

LUISETTO, Frédéric, *Arméniens et autres chrétiens d'Orient sous la domination mongole: L'Ilkhanat de Ghâzân 1295-1304*, «Orient Chrétien Médiéval» (Paris: Geuthner, 2007), 262 pp. ISBN: 978-2-7053-3791-9

It must first be noted that no reviewer can approach this work without being unaffected by the fact that the author died at such a tragically young age and that therefore this will be his only book. That he was a remarkable young man and an outstandingly promising scholar is clear from reading the testimonies at the beginning of the work and this impression is reinforced on reading the book.

At first glance the subject area seems exceptionally narrow as the work covers a mere nine years but when it is understood that this work was undertaken as a thesis for a Masters Degree then this relatively brief period can be forgiven and this is the only obvious element that gives the origin of the work away. The rest of the text could actually have been written by a far more mature scholar given the clarity with which Luisetto understands the lacunae in the historical record and the manner in which he seeks to espouse the merits of a more panoramic view of history is clearly enunciated in his introduction where he states;

“Les recherches précédentes ont essentiellement concentré leur activité autour d'un seul groupe en faisant une étude générale des rapports établis entre les Mongols et la communauté choisie. Ainsi Jean-Maurice Fiey a centré ses efforts sur les Syriques. Pour sa part, monsieur Claude Mutaïan oriente son travail sur l'étude des relations arméno-mongoles.” (p. 12)

He is absolutely correct in this assertion, and also realistic in comprehending that the formidable range of languages required to fully explore the various chronicles available to the scholar are a significant handicap to this kind of research in a region that hosted so many diverse ethnic and linguistic groups in parallel to each other.

On reaching the body of the text it immediately becomes apparent that the title of the volume is somewhat misleading in its narrow subtitle; while there is indisputably a privileging of the reign of Ghazan, there is also a clearly ordered explanation of the events that led up to his reign, further clarified by a useful timeline at the back of the book. Rather than expecting the reader to orientate themselves immediately, there is a comprehensive contextualisation that enables the understanding of the wider political and religious currents that influenced the military campaigns of the time and necessitated the need for both a militarily and politically astute leader. The other aspect of this orientation is a detailed analysis of the relationships between the different Christian groups in this period and it is this

that is truly distinctive about this study. By analysing how relations between different Christian denominations and internal divisions in Georgian and Armenian society weakened Christianity in the face of a variety of threats; crusading westerners, an increasingly militant form of Sunni Islam and the shifting sands of Mongol tribal divisions, Luisetto avoids generalisation and treats each faction individually. Ultimately he concludes that the reign of Ghazan was very much a case of *plus ça change*;

Les rapports entre les Mongols et les chrétiens orientaux n'ont pas fondamentalement changé sous le règne de Ghâzân. Hormis les premières années de son pouvoir, marquées par des persecutions religieuses encore jamais vues jusque là, le Khan maintient la ligne directrice de ses prédécesseurs. (p. 233)

Of course as Luisetto points out, Ghazan's reign was also significant in marking "the point of no return", in that by his death the Mongol Empire had become irrevocably Islamic. This was something that had appeared for many years to hang in the balance as traditional Mongol religious beliefs, Buddhism and Christianity all played their part in the battle for the souls of the khans. This book gives a brief introduction to this religious struggle and guides us through the endgame as Islam finally gained ascendancy as the dominant religion of the Il-Khans.

One minor quibble levelled at the editors of the volume is that the confusing plethora of headings, sub-headings and sub-sub-headings was irritating and often unnecessary and the re-organisation and removal of some of these sub-headings would have strengthened the flow of the argument, which often seemed to hold its breath as the reader was interrupted by yet another break in the text. This organisation may be suitable for a Masters Dissertation, but should have been removed when the book was prepared for publication.

In conclusion this was a book to be read with mixed emotions; astonishment that a young scholar could achieve such a breadth of knowledge at a young age and sadness that we will never have the opportunity to see his scholarship evolve. The publishers and editors are to be applauded in bringing this work to a wider audience and it is an extremely useful addition to our knowledge of Christian-Mongol relations.

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