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# THE MONGOLS AND GLOBAL HISTORY

A NORTON DOCUMENTS READER

*Morris Rossabi*

*City University of New York*



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Buddhist monks and Daoists, going this way and that, and the sounds of drums and music are everywhere.

Zhou Daganan, *A Record of Cambodia*, translated by Peter Harris (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 56–58.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does this section of Zhou's report reveal about Chinese attitudes toward foreigners?
2. Most travelers during the *Pax Mongolica* were merchants and missionaries, but Zhou was an official emissary. Why would the Mongol rulers of China send Zhou on this official embassy to the modern country of Cambodia?

## E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*

*Rabban Sauma (d. 1294) was the first man from China attested to have reached Europe. A Nestorian Christian, he and another monk received permission from the Mongols in China to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. They arrived in Mongol-ruled Iran to discover that the Mamluks, an Islamic dynasty, controlled the Holy Land, preventing the two Nestorian clerics from fulfilling their dream. The two decided to remain in the Middle East, leading to Rabban Sauma's great adventure.*

*In 1287, the Il-Khan Arghun sought to propose an alliance with the Europeans to topple the Mamluk dynasty, their common enemy. He recruited Rabban Sauma as his envoy, and the Nestorian monk traveled to the Byzantine empire, Naples, Rome, Paris, Bordeaux, and Genoa. He met with King Philip IV of France and King Edward I of England, both of whom professed interest in a crusade against the Mamluks, an extraordinary alliance had it been effected. However, both kings faced domestic insurrections and conflicts with other European states, preventing them from pursuing such an entente. Moreover, they may not have trusted the Mongols; after all, the Mongols had conquered much of Russia and attacked Hungary and Poland.*

*Rabban Sauma returned to the Il-Khanate, believing that he had achieved a diplomatic coup. He then produced an account of his travels, much of which deals with his theological discussions with the College of Cardinals and the Pope, the sacred sites and churches he visited, and the hazards of travel. This account offers a unique Eastern view of the West. His diplomatic mission turned out to be a failure but offered the opportunity for endless discussion and speculation about the consequences of such an alliance and the potential defeat of the most important remaining Islamic dynasty.*

There are many Mongols who are Christians. For many of the sons of the Mongol kings and queens have been baptized and confess Christ. And they have established churches in their military camps, and they pay honour to the Christians, and there are among them many who are believers. Now the king [of the Mongols], who is joined in the bond of friendship with the Catholics, hath the desire to take Palestine, and the countries of Syria, and he demandeth from you help in order to take Jerusalem. He hath chosen me and hath sent me to you because, being a Christian, my word will be believed by you."

\*\*\*

## Rabban Sawma in Fransa or Frangestan

Afterwards they went to the country of Pariz (Paris), to king Francis [i.e. Philippe IV le Bel]. And the king sent out a large company of men to meet them, and they brought them into the city with great honour and ceremony. Now the territories of the French king were in extent more than a month's journey. And the king of France assigned to Rabban Sawma a place wherein to dwell, and three days later sent one of his Amirs to him and summoned him to his presence. And when he had come the king stood up before him and paid him honour, and said unto him, "Why hast thou come? And who sent thee?" And Rabban Sawma said unto him, "King Arghon and the Catholics of the East have sent me concerning the matter of Jerusalem." And he showed him all the matters which he knew, and he gave him the letters which he had with him, and the gifts, that is to say, presents which he had brought. And the king of France answered

him, saying, "If it be indeed so that the Mongols, though they are not Christians, are going to fight against the Arabs for the capture of Jerusalem, it is meet especially for us that we should fight [with them], and if our Lord willeth, go forth in full strength."

And Rabban Sawma said unto him, "Now that we have seen the glory of thy kingdom, and have looked upon the splendour of your strength with the eye of flesh, we ask you to command the men of the city to show us the churches, and the shrines, and the relics of the saints, and everything else which is found with you, and is not to be seen in any other country, so that when we return we may make known in the [various] countries what we have seen with you." Then the king commanded his Amirs, saying, "Go forth and show them all the wonderful things which we have here, and afterwards I myself will show [them] what I have." And the Amirs went out with them.

And Rabban Sawma and his companions remained for a month of days in this great city of Paris, and they saw everything that was in it. There were in it thirty thousand scholars [*i.e.* pupils] who were engaged in the study of ecclesiastical books of instruction, that is to say of commentaries and exegesis of all the Holy Scriptures, and also of profane learning; and they studied wisdom, that is to say philosophy, and [the art of] speaking (rhetoric?), and [the art of] healing; geometry, arithmetic, and the science of the planets and the stars; and they engaged constantly in writing [theses], and all these pupils received money for subsistence from the king. And they also saw one Great Church wherein were the funerary coffers of dead kings, and statues of them in gold and in silver were upon their tombs. And five hundred monks were engaged in performing commemoration services in the burial-place [*i.e.* mausoleum] of the kings, and they all ate and drank at the expense of the king. And they fasted and prayed continually in the burial-place of those kings. And the crowns of those kings, and their armour, and their apparel were laid upon their tombs. In short Rabban Sawma and his companions saw everything which was splendid and renowned.

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### Rabban Sawma goes to the King of England [*i.e.* Edward I]

And they went forth from that place, that is to say, from Paris, to go to the king of England, to Kasonia (Gascony?). And having arrived in twenty days at their city [Bordeaux?], the inhabitants of the city went forth to meet them, and they asked them, "Who are ye?" And Rabban Sawma and his companions replied, "We are ambassadors, and we have come from beyond the eastern seas, and we are envoys of the King, and of the Patriarch, and the Kings of the Mongols." And the people made haste and went to the king and informed him [of their arrival], and the king welcomed them gladly, and the people introduced them into his presence. And those who were with Rabban Sawma straightway gave to the king the Pukdana [*i.e.* letter of authorisation] of King Arghon, and the gifts which he had sent to him, and the Letter of Mar Catholicus. And [King Edward] rejoiced greatly, and he was especially glad when Rabban Sawma talked about the matter of Jerusalem. And he said, "We the kings of these cities bear upon our bodies the sign of the Cross, and we have no subject of thought except this matter. And my mind is relieved on the subject about which I have been thinking, when I hear that King Arghon thinketh as I think." And the king commanded Rabban Sawma to celebrate the Eucharist, and he performed the Glorious Mysteries; and the king and his officers of state stood up, and the king partook of the Sacrament, and made a great feast that day.

Then Rabban Sawma said unto the king, "We beseech thee, O king, to give [thy servants] the order to show us whatever churches and shrines there are in this country, so that when we go back to the Children of the East we may give them descriptions of them."

\*\*\*

And that same night [the Arabs] seized Mar Catholicus in his Cell [*i.e.* palace] in Maraghab, and outside the building no man knew anything about the seizure of him until the day broke. And from the morning of that day, which was the second day of the week (Monday) they went into his Cell and plundered everything that was in it, both that which was old and that which was new, and they did not leave even a nail in the walls.

And on the night of the third day of the week (Tuesday) following, which was the 27th day of 'Ilul (September), the Catholicus was buffeted the whole night long by those who had seized him. And in respect of the venerable men who were with him, the Arabs tied some of them up naked with ropes; others cast aside their apparel and took to flight, and others cast themselves down from high places [and perished]. And they suspended the Catholicus by a rope head downwards, and they took a cloth used for cleaning, that is to say, a duster, and they put ashes in it, and tied it over his mouth, and one prodded him in the breast with a skewer (*bukšina*), saying, "Abandon this Faith of thine that thou perish not; become a Hagaraya (Muhammadan) and thou shalt be saved." And the Catholicus, weeping, answered them never a word. And they smote him with a stick on his thighs and seat (*i.e.* posterior). And they also took him up on to the roof of the Cell, saying, "Give us gold and we will let thee go; point out to us thy treasures, show us the things which thou hast hidden away, and reveal to us thy hiding-things and we will let thee go."

\*\*\*

And then a great tumult took place, and the peoples of the Arabs came with a great rush to destroy the great church of Mar Shalita, the holy martyr, and they destroyed it. And they took everything that was in it, the veils (or hangings), and the vessels and other objects used in the service. And the uproar made by their outcries, and the storm of their shoutings shook almost the earth itself and the inhabitants thereof. Peradventure the reader of this history, since he was not caught in the middle of that storm, may think that the writer is telling a fabulous story; but to speak the real truth, he who stateth what is here written calleth God to witness, that it is impossible for even one of the events which took place to be adequately described and written!

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### King Kazan Pays Honour to Mar Yabhb-Allaha

Now when the sun had descended into the sign of the Ram, and creation was warmed a little, the Catholicus sent one of the monks of the Cell to the victorious King Kazan, to the place called Mughan,

the winter station of all the Mongol Kings, to bless him and to inform [him] concerning the events that had happened to him. And when that monk arrived at the Camp, and he had taken care to see all the Amirs, they introduced him into the presence of the victorious king, and he declared unto him in their entirety all the words which Mar Catholicus had spoken to him saying, "Blessed is thy throne, O king, and it shall stand firm for ever, and thy seed shall be surely seated thereon for ever." And the king asked, "Why did not the Catholicus come to us?" and the monk replied, "Because of the confused state [of his mind]. He was hung up, and cruelly beaten, and his head touched the earth. Through the severe pain which hath been roused in him he was unable to come to do homage to the king, and it is for this reason that he hath sent me to pronounce his blessing upon thee, O my lord, the king. But when the victorious king shall arrive in peace at Tabhriz, whether the Catholicus be sick or whether he be well, he will come to salute thee and do homage to thee."

And God caused these words to find mercy in the eyes of the king, and he gave to the Catholicus a Pukdana, according to custom, in which it was laid down that poll-tax should not be exacted from the Christians; that none of them shall abandon his Faith; that the Catholicus shall live in the state to which he hath been accustomed; that he shall be treated with the respect due to his rank; that he shall rule over his Throne; and shall hold the staff of strength over his dominion [*i.e.* that he shall wield his sceptre with vigour and determination]. And he promulgated an Edict throughout all countries, and addressed it to all the Amirs by their names, and to the soldiers, ordering them to give back everything which they had taken from the Catholicus or from the holy old men by force, and to give back to him what those men of Baghdad and their envoys, whom we have mentioned above, had taken. Moreover, he allotted and despatched to the Catholicus five thousand *dinars* (£2,500) for his expenses, saying, "These will serve him as a supply until he cometh to us."

E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1928), 174, 182-86, 210-11, 213, 220-22.