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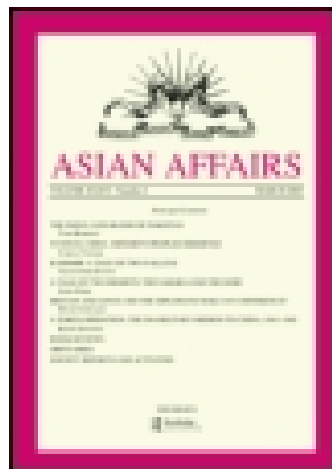
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THE MONGOLS AND RELIGION

THOMAS HAINING

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The Historical Background: Relations With Christianity

"AGAINST THE WRATH of the Tartars, O Lord, deliver us."

These words from an early 13th century Eastern Litany, before the Mongols were, in 1241, knocking at the gates of Wiener Neustadt and of Vienna itself, bear eloquent testimony to the fear in Russian and European states of Genghis Khan, "the Scourge of God". The prayer was fully justified by the terror and suffering already brought to Central Asia and Eastern Russia by the hordes of Mongol horsemen, the "Tatari", the denizens of Hades (still so named in the German and Eastern European languages). Yet, as we will see, these barbarians were not to cause the utter devastation of European culture; even less were they, as then portrayed, the hordes of Gog and Magog, come to destroy the Christian religion.

European interest in the East might be said to have had its real beginnings with Alexander the Great, his much romanticised Middle Asian and Indian adventure of 326 B.C. and the later Empires of his Bactrian successors; but it was not, despite their trade routes to India, an interest seriously pursued by the Romans, especially after the defeat of Marcus Linius Crassus at Carrhae in A.D. 53 blocked any expansion into Central Asia. Thus, although we have the early interest in the East reflected in the writings of Hellenic geographers, and especially in Ptolemy's remarkably good account of the Silk Route, later European accounts of the East remained purely classical, mainly allegorical for many centuries, full of "travellers' tales" of weird beings and animals; cynocephali, monopedes, unicorns and griffins. The Chinese too, it should be noted, had similar misconceptions of Europe, and their first recorded envoy to the West, Kang Ying, although he reached the Persian Gulf in A.D. 97, did not attempt to travel on to Europe. European links were, however, re-established by Byzantine merchants who went East from the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., until Moslem power brought all land and sea routes to the East under Arab and Turkish control, placed trade in the hands of Arab middlemen and effectively severed direct commercial contact between East and West for some centuries.

There were also firm European Christian traditions concerning the East. The Holy Land lay to the East of Europe; the Star rose even further in the East, and the Three Wise Men were to become Kings of the Orient.

There was also, for example, the St Thomas' Apostolate to the Parthians and the Dravidians, the resultant Christian community on the Coromandel Coast and the mission, said to have been sent in A.D. 883 by King Alfred to the grave of St. Thomas in Ceylon – or was it Madras? Then, after the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 451, there was the expansion eastwards of the “heretical” Nestorian Christians who, supported by the Sassanid Persians, spread to West Turkestan in the sixth century, East Turkestan and China by the seventh and eighth centuries, and had Mongol converts by the eleventh century (in the Keraït tribe).

It was this Nestorian expansion which led, without doubt, to the legends of the famous Prester John – Presbyter Johannes – and of his grandson, King David, Negus of Ethiopia, who were both to play a shadowy role in the history of the Crusades. In 1122 there was a visit to Rome – a well guarded secret at the time – by one Johannes, who apparently lectured the Curia on miracles in the East; whether he was a Nestorian from the Near East, or a complete imposter, as some suggest, is not known. In 1158 there was a report from the Bishop of Gabala (Syria) to Pope Eugenius III about a Nestorian Priest King who had defeated the Persians; and a few years later Manuel I of Byzantium received a letter (also sent on to the Pope) purporting to come direct from Prester John. Then in 1181 there was the first recorded Christian attempt to make contact with Prester John, when Pope Alexander III despatched his personal physician, Master Phillip, as an Envoy bearing Papal greetings to that Most Christian King of the East. Master Phillip reached Palestine but, alas, nothing was ever heard of him after he set off East into the deserts of Asia.

There is no evidence that there was ever a Prester John, nor any great Christian King in the East. The legend relied perhaps on Nestorian claims of Royal converts (and such converts did exist among the Princesses of the Keraït, many of whom married into the Mongol Royal Family) and was doubtless embroidered as the story passed from mouth to mouth across the deserts and mountains of Central Asia. It was, most probably, also based on the historical fact that in 1125, with the defeat of the Liao Dynasty by the Ch'in, Yeliu Tashi fled West to join with the Khitans and form the Kingdom of the Western Liao (also known as Khara Khitai or Black Cathayan Empire). There Tashi took the title of Gur Khan which, it has been suggested, was corrupted to or misunderstood as Johann, probably via the Syriac version, Juhannan. Yeliu Tashi was a Buddhist, never a Christian; he was, however, strongly anti-Muslim and stories of his persecution of the Muslim population in his new Empire would lead to the assumption in the West that he must be a Christian, *the* Christian King of the East. Whatever the facts, the legends continued and in 1218/19 the Crusaders were heartened by stories reaching them of the Mongol invasion of the Khwarezmian Empire in Central Asia. It is indeed said that a letter from Jaques de Vitry, Bishop of Acre, telling of the battles and victories against the Muslims by nomadic Christian warriors under King David, led to a wave of optimism amongst the Crusaders of Damietta. This caused the Papal Legate, Cardinal Pelagius, to reject a favourable peace offer made by the Sultan and to mount a disastrous attack on Cairo

— a piece of unjustified optimism which eventually led to the recapture of Damietta by the Saracens.

It is interesting to note that there was at Damietta someone who was to be of importance for the spread of Christian contacts with the East and with the Mongols in particular. This was St. Francis who, only two years earlier at the First General Chapter of the Franciscan Order at Assisi founded the Franciscan Province of Terra Santa, thus launching the diplomatic and apostolic role which was to fit his Friars for their travels in the East in the later 13th and 14th centuries.

But much was to happen before these travels. The Mongols who, under Genghis Khan, had defeated the Ch'in Empire and captured Peking by 1215, were, partly because of the murder of a Mongol envoy by the Governor of the city of Otrar, to sweep across Central Asia, annihilate the Turkish Empire of Khwarezm, subjugate the ancient cities of Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand, push through and ravage the North of Persia, breach the Iron Gate in the Caucasus and defeat Queen Russadan of the Christian Georgians, destroy the Kipchak (Cuman) nation and scatter the forces of Kiev and Galicia. They then penetrated the Crimea where they had their first direct contact with Europeans, the Genoese and Venetian merchants in the ports of Sudak and Ta'ana. All this was achieved in a mere four years before the Mongol hordes withdrew in 1222 across the Eastern Steppe to their homeland North of the Gobi desert.

Genghis Khan died in 1227, leaving to his sons the dream of world domination. As the Italian missionary Carpini put it: "It is the intention of the Tartars to bring the whole world into subjection if they can . . . they have this command from Genghis Khan". Their first task was to be the final defeat of the Ch'in Dynasty. (As Ogadei Khaan said when refusing Ch'in gifts on his election as Khaan in 1229: "My father grew old and died fighting the Ch'in. This I cannot forget".) The second task was to put down the rebellion in Khwarezm led by Jelal ad Din, son of Muhammad II; and the third was the re-subjugation of the Bulgars on the Volga, originally conquered in 1221 by the famous Mongol Generals, Jebe Noyan and Subodai Bagatur. These Central Asian and Russian campaigns were to lead to the expansion of the White Horde, the fief originally given to Genghis Khan's eldest son, Juchi, and now ruled by his son, Batu. This saw the final crushing of the Kievan Empire in 1240, the destruction of the most beautiful city in Southern Russia, and the greatest trade centre between the Baltic and Byzantium.

From the Dnieper the Mongol Army, after a winter to re-group and train the foreign troops regularly pressed into its ranks, drove across the Dniester and Bug Rivers as far as Lithuania before pouring into Central Europe, Germany, Hungary and then Austria, crossing the Danube from Buda on Christmas Day 1241. The travails of these times are well told in the famous "Miserabile Carmen" of 1242 by Canon Roger of Apulia, later Archbishop of Spoleto. The Pope of the day, Gregory, did his best to unite Europe in a Crusade against the Tartars, but his appeals were never very successful. When, in early 1242, the Mongol armies disengaged and rode off whence they had come they did so not because of any European military prowess. The reason for their departure, which left the Europeans

relieved, but perplexed and afraid of future attacks, lay thousands of miles away on the Mongol steppe. There, just as his forces were entering Austria, the Mongol Emperor, Ogadei, died and Mongol tradition demanded that all Princes of the Blood (there were 12 with the armies) and all the Orlok (the senior generals and advisers) return to the "hearth" for a Khuraltai, the solemn conclave which would elect the next Khaan.

The Mongol drive into Europe produced one interesting, if perhaps somewhat bizarre, ecclesiastical story, treated in full in *The Tartar Khan's Englishman* by Gabriel Ronay. Basically the thesis which Ronay propounds rests upon a report by a Brother Julian, sent in the early 1230s by the King of Hungary on a mission to the People of Greater Hungary on the Volga who, in 1237, reported having met a Tartar Envoy who was a European; also on a letter by a Gascon, Brother Yvo, a French priest living in exile in Vienna, who wrote to the Bishop of Beauvais of the capture of an Englishman working with the Tartar forces during a foray towards the Leopoldsberg in Vienna. These stories were taken up by the St. Albans chronicler, Matthew Paris, who reported in 1243: "A native of England, the Great Khan's chief diplomat and chief of intelligence, was captured outside Vienna, tried and executed there in July 1242". Ronay's researches have led him to postulate that "the Englishman", said to be a Templar, was possibly Robert de London, a King's Chaplain who, when dispossessed of his temporary Abbacy of St. Albans, joined the English Barons in 1214, became Chaplain to Baron FitzWalter of Baynards Castle and Dunmow (who was Marshal of the Army of God which opposed King John), was exiled with the Barons, took part in the Damietta campaign and eventually joined the Tartars after having been expelled from the Templars in Acre.

If Brother Julian was one of the first Christian friars to venture into the Mongol maw he was, after the Mongol withdrawal from Europe, soon to be followed by others. The most famous of these were Giovanni di Piano Carpini, William of Rubruck, and later John of Montecorvino who, under Kublai Khaan's immediate successors, was to become the first Archbishop of Peking. The stories of these intrepid missionaries have been the subject of many learned studies and books – among these *Mongol Mission* edited by Dawson, and the more recent and very readable *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* by Igor de Rachewiltz.

A few words about these famous early missionaries may, however, be appropriate as an introduction to further reading about their trials and achievements. They were not merely missionaries but also diplomats and explorers, scholars and social historians; and I like to think that had the Royal Society for Asian Affairs existed in those days both Carpini and Rubruck would have been unchallenged recipients of the Sir Percy Sykes' medal.

The immediate impetus to these missionary trips came in 1245 as the result of the Council of Lyons, called by Pope Innocent IV who had, because of his continued feuds with the Emperor, just placed himself under the protection of King Louis of France. Innocent IV had already collected much useful material on the Mongols. Some of this was from sources already quoted, but other information came from Berthold of

Aquilla, from the Russian Bishop Peter, from Queen Russadan of Georgia and from Bishop Orbellian of Armenia. It is not surprising that the item on the Council's agenda, entitled: "Seeking a Remedy Against the Tartars" resulted in a series of exploratory missions. Nor is it strange that the early Legates selected should have been from the Franciscans and Dominicans, since these Orders had already been involved in Eastern Europe and in the Terra Santa, evangelising the pagans and seeking to return the schismatic Nestorians (and Jacobites) to the bosom of the Holy Roman Church.

Carpini, a friend of St. Francis, and Stephen of Bohemia were the first to set out in 1245, making their way from Lyons via Eastern Europe where they wintered in Poland and Galicia and were befriended by Wencelas of Bohemia. Stephen fell seriously ill and could not continue the journey but Carpini, joined by "Brother Benedict the Pole", travelled on via Kiev and reached a Tartar outpost near the River Don in early Lent 1246 where he reported: "They rushed at us in a horrible manner, wanting to know what kind of men we were". From the outpost the Friars were sent on to the Volga, to the Orda of Batu, Khan of the Golden Horde (now so named after the Golden Tent used by Batu and said to have belonged originally to King Bela of Hungary). From Batu they were sent to Guyuk Khaan in Mongolia itself and this trip began as Carpini reports; "With many tears, because we did not know whether we were going to death or to life".

It must have been a taxing ordeal for the heavily built and none too healthy Carpini, travelling on the small, fast moving Mongolian ponies, "with little rest and sometimes even less food, sometimes so weak we could hardly ride", North of the Caspian and Aral Seas, down the Syr Darya River, across an area of Central Asia still showing the ravages of the Mongol hordes which had over-run the Khwarezmian Empire some 25 years earlier. They skirted the Hindu Kush Mountains, fought their way through the notorious wind storms of the Dzungarian Gap on the edge of what is now Sinkiang, traversed the passes of the Altai Mountains and arrived on the plains of Mongolia in time to be present at the enthronement of Guyuk Khaan, a ceremony which had been postponed from 15 August 1246 because of a hailstorm. Their presence at this ceremony is substantiated by Juvaini, the Persian chronicler who describes them as "the envoys of the Franks". Carpini and Benedict remained in Mongolia until 13 November, where they had audiences with the Chancellor, Chinguai, (of Nestorian faith) and also with Guyak Khaan, returning by much the same route as on their outward trip, but with the greater discomfort and indeed danger of winter travel. They arrived in Kiev on 9 June 1247 and rested there for some weeks. Cologne was reached in October and they reported to the Pope in Lyons in November and delivered to him Guyuk Khaan's letter demanding that the Pontiff and the Kings of Europe submit to him.

While Carpini was sent as a Papal Legate by Innocent IV, bearing for use at his discretion two Papal Bulls, one ecclesiastical and one political, addressed to "The King and People of the Tartars", William of Rubruck and his companion, Friar Bartholomew of Cremona who, because of ill

health remained in and died in the old Mongol capital of Karakorum, were sent primarily as missionaries by St. Louis of France, carrying only letters requesting that they be permitted to minister to Christian communities within the Kingdom of the Mongol Khaan. Rubruck's original aim for the mission was to find and minister to some German Christian slaves who had been taken back to Central Asia about 1240 by Buri, grandson of Genghis Khan. Their presence near Lake Balkhash in Central Asia had been reported by Andrew of Longjumeau, who had travelled to that area in 1247 via the Middle East. Rubruck and his companion travelled in 1253, via Constantinople and the Crimea, to the Golden Horde on the Volga and thence, like Carpini, across Central Asia to be received by Mangu Khaan, successor to Guyuk. Sad to say, they never came across the German prisoners, who had been moved from Central Asia into Sinkiang to work in the iron mines there. Nevertheless the trip was of considerable importance and the source of much valuable information of a geographical, political, social, religious and even military nature.

There were two further major missions to the Mongol Khaans, now, with the accession of Kublai Khaan, firmly established as the Mongol Yuan Dynasty of China. The first in 1289 bearing letters from Pope Nicholas IV, was led by John of Montecorvino who in 1307 was installed as the first Archbishop of Khanbaliq (Peking). We learn of his relatively successful Episcopate (which included the conversion and baptism of a near relative of the Khaan) from Oderic of Pordenone in Friuli, who in 1328/30 travelled to China via India and then back to Europe through Asia. Archbishop John died in China and in 1338 in Rome a deputation of Alans from the Crimea (within his Archbishopric) complained that they had had no Bishop since Montecorvino. This resulted in the last major medieval mission to reach the Far East. In 1338 John de Marginolli left the Pope in Avignon and travelled overland to China taking with him for the Khaan a gift which has been immortalised in Chinese poetry as 'The Supernatural Horse'.

But the end of Christianity in China was soon to come. In 1362 nationalistic Chinese captured Zaytung and martyred the Bishop, James of Florence. All Christians were expelled from China in 1369 after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty and its replacement by the new Ming Dynasty. Soon after that Tamerlane – no ruthless barbarian, as Clavigo the Spanish Ambassador to his court testifies, but lacking what we shall see to have been the religious tolerance of Genghis Khan and his direct descendants – destroyed Christianity in Central Asia.

Speaking thus of Central Asia it is appropriate to comment that, although the Romance of Prester John and King David proved to be without foundation, the Il Khans, the Mongol Viceroys of Persia – and themselves direct descendants of Genghis Khan – regarded the Christians as their natural allies against Egypt and Islam in the second half of the 13th century. Louis I was dying and perhaps of the European Christian monarchs only Edward I realised the potential of such an alliance. In 1271, after reaching Palestine, he sent two envoys, Reginald Russell and John Parker, to the Il Khan, Abaga – whose mother Dokuz Khatun, widow of the first Il Khan, was a Keraït Christian Princess. Agreement

was reached with Abaga for a joint campaign against the Egyptian Mameluke state, but internecine strife between the Il Khans and the Jagatai branch of the Mongol Royal Family which ruled Central Asia, prevented any military link-up of significance between the Mongols and the Crusaders. In 1274 Abaga sent envoys to Lyons, and some years later six envoys to Edward I, to apologise for his inability to assist as promised. Under Pope Nicholas IV this dialogue continued with Abaga's son, Argun, whose own son, Oljaitu, was christened Nicholas by a Nestorian chaplain. Argun undertook to assist Nicholas IV in recapturing Jerusalem and himself to be baptised when the Holy City was freed. On 15 March 1291 Argun reached Damascus with provisions and horses for 20,000 horsemen. But the European squabble between the Pope and Charles of Anjou over Sicily frustrated any Crusade, despite attempts at arbitration by Edward I. Acre fell on 18 May of that year, Argun died, Oljaitu became a Muslim and the Mongols in Persia and Turkestan became absorbed into the Muslim culture.

As I have indicated, the early missionaries such as Carpini and Rubruck brought back from their forays to the homeland of the Mongol Khaans a mass of new and fascinating information, even penning as chapters in their reports advice on "How to wage war against the Tartars" and "How to treat Tartar Prisoners". Frank disbelief greeted some of their statements, many now proved to have been not only accurate but very perceptive. Poor Carpini, aware of this wave of doubt and distrust, wrote in the Introduction to his report; *The History of the Mongols*: "Do not call us liars if we (Carpini and Benedict) report things new to you. A year and four months we travelled both through the midst and in the company of the Mongols. We are reporting for you things which we ourselves have seen, or have heard from others whom we believe to be worthy of credence." Much of the less reliable information which they reported was certainly from these "credence-worthy sources", a mixture of hearsay and misunderstood half-truths, often reminiscent of the more classical tales of the past. The controversy was revived in the late 1960s with the "discovery" and publication of the *Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation*, the *Tartar Relation* being allegedly the report of Benedict the Pole, whose literary contribution to the travels of 1245/7 had hitherto been assumed to be one short report which formed an appendix to Carpini's *Historia Mongolorum*. The authenticity of the *Vinland Map*, said to date from about 1400, has been fiercely disputed by scholars and, naturally, doubts have thus also been cast on the *Tartar Relation* and its attribution to Benedict the Pole. But whatever the truth of the matter, however inaccurate and fanciful some sections of the various reports may be, this does not in any major degree diminish the achievements of these early Christian travellers, nor negate the value of their contribution to the study of the Mongol Empire.

The analysis of these many reports, the assessment of the accuracy of their comments on geography, customs, dwelling places, food, clothing, military organisation, etc, is fascinating and rewarding, but it is alas beyond the parameters of this study; and having glimpsed the outward relations between the Mongols and the Christian world up to the 14th

century, it now seems natural to turn to the question of religion within the Mongolian homeland in those days and to the historical development of religion within the area of what is now the last independent Mongol homeland, the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR).

Religions in Old Mongolia

Religions, and I use the plural advisedly, were an interesting phenomenon in old Mongolia. The Yaasa, the famous laws of Genghis Khan, said to be written on tablets of iron before his death, had as one of their basic articles the following:

"It is ordered to believe that there is only one God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, Who alone gives life and death, riches and poverty as pleases Him, and Who has over everything an absolute power." And the Yaasa continues: "Leaders of a religion, preachers, monks, persons who are dedicated to religious practices, the criers of mosques, physicians and those who bathe the bodies of the dead are to be freed from all public charges".

There was, as the above would lead one to expect, a very considerable degree of religious tolerance within the Mongol Empire. As early as 1206, the year of his elevation to the position of Great Khan, Genghis Khan wrote to a senior Tibetan Lama of Saja; "I would have wished to visit you, but my affairs are not yet in order. Pray for my victory". In 1220 when, in disputation with the Mullahs of Bukhara, he received their thanks for the new protection and privileges accorded them by the Yaasa, Genghis Khan exclaimed in astonishment: "Did the Shah (i.e. Muhammad II of Khwarezm) then care so little that you prayed for his welfare?" and, having relieved them of all taxation, ordered that they should always be ready "to pray to his charge". Again when the great Taoist monk, Chan Chun Ya travelled from China to Samarkand and back in 1224 (covering some 12,000 miles in all) to answer the summons of Genghis Khan (who hoped to obtain from the Taoist seer the secret of eternal life), a *Khuraltai* was convened at which Chan Chun was invited to preach. Afterwards the Great Khan said: "What the Sage speaks is wisdom he has learned from Heaven. I have locked his words in the depths of my heart. Do you likewise".

Genghis Khan must not however be seen as a potential convert to any of these religions, although there was later to be considerable argument as to whether or not important members of the Genghiside family had embraced Christianity. The faith of Genghis Khan was that of his people and of his forefathers, Shamanism; and his Seal, devised by his Uighur Scribe, Tatatungo, contained what we might regard as his profession of faith: "God in His Heaven; on Earth the Great Khan, the Power of God, the Ruler of Mankind". As he told the Mullahs of Bukhara, when criticising their prostrations towards Mecca: "God is to be found everywhere on the earth" and later: "Under my rule everyone may pray to any God; my only orders are obedience to the laws which I have established". He

might well have said with Bernard Shaw: "I am a sort of collector of religions; and the curious thing is that I find I can believe in them all". But Genghis Khan would certainly have added: "... as long as they do not interfere in any way with *my* scheme of things".

But religious tolerance was widespread. There was indeed what one might term "right royal treatment" of representatives of religions who, once accepted in the Mongol Orda, received board and lodgings and often fine gifts from the Genghisides (although they usually had to part with a great proportion of these gifts to rapacious courtiers). Thus over the years European travellers such as Carpini, Rubruck and the Polos found Nestorian Christianity, Greek Orthodox Christianity, Shamanism, Islam, Buddhism and even Taoism all represented, many of these religions vieing with each other for the souls of the members of the Mongol Royal Family and their wives – and for the considerable influence, even if not for the potential wealth, which such conversions could bring.

But Shamanism, relics of which may still be seen in the Choijil Sume Museum in Ulan Bator, was the ordinary Mongol religion of that time. It can be traced back to the Huns of the Second Century B.C. and it revered the old spirits of the North, the spirits of air, fire and water and, above all *Ikh Tenger* or *Mönkhe Tenger* – the Everlasting Blue Sky. The Shamans, priests cum magician/doctors, like the famous Gochku Shaman, Tebtengri, who presided over the religious aspects of the *Khuraltai*, which in 1206 elected the youthful Temuchin to be Genghis, Khan of Khans, foretold the fortunes of individuals, of nations and of wars from the cracks in the shoulder blades of sheep burned in the camp fires; they drove the Khelet, the evil spirits, from the bodies of the sick and presided over sacrifices and libations to the Gods. Even today, just as superstitions persist here, so Orthodox Mongolian Communists will still dip a finger in a glass and offer a few drops of fermented mare's milk or vodka as a libation. Their faith may be Marxism – Leninism, but they see no point in offering possible offence to the all-powerful Heaven and its attendant spirits.

Evidence indicates that Buddhism spread to Mongolia from the Tariat Basin, now in Sinkiang, only in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., although there is a suggestion that a statue taken from the Huns in Koko Nor in 121 B.C. may have been of Buddhist origin. Buddhism however lost ground under the 7th century Turkic rulers of Mongolia whose famous Councillor, Tonyakuk, argued strongly against the building of churches, and indeed even villages, as being an anti-nomadic influence; but it was, as indicated by evidence from the excavations of the old city of *Khar Balgass*, much more firmly established under the Khitans, with the first Buddhist temple of the Khitan Empire dating from A.D. 902 and the acceptance of Buddhism by the Khitan Emperor himself following a few years later.

William of Rubruck tells us in his account of his visit to Karakorum in 1254 of "a large temple with two rows of Lamas, with beads in their hands, wearing faded yellow robes, with hair and beards close cropped, reciting the Tibetan prayer 'Om Ma Ni Pad Me Hum'". The Yuan Dynasty, especially Kublai Khaan, continued to foster the spread of Buddhism, sponsor the translation of Buddhist scriptures and free the Lamas

from taxes and from örtöö service (the pony relay). They even (in the Shengdu Edict of 1260) formally appointed the Pagspa Lama, Kublai's former tutor, as head of religion in the Empire. But the downfall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368, the retreat of the Mongol Emperors to Khirlin Bars Knot in the Khentei Province and then to Karakorum, and the wars in the middle of the 15th century between the Mongols and Oirats, brought a marked decline of Buddhism in Mongolia, with a parallel improvement, for a time at least, in the status of Shamanism.

During this period Tibet, which since the 7th century had gradually donned the mantle of Buddhism from India, was also rent by power struggles, religious as well as secular; and the early part of the 16th century saw the establishment of the reformed Yellow Hat Sect of Buddhism and the eventual suppression of the Red Hat Sect in 1642 by the Oirat Khan of Koko Nor.

The first Mongol contact of real significance with reformed Buddhism was in 1576 when the Altan Khan of the Mongols invited one of the most senior of the Yellow Hat Sect, the Lama Sodnomgyantso, to meet him in Khokhot to discuss religious problems. At this historic meeting the Lama had conferred on him by the Altan Khan the title of "Dalai", (Mongolian: Ocean, Sea) a title which was then retrospectively given to his two previous incarnations and has been held by all his incarnations since, up to and including the 14th Dalai Lama of the present day. The newly created Dalai Lama reciprocated by declaring the Altan Khan "Great Khan of the Darma and the Heaven" and also a re-incarnation of Kublai Khaan, this latter doubtless a useful lever in the Altan Khan's struggle with the then Mongol titular Khaan.

Other Mongolian Khans were quick to involve themselves in the spread of Buddhism. Two years later the Abtai Sain Khan met with the Dalai Lama, proclaimed the Yellow Faith in his territories and, in 1586 founded the majestic Monastery of Erdene Dzuu, with its 108 stupas, built beside and partly from the ruins of the old Mongol capital of Karakorum, which had been sacked by Ming troops in 1380. This, the first Yellow Faith Monastery on the territory of the MPR, is preserved today as a National Museum and its temples and treasures are being carefully and beautifully restored.

The first Mongolian leader of the Buddhist faith in his country, Öndör Gegen Zanzabar, came from the family of the Tushet Khan Gombodorj. In 1639 Öndör Gegen was proclaimed Head of the Buddhist Faith in Mongolia and received from the 5th Dalai Lama (the Great Fifth) the title Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu. Returning to Mongolia in 1651 from his religious studies in Tibet he set up his peripatetic religious centre of Ikh Khuree (Great Encampment) which moved in 1654 to the Khentei Province, spent some time before 1690 in Erdene Dzuu, where his mother is buried just outside the monastery walls, and later moved to Erdene Tolgoi in Tsetserleg in 1706, eventually establishing itself permanently in Urga, initially known as Da Khuree (Capital Encampment), which thus became the accepted capital of Mongolia, even although the more Easterly Uliasutai was the official residence of the Manchu Amban, the Chinese Governor-General of Mongolia.

Öndör Gegen is revered by Mongolian Buddhists and respected by the State as a skilled craftsman of Buddhist statues – several of which can still be seen at Erdene Dzuu and in Ulan Bator – and especially as the creator of the square style Soyombo script. The original wooden alphabet is preserved in the library of the Gandang Monastery, and the initial letter, the *Soyombo*, is still, although now with the addition of the Communist five pointed star, the official cypher of the MPR. After fleeing from Erdene Dzuu on the defeat of the Khalkha Princes by the Djungar leader, Galdan, Öndör Gengen took part in the formal Khalkha submission to the Manchu Emperor, Kang H'si, at the Diet of Doloon Nor in 1691. Thereafter, although visiting Mongolia, he remained mainly in Peking where he was awarded the title of "Very Great Lama". He died in 1727.

The Urga Khutukhtu, as the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu came to be commonly known to the world, was, it should be noted, the third in the Buddhist hierarchy, following directly the Dalai and Panchen Lamas. The link between the Dalai and Urga Lamas was close. In 1904 when Young-husband entered Tibet it was to Urga that the Dalai Lama fled; in 1911 Tibet was the only country which fully acknowledged the independence of the Kingdom of Mongolia; and the 14th Dalai Lama, who has visited Ulan Bator twice over the past 5 years, delights the present day Mongolians by acknowledging the Mongolian origin of his title.

Öndör Gegen, and also the 4th Incarnation of the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu, are buried in the Imperial Monastery of Amurbayasgalan some 80 kilometres from the modern industrial city of Erdenet, in the Northern Province of Bulgan. This Monastery, one of the most important in the MPR, still has a quite readable blue and gold plaque above its main entrance testifying in Chinese, Manchu and Mongolian to its Imperial Origin. There is also a now less readable stylus, deciphered by the Russian Mongolist, Pozdneyev in the nineteenth century, which gives its history in great detail, including its cost (100,000 liang of silver) to the Imperial coffers. Lying in a beautiful but very remote valley, Amurbayasgalan is destined, according to the State Tourist Agency, to become a major tourist attraction, an aim which will require considerable transport logistic improvements if it is to be successful. The Monastery is still in need of urgent and extensive restoration. Quite considerable funds have been earmarked for this and details of a restoration programme worked out by United Nations Agencies to supplement the work of the Mongolian State Restoration Agency. But the involvement of foreign restoration specialists, possibly Japanese, has been a point of controversy and the Mongolians have gone ahead with their own modest programme of essential restoration. One hopes that the complete restoration will not be delayed by what may be purely political considerations.

Another smaller but to my mind equally historic temple, Gunjiin Sume, which lies perhaps some 60 miles N.E. of Ulan Bator, has similar links with the Mongolian High Lama. The Chinese Princess buried there was one of the wives of Darkhan Ching Wang Dondubdorj, who succeeded as Tushet Khan on the death of his grandfather in 1700, and she was the step-mother of the second Jebtsundamba. He lived for most of his reign in Peking where, in 1758, he is said to have been murdered on the

orders of the Manchu Emperor, allegedly for supporting Mongol resistance against the Manchus. After his death, despite Mongol protests, all re-incarnations of the Jebtsundamba were sought and found in Tibet, initially to avoid internal Mongolian squabbles over the re-incarnation but later as a Manchu policy to control and manipulate the Head of the Mongol Church and through him his countrymen.

Through the centuries the numbers, size and influence of the Buddhist Monasteries in Mongolia gradually increased. In the mid 17th century there were 100 monasteries; by the early 20th century there were 7,000. The Great Shabi, the personal estates of the Jebtsundamba, were founded in 1639 on the election of Öndör Gegen, when he received a gift from the Mongol Khans of 32 families from their estates; by 1764 the Great Shabi had grown to 20,000 souls, by 1825 to 110,000; and the Shabinaar of other monasteries were similarly increasing.

There was justification for this, in that unless they attached themselves to monasteries the serfs of the often quite poor Mongol Khans would have been destitute. But the ability of the monasteries to support these numbers lay in the continuing total exemption of monasteries and their dependents from all taxes and military service, also from the duty to provide without payment horses and other services to the örtöö (pony relay) service. By the nineteenth century Ikh Khuree itself, and later the other monasteries, were big business, many with very large herds and hundreds of acres of cultivated land. They were involved in the lucrative usury of trade and prospered from their ability to provide horses for the relay service and camel and other caravans for traders and be paid for so doing.

There were, of course, pious and dedicated Buddhist Mongolian Lamas. Maisky, the Soviet Mongolist, in his book *Mongolia on the Eve of the Revolution* points to the important liberal reformation and the development of critical faculties which grew out of the founding of the Buddhist University of Gandang in 1838. But the purely religious aspects of Buddhism do sometimes seem to have ceded place to a more secularised, economically and eventually politically oriented Buddhist hierarchy. This aspect naturally reached its apogee during the period 1911 to 1919 when Mongolia declared itself a Kingdom under the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu, who ruled as Bogdo Gegen, and during which period many Lamas held high secular posts and titles.

Religion in The Mongolian People's Republic

There was much undoubted devastation of the monasteries and towns by the Chinese and by the White Guards of Ungern-Sternberg in 1919–1920, but the People's Revolution in 1921 saw the beginning of the final decline and eventual destruction of the Buddhist church in Mongolia, even although the VIIIth Khutukhtu of Mongolia remained as Head of State until his death in 1924.

On this occasion the Government of the new People's Republic seized on an old folk legend regarding the Urga Hkukhtus. The VIIIth Khutukhtu had as predicted, so ran the solemn official statement, attained perfection. He was now with the Buddha and his soul would not return to

earth to his people. Although the High Lamas, with the encouragement of the Japanese, and indeed the approbation of the 13th Dalai Lama, were in the 1930s seeking a re-incarnation of the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu in Inner Mongolia, the role of the Khutukhtu had been terminated within the MPR.

As in so many other socio-economic fields in the MPR, considerable changes arose for the Buddhists in the early 1930s. Although the refusal of the initial 1924 demand of the High Lamas that there should be a search for a re-incarnation of the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu led to some revolts, and their forceful suppression, the officially expressed Party line of 1926 was still "The search for a purer Buddhism" because, as the Chairman of the then Central Committee, Damba Dorj, pointed out, the people could not be expected to unlearn in a short period the reverence for the Lamas which had existed for 300 years. A nudge from the 1927 Comintern meeting led, however, to the 8th Congress of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party denouncing the Lamas as "a parasitic class of feudal society . . . an irreconcilable enemy of the Mongolian Revolution". The Congress approved active anti-religious propaganda and the introduction of discriminatory taxation; but it also warned against "administrative measures which could be interpreted as actual religious persecution". The later "Swing to the Left" of 1929/30, the creation in the latter year of the Anti-Buddhist League, the enthusiasm and excesses of the Youth League, especially of some local branches, in carrying out anti-Buddhist measures, together with the simultaneous enforcement of the first attempt at collectivisation, led to great chaos and suffering, to serious and widespread rebellion and large scale movement by Lamas and herdsmen, with families and herds, into Inner Mongolia.

Even the so-called "New Turn" of 1932, with its swing away from the alleged "Left Deviation" – if indeed the long term policy of the Party ever really swung to the Right or to the Left – did not save the monasteries and the Lamas. These, with the earlier destruction of the old secular feudal Khans and lesser Princes, were now the one organised force confronting Choibolsan and his Party in their determination to socialise Mongolia. For economic as well as ideological reasons the power of the Buddhist Church had to be broken; and the advent of Japanese armed force in Manchuria and its alleged support of, and by, the High Lamas added an external dimension which made the Party's determination to carry out the final liquidation of the monasteries appear more reasonable, more in the interests of the young People's Republic.

The future of the Monasteries and the Lamas was sealed by the presence in the MPR of strong Soviet military and security forces under the MPR/USSR Treaty of Friendship. This made it possible to carry through the plan of destruction without the disturbances which had accompanied, and indeed foiled the earlier attempted purge. A many-pronged and determined onslaught on the Buddhist Church included the use of discriminatory taxation, restrictions on entry to the ranks of Lamas, compulsory military service, wedge driving between various classes of Lamas and discrediting the Church through the show trials of High Lamas on charges of economic sabotage, immorality or treason. On grounds of national

security monasteries were forced to move into the interior of the country and this often in coldest winter; and there is evidence of the actual destruction of some monasteries by more direct means. This may well have been the case, for example, at Erdene Dzuu, the reported condition of which, before and after its official closure in 1937, does not really square with the suggestion from some sources that the deterioration was due to destructive acts of the Ming troops in 1380, or even to the later ravages of the Djungars in 1687/88.

The position of religion in the MPR today is, constitutionally at least, quite straightforward; in practice it is somewhat equivocal. The Constitution of the MPR guarantees freedom of worship – but one must not overlook the fact that Marxism-Leninism, the guiding philosophy of the Mongolian People's Revolution Party, regards religion as the opiate of the people. Religion is thus tolerated only as far as it does not actively oppose or even explicitly contradict the socialist internationalist principles and aims of the MPR. The only working monastery and seminary in the MPR is the Gandang Monastery in Ulan Bator, founded in 1838 as the Buddhist University, – all other monasteries are either closed or maintained simply as museums.

At the Gandang Monastery the Buddhist faithful can and do attend regular religious ceremonies, and crowd into the special celebrations of Buddhist festivals, when the temples in the Monastery resound to the conches and cymbals and the recitation of Buddhist prayers. But the Gandang, the seat of the now elected Head of the Mongolian Buddhist Faith, the Khambo Lama, is perhaps equally important in official eyes as the Seat of the Secretariat of the All-Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace. In this Organisation the MPR plays a very important role, a role in which it is quite unthinkable that the voice of the Mongolian Buddhists should ever disagree with the policies and aims of the Government.

The Mongolian Buddhists set out their attitude to the current position of their religion and its role in the two following statements: "In this way separation of the state from religious affairs prevented evil actions that might deviate the religion from its sacred tasks and disgrace the reputation of the religion and it provided broad possibility for monasteries and lamas to bend their efforts toward humaneness for benefit of all sentient beings, and the cause of safeguarding peace." (Buddhism in Mongolia: Centre of the Mongolian Buddhists, Ulan Bator. 1979 p. 79) "Mongolian Buddhists respect and support their society and state system because the state, revering the people's freedom and religious faith, takes care of and does everything for the development and prosperity of the country, the people's welfare, and the peaceful life. So our Buddhists pray that the activity and cause of the state [may] always be successful." (op. cit. p. 85).