1295, thereby making Islam the state religion of the Ilkhanate.¹⁰⁸ Ghazan redistributed many resources in the government; he reformed the treasury and reorganized the system of taxation. As soon as he was elected, Ghazan appointed Nawruz, Arghun Aqa's son and a devout Muslim, as first emir, and who, according to the Armenian and Georgian sources, was known as very hostile towards the Christians.¹⁰⁹ The anti-Christian repression was systematic in the years spanning the 13th and the early 14th centuries and it provoked frequent revolts by the Caucasian nobility. The situation became so tense that in 1297 Ghazan expelled Nawruz to Khorasan and replaced him with the more moderate Qutlugh shah (d. 1307).¹¹⁰ The latter reached an agreement with the Caucasian nobility, in particular with the Georgian King David VIII (r. 1293-1311). However, King David was compromised since he had supported Ghazan's rival, Baidu, during the fight for the Ilkhanid throne. In fact, David VIII was deposed by Ghazan in 1299. King George V (The Brilliant, 1286 or 1289-11346) was selected as David's replacement. George had been brought up by the Atabeg of Meskhia (southwestern Georgia) and was deposed after incurring the wrath of Ghazan.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Rashid al-Din, tr. Thackston 2012, 415.

¹⁰⁷ Dashdondog 2011, 189; Melville 2007, 54-5.

¹⁰⁸ On Ghazan see Luisetto 2007, Melville 1990 and Boyle 1968, 379-97.

¹⁰⁹ Jackson 2017, 369-70. Nawruz was the son of Arghun Aqa and had personally contributed to bringing Ghazan to power; Boyle 1968, 380; Rashid al-Din, tr. Thackston 2012, 440. Step'annos Orbelean, tr. Bedrosian 2012-5, 238-9.

¹¹⁰ Dashdondog 2011, 197. According to Step'annos Orbelean, Nawruz plotted against Ghazan. His plan was discovered with the help of Armenian princes and Nawruz was executed with his family in 1297.

¹¹¹ Lang 1955, 75.

Ghazan was also a fervent Muslim and during his rule Islam thrived in the whole Ilkhanate.¹¹² The same situation continued with Öljeitü, the successor of Ghazan. Under Öljeitü, the two tendencies above mentioned – strong concentration of resources on internal affairs and increasing affirmation of Islam - became the distinctive features of the Ilkhanate. Even if, after 1308, these measures were eased and Christians at large were exempted from taxation.¹¹³

George's successor to the Georgian throne was, in this period, the son of David VIII, known as George the Little (1273-1311); but the latter was assisted by George the Brilliant (who would rule alone again only from 1314). Öljeitü's rule coincided with an increasing fiscal pressure on Greater Armenia, as confirmed by a colophon written in Erzurum in 1314.¹¹⁴ Another colophon written in the monastery of Glajor in the same year states that the Mongol tax collectors arrived and registered "even those children who were a month old".¹¹⁵

Taxation on non-Muslims (*Jizya*) was permanently reintroduced in the Ilkhanate by Abu Sa'id (r. 1316-1335).¹¹⁶ A colophon written in the monastery of Varag in 1318 recounts that the Ilkhan issued orders that all Christians should be taxed "on account of their faith in Christ [...] and they collect more levies from us ecclesiastics without the specific instructions of the xan".¹¹⁷

In these years, the hostilities between the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde reached a climax. The Arabic and Persian sources describe how the army of Özbek Khan (r. 1313-41) infiltrated the region, arriving at the Kura River, after having passed through Arran and

¹¹² On Ghazan, see Boyle 1968, 378 and ff. On the conversion of the Ilkhan there is a very interesting colophon, originally from the monastery of SS. Apostles in Muš and published by A. Sirinian 2010, 512-3.

¹¹³ Jackson 2017, 371.

¹¹⁴ Sanjan 1969, 58; quoted also in Dashdondog 2011, 208.

¹¹⁵ The author of another colophon written in 1315 confirms the situation. "We have become feeble and lean, emaciated and languished; we are nearing death and hell, and our loins have been lowered to the ground": Sanjan 1969, 59.

¹¹⁶ Jackson 2017, 372.

¹¹⁷ Sanjan 1969, 60.

Shirvan in 1318-19. The Ilkhanid forces retaliated and Chupan (d. 1327),¹¹⁸ the powerful minister of the Ilkhan Abu Saī'id (r. 1316-35), headed to the Caucasus in order to pillage the southern territory of the Golden Horde in 1325.¹¹⁹

The relations between Georgia and the Ilkhanate improved during the reign of George V. The king tried to cement the relationship with the Mongol governor of Georgia and succeeded in having just a military garrison, a *tūmen*, there, and no other control by the Ilkhanid court.¹²⁰

In the same years, Georgia was becoming an object of increasing interest to Western Christians, and that convinced King George of the necessity of securing his borders and keeping the aristocracy under control. The papacy tried to retain Georgia under its sphere of influence and bring the autocephalous church of Georgia back to Roman Christianity. Pope John XXII's appeals fell on deaf ears. Nonetheless, Tiflis was made a diocese by Pope John XXII in 1329. The Dominican John of Florence was the first Roman Catholic bishop of Tiflis.¹²¹

Chupan fell into disfavor with Ilkhan Abu Saī'id and was executed in 1327. The good relations with Chupan established by George began to deteriorate and the next commander of Gurjistan – Iqbāl Shāh¹²² – was not as close to the Christian king as his predecessor.

The sources are divided on the consequences of Chupan's execution in Georgia. According to the Georgian ones, the Christian king succeeded in exploiting the weak

¹¹⁸ On Chupan see Melville 1999.

¹¹⁹ Tizengauzen 1941, 100-1, 142-3; Lang 1955, 80.

¹²⁰ Al-Qalqashandī in Lang 1955, 77.

¹²¹ Lang 1955, 81; Richard 1998, 173-4.

¹²² Son of Qutlughshāh and elected in 1327. Lang 1955, 83.

Mongolian protection to his advantage and, one after another, he regained all the lost territories, to the point that "in all of Georgia there were no more Tatars."¹²³

The Arab and Persian sources offer a very different version of the facts.¹²⁴ Chupan's death and the progressive disintegration of the Ilkhanate produced an inexorable weakening of George's power and the king was never able to reacquire the lost territories. The Armenian colophons confirm this reconstruction. If, until 1323, George V is described as the king of Georgia and Great Armenia, only a few years later he is awarded the sole title of king of Georgia. From 1332, the name of the sovereign definitively disappears from the Armenian sources.

In the late 1330s, Georgia (Gurjistan) still paid tribute to the Ilkhans, but the amount was much lower than had been paid in previous years.¹²⁵ According to the Persian Qazvini (1281-1349) - who wrote a geographical survey in 1339-40 - Georgia paid the Ilkhanid Treasury 1,202,000 dinars in 1336. Before the Mongol invasion, the Georgian treasury collected, in a comparable territory, almost five times as much.¹²⁶ Although the figures provided by the Persian historian for the first decades of the 13th century are not reliable, it is interesting to note how the author emphasizes the drastically lower sum paid.

In the first half of the 14th century, there were two active mints in eastern Georgia: one in Tbilisi and one in Kahezia, near the border with Shirvan.¹²⁷ The currency issued by the two institutes, of which an almost uninterrupted series is preserved - from the Ilkhanate of Abu Said to the mid-14th century - is identical to that issued by Ilkhanid mints in the same period. If George V had achieved independence from the Ilkhans, he would never have

¹²³ For a survey of the question, see Lang 1955, especially pp. 82-90; Charachidzé 1970, 133.

¹²⁴ Hafiz-i-Abri, trad. Bayani, II, 107, 131, 136 and 148; also Lang 1955, 84.

¹²⁵ Suny 1994, 44.

¹²⁶ Hamd-Allah Mustawfi, tr. Le Strange 1919, 94.

¹²⁷ Lang 1955: 85.

issued coins in the name of the Mongols. Thus, in the mid-14th century, Tbilisi and Eastern Georgia were strictly subjects of the Ilkhanate.

Several attempts by the Georgian monarchy to recover from continuing Mongol domination were frustrated by a series of traumatic events. The Black Plague devastated Europe and did not spare Caucasia (the epidemic arrived in this area in the 1360s). The campaign of Timur (Tamerlane), started against the Qipchaqs, soon moved to the Caucasus (1380s) and the Mongol armies invaded Georgia several times. The consequences of the Timurid incursions in Georgia and in Greater Armenia were enormous not only because of their intensity, but also because the monarchy was weak and the population exhausted. The recovery was, in fact, very slow and involved, at least, the first two decades of the 14th century.

Conclusions. The Mongol legacy in the Caucasus

The consequences of the Mongol domination in the Caucasus were manifold and, in some cases, reverberated through the following centuries. However, the costs were often less significant compared to other areas of the Mongol Empire. Specifically, the dominant political role acquired by the kingdom of Georgia at the dawn of the 13th century was significantly reduced by the harshness of the conquest and the mode of domination. The Christian kingdom never did recover the status reached with the Bagratid branch of King David IV and Queen Tamara. The patient policy, carried out by George V in the 14th century, during the years when the Ilkhanate was losing its authority in Caucasia, led to a sort of partial and ephemeral unity among the Georgian aristocracy. In Armenia, the upshots of the Mongol domination were even starker. Armenia was, at the time of the Mongol invasion, a complex system of power tied to the Georgian crown by vassalage bonds. Because of the collaborative posture of the local nobility, Caucasia did not suffer

the destruction that occurred in other areas of the empire (Russia, Central Asia and China). Since the beginning of their rule, the Mongols relied upon an indirect administrative model, preferring to control instead of govern personally. After the formation of the Ilkhanate, the focal point of power moved southwards and the political conduct of Caucasia became more indirect and relied on the local aristocracy. The end of the Ilkhanate did not immediately correspond to the end of the Mongol rule in the Caucasus, but started a process of political re-adaptation whose more immediate outlook was the fragmentation of power and the disappearance of a hegemonic center. The situation was different for Lesser Armenia because since the early 1240s it profited from collaboration with the Mongols. First, to reinforce its borders against the menace coming from the surrounding polities — especially from the Mamluks — and to grant security to its international trade seaports. The peace signed between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks (1323), and then the collapse of the Ilkhanate itself, accelerated the decline of Cilician Armenia, which fell in 1375.

The creation of the Mongol Empire represents a seminal event in the history of medieval international trade that had direct consequences for the Caucasus. The Mongol conquest opened new trade routes, and international commerce was revitalized in areas almost unknown to Western Europe. The Mongols destroyed many important economic centers in the Caucasus, but moved the focal point of production and exchanges elsewhere, causing the growth of cities like Tabriz and Maragha that had been previously marginalized in international trade.

The unification of a territory that, at its zenith, covered two-thirds of Asia and one-third of Europe was an authentic cultural revolution. The better prepared Italian cities (especially Venice and Genoa) abandoned Constantinople as the arrival point for trade and brought their investments to the Black Sea, creating trade centers that in some cases became real homelands away from Italy (it is, for instance, the case of Caffa in Crimea, Tana on the

Azov sea, or Savastopoli in Georgia). The Mongol domination in Subcaucasia favored the mobility of merchants from all over; the security of the trade routes was enhanced and in some areas productivity increased. Specialized manpower was forcibly moved from their native countries to workshops at the court of the Great Khan. Production became better organized, as evidenced by the records produced by the Italian notaries and merchants active on the eastern coast of the Black Sea in these decades. The new domination did not invent a large-scale market, but made it much more substantial than before. The records show how the Mongols not only favored trade and traders but directly participated into it. The *Pratica della mercatura* of the Italian merchant Francesco di Balduccio Pegolotti is a marvelous example of how normal it had become to work in these areas of the world.¹²⁸ The Caucasus was a natural frontier and, at the same time, the connection between Europe and Asia, especially for the Italian traders who had their ships docked in Savastopoli, Kerč, Tana or Trebizond.¹²⁹

The Mongol legacy on Caucasian culture is less evident, but is not entirely insignificant.¹³⁰ It is interesting to note some changes in Caucasian religious architecture during the Mongol period. Since the second half of the 13th century, private commissions - particularly by local noble families - increased.¹³¹ The churches, in particular, were financed by the aristocracy, who wanted to appear as *patron* and visibly display their power, wealth and proximity to the ruling class. In other words, the sacred buildings became symbolic of the social status of the patron. The decorative sculpture of the sacred buildings became increasingly significant. The churches were constructed in more isolated places and were generally taller rather than larger, as the architectural focal point moved to the outside. The monastery of Gandzar, today in the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh, is

¹²⁸ Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, ed. Evans 1932.

¹²⁹ Several names from the Mongol Ilkhans were borrowed in Italy. See on this hypotheses Jackson 2005, 315.

¹³⁰ See on this Allsen 2009.

¹³¹ Lala Comneno 2010, 582.

one of the best-preserved examples of this trend.¹³² Local aristocracy bound to the Mongols improved its position and became relatively wealthier.

We can find Mongol influence also in Caucasian medieval literature. The several Armenian chronicles and the Georgian records are selected examples. But poetry too was affected by the Mongol domination, as documented by several Armenian authors. The Mongols became part of the Armenian and Georgian collective imagination and contributed to the strengthening of local identity based on religion. In the works of Armenian poet Kostandin,¹³³ from the city of Erzindjan and active between the 13th and 14th centuries, the Mongols are a constant presence. In a poem written in the aftermath of Ghazan death, Kostandin focuses on human mortality and the emptiness of material wealth. The central corpus of this poem refers to the death of the Ilkhan, who died at only 30 years of age. Despite the favorable judgment of the statesman, Kostandin describes Ghazan as a vacuous man, intent on pursuing wealth and power, both ephemeral glories, destined not to last. Only nature represents permanent beauty, since it is a divine creation, a sign that the Ilkhanid court lived in luxury and an abundance of material goods. In Kostandin's work the Mongols represent the political power that, no longer tyrannical and oppressive, remains alien to the population and far from the True Faith.¹³⁴

The Mongols are also a constant presence in the oeuvre of Armenian poet Frik, a contemporary of Kostandin.¹³⁵ In a poem composed in the early 14th century, the author describes the figure of Arghun. The Mongol ruler is legitimately in power since God's will installed him. He is a cruel man to Christians, and during his reign the fiscal weight yoked to them is unbearable. Nonetheless, Frik utterly criticizes the attempted coup of Bugha, who is depicted as a symbol of the devil. According to Frik, the Ilkhan's hostility towards

¹³² Lala Comneno 2010, 583-6.

¹³³ On Kostandin of Erznka see Dadoyan 2014, 114-116; Van Lint 2010, 457.

¹³⁴ Van Lint 2010, 465-66.

¹³⁵ Van Lint 2010, 468-73.

the oppressed Armenian people does not justify the overthrow of a power seen by the poet as legitimate. In the first decades of the 14th century, the authors had elaborated literary models to represent the ruling elite.¹³⁶

Politically, the consequences of Mongol domination in the Caucasus were certainly negative, even though it is still difficult to establish to what extent the Chinggisid invasions were the direct cause of subsequent events, or how they accelerated processes started earlier. In fact, since the mid-13th century, Caucasia lost its political center. As stated above, the power fragmentation consistently increased and — together with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the Empire of Trebizond in 1461 — reduced the two major Christian kingdoms in the region to an even more marginal role, accelerating the progressive Islamization of the Caucasus.

At the end of the 14th century, the Caucasus was exhausted and had to face a new enemy, the Ottomans. In the following decades, Europe would now have to confront this new, much closer threat.

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¹³⁶ This aspect has been deeply studied by T.M. Van Lint. In his work (see Van Lint 2010), the author gives a detailed analysis of the two poets' works and the influence of the Mongol presence on Armenian medieval poetry.

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David Narin "The Younger"
David Ulu "The Elder"
David V
David VIII, also George the Little
Demetre, Georgian King
Derbend
Dmitri the Devoted

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 Elbrus Mount
Enchu
 Erzindjan
 Erzurum
 Eurasian steppe
 Europe
 Franks
 Frik, Armenian Poet
 Gandzakets'i, Kirakos, see Kirakos
 Gandzakets'i
 Gandzar, Monastery
 Ganja
 Geikhatu Ilkhan
 Genoa
 George IV Lasha
 George V "The Brilliant"
 Ghazan Ilkhan
 Ghiyāth al-Dīn, Sultan of Rūm
 Glajor, Armenian Monastery
 Golden Horde, also Ulus Jochi
 Gontsa, Georgian Queen
 Great Khan
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 Güyük Qa'an
 Hayton, Cilician Monk
Hazarapet
 Hethum I, King of Cilicia, 8
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Injü, also *enchu*
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 Iwanē, *Atabeg*
 Jālāl al-Dīn
 Jizya
 Jochi, Ulus
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 John of Florence, Bishop of Tiflis
 John XXII, Pope
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 Kalka River
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 Karin see Erzurum
 Kay-Khusraw, Seljuk Sultan of Rūm
 Kerč
 Khunan plain
 Khutlu Bugha
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 Kirakos Gandzakets'i, also Gandzakets'i
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 Lewon II, Cilician King
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 Mamistra, Port of Cilicia
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Mayyafariqin, Fortress
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 Mughan, Plain
 Muḥammad, Khwārazm Shāh
 Nagorno Karabakh
 Nawruz, Emir
 Nicaea
Noyan
 Ögödei Qa'an
 Öljeitü Ilkhan
 Orbelian, Stepannos
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 Özbek Khan
Paiza
 Palestine
 Pegolotti, Francesco di Balduccio
 Prosh Khaghbakian, Armenian Prince
 Qazvini, Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī
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Qubchur
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 Rusudan
 Sadun Artsruni
 Sartaq Qa'an
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 Shams al-Dīn Juvainī
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 Siba, Fortress
 Smbat Orbelian, Armenian Prince
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 Tagüder
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 Tbilisi, see Tiflis
 Tegüder, Chaghadayid Prince
 Terunakan, Fortress
 Tiflis, also Tbilisi
 Timur, also Tamerlane
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Tümen
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Ulus
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 Vakhtang II, Georgian King
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