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AN “UN-KNOWN AND UNBRIDLED PEOPLE”: VARDAN AREWELC‘T’S COLOPHON ON THE MONGOLS

ZAROUI POGOSSIAN

Introduction

When the first Mongol contingents raided Armenia and Georgia in the winter of 1220-1221 they were far from being the first nomadic people of the Eurasian steppe to have set foot south of the Caucasus mountains.¹ Over the centuries Armenians (and Georgians) had encountered Huns, Hephtalites, Kushans, Khazars, and, most recently, Seljuqs. As a result, Armenian authors recorded not only the political and military exploits of these peoples, especially when those were relevant to the history of the Armenians, but also their customs, religion, and geography.² Written sources on nomadic steppe

¹ It is always a challenge to find the correct wording when referring to the geographical area and political units wherein the Armenians lived during the Middle Ages, since the extent of their settlement in Anatolia and southern Caucasus never corresponded to exact political boundaries. At the beginning of the 13th century Anatolia and the southern Caucasus were divided into a patchwork of variously sized Muslim and Christian polities. The largest among them were the Georgian Kingdom and the Seljuq Sultanate of Rum. I will use the term “Greater Armenia” to refer to the geographical area that roughly corresponds to the former Bagratid, Arçrunid, and Siwni Kingdoms of the 10th c. taken together, whence an important emigration towards Cappadocia and Cilicia ensued in the 11th c., in the wake of Seljuq invasions and conquests of Anatolia. As a result of this population movement, the Cilician Kingdom of Armenia was established (1198) and this polity, as well as territories adjacent to but not directly dependent upon it, even if often tightly linked to it culturally, were another center of Armenian settlement during the Mongol period.

² In fact, Armenian sources provide much useful information and are regularly used by scholars dealing with the history of the Turkic peoples, among which one may mention Peter Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples. Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992). The Armenian sources on the north Caucasian Huns and Khazars are especially valuable; cf., for example, Constantin Zuckerman, “The Khazars and Byzantium: The First Encounter,” in *The World of the Khazars. New Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium hosted by Ben Zvi Institute*, ed. P. Golden, H. Ben-Shammai and A. Róna-Tas (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 399-432; and Dan Shapira, “Armenian and Georgian Sources on the Khazars: A Re-Evaluation,” in *ibid.*, pp. 307-352. The Turkic nomads of the Eurasian steppe were not the only type of nomads that the Armenians met in their history. The Islamic incursions and conquests of the 7th century brought also southern desert nomads to Armenia. I will not engage in a comparison of the two different nomadic cultures and their impact on Armenia unless it is strictly necessary. For the different types of nomadism—desert and steppe—with their distinct ways of interacting with sedentary societies, cf. Joseph Fletcher, “The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46/1 (1986), pp. 11-50. For a comparison of their ruling ideologies, cf. Anatoly Khazanov, “Muhammad and Jenghiz Khan Compared: The Religious

peoples provided a pool of information for later authors who wished to describe the Mongols. However, the observers also clearly distinguished the newcomers from older peoples. In fact, thirteenth-century Armenian authors often described the Mongols as a completely unknown barbarian people. Expectedly, however, the earlier sources provided the tools for categorizing these new “Barbarians” according to certain received notions. In doing so, the contemporaries also added fresh, often factual, information to the older layers of knowledge and preconceptions.

In this essay I wish to draw attention to a short but complex source—a *Colophon*—by the thirteenth-century renowned Armenian theologian, historian, and monastic teacher Vardan Vardapet Arewelc’i on the Mongols. Vardan’s description is an example of what was outlined above: an effort to create a paradigm for explaining a bewildering historical situation, based on older traditions and updated to fit new information. In my analysis I will trace the religious significance ascribed to the Mongols, as well as the way in which the Mongols’ own religion and claims to a divine destiny to rule the world were absorbed by Armenian authors. Throughout my analysis I will place Vardan’s *Colophon* in a larger Armenian and Near Eastern context.

Written in 1248, the *Colophon* represents one of the earliest attempts by an Armenian author to explain the so-called “Mongol phenomenon” from various perspectives: their biblical genealogy, geography, reasons for leaving their original homeland and the religious dimension of their conquests.³ When Vardan wrote the *Colophon*, in 1248, the Mongols had conquered most of Anatolia and did not seem intent on halting their westward advance. In fact,

Factor in World Empire Building,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35/3 (1993), pp. 461-79.

³ The *Colophon* has been published several times. In this paper I have used three editions, comparing their texts when necessary: Lewond Ališan, *Hayapatum, patmič’k’ ew patmut’iwnk’ hayoc’* (Hayapatum: historians and histories of the Armenians), vol. 1 (Venice: Mechitarist Press, 1901), pp. 452-454; Garegin Hovsēp’ean, *Hišatakarank’ jeṛagrac’* (Colophons of Manuscripts), vol. 1 (Antelias: Press of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1951), cols. 985-997, based on a manuscript preserved in New Julfa (Isfahan) dated to 1302; and *Teaṛn Mixayēli patriark’i asorwoc’ Žamanakagrut’iwn* (*Chronicle of the Lord Mixayēl, Patriarch of the Syrians*), (Jerusalem: St. James Armenian Patriarchate Press, 1870), pp. 609-622, repr. in A. Mat’evosyan, *Hayeren jeṛagreri hišatakaranner. ŽG dar* (Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts: XIII century) (Yerevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1984), pp. 243-248. A French translation of the colophon is available in Michel le Grand, *Chronique de Michel le Grand, Patriarche des Syriens Jacobites*, trans. V. Langlois (Venice: Mechitarist Press, 1868), pp. 374-378; most recently it was translated into Italian by Anna Sirinian, “I Mongoli nei colofoni dei manoscritti armeni,” in *Atti del Seminario Internazionale ‘I Mongoli in Armenia: storia e immaginario’*, Bologna, Dipartimento di Paleografia e Medievistica, 27-28 novembre, 2009, ed. M. Bais and A. Sirinian. *Bazmavēp* 3-4 (2010), pp. 498-505.

the first Mongol contingents had irrupted into Caucasian Albania, Armenia, and Georgia during the winter of 1220-1221 and were met by the Armeno-Georgian armed forces under the leadership of the *atabek* Iwanē Zak‘arean (Mqargrdzeli).⁴ The latter suffered defeat on two occasions, in December 1220 and January 1221. After these two battles, however, the Mongols left the Caucasus out of their plans of conquest, since they were busy chasing the Khwarazm-Shah Jalāl al-Dīn until the latter’s death in 1231. In 1232, the Mongols launched their systematic program of conquests in Anatolia under the command of Baiju, Sübedei, and Chormaghun. The cities of Ganjak, Lori, Ani, Kars, Xlat‘, Sebastea, Caesarea, to mention the most significant, were conquered one after the other between 1232 and 1242.⁵ The conquest of Anatolia was completed at the Battle of Kose Dağ in 1243 where the Seljuq army of Giyath al-Din Kay Khusraw II was annihilated.⁶ The Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, on the westernmost fringes of the vast Mongol Empire,

⁴ The history of the Mongol conquests in Armenia has been the focus of older and recent research. From older standard works the following are still useful: Hakob Manandyan, *K‘nnakan tesut‘yun hay žolovrdi patmut‘yan. Seljukyan šrjanic‘ minčev Sefyanneri hastatumn Iranum (XI-XV dd.)* (A Critical Survey of the history of the Armenian people. From the Seljuqid period until the establishment of the Safavids of Iran [XI-XVcc.]) *Complete Works*, vol. 3 (Yerevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1977), pp. 192-219; Bernhard Limper, *Die Mongolen und die christlichen Völker des Kaukasus: Eine Untersuchung zur politischen Geschichte Kaukasiens im 13. und beginnenden 14. Jahrhundert* (Ph.D. dissertation, Universität zu Köln, 1980); Robert Bedrosian, *The Turco-Mongol Invasions and the Lords of Armenia in the 13-14th Centuries* (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1979), pp. [65]-[119], available on-line at <http://rbedrosian.com/dissert.html>; idem, “Armenia during the Seljuq and Mongol Periods,” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 1. ed. R. Hovannisian (New York, 1997), pp. 241-271; Golden, *An Introduction*, pp. 287-291. More recently, cf. various articles in the volume *Caucasus during the Mongol Period/Der Kaukasus in der Mongolenzeit*, ed. J. Tubach, S.G. Vashalomidze and M. Zimmer (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2012), especially the following for a review of historical sources and a reconstruction of events pertinent to the Caucasus and Anatolia: Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, “The Mongol Conquerors of Armenia,” pp. 53-82; Timothy May, “The Conquest and Rule of Transcaucasia: The Era of Chormaqan,” pp. 129-151. See also Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220-1335)*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011) and the various articles in the journal *Bazmavēp* 3-4 (2010) (cf. note 3).

⁵ Manandyan, *A Critical Survey*, pp. 208-219; Bedrosian, *The Turco-Mongol Invasions*, pp. [94]-[108]; Limper, *Die Mongolen*, pp. 118-132; and Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians*, pp. 50-64.

⁶ On the significance of the battle for Seljuq history in Anatolia, cf. Charles Melville, “Anatolia under the Mongols,” in *Cambridge History of Turkey: From Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453*, vol. 1, ed. K. Fleet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 53-54. Given the high quality and stimulating scholarship of several articles in this volume, the choice of the unscholarly title of the book is quite unfortunate. It leaves the false impression that there was a transition of political power from Byzantium to a political entity known as “Turkey” in 1071-1453, which is anachronistic at least, if not deliberately misleading, at worst.

found it expedient to submit to the Great Khan, hoping to avert a direct conquest of its territories. Constable Smbat, the brother of King Het‘um I (r. 1221-1269, †1270) travelled to Qara-Qorum in 1247-9/50 to confirm this status.⁷ Soon after, in 1254-55, King Het‘um I himself traveled to the Mongol capital in order to confirm his Kingdom’s submission to the Mongol Empire.

The Date and Context of Vardan’s *Colophon*

The *Colophon* was written at the end of the translation of Michael the Syrian’s *Chronicle*, made jointly by Vardan Arewelc‘i and the Syriac doctor and author Išōḥ (Išox in Armenian sources).⁸ This manuscript context is very important as shall be seen below. Its date is also significant. In that same year, the Constable Smbat wrote a *Letter* to King Henry I Lusignan of Cyprus while he was travelling to Qara Qorum, dated to February 7, 1248, and received in Cyprus in September 1248.⁹ In this *Letter* Smbat emphasized the Christian

⁷ A. Galstyan, *Hay-Monlolakan arajin banakc‘ut‘unnerə* (The First Negotiations between Armenians and Mongols), *Patmabanasirakan handes* 1 (1964), pp. 91-106, affirms (102-103) that Smbat left Cilicia in 1246 to the Court of Güyük Khan. However, he dates Smbat’s *Letter* to Henry I Lusignan of Cyprus to 1246, which is not correct. On this letter, cf. *infra*. Smbat left for Mongolia in 1247 and returned either in late 1249 or 1250.

⁸ On the Armenia translations of Michael the Syrian, as well as information on Išōḥ and Vardan and their respective roles in the enterprise, cf. Andrea B. Schmidt, “Die Zweifache Armenische Rezension der syrischen Chronik Michaels des Großen,” *Le Muséon* 106 (1996), pp. 299-319, and an updated English version in eadem, “The Armenian Versions I and II of Michael the Syrian,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 16/1 (2013), pp. 93-128. Schmidt emphasizes that there are two Armenian versions of Michael the Syrian’s *Chronicle*, none of which can be assigned priority given our present knowledge. Moreover, these are not simply translations, but include important adaptations and modifications. Thus, the Armenian versions cannot be read as parallels to the Syriac original, they must be considered as independent sources regarding many issues. I follow Schmidt’s nomenclature of citing Version I and Version II as referring respectively to the 1870 and 1871 editions, both published in Jerusalem: *Teārṇ Mixayēli patriark‘i asorwoc‘ Žamanakagrut‘iwn* (*Chronicle of the Lord Mixayēl, Patriarch of the Syrians*), (Jerusalem: St. James Armenian Patriarchate Press, 1870) and *Žamanakagrut‘iwn Teārṇ Mixayēli patriark‘i asorwoc‘* (*Chronicle of the Lord Mixayēl, Patriarch of the Syrians*) (Jerusalem: St. James Armenian Patriarchate Press, 1871). The Armenian versions of Michael the Syrian will be referred to as MSA I and MSA II in this article.

⁹ Jean Richard, “La Lettre du Connétable Smbat et les Rapports entre Chrétiens et Mongols au Milieu du XIII^{ème} Siècle,” in *Armenian Studies/Études Arméniennes In Memoriam Haig Bérbérian*, ed. D. Kouymjian (Lisbon: Calouse Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986), pp. 683-695, esp. p. 684 for dating. Osipian has recently argued that not only were Smbat and others in Cilicia aware of the Prester John and King David of India Legends but exploited them, in collaboration with Nestorian Christians, to shore up European support for a Christian-Mongol cooperation, see Alexandr Osipian, “Baptised Mongol Rulers, Prester John and the Magi: Armenian Image of the Mongols Produced for the Western Readers in the Mid-Thirteenth – Early Fourteenth Centuries,” in *Caucasus during the Mongol Period*, pp. 153-167. Yet, these tales never became popular among the Armenians themselves.

component in the ranks of the Mongols and the latter’s pro-Christian attitudes and policies, as well as made a clear reference to the Legends of Prester John and King David of India as possible eastern allies against the Muslims. Representing the Mongols as Christians or on the verge of becoming Christians, as well as calling for a joint Western-Mongol Crusade, would eventually become the centerpiece of the Armenian Cilician foreign policy in the second half of the thirteenth century.

The best-known expression of this political orientation is *La Flor des estoires de la terre d’Orient* written by Het‘um/Hayton, the nephew of King Het‘um I, in 1307.¹⁰ Vardan’s *Colophon* was written before such tendentious notions and an on-going effort to portray the Mongols in a positive light became the norm and were integrated into the appraisal of the Mongols in the Armenian sources, especially those written in Cilicia. Interestingly, this latter tendency is characteristic of Vardan’s own *Historical Compilation* finished around 1266, where the Mongols, especially some Ilkhānid rulers, of whom Vardan personally met Hülegü in 1264, are presented in a flattering light, including praise for their protection of Christians and expectations of their imminent conversion to Christianity.¹¹ Thus, the *Colophon* provides a glance into an earlier explanatory strategy before *Realpolitik* called for other paradigms and the collaboration with or even submission to the Mongols had to be justified, if not extolled. The *Colophon* and the *Letter of Smbat* are also the earliest signs that a neutral to positive attitude to the Mongols was forming already at an early date, at least at the upper stratum of the ruling elite in Armenian Cilicia.

Even though Vardan wrote the *Colophon* in Armenian Cilicia, he was originally from Greater Armenia. He had studied together with the historian

¹⁰ Some reflections on this issue can be found in Osipian, “Baptised Mongol Rulers.” In general on the perceptions of the Mongols’ religion on the part of the conquered peoples, especially those from the so-called “world religions,” see Peter Jackson, “The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered,” in *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. R. Amitai and M. Biran (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 245-90. The only presumably critical edition of the text of Het‘um/Hayton is that of C. Köhler “*La Flor des estoire de la terre d’Orient*,” in *Recueil des Histoires des Croisades. Documents arméniens*, vol II, pp. 110-363 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1906). The problems of this edition, as well as a perceptive study on the manuscript tradition of Het‘um, its various translations, their context, and a linguistic analysis has been recently carried out by Cristiano Leone, *La Tradizione manoscritta de La Flor des ystoire de la terre d’Orient di Het‘um con saggio di edizione del I libro e trascrizione del ramo a* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Siena, 2012). I am grateful to Dr. Cristiano Leone for having provided me with a copy of his unpublished dissertation.

¹¹ For Vardan’s change of heart, see Zaroui Pogossian, “Armenians, Mongols and the End of Times: An Overview of 13th Century Sources,” in *Caucasus during the Mongol Period*, pp. 182-185.

Kirakos Ganjakec'i, who became his close friend, under the guidance of the renowned monastic teacher Yovhannēs Vanakan Vardapet Tawušec'i (d. 1251). Incidentally, Vanakan Vardapet was the first Armenian author to have written a *History* of the Mongols, which is unfortunately lost.¹² Vardan could have witnessed the first Mongol incursions in person while he was still in Greater Armenia. We know from the testimony of Kirakos Ganjakec'i that Vardan left for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1236, probably not long before Kirakos and their teacher Vanakan were taken prisoner by the Mongols.¹³ From Jerusalem Vardan went to Cilicia in 1239 where he stayed for five years. Soon after 1243 he travelled to Greater Armenia bringing with him the *Encyclical Letter* of the Catholicos Konstandin Barjraberdc'i (1221-1267) which was issued at a Church Council held in Sis that year.¹⁴ Thus, Vardan had further occasions to observe and evaluate the Mongols, their culture and to possibly inquire and learn about their history and religion first-hand. According to Kirakos Ganjakec'i, after delivering the Catholic *Letter* to various Armenian prelates, Vardan settled in the Monastery of St. Andrew near the fortress of Kayean where he dedicated his time to teaching.¹⁵ His engagement as an educator is important to remember when considering the audience of Vardan's ideas and their diffusion. Vardan was back in Cilicia again before 1248, the year when he wrote the *Colophon*, but returned to Armenia shortly afterwards and lived there, again involved in monastic teaching among other activities, until his death in 1271.

The Sources and Their Use in the *Colophon*

As was customary for the genre, Vardan started the *Colophon* by

¹² Hamazasp Ōscean, *Yovhannēs Vanakan ew iwr dproc'e* (Yovhannēs Vanakan and His School) (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1922), pp. 21-25.

¹³ Vardan returned from his pilgrimage via the capital Sis of Cilician Armenia in 1239, where he stayed for five years. Xaç'ik'ean estimates that he left Greater Armenia in 1236, cf. Levon Xaç'ik'ean, "Vardan Arewelc'u *Vasn Banin Masanc'* ašxatut'iwnə (Vardan Arewelc'i's treatise *On Parts of the Speech*), *Telekagir Haykakan Gitut'iwnneri akademiai* 2 (1943), pp. 81-89, reprinted in idem, *Ašxatut'iwnner* (Collected Works), vol. 1. (Yerevan: Ganjasar, 1995), pp. 193-199, esp. pp. 193-194, on Vardan's life. I follow the page numbers of the 1995 reprinted edition; idem, "Kostandin Barjraberdc'u xratakan t'ult'ə arak'wac arewelean Hayastan 1251 t'vakanin" (The *Letter of Admonition* of Konstandin Barjraberdc'i sent to eastern Armenia in 1251), *Banber Matenadarani* 4 (1958), pp. 267-284, reprinted in idem, *Collected Works*, vol. 1. I follow the page numbers of the 1995 reprinted edition. For an overview of Vardan's life see also Robert Thomson, "Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc'i," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989), pp. 125-266, esp. pp. 127-128.

¹⁴ Xaç'ik'yan, "Vardan's *On the Parts of the Speech*," pp. 193-194. This *Letter* is included in Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *Patmut'iwn hayoc'* (History of the Armenians), ed. K. Melik'-Ohanjanyan (Yerevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1961), pp. 295-310.

¹⁵ Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *History*, p. 311.

providing historical information on the times and circumstances of the translation of Michael the Syrian’s *Chronicle* into Armenian and its usefulness. He informs the reader about the current holders of the highest religious and state offices in the Armenian Cilician Kingdom, i.e. Catholicos Constantin Barjaberdc‘i, King Het‘um I and Queen Zabel (†1252). Vardan lists the names of their children, discusses the international political situation, and, finally, elaborates on the irruption of the Mongols in the world of the Armenians. The section dedicated to the Mongols explores their origin, both according to biblical genealogy and geography, some of their religious customs, their own understanding of a “God-given destiny” which inspired their military endeavors and ensured their success. It also briefly mentions the submission of the princes of Greater Armenia to the Mongols and the system of taxation imposed by the latter, including exemptions given to any person with a religious vocation. A lament on the current Armenian political situation, with a list of sins appended, closes the *Colophon*.

The invasion of the Mongols is explained as God’s punishment for “our countless sins” and this “unknown and unbridled” (*ounur l wñrñuntē*) nation is placed in an eschatological framework. Like his friend Kirakos Ganjakec‘i, the author of a most valuable and extensive *History of the Armenians* written between 1241 and 1265/6 (the last entry in the book),¹⁶ Vardan thought that the Mongols were the “Nation of the Archers”—a destructive eschatological force—about whom the influential *Vision of St. Nersēs* had foretold.¹⁷ But by 1273, when the priest Grigor Aknerc‘i penned

¹⁶ In his “Introduction” to Kirakos Ganjakec‘i, *History*, Melik‘-Ohanjanyan specifies that Kirakos started writing it on the 19th of May, 1241 (ibid., xxv). The last entry belongs to the year 1265/6, but the absolute *terminus ante quem* is 1271—the year of Kirakos’ death.

¹⁷ It is worth mentioning that the locution “Nation of the Archers” was probably used to refer to the Seljuqs in the eleventh-century update of the *Vision of St. Nersēs* and other 11th-12th-century apocalyptic texts due to their dexterity as archers, as noted in Ašot Hovhannissyan, *Drvagner hay azatagrakan mtk‘i patmut‘yan* (Episodes from Armenian national liberation movement), vol. 1 (Yerevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1957), pp. 21-29; and Pogossian, “Armenians, Mongols,” pp. 169-170. The image of Turks as excellent riders is present also in Arabic literature, for which see Ernst Mainz, “Die Türken in der klassischen arabischen Literatur,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients* 1 (1933), pp. 279-285. In Armenian literature this *topos* could be the result of multiple layers of meaning. On the one hand, it evoked reminiscences of Ismael and his growing up in the desert to become “an archer.” The biblical verse about Ismael, Gen. 20:21 says: “Եւ էր Աստուած ընդ մանկանն, եւ աճեաց եւ եղև աղէկնաւոր/And God was with the boy, and [he] grew and became an archer.” I am grateful to my friend and colleague Michelina di Cesare for this helpful suggestion. On the other hand, this expression fit well the complex of images associated with the equestrian steppe nomads. The most recent publication of the *Vision of St. Nersēs*, which is included in a presumably 10th century *Life of St. Nersēs*, is *Mesropay Eric‘u Vayoc‘jorec‘woy Patmut‘iwn srboyn Nersisi Hayoc‘ Hayrapeti* (History of St. Nersēs

his *History of the Nation of the Archers* the term had lost its eschatological connotations. Moreover, Grigor deliberately de-eschatologized his entire *History* compared to the *Colophon* of Vardan or the *History* of Kirakos Ganjakec'i, even though he was closely familiar with Vardan's *Colophon*.¹⁸

While Vardan starts his description of the Mongols by claiming that they were an "unknown nation," he nevertheless finds it expedient to incorporate them into the known world, within a familiar or knowable past and physical space. For a Christian author this meant providing the Mongols with a biblical ancestry and, based on that, a specific geographical location whence they originated. In fact, Vardan asserts that they were "from the race of Togarma [arm. T'orgom] and the progeny of Hagar."¹⁹ After this initial explanation, he glosses the ethnonym Tat'ar (*տաթար*), spelled with a non-aspirated first *t/un* as opposed to the more common aspirated *t'/p*, from an etymological point of view, citing again the authority of St. Nersēs:

...[St. Nersēs] calls their name "sharp and light," since perhaps T'at'ar means "sharp and light" according to a change in consonants, or "give and take," that is *tat'ar*,²⁰ since they struck insatiably and took without fear the sons of Zion into the slavery of imprisonment.

Patriarch of the Armenians by Priest Mesrop Vayoc'jorec'i), ed. G. Tēr-Vardanean. *Matenagirk' hayoc'/Armenian Classical Authors*, vol. 11. (Antelias, 2010), pp. 631-741. An earlier publication containing a shorter version of the *Vita* and the *Vision* is *Patmut'iwn srboyn Nersisi Part'ewi* (History of St. Nersēs Part'ew). *Sop'erk' hayakank'*, vol. 6 (Venice-St. Lazzaro, 1835). Zaroui Pogossian, "Jews in Armenian Apocalyptic Traditions of the 12th century: a Fictional Community or New Encounters," in *Völker der Endzeit. Apokalyptische Vorstellungen und politische Szenarien/ Peoples of the Apocalypse. Eschatological Beliefs and Political Scenarios*, ed. R. Voss, W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag) (forthcoming) discusses the relationship between the *Vision* and other apocalyptic texts of the twelfth century. There is no critical edition of the *Vision of St. Nersēs*.

¹⁸ The process of de-eschatologization—evident in the written sources and thus expressing the point of view of at least the literate social stratum—happened roughly from the middle of the 13th c. onward. At that time the Mongols set on solidifying a system of territory control in their western domains, culminating in the establishment of the Ilkhānate. The local elites of Anatolia and the southern Caucasus, whatever their religious or ethnic back-ground, had to come to terms with the new rulers and to find a *modus vivendi*. In this context the eschatological explanatory paradigm had to be revised. The process of de-eschatologization and evidence for this is provided in Pogossian, "Armenians, Mongols," *passim*.

¹⁹ *Թորգոմուգոնիք զպսղէ Հաղարի*. Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 451; Yovsēp'ean, *Colophons*, p. 990; and Mat'evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 245 all have the variant *զպսղի* (gen. sing.), but Yovsēp'ean gives also another variant *ի զպսղէ* (abl. sing.) in the apparatus.

²⁰ This creative etymology is based on a word play, where "tur ew tar" (give and take) sounds like *tat'ar*, especially in the variant spelling employed, where the first letter is a non-aspirated *un/t* as opposed to the more common *p/t*.

...զորոց զանուանս կոչէ սուր և թէթել, զի թէրէս
Թաթարն սուր և թէթել ասի ըստ լծորդաց փոփոխման և կամ
տուր և տար, որ է տաթար քան զի հարին անյազապէս և
տարան աներկիւղապէս զորդիսն Սիոնի ի ստրկութիւն
գերութեան:

This imaginative etymology was meant to confirm the violent nature of the Mongols, or rather the T‘at‘ars: their name contained the essence of their behavior. Now, the *Vision of St. Nersēs* has survived in a number of versions and Vardan’s *Colophon* provides indirect evidence for the transmission of one text-type preserved in an early twelfth-century manuscript, part of M1912.²¹ Significantly, it is this version that was translated into Latin.²² In the *Vision of St. Nersēs* the name “Sharp and Light and Awake” belongs to a warrior king that will emerge from the East in an eschatological future, and who is described thus:

...[the Lord] will raise from the eastern side of this throne of
King Šapuh²³ who [rules] presently in the house of the Xorasanians,

²¹ Manuscripts will be cited according to the system of the Association Internationale des Etudes Arméniennes available at http://aiea.fltr.ucl.ac.be/aiea_fr/SIGLE_FR.htm, i.e. a capital letter indicating the location or name of the library followed by the number of the manuscript in the given library’s cataloguing system. The following *sigla* appear in this work: J = Jerusalem, Library of the Armenian Patriarchate; M = Matenadaran, Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan, Armenia. More than half a century ago Hovhannissyan, *Episodes*, pp. 28-29, identified M1912, which he dated to 1220, as containing a different text-type of the *Vision of St. Nersēs*, compared to the printed editions. Thanks to the permission of the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) in Yerevan, I was able to access this text through digital photographs, kindly provided by the Institute. My gratitude is due also to Garnik Harutyunyan from the same Institute for his help in identifying certain aspects of the manuscript. Access to the *Vision of St. Nersēs* in the M1912 version allowed me to establish some important facts about Vardan’s reliance on this text and his procedure when using such earlier sources when composing the *Colophon*. A detailed description of M1912 indicates that its second part, where the *Vision of St. Nersēs* appears, was copied in the 11th c.; *Mayr c‘uc‘ak hayerēn jeragrac‘ Maštoc‘i anuan Matenadarani* (Grand catalogue of Armenian manuscripts at Maštoc‘ Matenadaran), vol. 6, ed. G. Tēr-Vardanean (Yerevan: Nayiri, 2012), pp. 497-506. However, the *Vision of St. Nersēs* in this manuscript was updated beyond any doubt after the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099. There are explicit references to this event, as well as the conquest of Antioch before it, on fol. 316r-v. These are too precise to be “real” predictions as opposed to *vaticinia ex eventu*. Thus, M1912 may have been copied in the early 12th but not the 11th c.

²² The Latin version was edited by Agostino Pertusi and published posthumously in *Fine di Bisanzio e fine del Mondo. Significato e ruolo storiche delle profezie sulla caduta di Costantinopoli in Oriente e in Occidente*, ed. E. Morini (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1988), pp. 130-135 (text) and pp. 135-55 (comments and analysis). I have only made a brief comparison of the two texts. A more detailed study may reveal some differences.

²³ The mention of King Šapur II (309-379) was necessary since St. Nersēs lived in the 4th c.

a king with an alien face and an alien tongue.²⁴ His name [will be] Sharp and Light and Awake. [He is] neither from the race of Aršak the Parthian, nor of Cyrus the first King of the Persians, but from the remnants of the Ismaelites born of Hagar, and from an offspring of Elam's first tribes. [He is] terrible looking and amazing, insolent and arrogant, impertinent and with long hair.²⁵

...յարուսցէ յարեւելից կողմանէ յայսմ արթոռոյ Շապուհոյ արքայի, որ այժմս է ի տան խորասանաց, թագաւոր այդպէս էլ այդպէզու, անուն նորա սուր էլ թելթել էլ սգաստ. ոչ զազգէն Արշակա Պարթեւի կամ ի Կիրոսի յառաջին թագաւորէն պարսից. այդ ի մնացորդաց Իսմաէլեան, ի ծնընդոցն Հագարու. էլ ի զաւակէ Եղամայ յառաջին տոհմից. ահեղատես էլ զարմանալի. ժպիրի էլ սեզ, լիրբ էլ երկայնահեր:

The larger context whence the excerpt is taken makes unequivocal allusions to the eleventh-century Seljuq conquests of Anatolia and the Byzantines' inability to withstand their incursions. The vague and symbolically allusive language employed to describe an evil king—an anti-hero—who came from the east of Xorasan, conjures up a set of identity markers associated with a nomadic steppe “Barbarian.” The reference to “long hair” is especially intriguing in this context as the latter *topos* was used to describe Turkic peoples of the north Caucasian or Eurasian steppes in other sources too.²⁶ Whomever the *Vision of Nersēs* alluded to, the Eastern King's

Thus, a prophecy ascribed to him, even if written later, would still need to make references to kings who were his contemporaries.

²⁴ Note that the Mongols were often characterized as having an “alien” something, i.e. an alien face/look/*այլադէմ*, an alien language/*այլալեզու*, etc. Composite words with a first root in *այլ*/alien were commonly used in a polemical way to denote a concept or entity alien to the Armenians or their ways. The application of this principle in the characterization of the Mongols is observed by Sirinian, “I Mongoli nei Colofoni,” p. 497.

²⁵ M1912 fol. 303v. I have capitalized the proper names and applied modern punctuation to the text of the manuscripts.

²⁶ Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *Patmut'wn Ałuanic' ašxarhi* (History of the Country of Ałuank'), ed. V. Ařak'elyan (Yerevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1983), p. 141, where Emperor Heraclius' allies in his campaign against Xosrow II in 625-626—“people of the North”—are told to be a “gold-loving long-haired nation.” Constantin Zuckerman, “The Khazars and Byzantium,” pp. 399-432, identified Heraclius' northern allies as Turks. Similarly, the eleventh/twelfth century historian Matt'ēos Urhayec'i, *Žamanakagrut'wn* (Chronicle), ed. M. Melik'-Adamyanyan and N. Ter-Mik'ayelyan, trans. to modern Armenian and comments by H. Bartikian (Yerevan: Yerevan University Press, 1991), p. 54, comments on the unusual looks of the Seljuqs who were “archers and with loose hair like women.”

name “Sharp and Light and Awake,” as well as his genealogy was taken out of its context and applied to an entire people by Vardan, who, he claimed vaguely but accurately, “came from the northeast.” Vardan thus made an implicit connection between the Seljuqs, or more generally the Turks, and the Mongols by transferring an apocalyptic imagery from one nomadic steppe people to another.²⁷ The juxtaposition of the two peoples was an important explanatory strategy for Vardan. In fact, his reflections on the Mongols’ biblical genealogy is further evidence in this direction.

When postulating a biblical genealogy for the Mongols Vardan again appeals to the authority of St. Nersēs, but then incorporates material from other, Syrian sources, as he affirms, and concludes by ascribing a geography and proposing a specific “nation”—the Tughark’—to be identified with the Mongols.²⁸

And St. Nersēs says that they are from the remnants of Hagar, and the Syrians say that they are of Torgom, as is known mixed with the nation of Gog, who is from Torgom, and the race of Hagar,²⁹ who possesses the part of the world [that is] Scythia, which starts from the River At‘l³⁰ and stretches to the mountains Emawon,³¹ where forty three nations live who are called by the name *Xužakan*³²

²⁷ Armenian sources rarely make a distinction between various tribal or dynastic groups and usually employ the generic term “Turks.” However, the thirteenth-century historian Mxit‘ar Ayrivanec‘i’s list of priests, prophets, kings, etc. of various peoples, makes a point in identifying the founder of the Seljuqs as “Saljuk the Turk‘man” and his descendants as “Salčuks,” Mxit‘ar[ay] Ayrivanec‘[woy], *Patmut‘iwn Hayoc‘* (History of the Armenians), ed. M. Emin (Moscow: Lazarean Seminary Press, 1860), pp. 21-22. In this essay I will use the word “Turk” as the medieval writers did, i.e. to denote any Turkic (but not Mongolic) people or tribe, unless the sources themselves are more precise.

²⁸ While the usual transliteration of Armenian *ղ* is *l*, I have opted for *gh* when it stands for what is normally transliterated as “q” in words of Turco-Mongolian origin.

²⁹ The italicized part is not included in all the manuscripts, such as the ms. of New Julfa 243 which Yovsēp‘ean used for his edition, cf. Yovsēp‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 991. However, it is found in other mss. and printed versions, such as Ališan, *Hayapatum*, pp. 452-453, and Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 245.

³⁰ The Armenian variant is *Up2/At‘š*, obviously due to a confusion between graphically similar letters *l/l* and *2/š*. The *Geography* of Anania Širakac‘i, on whom this information is based, has the variant At‘l. The River At‘l refers to the Volga, *Širakac‘u ‘Ašxarhac‘oyc‘ə*’ (The *Geography of* [Anania] Širakac‘i), in A. Abrahamyan, *Anania Širakac‘u matenagrut‘iwnə* (The Works of Anania Širakac‘i) (Yerevan: Matenadaran of Armenian SSR, 1944), p. 353.

³¹ Presumably the Himalayas. In his *Historical Compilation* Vardan says that Japheth received a portion of the world that stretched east of Europe, from the “Mountain Emawon.” Here the identification of Emawon with the Himalayas is less clear and could be interpreted even as referring to the Carpathian mountains, Thomson, *Historical Compilation*, p. 146.

³² The expression “*xužakan* name” is translated literally. The word *xužakan* usually denotes “Barbarian.”

in their languages, and the chief [among] them is called *Buṣḫ*³³ and the name of one nation is said [to be] *T'ughark'*, which I think are the T'at'ars...

Եւ ասէ զնոսայ սուրբն Ներսէս ի մնացորդացն Հագարու և Ասորիք ասեն զ[նո]սա³⁴ Թորգոմեանս, յայտ է՝ խառնեալ ազգին Գովգայ, որ ի Թորգոմայ՝ ընդ զարմն Հագարու, որք ունին զՍկութիայ մասն աշխարհի, որ սկսանի յԱթշ գետոյ և ձգի առ Եմաւոն լերամբն, ուր բնակեալ են ազգ ԽԳ, որք Խուժական անուամբ կոչին յիրեանց լեզուս և գլխաւորն սոցայ Բուշխ անուանի և անուն միոյ ազգին Թուղարք ասի, զոր կարծեմ այս են Թաթարքս...

The passage from the *Vision of St. Nersēs* cited above leaves no doubt that Vardan relied on this source. In the *Vision*, however, the King “Sharp and Light and Awake” was of Hagar’s progeny and an Ismaelite. In the *Colophon*, the Ismaelite connection was suppressed, since its obvious Islamic connotations did not fit the Mongols in 1248. Instead, an intriguing new detail was added: the Torgomite line of the Mongols’ descent from Hagar, mixed with Gog.³⁵ Vardan does not name his Syriac source, but, in fact, he adopted this genealogical construction from his own and Iṣḥāq’s translation of Michael the Syrian’s *Chronicle*. A comparison of Vardan’s *Colophon* to the Syriac and the two Armenian versions reveals that Vardan relied on the Armenian translations, even though it cannot be determined which version he used. From Michael the Syrian Vardan transferred the Japhethic/Torgomic origin of

³³ Yovsep‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 991, Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453 has the variant *P‘uṣḫ* which is obviously based on the Western Armenian pronunciation, Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 245. Cf. Zuckerman, “The Khazars and Byzantium,” pp. 422-425 on the ethnonym *Buṣḫ*, including a discussion of the Long Version of the *Geography* of Anania Širakac‘i which mentions them and the localization of the peoples *Buṣḫk'* in the Samara Elbow segment of the Volga. It is not clear why Vardan preserved this seemingly irrelevant detail in his *Colophon*.

³⁴ Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 245 has the variant *qūw*, i.e. acc. sing. of “he” or “she.”

³⁵ In light of Vardan’s suppression of Ismaelite genealogy, it is rather strange that he maintained the reference to Hagar, i.e. Ismael’s mother. Presumably a Hagarite progeny, while still casting a negative shadow on the Mongols in the minds of Vardan’s Armenian readers, remained more ambiguous and one could even argue that the line of descent did not necessarily pass through Ismael, but another son of Hagar. Nevertheless, this information could still be confusing for contemporaries, since the most widespread opinion was that the Arabs descended from Abraham through Hagar. Intriguingly, some Islamic traditions postulated an Abrahamic origin of the Turks but through his wife Qetura; see Yehoshua Frenkel, “The Turks of the Eurasian Steppes in Medieval Arabic Writing,” in *Mongols, Turks and Others. Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. R. Amitai and M. Biran (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 225-226.

the Turks to the Mongols, using the same principle of association between the two peoples as when applying the titles ‘Sharp and Light and Awake’ or the ‘Nation of the Archers’ to the Mongols. Intriguingly, while the Syriac original of the *Chronicle* mentions the Turks’ Japhethic progeny through Magog,³⁶ both Armenian versions specify that the precise family line went through Torgom. Here are the different versions of this genealogy found in the Syriac and the two Armenian versions of Michael’s *Chronicle*:

MSS ³⁷	MSA I ³⁸	MSA II ⁴⁰
This nation of Turks... is found to be from the sons of Japheth, for they are the sons of Magog. Even as the great Moses has written, “Magog [was] the son of Japheth, the son of Noah.”	The head of the prophets, Holy Moses, says thus in his Book: “Japheth begot Tiras and the latter Torgom and Gog and others with him.” ³⁹ It is, thus, known that [they] are from the nation of Torgom, because of which they are called “Turk,” from whom [come] Gog and Magog which is a tumultuous nation.	The Holy Moses says in the Book of Genesis: “Torgom begot Gog and others with him.” It is known that Turks are from the nation of Japheth, which is Gog and Magog. And they are called “Turk” because of Torgom. ⁴¹

³⁶ *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, ed. and trans. J.-P. Chabot, vol. 3 (Paris: Ernest Leroux Éditeur, 1905) [Henceforth: MSS], p. 149.

³⁷ The English translation is taken from Mark Dickens, *Medieval Syriac Historians’ Perceptions of the Turks* (M. Phil. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2004), p. 29. In the Syriac version it is the beginning of Book XIV, Chapter 1: MSS, p. 149. The Armenian versions compress the various chapters of Book XIV, eliminating the thematic divisions of the Syriac original.

³⁸ MSA I, p. 394: Գլուխն մարգարէից սուրբն Մովսէս ասէ ի գիրս իւրում այսպէս՝ «Յաբէթ ծնաւ զԹիրասս և նա զԹորգոմ և զԳովք և զայլս ընդ նմա»: Ուստի յայտ է թէ յազգէ Թորգոմայ են, վասն որոյ և Թուրք ասի. Յորմէ Գովք և Մագովք, որ է ազգ ամբոխական.

³⁹ In the *Historical Compilation* of Vardan we read that the eponymous founder of the Armenian nation was Hayk “son of Torgom, son of T‘iras, son of Gamir, son of Japheth, son of Noah.” Thomson, *Historical Compilation*, p. 148 and n. 3 for the identification of Movsēs Xorenac‘i I.5 as Vardan’s source. The ultimate source of all these genealogical constructions was Gen. 10:2-3.

⁴⁰ MSA II, p. 387: Ասէ սուրբն Մովսէս ի գիրս արարածոցն, թէ «Թորգոմ ծնաւ զԳովք և զայլս ընդ նմա». յայտ է՝ զի յազգէ Յաբէթի է Թուրքը, որ է Գովք և Մագովք: Եւ Թուրք վասն Թորգոմայ ասին...

⁴¹ Ališan in his commentary to Vardan’s *Colophon* in *Hayapatum*, p. 452, n. 7, also remarks that “some people consider Turks as [originating from] Torgom because of the similarity of the names... but this is not correct.” He does not cite the source of his comment, which must be the Armenian version of Michael the Syrian.

Michael was the first Syriac author to have identified the Turks with the sons of Japheth through Magog.⁴² But the Japhethic origin of the Turks—or a certain Turkic group when specified—was a rather widely held opinion, found in a variety of medieval Jewish, Christian and Islamic sources and accepted in some native Turkic traditions too. This subsequently meant that the Turkish homeland was believed to have been that which was allotted to Japheth after the Flood.⁴³ The different types of sources had their own agendas when ascribing such a genealogy to the Turks, which is not of central concern to this essay.⁴⁴ The reasons why Vardan and Išoḥ added the Torgomic line of descent to the Turks in their translations of Michael the Syrian's *Chronicle* are also beyond the scope of the present article.⁴⁵ This element is certainly intriguing in light of the long-standing Armenian received tradition about themselves as descendants of Torgom.⁴⁶

By transferring the Japhethic genealogy from Turks to Mongols Vardan allotted a further series of representations and preconceptions associated with a Eurasian nomad to this newly arrived people. Moreover, Vardan's other contemporaries made such connections as well. Some years later, a similar

⁴² Dickens, *Medieval Syriac Historians*, pp. 28-31.

⁴³ Frenkel, "The Turks of the Eurasian Steppe," p. 219, for evidence from al-Gardīzī on the Turks' geographical origin: "the Turks, Slavs and Gog and Magog as far as China"; p. 225, n. 133, on Al-Mas'ūdī's summary of other scholars' opinions that the Turks were of Japhethic origin; p. 216 on Jewish authors identifying the Turkic peoples of the Black Sea steppe with Japheth; p. 228 for information from al-Kashgari on native Turkic traditions. For an overview of Arabic sources on the Torgomic/Japhetic origin of the Khazars but with implications for Turkic peoples in general, see T. M. Kalinina, "Al-Khazara and Aṣ-Ṣaḡāliba: Contacts. Conflicts?" in *The World of Khazars*, pp. 195-206.

⁴⁴ Frenkel, "The Turks of the Eurasian Steppe," p. 225 suggests that the Japhetic biblical genealogy ultimately connected the Turks with Abraham (through his third wife Qetura) and forged a link between Arabs and Turks. Dickens, *Medieval Syriac Historians*, pp. 37-40, and throughout his work demonstrates how Michael the Syrian tried to demystify the origin of the Turks by ascribing them a Japhetic/Togarmic genealogy. Moreover, Michael used various narrative techniques to de-eschatologize the "Gog and Magog" *topos* associated with the Turks and to mitigate the negative bearing of Ezekiel 38-39. His purpose seems to have been to compose an apology for Turkish rule in Mesopotamia. Vardan's and Išoḥ's modifications of Michael the Syrian's description of the Turks need to be researched and analyzed on their own.

⁴⁵ A first, superficial reading, leads one to think that Vardan's choice was dictated by the similarity of the names "Turk" and "Torgom," as noted by Ališan.

⁴⁶ For a thirteenth-century Armenian author a most authoritative source for this tradition would be Movsēs Xorenac'i, *Patmut' iwn Hayoc'* (History of the Armenians) (Tiflis: 1913), I.5. His date is hotly debated by scholars and vacillates between the 5th and the 9th centuries. But many other Armenian authors repeat this biblical genealogy of the Armenians, including Vardan himself in his *Historical Compilation*, see Thomson, "Historical Compilation," pp. 131 and 148. This genealogy is ultimately based on Gen. 10:1-3, where we learn that Torgom was the son of Gomer (Gamir in Armenian sources), son of Japheth.

approach to the two peoples would appear in the *Chronicle* of Bar Ebroyo.⁴⁷ Muslim writers too considered the Mongols as part of the Turks.⁴⁸ But, besides general trends and the appearance of common motifs in literate elite cultures of the thirteenth-century Near East in which Vardan participated, his systematization of Turks and Mongols under the same category could be based on other reasons.

Firstly, Vardan’s narrative strategy of applying certain markers associated with the Other from one people to another had a long history in the Armenian historiography.⁴⁹ Secondly, it could well be the result of his own evaluation of the two peoples’ cultural similarities based on personal experiences and observations, not to mention the vivid image of the equestrian archer which fit both peoples and facilitated the transfer of the title “Nation of the Archers.”⁵⁰ Thirdly, the geographical information about the Mongol homeland—somewhere in the far away northeast covering a vast domain that stretched from the Volga to the Himalayas—certainly overlapped with previous knowledge about the homeland of the Turkic nomadic peoples of the steppe, whatever their exact tribal origin or more precise location within Eurasia may have been. Such reports could be found not only in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian about the Turks but also in earlier Armenian sources, such as the *Geography* of Anania Širakac‘i on whom Vardan relied, even repeating names of peoples or tribes who had long disappeared. This previous knowledge and the preconceptions shaped by it made the association of the two nomadic peoples originating in the vast Eurasian domain—Turks and Mongols—quite natural for a medieval author. Should Vardan have wished to test the veracity of the information culled from books by means of an inquiry into first-hand sources, including the Mongols themselves, he would have certainly found

⁴⁷ Dickens, *Medieval Syriac Historians*, p. 33. Bar Ebroyo introduced the Seljuqs in his *Chronicle* by quoting Michael the Syrian: “These are the children of Māghôgh, the son of Japhet, the son of Noah,” while later on he refers to the Mongols as “the House of Māghôgh.” For the European identification of the Mongols with the people of Gog and Magog, see Felicitas Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden. Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. bis in das 15. Jahrhundert* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke Verlag, 1994).

⁴⁸ Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhānīd War 1260-1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 220, citing evidence from Ibn al-Athīr.

⁴⁹ Robert Thomson, “Christian Perception of History – the Armenian Perspective,” in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, ed. J.J. Van Ginkel, H.L. Murre – van den Berg, T. M. van Lint (Leuven-Paris-Dudely, MA: Brill, 2005), pp. 35-44; Sergio La Porta, “Conflicted Coexistence: Christian-Muslim interaction and its representation in medieval Armenia,” in *Contextualizing the Muslim Other in Medieval Judeo-Christian Discourses*, ed. J. Frakes (New York, 2011), pp. 103-124.

⁵⁰ For the importance of nomadic traditions among Seljuq Turks, see Andrew C. S. Peacock, “Nomadic Society and the Seljūq Campaigns in Caucasia,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 9/2 (2005), pp. 205-230. The author treats only the 11th and early 12th c., however.

confirmation for some of his ideas. Thus, Vardan's effort to place the Mongols in the known world that was parceled out to Noah's children in the biblical past and described by the venerated scholars of his native or neighboring peoples' traditions, was based on a combination of factual information and previous knowledge or stereotypes. Certainly, it would be natural for Vardan or any other author to view the Mongols through the lens of his own experiences, learning, and new information received from what we would call today reliable sources. But we can hardly expect a medieval author to have made the same distinctions as we do when evaluating the sources at his disposal.

The few lines scrutinized from Vardan's *Colophon* already demonstrate that his short composition is a multi-layered and eclectic piece of writing that combines real and imaginary information—a dichotomy posited by modern scholars and not necessarily medieval authors—to provide an explanatory paradigm for this recently arrived people and their rapid conquests. It is, incidentally, an early testimony to this author's mode of scholarship, which is evident also in his *Historical Compilation*: taking information from a number of different sources and combining them to create a new narrative.⁵¹ This was accomplished in the *Colophon* through the parallel processes of gathering new information and re-elaborating it according to the expectations of a medieval author (and his presumed audience), who did not hesitate to assimilate previous knowledge on Eurasian nomads to a new people, the Mongols. While Vardan's method of research and writing may have resulted in intriguing new information, its historical value should be accepted with the same due caution as many other medieval authors' testimonies on the Mongols.⁵²

The Exodus of the Mongols

Besides direct borrowings from the Armenian version of Michael the Syrian in establishing the Mongols' biblical genealogy, Vardan structured other aspects of his *Colophon* on the venerable Syriac historian's chapter on the Turks. It must be noted, however, that there are no other examples of obvious dependence on Michael the Syrian besides those cited above. Rather, there are certain affinities between the underlying themes and narrative motifs which appear in the description of the Mongols' exodus from their *Urheimat* by Vardan and Michael's account on how the Turks left their original

⁵¹ On this aspect of Vardan's *Historical Compilation*, see Thomson, "The Historical Compilation," p. 133.

⁵² For an interesting and pertinent case of age-old stereotypes about nomads and their material culture influencing even eye-witness accounts on the Mongols, such as that by William of Rubruck, and continued to the present, see Michael Gervers and Wayne A. Schlepp, "Felt and 'Tent Carts' in *The Secret History of the Mongols*," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 7/1 (1997), pp. 93-116.

homeland.⁵³

According to Michael the Syrian, the Turks, descendants of Japheth and thus located in the northeast where the latter were assumed to be, were barred from moving westward by two gates. One of them was between two mountains—“Breasts of the North”—in Iberia, constructed by Alexander the Great, while the second one was at the borders of Persia.⁵⁴ The native land of the Mongols is said to be to the northeast also by Vardan, but he does not employ the motif of the Gates of Alexander.⁵⁵ The *Colophon* leaves the impression that Vardan pondered the various possibilities in attempting to identify the Mongols with one of the forty three “Barbarian nations”—information adopted from the *Geography* of Anania Širakac‘i—and concluded that the most likely candidates were the T‘ughark‘ (Toxarians). At some undefined moment the “original” Mongols⁵⁶ moved even further east from T‘urk‘astan “as we heard from some of them.”⁵⁷ It is from this location that the contemporary Mongols presumably went westward. Michael the Syrian connected the Turks’ exodus with their native legends about a “white animal”—presumably the totemic Grey Wolf—which lead them, as a way of justifying their conquests and rule in Mesopotamia, ascribing those to God’s plan.⁵⁸

Vardan, on the other hand, outlines something like a “civilizational

⁵³ I borrow the term exodus to describe the Turks’ movement from their homeland towards Anatolia and Mesopotamia from Dickens, *Medieval Syriac Historians*, p. 61.

⁵⁴ MSS, p. 151; MSA I, p. 388; MSA II, p. 395. The account in the Syriac original is much longer and is analyzed in detail in Dickens, *Medieval Syriac Historians*, pp. 54-64. On the cluster of texts that contributed to the creation of this legend and the *topos* “Breasts of the North,” see Andrea B. Schmidt, “Die ‘Brüst des Nordens’ und Alexanders Mauer gegen Gog und Magog,” in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (Berlin-New York: W. de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 89-99.

⁵⁵ This may be due to the fact that the Armenian traditions on the Gates of Alexander were considerably different from the Syriac ones as discussed in Schmidt, “Die ‘Brüst des Nordens’.”

⁵⁶ Vardan literally says “the first of them”/ւնւղփփ ւնգւ, Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453, Yovsep‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 991, Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, pp. 245-246.

⁵⁷ Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453, Yovsep‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 991, Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 246.

⁵⁸ Michael mentions two “irruptions” of the Turks, the first one he dates 510 years before Christ and the second is said to be the most recent, i.e. that of the Seljuq invasions of the 11th c., MSS, p. 150. He then says that there were other occasions when they moved out, e.g. MSS, p. 152. He further describes a gradual migration of Turks to Persia that he dates to one hundred years before the fall of the Sasanian Empire, MSS 153. An analysis of the possible historical moments that may be reflected in these instances can be found in Dickens, *Medieval Syriac Historians*, pp. 54-55, and pp. 60-61 for a discussion of Michael’s purpose in retelling legends from native Turkish traditions. The Armenian versions of the same narrative are much shorter, cf. MSA I, pp. 396-399 and MSA II, pp. 389-390.

process” combined with religious revelations that slightly preceded the Mongol migration and continued while they were on the move. Michael the Syrian makes a strong connection between the Turks’ exposure to the wealth of sedentary Persia, whom they had been serving as mercenaries, and their desire to move out of their homeland behind the “Breasts of the North.”⁵⁹ Vardan also creates an implicit cause and effect relationship between the Mongols’ poverty-stricken existence dedicated to pillage, and their emigration as a means of abandoning their grim living conditions. Of course, the underlying presumptions of both Michael and Vardan are preconceived notions, as well as actual modes of interaction between nomadic and sedentary cultures, especially on the borderland regions. Depicting steppe nomads as poor robbers and Barbarians was a common stereotype repeated by writers of sedentary cultures across space and time.⁶⁰

The modalities of the emigration of each group outlined in the two authors reveal further parallels. Michael the Syrian describes a first *avant-garde* group—mercenaries of the Persians who were being escorted back to their homeland behind the Gates—who attacked the Persian guards and conquered a fortress, whence they asked for reinforcements from their co-nationals left behind. With the latter’s help the Turks eventually expanded their rule to Margiana.⁶¹ The narrative structure in Vardan is similar but far from identical. According to him, some of the Mongols, tired of a life in poverty and invoking the help of the “Celestial God” moved out first, seized a small town, then requested help from among those left in “their country.” They eventually reached Persia and conquered it.⁶² Both authors talk of a three-fold division of

⁵⁹ MSS, p. 153; MSA I, pp. 396-396 and MSA II, pp. 389-390.

⁶⁰ A most emblematic example is the economic, political and military interactions, conflict or cooperation depending on the circumstances, between the Eurasian steppe nomads and sedentary China; see, for example, Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); idem, “Inner Asia and Cycles of Power in China’s Imperial Dynastic History,” in *Rulers from the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery*, ed. G. Seaman and D. Marks (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Ethnographics Press, 1991), pp. 21-62; and Sechin Jagchid, “The Historical Interaction between the Nomadic People in Mongolia and the Sedentary Chinese,” in *ibid.*, pp. 63-91. A magisterial and stimulating discussion of this “steppe vs. sown” phenomenon is found in Fletcher, “The Mongols.” See also the description of the interaction between Hephthalites and the Sasanian Empire, involving both the giving of military assistance and the raiding of borders as occasions presented themselves, as a representative example in Golden, *Introduction*, p. 82.

⁶¹ MSS, p. 153; MSA I, p. 397 and MSA II, p. 390. The Syriac version dates this event to the end of the “Last Empire of the Persians,” while the Armenian versions state that this happened five hundred and ten (or eleven) years before Jesus Christ: MSA I, p. 396; MSA II, p. 389.

⁶² Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453; Yovsēp‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 991, Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 246.

the Turks (Michael) or the Mongols (Vardan) as they moved out of their homeland. Then one group went to India in the south; the second, to the northwest—near Thrace (Michael the Syrian)—or the desert of the North (Vardan); and the third, to Persia.⁶³ The encounter of each nomadic people with a sedentary culture is described as having had a more or less significant impact on their religious beliefs.

To wrap up before embarking on an analysis of Vardan’s understanding of the Mongol religion, let me reiterate the main conclusions regarding Vardan’s reliance on Michael the Syrian’s *Chronicle*. It is clear enough that the two sources share many similarities. In most cases Vardan is indebted not directly to the Syriac version of the *Chronicle* but rather its Armenian translation and adaptation. Michael’s description of the Turks, their westward migration and conquests, provided a loose blueprint to which Vardan referred when shaping his own story of the Mongols. This does not mean *a priori* that Vardan deliberately changed “more reliable” information on the actual events to fit his model. His *Colophon* is far from mimicking Michael, as he adds considerable new data on the Mongols, taken from other sources, including first-hand oral reports. It is more plausible to imagine that Vardan’s close familiarity with the text of Michael the Syrian suggested to him certain affinities between the Turks and the Mongols, as well as the history of their military conquests originating in the “East”—however large and vague this term may have been—to the West, including Armenia and large parts of Asia Minor.

Religion and Conquest

As we saw above, Vardan (or his sources) imagined the earliest Mongols to have settled somewhere east of T‘urk‘astan. These “original” Mongols are reported to have had “no religious worship (*պաշտան*),” a term best translated as *latría*. Yet, they had some idea of the Numinous, since “they admired the Sun⁶⁴ and for the purposes of divination had certain felt images which they still carry with them.”⁶⁵ This narrative unit is set in an almost mythical time—*illo tempore*—since these details appear immediately after the sentence which informed the reader about the Mongols’ biblical genealogy and their geography, both inserted in the context of a post-diluvian “colonization” of the world. This setting implies that it was in biblical times that the Mongols had no religious worship but admired the Sun. Let us note the verbal differentiation. While *պաշտան* (*paštawn*)/*latría* was an accepted

⁶³ MSS, p. 155; MSA I, p. 398; MSA II, p. 390; Ališan, *Hayapatum*; Yovsēp‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 992, Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 246.

⁶⁴ Հնդ պրէզակն զարմանային.

⁶⁵ Yovsēp‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 991, Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 246, Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453.

term also for Christian worship, the phrase “they *admired* the Sun,” rendered by the verb *qupułuyhñ* (*zarmayin*), has no obvious religious significance. This could well be understood as characterizing a people so primitive that their beliefs or practices could not be described by appropriate religious terminology. Vardan thus created a verbal hierarchy which conveyed a message about the quality of religious experiences. Sure enough the behavior of these first Mongols, engaged in robbery and pillage as they were, came to complete the image of a savage people without religion.

That nomads had “no religion” or “no religious services” was a common *topos* applied to Eurasian populations in various sources from which one may cite a couple of examples. Ammianus Marcellinus thought that the Huns did not worship or believe in anything.⁶⁶ In the Georgian *Life of St. Abo*, the Khazars are described as “wild men, fearsome of face, savage in character, drinkers of blood, *without religion except that they recognize a god the creator*.”⁶⁷ Close parallels can be drawn also with some Islamic authors’ depictions of pre-Islamic Turks as “having no religion.”⁶⁸ Vardan’s friend Kirakos Ganjakec’i used almost identical language about the Mongols, claiming that they had no “religious worship”/*uyuzunulñ*, but then went on to describe their reverence for Tängri.

Vardan’s reference to a form of Sun-veneration may have further implications. It was a “false *latria*” of which the Armenian authors had accused the Zoroastrians, calling them *arewapašt* or Sun-worshippers.⁶⁹ In the twelfth century, an Armenian community of “Sons of the Sun,” *arewordik’*, were exposed in Mesopotamia and condemned by the Catholicos Nersēs Šnorhali for their worship of the Sun, among other objects.⁷⁰ Thus, Vardan

⁶⁶ Jean-Paul Roux, “Tängri. Essai sur le ciel-dieu des peuples altaïque,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 149/1 (1956), pp. 49-82; Part II in 149/2 (1956), pp. 197-230 and Part III in 150/1 (1956), pp. 27-54. The specific reference is from Roux, “Tängri II,” pp. 198-199.

⁶⁷ Cited from Golden, “The Conversion of the Khazars,” in *The World of the Khazars*, p. 135; italics are mine.

⁶⁸ Frenkel, “The Turks of the Eurasian Steppes,” p. 218.

⁶⁹ See for example, the fifth-century historian P’awstos Buzand (IV.59) who talks of the apostate Prince Meružan Arcruni (IV c.?) as one who worships “the Sun and the fire.” The historian Movsēs Xorenac’i describes temple foundations of the Zoroastrian King Valaršak (Vologeses) to include temples to the Sun. These examples are taken from James Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 53, 493. It is not my purpose here to trace Sun worship among pre-Christian Zoroastrian Armenians, which is discussed at length throughout Russell’s monograph. What is important for this study is that a thirteenth-century Armenian author would associate Sun worship with Zoroastrianism, with a strong sense of disapproval.

⁷⁰ Nersēs Šnorhali, *Endhanrakan t’ult’k’* (Encyclical Letters) (Jerusalem: St. James Armenian Patriarchate Press, 1871), pp. 223-229; James Russell, “The Credal Poem Hawatov Xostovanim (“I Confess in Faith”) of St. Nersēs the Graceful,” in *Redefining Christian*

added a further contentious edge to his narration. But here too, he is only one of many authors who reported Sun worship among Eurasian nomads. *Hudud al-‘ālam*, to cite one of the Islamic sources, mentions Sun worship among the Turks.⁷¹ Numerous Sun amulets discovered by archaeologists in Khazar territory attest to if not a Sun cult among this Turkic people (Golden interprets them as representing the Tängri cult), then at least a religious image which for an outside viewer could represent an object of worship.⁷² Closer to Vardan’s time, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine reported Mongol beliefs associated with the Sun and the Moon.⁷³ That this was not only a stereotype but had a basis in actual Mongol practice is confirmed by examples of Sun veneration (or at least actions that could lead an observer to assume such a veneration) found in the *Secret History of the Mongols*.⁷⁴ Vardan also notes that they possessed “certain felt images for the purpose of divination which they still carry with them.”⁷⁵ He does not say what the felt images represented, but the ritual importance of felt among Eurasian nomads is well-known.⁷⁶

Vardan frames the emigration of the Mongols out of their original homeland within a “civilizational” discourse whose cornerstone is adherence to a form of monotheism. Their exodus is linked to the recognition of a “Celestial God, creator of everything” by some judicious Mongols.

Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam, ed. J.J. Van Ginkel, H.L. Murre – van den Berg, T. M. van Lint (Leuven-Paris-Dudely, MA: Brill, 2005), pp. 185-236.

⁷¹ Frenkel, “The Turks of the Eurasian Steppes,” pp. 118-220.

⁷² Golden, “Khazar Conversion to Judaism,” p. 132.

⁷³ Discussed in Roux, “Tängri II,” p. 215. More details on the fire-cult among these populations can be found in idem, “Fonctions chamaniques et valeurs du feu chez les peuples altaïques,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 189/1 (1976), pp. 67-101. Fletcher, “The Mongols,” p. 30, even proposes a working hypothesis that not only fire worship but also the idea of a universal dominion came from the Aryans “some of whom eventually migrated into Iran and India and some of whom remained in the steppe.” Zoroastrian type fire worship among pre-Islamic Turks is reported by Al-Idrīsī, while *Hudud al-‘ālam* mentions their veneration of the Sun; cited in Frenkel, “The Turks of the Eurasian Steppes,” p. 220. Knowledge of Mazdaism is affirmed again by Roux, “Les Religions dans les sociétés turco-mongols,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 201/4 (1984), p. 400, who talks about possible Zoroastrian influences on Turco-Mongol religions, and by Golden, *Introduction*, p. 150. This would, in the final analysis, support Vardan’s contention.

⁷⁴ *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. and comm. I. de Rachewiltz, 2 vols. (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 33, where Temüjin (future Chinggis Khan) “beat his breast with his fist, and nine times kneeling down towards the sun, he offered libation and a prayer.”

⁷⁵ Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453, Yovsēp‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 991, Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 246.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Golden, *Introduction*, p. 147, on the ritual elevation of a newly elected Qagan on a felt carpet. For a survey on felt in the *Secret History of the Mongols* and in the Mongols’ every-day life, see Gervers-Schlepp, “Felt and ‘Tent Carts’.”

Subsequently, their successful conquests are tied to a covenant with this newly “discovered” God:⁷⁷

...they called the Celestial God, who created everything, to their aid and made a vow to him and came out to a small town and captured it from [its] lords...

...կոչեցին զերկնաւորն Աստուած, որ զամենայն ինչ արար՝ յօգնութիւն անձանց, և ուխտեցին նմա ուխտ և ելին ի վերայ քաղաքի միոյ փոքրու և յափշտակեցին զնա ի տերանցն...

The capture of the aforementioned town precipitates the chain of further conquests until the Mongols reach Persia. Here yet another comparison between Michael the Syrian and Vardan is in order. According to Michael the Syrian, the “original” Turks, i.e. those that lived behind the Gates, proclaimed One God, Kōk Tängri, but had no knowledge of the Abrahamic religions.⁷⁸ The Syriac version expands only about the Turks’ conversion to Islam, while the Armenian versions add that some Turks who moved to the other parts of the world, such as India, Armenia, Georgia or the “West” adopted other religions, such as Christianity or “idolatry.”⁷⁹ Again, there is a kernel of truth in these narratives; but they also convey the message that the nomads’ encounter with settled cultures led to the former’s acceptance of a new religion, that of the settled folk. It is this fundamental change of attitude that lies behind their military success. Vardan does not specifically mention the cult of Tängri in relation to the Mongols’ “Celestial God.” However, his locution “Celestial God” is a perfect translation of “Kōk Tängri” into Armenian, if *kōk* was understood according its meaning “celestial, heavenly”

⁷⁷ Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453, Yovsēp‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 991, Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 246. Sirinian’s translation of this expression as “dio terreno” (terrestrial god) in eadem, “I Mongoli nei colofoni,” p. 503, is not supported by the source.

⁷⁸ MSS, p. 152. Dickens, *Medieval Syriac Historians*, p. 51, translates Michael thus: “They do not have intellectual knowledge or a corpus of the wisdom of learning, and they are not aware of Moses or any of the prophets, nor of the advent of our Saviour, our Life-giver, Christ our God. Therefore, it is thought that no apostle or evangelist has gone to them.” See also Dickens’ analysis and comments on Michael’s possible sources, especially Armenian ones on pp. 49-53. The Armenian versions contain the same core information: MSA I, p. 395, mentions “Kōk‘tanghri” (Կօքսանդրի), i.e. Kōk Tängri, or MSA II, “Kōn tangri/kōn tangri.” Both versions gloss it as “Blue God.” These are all, of course, references to the widely diffused belief among the Altaic peoples in a celestial God Tängri. This belief is discussed in Roux, “Tängri,” parts I, II, and Golden, *Introduction*, pp. 149-151.

⁷⁹ See MSS, pp. 156-7, on the conversion of the Turks to Islam because of their military service to the Arabs; MSA I, p. 399, and MSA II, p. 392.

rather than “blue.”⁸⁰

Unlike Michael the Syrian who qualifies the beliefs of the Turks in the light of his own understanding of religious doctrine, Vardan does not engage in any discussion regarding the Celestial God of the Mongols, thus leaving open a fundamental question. What was this God’s relationship to Vardan’s and his community’s God? Presumably, Vardan is referring to the same Tängri cult which, of course, existed among the Mongols. Vardan not only posits a form of monotheism among the Mongols but he is also aware of the Mongol ideology of a divine mandate to conquer and rule the world.⁸¹ While he does not dispute the Mongol concept of God, he does add a polemical spin to the modality whereby the God-given destiny to rule the world was revealed to them. When the Mongols conquer Persia this is what happens:⁸²

...and there they learned sorcery from the *magi* and receiving an injunction from those diviners that the whole world was given to them by God, they went out confidently and inherited it.

...ուսան և ի մոզաց անտի կախարդութիւնս, և տուեալ
հրամանս ի դիւթաց անտի, եթէ տուեալ է նոցա յԱստուծոյ
զաշխարհ ամենայն, ելցեն վստահութեամբ և ժառանգեցեն
զնա:

This idea may be loosely based on Michael the Syrian’s description of the encounter of nomadic Turks with sedentary cultures outside their *Urheimet* which led to their adoption of the latter’s religions, as discussed above. Vardan is not reporting a conversion, however, but rather a revelation. Of course it was neither the *magi*, nor the Persians who imparted the knowledge of a divine destiny to conquer the world to Chinggis Khan and his successors; this was a concept with ancient roots in steppe culture.⁸³ It is quite possible that Vardan had first-hand sources about such beliefs among the Mongols which he again clothed in polemical terms understandable to his audience. Thus, we should hardly start looking for historical *magi*, which from the pen

⁸⁰ On the different meanings of *kök*, as well as its use as an adjective of Tängri, cf. Roux, “Tängri: II,” pp. 202-226.

⁸¹ On this ideology among the Mongols cf. Igor de Rachewiltz, “Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundations of Chingis Khan’s Empire,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 7 (1973), pp. 21-36; Thomas T. Allsen, “Changing Forms of Legitimation in Mongol Iran,” in *Rulers from the Steppe*, pp. 223-241; and Khazanov, “Muhammad and Jenghiz Khan.”

⁸² Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453; Yovsēp‘ean, *Colophons*, pp. 991-2, n. 111, suggests that the first “giving [an injunction]” to have been “receiving [an injunction]” which makes more sense but needs further research into the manuscript tradition to support it; Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 246.

⁸³ See n. 81 above.

of Vardan must refer to Zoroastrians in general, who were responsible for the revelation of their divine destiny to the Mongols. It should rather be read as yet another aspect of Vardan's polemical approach to information he may have collected or learned directly from Mongol sources.

The above examples show that Vardan's descriptions of the Mongols and their religion is a dynamic mixture of accurate information that can be corroborated through other evidence, old stereotypes about nomadic peoples of Eurasia and, very likely, his own observations or information gathering. Vardan's reference to "sorcerers and diviners" among the Mongols is yet another element that fits all the three layers. Turkic and Mongolic peoples were often either accused of or, more neutrally, described as engaging in divination or sorcery. These were stereotyped references to "shamanistic" practices among them.⁸⁴ Vardan's friend Kirakos Ganjakec'i also described the Mongols as "having no religious worship" but performing divination and sorcery.⁸⁵ When read in a wider Near Eastern context, Kirakos and Vardan do not appear alone in ascribing such religious practices to Eurasian nomads. Like the reference to the worship of the Sun, the convergence of information from independent sources on divination and so-called sorcery ascribed to them may provide grounds for concluding that a similar or the same phenomena was being described. Conversely, one may conclude that such evidence proves only that certain stereotypes and common pools of traditions were available to the authors of sedentary societies regardless of their linguistic and religious differences. This in itself is significant.

Divine Mandate to Rule the World

It appears that Vardan was not only aware of but grudgingly accepted the Mongol claim to a divine sanction to conquer the world. What is surprising is that he does not mention Chinggis Khan or any of the Khans by name, but implies that the divine mandate was given to the Mongols as a whole, not just the Chinggisid line. Vardan enters a subtle polemic against this concept in positing *magi*, sorcerers or diviners as recipients and transmitters of this message. Clearly these were religious specialists of inferior status from Vardan's or any Christian reader's point of view. At the same time, however, Vardan attempts to accommodate the precept of divine command through the

⁸⁴ John Andrew Boyle, "Turkish and Mongol Shamanism in the Middle Ages," *Folklore* 83/3 (1972), pp. 177-193; Roux, "Les Religions dans les sociétés turco-mongols," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 201/4 (1984), pp. 393-420; Golden, "The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism," in *The World of the Khazars*, p. 132, on the "sorcerers and idolaters" in the court of Khazar rulers who were expelled after the Khazar conversion to Judaism.

⁸⁵ Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *History of the Armenians*, p. 271. This excerpt is translated and commented by John Andrew Boyle, "Kirakos of Ganjak on the Mongols," *Central Asiatic Journal* 8 (1963), pp. 199-214.

categories of his own Scripture. Thus, he adduces biblical parallels which were aimed at proving that *his* God too had in the past imparted His message to not very suitable candidates, such as Nebuchadnezzar or King Cyrus of Persia. This statement creates parallels between the Mongols and ancient conquering peoples of biblical times, suggesting that the biblical past could and should be studied as a guide for understanding the unraveling of God’s plan in the present.⁸⁶

And there is nothing surprising, since Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Babylonians, came to Jerusalem through augury and the Lord delivered it to him. And God called Cyrus—King of the Persians—his anointed and called him upon Babylon. And they [Mongols] too confess to do everything that is of God and say that they came upon His orders.⁸⁷

Եւ չէ ինչ զարմանալի, զի Նաբուգոդոնոսոր արքայ
Բաբելացոց հմայիւք ել յԵրուսաղէմ, և մատնեաց տէր ի ձեռս
նորա, և զԳիրքս Պարսիցն արքայ՝ աւծեալ իւր կոչէր
Աստուած եւ հրաւիրէր ի վերայ Բաբելոնի: Նաև ինքեանք իսկ
խոստովանին զամենայն ինչ Աստուծոյ առնել և զինքեանս
նորին հրամանաւ ասէն եկեալ:

In the end, there is a certain tension in Vardan’s construction. On the one hand, he apparently accepts the Mongol claim of a divine mandate to conquer and rule the world. On the other, he diminishes the quality of the “divine” by positing magi, sorcerers, and diviners as the mediators between God and the Mongols. Yet, the Mongol conquests *were* a reality to be explained. Thus, Vardan provides a brief Scriptural excursus conveying the idea that biblical precedents constituted the best paradigm for explaining current events.⁸⁸ God had given similar commands to Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus and one should not be surprised if such an order is imparted to the Mongols in the present day.

⁸⁶ Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453; Yovsēp‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 992; Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 246.

⁸⁷ Note a similar impression reported by a Sung envoy Peng Da-ya to Mongolia in 1237: “As for their everyday expressions, they always say: ‘Relying on the might of the Eternal Heaven and the protective good fortune of the Emperor’,” cited in Allsen, “Changing Forms,” p. 223. According to Allsen, this implies that Mongol imperial ideology had deeply penetrated the rank and file soldiers.

⁸⁸ Vardan did author biblical exegeses, such as a *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, a *Commentary on the Psalms* and a *Commentary on Daniel*. He also wrote a *Miscellany on Passages from the Scripture* (Ջլլանկ‘) for King Het‘um I around 1244-1246, Thomson, “Historical Compilation,” pp. 127-128. When writing this article I did not have access to *Ջլլանկ‘*. It would be opportune to explore any possible similarities between the latter and the *Colophon*.

Chormaghun and Mongol Propaganda

From narratives of distant times and places, where the line between biblical history and the recent past becomes blurry, Vardan moves smoothly on to describing the actual conquest of Armenia by the Mongols. At this point we are no longer surprised to find factual knowledge intertwined with anecdotal elements. Vardan mentions that the Mongols were guided by three “leaders” among whom he provides only the name of Chormaghun.⁸⁹ The latter is credited with advocating a peaceful policy after much destruction was carried out, “lest God become enraged.”⁹⁰ This pro-Chormaghun tale is imbued with religious significance. The opponents of the General retort that they should not allow anyone to survive because “God gives us success.” As a result, the following night the two bellicose generals, identified as Benal and Mular by Grigor Aknerc’i,⁹¹ die in their sleep while Chormaghun wakes up healthy as ever and his policy triumphs. He receives an order from the “Khan,” who is not named but is presumably Ögödey, to implement it by imposing taxes and is promoted to become the single leader of the Mongols. Vardan justifies this decision as being the “will of God” and the need for such an explanation must have been an important motivation for reporting this tale, which was perpetrated even eight years after Chormaghun’s death. It is obvious that Vardan depended on a pro-Chormaghun source or sources, known also to Kirakos Ganjakec’i and Grigor Aknerc’i, if the latter did not depend on Vardan. One is tempted to suggest Vanakan Vardapet’s lost

⁸⁹ For Chormaghun’s role in the conquest of Armenia, see Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians*, pp. 50-55. Despite some confusion between secondary and primary sources, important bibliographical *lacunae* and inappropriate transcription of Armenian proper names, interesting observations on Chormaghun’s leadership in the conquest of Armenia and his representation by Grigor Aknerc’i can be found in May, “The Conquest and Rule of Transcaucasia,” esp. pp. 137-139. May expresses his perplexity regarding the motifs behind such a positive depiction of Ghormaghun but does not expand on Grigor’s sources, among which was Vardan’s *Colophon*.

⁹⁰ Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453; Yovsēpean, *Colophons*, p. 993, Mat’evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 246.

⁹¹ Blake-Frye, “History of the Nation of the Archers,” p. 296. This is the most accessible publication of the *History*, despite a number of typographic errors. All translations into English are mine and do not always agree with that of Blake-Frye. I will cite the pages of this edition, but the Armenian text has been also checked against the on-line version of the *History* available through Armenian Digital Library at <http://www.digilib.am/digilib/?menu=5&wrk=1517&captn=17181&wrpg=0&aupg=0>. The similarities between Vardan’s *Colophon* and the *History of the Nation of the Archers* are discussed in Nersēs Akinean, “Grigor K’ahanay Aknerc’i Patmagir T’at’arac’ Patmut’ean (Priest Grigor Aknerc’i, Author of the *History of the T’at’ars*), *Handēs Amsōreay* 72 (1948), pp. 387-403. Some important differences between the two texts are pointed out in Pogossian, “Armenians, Mongols,” pp. 186-188.

History as a possible common source for all of them.⁹² Vardan (and his source) may be recounting a real disagreement among some Mongol military leaders involved in the conquest of Anatolia, but the main purpose of the episode and the miraculous element in it is to extol Chormaghun and justify his conquest of Armenia by ascribing his successes to God. Moreover, Vardan conveys that Chormaghun’s “taxes in exchange for peace” policy was sanctioned by God. Subsequently, the acceptance of this policy by the Armenian princes was not a sign of their weakness but rather fit God’s larger plan.

The complexity of Vardan’s multi-layered, eclectic text does not end here, as he returns to the eschatological perspective with which he had opened the narration on the Mongols in order to explain the date of their invasions to the detriment of precise chronology.⁹³ Then follows historically reliable information on the actual date of the Mongol invasions, the submission of the “princes of the land” to them and the imposition of taxes. Vardan does not fail to mention that the religious were exempt from taxes. He ends the composition with a long lamentation. In this last portion typical biblical parallels are adduced, such as the lament of Jeremiah for the capture of Jerusalem, to complete Vardan’s vision of present history as a sequel to biblical stories.

Preliminary Conclusions

Vardan’s *Colophon* is a sophisticated piece of writing, where distinct sources—some identifiable others putative—personal observations, and biblical stories are blended together to provide a multi-faceted explanation for the rise and conquests of the Mongols. The author aimed at placing the Mongols in Armenian *and* broader, biblical history. In doing so, Vardan adopted genealogies devised for others (such as the Turks or an apocalyptic Eastern King, presumably a Seljuq chief) and found in a variety of sources and strove to create a coherent picture of Mongol origins. Not surprisingly, such a patchwork required leaps of imagination which at times obstructed the coherence of the information. For example, on the one hand, the Mongols were told to be the descendants of Hagar. On the other, they were assigned the

⁹² On the now-lost *History* of Vanakan Vardapet and its use by later authors, see Ōslean, *Yovhannēs Vanakan*, and esp. p. 55 for Vardan’s reliance on it when composing his *Historical Compilation*. Nersēs Akinean suggests that Grigor Aknerc‘i could also have had access to Vanakan’s *History*, “Grigor K‘ahanay,” esp. p. 403, where he calls for a further exploration of this issue.

⁹³ Vardan again refers to the same version of the *Vision of St. Nersēs*, where Nersēs gives a date for the events as “seven hundred years” after his death; cf. M1912 fol. 313r. If St. Nersēs died c. 373, this would put the *Vision*’s redaction to 1073 and it thus may possibly represent a reaction to the Battle of Manzikert. The text, of course, needs to be studied further.

same ancestor as the Armenians, i.e. Torgom. The overall narrative framework of the Mongol exodus from their homeland is based on Michael the Syrian's tale of the Turks' westward migration, but Vardan added details that belonged to the Mongol tradition proper.

Most importantly, he was aware of and duly reported Mongol concepts of a divine destiny to rule the world that lay at the heart of their conquests. Vardan did not polemicize openly with the Mongol claim to universal dominion, something that one could easily expect from an author who was informed about the harshness of the Mongol conquests and rule. On the contrary, Vardan adduced biblical parallels with other less-than-ideal rulers who had enjoyed divine favor in the past. This approach diminished the confident appeal of the Mongols to their uniqueness, while providing a convenient strategy for explaining their conquests as part of God's plan. In fact, Vardan's explanations of the Mongol conquests as part of God's plan caused by his contemporaries' sins, as well as his overall unwillingness to openly condemn Mongol rule fit well with what seems to have been the dominant policy among the military and religious elite in both Cilicia and Greater Armenia. They echo analogous justifications and a call to the population of Greater Armenia to make-do with the harshness of Mongol rule expressed in Catholicos Constantin Barjraberc'i's *Letter of Admonition* written in 1251. Vardan was charged by the Catholicos with the delivery and circulation of the *Letter* among the clergy and the nobility.⁹⁴ Similarly, Vardan did not engage in direct religious polemic, nor questioned the nature of the Mongols' "Celestial God." But he did inform his readers that the injunctions of this God were channeled to the Mongols through inferior religious specialists, such as sorcerers and diviners. Lastly, Vardan relied on an eschatological perspective which magnified his contemporaries' sins and justified the Mongol conquests as part of God's punishment for them. This too was done on terms familiar to Vardan and his readers.

Yet, this *Colophon* is not only a curious composition—an amalgam of bits of information—to be analyzed as a literary piece. It provides insights into a number of issues relevant to thirteenth-century history. First and foremost it tells us much about the mind-set of Vardan and his contemporaries, whose encounter with a new nomadic people pushed the boundaries of previous knowledge and required new, sometimes, imaginative, textual strategies of explanation. It is a witness to how the Mongol ideology of universal rule sanctioned by God was received and elaborated upon by the conquered peoples. The tale of Chormaghun may provide a glimpse into possible disagreements between Mongol military rulers, but above all it depicts how

⁹⁴ Analysis and the text, as well as a comparison with an earlier *Letter* of Konstantin Barjraberc'i, in Xaç'ikyan, "The *Letter of Admonition* of Konstandin Barjraberc'i."

these were transmitted to and perceived by the conquered peoples. The fact that this episode was omitted in Vardan’s *Universal Chronicle* may mean that after his closer contact with the Mongols he was loath to reporting stories that cast a negative light on the centralized nature of Mongol rule. Lastly, the eschatological perspective of the *Colophon* and the identification of the Mongols with the destructive “Nation of the Archers” indicate that multiple, and not always congruous, interpretative options of the Mongol conquests were open and fluid in 1248. While there is nothing flattering in being identified as an eschatological foe, the overall picture of the Mongols outlined in Vardan’s *Colophon* is rather neutral if not positive, subtly tending to justify their conquests through various arguments. A brief excursus into two other major *Histories* penned after Vardan’s *Colophon* indicate the direction in which these explanatory strategies, as well as knowledge of the Mongols and their religion, evolved in the second half of the thirteenth century.

Vardan’s *Colophon* in Context and Other Strategies of Explanation

Without pretensions of being exhaustive, it is worth giving a slightly more attentive look at Vardan’s *Colophon* in relation to the *Histories* of Kirakos Ganjakec‘i and Grigor Aknerc‘i, mentioned briefly above. Vardan’s *Colophon* had the greatest impact on the *History of the Nation of the Archers* by Grigor Aknerc‘i.⁹⁵ In the first chapter of his *History* Grigor takes up Vardan’s genealogical construction, the geographical description and the location of the original homeland of the Mongols almost verbatim. He relies on Vardan also for evidence on the “original” religion of the Mongols, including their subsequent recognition of one God. Other parts of Vardan’s *Colophon* are incorporated seamlessly into the fabric of the *History* whenever those fit the general narrative. For example, the tale of the Mongol *avant-garde* which conquers a small Persian city, then requests reinforcements from their kinsmen left behind, is included in chapter three to which further historical data on the Mongol incursions into Georgia and Armenia is added.⁹⁶ The story of Chormaghun and his two companions is inserted in chapter four, but a number of new details are added. Those additions could be either Grigor’s or come from an older common source, such as Vanakan Vardapet’s lost *History*. The latter supposition is hard to prove, however. Chormaghun is reported to have travelled to the court of Chinggis Khan to report on the incident. Upon hearing him, the Khan extols his peaceful policy considering it

⁹⁵ The geographical description of the Mongols, which follows Vardan verbatim, both ultimately based on Anania Širakac‘i’s *Geography*, is found in Blake-Frye, “History,” pp. 286-288. The dependence of Grigor Aknerc‘i on Vardan’s *Colophon* is discussed in Ōslean, *Yovhannēs Vanakan*, pp. 118-119.

⁹⁶ Blake-Frye, “History,” pp. 290-292.

the fulfillment of “God’s will.” Moreover, Chinggis “donates” his “kindly and graceful wife Alt’anay Khatun” to Chormaghun, a detail that further bolsters the prestige of this general.⁹⁷

There are other intriguing differences between Vardan and Grigor. Some are due to Grigor’s information collection and updating, as those mentioned above; others imply a change of perspective. In most cases Grigor, whose work was finished in 1273 in the renowned Cilician Armenian monastery of Akner,⁹⁸ adds a much more positive spin to Vardan’s information, as is clear from the description of the Chormaghun anecdote. Certainly, episodes of Mongol violence and arbitrary plundering are also part of this work.⁹⁹ A more careful comparison between the two sources will reveal many telling details on how the image of the Mongols evolved in Armenian sources and in what way it was affected by changing political and military interests. Such a task cannot be carried out within the limits of this essay, but a couple of further examples reinforce our appreciation of this phenomenon.

Vardan mentioned the Mongol “admiration” of the Sun without any further comment. Grigor, however, was not satisfied with such a brief notice, and thus he added: “But they admired the Sun, *as a kind of divine power*,” thus rehabilitating the Mongols from “object-worshippers” to a people who worshiped the “divine power” behind the object.¹⁰⁰ The Mongols’ recognition of one God is presented as a much more dramatic experience involving the entire people and not just some sensible men among them. Moreover, their God is described in rather Christianized terms: “And then *suddenly coming to their senses*, greatly oppressed from their miserable and poor lives, they called God the *creator of Heaven and Earth* to their help. And they made a great vow with Him to be at his orders.”¹⁰¹ But the most impressive new piece of information found in Grigor is Chinggis Khan’s reception and establishment of the Yasa (*yasax*).¹⁰² An angel of God in the form of a gold-feathered eagle

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 298-302.

⁹⁸ Akinean, “Grigor Priest of Akner,” p. 389. Significantly, the manuscript contains also the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian, followed by a brief chronology of Armenian history between 1219 and 1246; then comes Grigor’s own work.

⁹⁹ Cf. Blake-Frye, “History,” p. 304, for a general lament, or pp. 326-328, for the martyrdom of Step’annos, Abbot of the Monastery Geret’i.

¹⁰⁰ Blake-Frye, “History,” p. 288: *Բայց ընդ արեգակն զարմանային, որպէս ընդ զօրութիւն ինչ աստուծային*. Italics are mine.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 288.9-12: *Եւ ասպա յանկարծակի ուշաբերեալք, յոյժ նեղեալք ի թշուառական եւ աղքատ կենացն, կոչեցին յօգնութիւն զԱստուած զարարիչն երկնի եւ երկրի. եւ ուխտեցին նմա ուխտ մեծ կալ ի հրամանս նորա*.

¹⁰² It is not my intention here to enter into a discussion of what exactly the *yasax* referred to was, i.e. whether it denotes an entire corpus of law, a so-called Great Yasa or Yasaq, nor of what kind of law it may have been. My purpose is only to examine an Armenian author’s

appeared to Chinggis Khan who stood in front of the “eagle-shaped angel” at a distance of an arrow-shot and received all the commandments of God in his own language. “And then the eagle told everything ordered by God in their language. This is the law of God which was established among them which they call Yasax.”¹⁰³

In Grigor’s narrative Chinggis Khan appears as a prophet who received the Yasa—the divine law—directly from God. This depiction may have deliberately evoked the image of Moses receiving the Law in his readers’ minds. But there can be no doubt that Grigor’s language was intended also as a diatribe against Muḥammad—the last Prophet to have enjoyed divine revelation, according to the Islamic tradition. This rhetoric is particularly relevant for the period of ideological war between the Mamluks and the Ilkhānids, during which the Armenians obviously took the Mongol side. Grigor’s polemic was directed both against Muḥammad and the Law of the Muslims, the *sharī‘a*, juxtaposing it to a divinely revealed Yasa.¹⁰⁴

In the *History* Grigor emphasizes time and again the Mongol self-understanding of their conquests as based on divine will. Moreover, this offers Grigor a perfect opportunity to justify the submission of Armenian and Georgian princes: “When the wise princes of the Armenians and Georgians learned that God gave them power and victory to take our countries, bound [together] in deed and love, they went to the submission of the Tat’ars and promised to pay them taxes.”¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the divine authority to conquer

knowledge of how this law was received and what it signified for the Mongols. For discussion of the Yasa, including a contextualization of Grigor’s evidence in relation to other sources, cf. Denise Aigle, “Le grand jasaq de Genghis-Khan, l’empire, la culture mongole et la sharī‘a,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47/1 (2004), pp. 31-79 and David O. Morgan, “The ‘Great “yāsā” of Chingiz Khān’ and Mongol Law in the Ilkhānate,” *Bulletin of the Oriental and African Studies* 49/1 (1986), pp. 163-176.

¹⁰³ Blake-Frye, “History”, p. 288.20-21: *էւ սպա արծիւն ըստ նոցա լեզուին սսաց զամենայն հրամայեալսն Աստուծոյ: Եւ այս է օրէնքն Աստուծոյ, որ եղեալ է ի նոսա, զոր անուանեալ են իրեանքն իսսախ.*

¹⁰⁴ The ideological war between the Mongols and the Mamluks that was carried on between the Battle of Ayn Jalut in 1261 and that of Abulustayn (Elbistan) in 1277 is thoroughly analyzed in Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhānid War 1260-1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). It is particularly relevant how during this period the psychological and ideological dimensions of the confrontation were exploited by both sides. Baybars was addressed contemptuously as a slave “bought in Siwas” who rebelled against the ruler of the earth by the Ilkhan Abaqa (ibid., p. 121). The Sultan, on his part, exalted the Muslim law, calling it “our Yasa,” which he claimed was greater than the Yasa of Chinggis Khan (ibid., p. 122). This exchange happened in 1269 only a few years before Grigor finalized his *History*. On the confrontation/comparison between the *sharī‘a* and the Yasa see Aigle, “Le grand jasaq,” pp. 36-8.

¹⁰⁵ Blake-Frye, “History of the Nation of the Archers,” p. 296: ... *յոթաւ իմացուն*

the world was caused by contemporaries' sins, as postulated decades prior by Vardan, Catholicos Constantin Barjaberde'i and others.¹⁰⁶

Kirakos Ganjakec'i is the other major historian who can provide yet more hints as to the transformations in the Armenians' attitudes to the Mongols and their religion. Kirakos' *History* is in some parts contemporary to Vardan's *Colophon*. It was written during the period between 1240 and 1266. Kirakos either did not share his friend Vardan's interest in biblical ancestry of the Mongols or the type of Mongol genealogy expounded upon by Vardan was felt to be less convincing for various reasons. One reason could be the awkward relationship that Vardan's genealogy posited between the Armenians and the Mongols, as described above. It is also possible that Kirakos' closer familiarity with the Mongols and better knowledge of Mongol traditions made Vardan's explanations obsolete. The first time Kirakos mentions the Mongols is when reporting the reaction of contemporaries to their first raiding campaign in the southern Caucasus. Reminiscent of Vardan, Kirakos mentions rumors which claimed that the Mongols were "*magi* and wonder-workers."¹⁰⁷ Similar to Vardan's *Colophon*, Kirakos' entire *History* is cast in an eschatological framework, even though towards the end of the composition his utterly negative initial impression of the Mongols seems to be mitigated. Such similarities of perspective could be due to a common source with which both Vardan and Kirakos must have been familiar. Here too, the lost *History* of their teacher Vanakan Vardapet is a distinct possibility.¹⁰⁸ Beyond common sources, the change of perspective on the Mongols was largely due to the Ilkhānid rulers' successes against the Islamic powers of the region and the generally tolerant attitude towards Christians and their institutions. Kirakos Ganjakec'i is also one of our most important informers on Mongol religion.¹⁰⁹

Kirakos located the Mongol homeland in the "far away country in the northeast, which they call Gharaghrum in the Barbarian language, at the borders of Ghati[a]." The quasi-mythical, far away land of Vardan's *Colophon* has not been entirely de-mythologized, but it has become more palpable in Kirakos' narrative, since specific and correct geographical names, such as Qara Qorum, and more accurate, if anachronistic, information on borders, such as the proximity to the Qara Khitai, have become available. Kirakos

իմաստուն իշխանքն Հայոց եւ Վրաց, թէ Աստուած է տուեալ զաւրութիւն եւ յաղթութիւն նոցա անուլ զաշխարհս մեր. ապա գործ եւ սէր կապեալ, գնացին ի հնազանդութիւն Տաթարին, եւ խոստացան տալ հարկս.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 290.

¹⁰⁷ Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *History*, p. 202.

¹⁰⁸ Pogossian, "Armenians, Mongols and the End of Times," pp. 172-175.

¹⁰⁹ An English translation of the relevant chapter and its analysis are in Boyle, "Kirakos of Ganjak."

further notes that there is “a multitude of Barbarian peoples there, unknown and uncountable by many, having as the chief of the kings a nation that is called T‘at‘ar whose name was Chinggis Khan.”¹¹⁰ Here too, while the very vague perception of numberless Barbarian tribes persists, Kirakos knows the name of the great conqueror—Chinggis Khan. Mongol legends about their rulers may have also become more diffused. Here I would like to draw attention to two stories and analyze, again, how Armenian authors perceived their religious significance.

Kirakos recounts a story about Ögödey’s succession (1229-1241) in epic and legendary terms.¹¹¹ Chinggis Khan, just before his death, calls his “entire army” and suggests to them to elect a new ruler in his stead. The army, in turn, asks Chinggis to nominate a worthy successor. Before doing so the Great Khan provides a brief characteristic of his three sons in order to support his decision. His “firstborn”—Chaghatay¹¹²—is told to be a “man of war and one who loves the army, but he is of proud nature and [aspires to be] greater than his allotted fortune.”¹¹³ The second son, not named, is also a winner in wars, but is “of ungenerous nature.”¹¹⁴ Yet, the youngest son¹¹⁵ is described as being “full of grace since his childhood, and generous in behavior, and greatly gifted in skills and after he was born to me, every day my glory and greatness grew.”¹¹⁶ Chinggis then leaves the final word to the army which promptly

¹¹⁰ Kirakos Ganjakec‘i, *History*, pp. 231-2: Քանզի յաշխարհին հեռաւոր հիւսիսոյ յարևելից, զոր կոչեն ի իմական լեզուն Ղարադրում, ի սահմանս Ղատիայ, բարբարոս ազգացն բազմութիւն որ անդ են՝ անզիտելիք և անթուելիք բազմաց, գլուխ թագաւորացն ունելով ազգն, որ կոչի թաթար, – որում անուն էր Չանգզ դան. I have translated the sentence literally, even if it is awkward. He presumably wants to say that Chinggis Khan was the king of the most important nation among those tribes, i.e. the T‘at‘ars. While it is known that Chinggis had to subdue the Tatars—a rival tribe of his own—the name was generally applied to the Mongols by various sources.

¹¹¹ The latter is called *Hok‘t‘a Khaghan* in Kirakos. Note that the updated title of *khaghan* (from khan) had reached the Armenians too. On Ögödey’s upgrading of his title, see Fletcher, “The Mongols,” p. 37. Behind Kirakos’ tale may be an episode found also in the *Secret History of the Mongols* on the succession of Ögödey. *Secret History*, pp. 183-188. Kirakos confuses the names of Chinggis Khan’s sons, but he speaks of three sons involved, just like the *Secret History*.

¹¹² Of course Chinggis Khan’s eldest son was Jochi who died in 1227, and whose progeny ruled the Golden Horde. Chaghatay was his second son.

¹¹³ Kirakos Ganjakec‘i, *History*, p. 232: սա այր պատերազմող է և զօրասէր, բայց հպարտ է բնութեամբ և մեծ քան զպատահեալ բախտն.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.: յաղթող է ի պատերազմունս, բայց ոհշտ է բնութեամբ.

¹¹⁵ Ögödey was the third son of Chinggis Khan, but not the youngest, who was Tolui.

¹¹⁶ Kirakos Ganjakec‘i, *History*, p. 232: Իսկ կրտսեր որդիս իմ, շնորհաւոր է ի մանկութենէ իւրմէ, և առատ բարոյիւք, և մեծատուր ի ձիրս, և յոքմէ հետէ ծնաւ սա ինձ, օր քստ օրէ յաւելաւ փառք իմ և մեծութիւն.

elects Ögödey.

The story is noteworthy for several reasons. It demonstrates acceptance of Mongol legitimacy through descent from Chinggis Khan and by using such technical terms as the “glory” and “fortune” of the Emperor; terms with a long history in the political culture of Persianate societies.¹¹⁷ Kirakos knows that the Mongols too emphasized generosity, the Emperor’s glory and good fortune, as well as the importance of charisma in choosing and affirming a new ruler. In fact, Kirakos depicts an idealized form of smooth succession ensured by the judicious decision of Chinggis Khan. Moreover, the Khan supports his youngest son who may not have been as skilled in the art of war as his elder brothers, but who was also not as haughty as the former are said to be. This story fits a context prior to Güyük’s death when the struggle between Ögödeid and Toluid factions would preclude the diffusion of such an obviously pro-Ögödeid tale.¹¹⁸ Besides painting a highly favorable picture of both Chinggis and Ögödey, Kirakos also extols Chormaghun who, as we saw above, received much positive publicity in Armenian sources. In Kirakos’ estimation, he is “a thoroughly learned and wise man, and successful in war.”¹¹⁹

Kirakos dedicates an entire chapter to the customs of the Mongols, among which the legend of Chinggis Khan’s miraculous conception is noteworthy. Kirakos transfers the myth of Alan Qo’a, the legendary ancestress of the Imperial house directly to Chinggis Khan’s mother.¹²⁰ According to Kirakos,

¹¹⁷ These notions—firmly established in the Iranian cultural realm—were known to the Armenians for centuries. Nina Garsoïan’s pioneering studies have shed much light on this aspect of Armenian culture. Among her studies, cf. “The Two Voices of Armenian Medieval Historiography: The Iranian Index,” in *Studia Iranica* 25 (1996), pp. 7-43, esp. pp. 8-9, on the concepts of *baxt*/fortune and *p’ark’*/glory in early Armenian literature. Such Persianate concepts were integrated also in Islamic and specifically Turko-Mongolian ideas of legitimacy. Thus, Kirakos could be relying both on his native, received traditions and first-hand familiarity with the Mongol variant of this ideology. On Mongol evidence on “the protective good fortune of the Emperor,” cf. note 87 and Allsen, “Changing forms,” p. 223. See also Fletcher, “The Mongols,” p. 30, for the “Aryan” origin of the idea of universal dominion. The importance of Chinggissid descent for the creation of political legitimacy in Iran, Iraq and Central Asia is mentioned briefly in Andrew Peakock, “Seljuq Legitimacy in Islamic History,” in *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, ed. Ch. Lange and S. Mecit (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 79-95, esp. p. 80.

¹¹⁸ Thomas T. Allsen, “Guard and Government in the Reign of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1251-1259,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46/2 (1986), pp. 495-521.

¹¹⁹ Kirakos Ganjakec’i, *History*, p. 233: *այր խորազէտ և իմաստունն, և յաջողած ի գործս պատերազմի*.

¹²⁰ *Secret History*, pp. 2-5; 245, for comments on Chinggis Khan’s lineage from Alan Qo’a. Boyle, “Kirakos Ganjakec’i,” p. 200, notes that this is the oldest version of the legend to have come down to us.

“Chinggis Khan, the father of the khaghan”¹²¹ was miraculously conceived through light which penetrated the roof and impregnated his mother. The mother of Chinggis was ordered: “Conceive and you will beget a son, ruler of the world.”¹²² Kirakos then reports how Mongols “continually said that their king was a relative of God.”¹²³ It is hard to imagine that this story of miraculous conception did not invoke another image in a Christian’s mind and it is surprising that such shocking similarities between the conception of Jesus and Chinggis did not compel Kirakos to refute the Mongol legend.

We saw above how Kirakos shared Vardan’s opinion that the Mongols had no “religious worship”:

There was no religious worship¹²⁴ among them or form of veneration,¹²⁵ but they continuously called the name of god for all things. Whether they thanked the Being of God or called someone else God, we do not know, nor do they themselves. But they usually said that their king was a relative of God, that God had taken the sky as his share and given the world to the khaghan.¹²⁶

The tension that was implicit in Vardan Arewelc‘i and Grigor Aknerc‘i is made explicit in Kirakos. Confronted with a new military/political formation that claimed to have conquered the world due to divine destiny, Christian authors must have asked themselves who this God was that sustained Mongol might. But Kirakos is the only one to have voiced these questions, even if in a very brief form. Like his friend Vardan, however, he too refrains from openly engaging in a refutation of the Mongol concept of “divinity.” Kirakos leaves the question of the Mongols’ “true” monotheism open, and hostile expressions such as condemning a false God find no place in this work.

Yet, while he declares his ignorance of the matter, he also assumes that even the Mongols don’t know what they mean when calling on God. Read in this light, the absence of a thorough religious polemic in Kirakos could well

¹²¹ I.e., Ögödey. Note again the accuracy of terms when referring to Chingis as Khan and to Ögödey as Khaghan.

¹²² Kirakos Ganjakec‘i, *History*, p. 272: *Յղասշիր և ծնցիս որդի ինքնակալ երկրի*.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid. Kirakos uses the word *պաշտաւն* just like Vardan. Boyle, “Kirakos,” p. 202, translates it as “religion,” which is not precise.

¹²⁵ The word employed is *երկրպագութիւն* which literally means “kissing the earth,” implying prostration.

¹²⁶ Kirakos Ganjakec‘i, *History*, p. 272: *Եւ պաշտօն ինչ ոչ գոյր առ նոսա, կամ երկրպագութիւն, բայց ստեպ զանուն աստուծոյ յիշէին յամենայն իրս. զայս թէ զէէն աստուծոյ զոհանային, և կամ թէ զա՞յլ ոմն աստուած կոչէին՝ մէք ոչ գիտեմք, և ոչ ինքեանք ևս: Բայց սովորաբար զայս ասէին՝ զարքայն իւրեանց ազգակից աստուծոյ. զերկիրն առեալ աստուծոյ իւր բաժին և զերկիրս տուեալ յաղանին*.

be due to his disparaging attitude towards the Mongols' ability to understand God at all. If their god—whatever it meant to them—did not compete with Kirakos' God, then there was not even a need to refute him.¹²⁷

A clear trace of disapproval may again be detected when Kirakos talks about Mongol women who, he claims, were “sorcerers and prophesied all things.”¹²⁸ We have seen this *topos* perpetrated among other authors. They and Kirakos apparently meant shamans and, in this case, female ones. The unfavorable wording employed by Kirakos betrays his disparaging view of these women and their activity.

Finally, let me briefly mention Step'annos Ōrbēlean who transmits the most positive image of the Mongols among thirteenth-century sources, and, not surprisingly, has the most idealized description of the Mongols' “original” religion. Writing at the end of the century, his retrospective was partially shaped by Ghazan's conversion to Islam.¹²⁹ Thus, according to Step'annos, the Mongols were originally “without God and without religion, but they were embellished with the laws of nature.” He also affirms that they were familiar with the Christian religion.¹³⁰ This ideal situation was disrupted when high-ranking Mongols started to convert to Islam and learned “all kinds of wicked [things].” Step'annos, thus, confirms what has been traced in this essay. Armenian historiographers employed various narrative techniques to downgrade some Mongol religious practices, but they never openly polemicized against their notion of God, nor attempted to refute legends, ideological constructions, and the divine legitimation of world conquest. Over time, however, their “original” religion was idealized and compared favorably to Islam as the Mongols started converting.

This loose attitude to the Mongol veneration of one God, as well as accepting—tacitly or openly—their ideology of conquest and rule based on a divine mandate is noteworthy. In this light, it is revealing to remember the reaction of the seventh-century historian Sebēos to the accommodation reached in 651 between the Prince of Armenia T'eodoros Rštuni and Muawiyah, the Muslim conqueror of Armenia and the future Caliph. Despite

¹²⁷ Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *History*, p. 274. Scholars have suggested that Kirakos here refers to the Tängri cult and we may note that in his Mongolian word-list Kirakos does mention that “they called the name of god T'angri,” cf. Boyle, “Kirakos of Ganjak,” p. 202, n. 25.

¹²⁸ Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *History*, p. 273; the characterization of female shamans as “sorcerers” is tendentious and misleading given the Mongols' intolerance towards sorcery, cf. Boyle, “Kirakos,” p. 208.

¹²⁹ On the ambiguity of conversion, such as inner conviction vs. political opportunism, and some examples from Ghazan's life and career, cf. Jackson, “The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered,” pp. 273-275.

¹³⁰ Step'annos Ōrbēlean, *Patmut'iwn Nahangin Sisakan* (History of the Region of Sisakan) (Tiflis/Tbilisi, 1910), pp. 400-401.

its favorable conditions, especially an agreement on the low taxes to be imposed on the Armenians, Sebēos branded it as a “pact with death and an alliance with Hell,” an expression echoed by later historians too.¹³¹ Compared to this negative stance, thirteenth-century Armenian authors’ views must have been conditioned by the Mongols’ rather lax religious policy. This aspect of Mongol rule has been widely discussed in the literature. As much as it must have been based on *Realpolitik* or a deliberately ambiguous favoritism to more than one faith community, who at different moments believed the Mongols to be on the verge on accepting *their* religion, to the conquered peoples this policy translated into a form of religious freedom.¹³² The Mongol lack of interest in proselytizing or imposing their religion(s) on their new subjects must have been a surprising new reality for the Armenians, too, whose long interaction with Islamic conquerors had had different inter-religious dynamics. Neutral or positive attitudes of Armenian authors to the Mongols and their religion must have further been dictated by political considerations at the highest levels of the Armenian ruling dynasties or the clerical elites, both in Greater Armenia and Cilicia. Considering the social, cultural, and political standing of the authors discussed here, it comes as no surprise that our sources voice similar attitudes.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this paper was to analyze one of the earliest descriptions on the Mongols, a *Colophon* written in 1248 by the historian, theologian, monastic teacher, and influential religious leader Vardan Arewelc‘i. The *Colophon* represents one of the earliest attempts at placing the Mongols into an explanatory framework within Armenian and world history, trying to make sense of their original genealogy and geography, their religion, the reasons behind their mass movement out of their homeland, and the cause of their military successes. In doing so, Vardan relied on a set of heterogeneous sources ranging from eschatological/apocalyptic visions attributed to St. Nersēs to the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian and the *Geography* of Anania Širakac‘i. It is possible that he was influenced by the now-lost *History* of his teacher Vanakan Vardapet, but this aspect of his *Colophon* needs to be researched further. More than likely, Vardan relied on other, unidentified texts, not to mention oral reports and his own observations.

Several conclusions emerge from the investigation of the *Colophon*.

¹³¹ Sebēos, *Patmut‘iwn hayoc‘* (History of the Armenians), ed. G. Abgaryan (Yerevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1979), p. 164.

¹³² This issue is minutely discussed in Jackson, “The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered.” Khazanov, “Muhammad and Genghiz Khan,” is also fundamental for understanding this attitude.

Vardan consistently used a complex of images associated by earlier sources with pre-Islamic Turks, but sometimes also with the Seljuqs. These include the biblical genealogy and the geography of the Mongols, the locution “Nation of the Archers,” their exodus from their far-away homeland in the northeast, knowledge of some kind of Sun worship among them, their reverence for one God, presumably Tängri, as well as the role of the shamans, who under Vardan’s pen became sorcerers and diviners. What is more, a number of these preconceived notions were not limited to Armenian texts—the easiest sources one could imagine Vardan employing—but were widely held stereotypes among Near Eastern authors, i.e., representatives of sedentary cultures, regardless of their religious background, describing nomads of the Eurasian Steppe. This subsequently means that Vardan, and presumably his other contemporaries, can best be understood in a wider context that is not limited to native Armenian traditions only.

Facing a new people with a little known religion, whose incursions wreaked havoc, Vardan also appealed to an eschatological scenario with his contemporaries’ sins at its center. Yet, he was also aware of the Mongol ideology to conquer and rule the world. This he neither refuted nor belittled, but rather exploited to justify the Mongol conquests and the submission of the Armenian princes to them. Thus, his *Colophon* testifies that the conquered peoples, in this case the Armenians, absorbed and elaborated upon Mongol ideas of political hegemony and world conquest.

The comparison of Vardan’s *Colophon* with somewhat later sources, such as the *History* of Kirakos Ganjakec’i and the *History of the Nation of the Archers* by Grigor Aknerc’i allows us to trace how the Armenians’ understanding of the Mongols evolved. Both later authors demonstrate a greater awareness of Mongol traditions, including native legends, as well as various religious practices and notions. More specifically, Kirakos indicates a process of reflection and an effort to understand the Mongol concept of God. Grigor, interestingly, depicts Chinggis Khan as a prophet-like figure receiving the divine law—the Yasa. None of the authors enter into any explicit religious polemic or refutation of Mongol concepts of God. This was largely due to the Mongols’ general indifference towards the faith of the conquered peoples, even if this attitude may have been dictated by *Realpolitik*. The socio-political ties of the Armenian authors to the ruling clerical or military elites who found it expedient to submit to the Mongols, certainly had its impact on their approach to the Mongols too. The involved parties on the Armenian side—and these were the ones who could leave or influence the written record—had every interest in maintaining a neutral, if not striving for a positive, relationship with the Mongols. But Mongol religious policy resulted also in eventually idealizing their “original” religion once they started converting to

Islam. This tendency is most evident in the *History of the Region of Sisakan* by Step‘annos Ōrbēlean.

The devastating outcome of the Mongol incursions has been pointed out more than enough by scholars working on different regions under Mongol domination. While attempts are being made to re-dimension this master narrative, there is a kernel of truth to it which cannot be entirely overlooked. The analysis above indicates that a more constructive approach, at least in relation to the Armenian sources, could focus on actual cultural exchanges and new cultural processes set in motion by the Mongol conquests. Topics such as the medieval authors’ attempts to explore the concept of One God outside of an Abrahamic religious context, Mongolian narrative motifs which appear in the *Secret History of the Mongols* and Armenian sources (and possibly oral traditions), not to speak of artistic exchanges¹³³ can all be studied more in depth and contribute to our understanding of this period which, as sanguinary as it was, produced also great theologians, poets, artists, and architects.

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¹³³ See for example, Dickran Kouymjian, “Chinese Dragons and Phoenixes among the Armenian,” in *Caucasus during the Mongol Period*, pp. 117-118, who makes the same plea from an art historian’s point of view.

Appendix: Excerpts on the Mongols from the 1248 Colophon of Vardan Arevelc'i

Thus, this book was translated from Syriac to Armenian in the year 1248 from the appearance of the timeless Son of God, in the year 697 of the Armenian era, when the patriarchate of the Armenians [was held by] Lord Constantine and during the rule of Het'um, King of the Armenians, crowned by Christ and his prudent Queen Zabel, daughter of King Lewon, who by Divine Providence had 5 purple-born children, three daughters and two sons, whose names are Lewon and T'oros, [according to] the names of their grandfather and his relative,¹³⁴ upon whom may there be the protection of the omnipotent paternal arm, leading [him?] to the paternal throne of the kingdom of the Armenians' lands.

[...]

On account of the times that cause misery, our evil-creating evil [deeds] multiplied, because the Lord made us drink fewer tears than the measure of our sins and fewer rivers of blood gushed around us than the bursting floods of our vices, and beasts satiated on our bodies according to our beast-like behavior, since the wrath of the Lord breathed the fly¹³⁵—the unknown and unbridled nation from the northeast—as they are told to be, from the race of T'orgom and the progeny of Hagar. And with the storm of our impiety [He] led them to us according to the tearful lament of our holy father Nersēs' provident prophecy, who foretold, weeping, the loss of his progeny [born] through his spiritual labors, which is what we suffered from the Nation of the Archers, whose name he calls “sharp and light,” since perhaps T'at'ar means “sharp and light” according to a change in consonants, or “give and take,”¹³⁶ that is *tat'ar*, because they struck insatiably and took without fear the sons of Zion into the slavery of imprisonment. And St. Nersēs says that they are from the remnants of Hagar, *and the Syrians say that they are of Torgom, as is known mixed with the nation of Gog, who is from Torgom, and the race of Hagar*,¹³⁷ who possesses the part of the world [that is] Scythia, which starts from the River At'l¹³⁸ and stretches to the mountains Emawon, where forty-three nations live

¹³⁴ The name Lewon was that of their maternal grandfather, King Lewon I, while T'oros was Lewon I's elder brother. It is interesting to note that the names passed on to Het'um's male children were those of his wife's family. This is understandable in light of the fact that Het'um became king through his marriage to Zabel, the daughter of King Lewon I.

¹³⁵ This strange expression may be a reference to Isa. 7:18, as noted by Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 452, and accepted also by Sirinian, *I Mongoli*, p. 501.

¹³⁶ These ethnonyms and their source are discussed in the body of the essay.

¹³⁷ The italicized part is not found in all the manuscripts or printed versions. Yovsēp'ean, *Colophons*, p. 991. The source of this information is Michael the Syrian's description of the Turks as discussed in the body of the article.

¹³⁸ These toponyms, as well as the ethnonyms that follow, are discussed in the body of the

who are called by the name *Xužakan* in their languages, and the chief [among] them is called *Bušx* and the name of one nation is said [to be] *T‘ughark‘*, which I think are the T‘at‘ars. And as we heard from some of them, the first ones among them came out of the region of T‘urk‘astan and moved towards the East. And they stayed there in poverty [engaged] in brigandage and robbery and they had no [religious] worship, but were amazed at the Sun and for magical purposes had some felt images that they still carry with them. And after time had passed, some of the sensible men among them, vexed by their miserable way of life, called the Celestial God, who created everything, to their aid and made a vow to him and came out to a small town and captured it from [its] lords, and settled there. Taking strength from this, they conquered the country, called for support from their land and became powerful over the Persians and took their dominion. And there they learned sorcery from the *magi* and receiving an injunction from those diviners that the whole world was given to them by God, they went out confidently and inherited it. And there is nothing surprising, since Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Babylonians, came to Jerusalem through augury and the Lord delivered it to him. And God called Cyrus—King of the Persians—his anointed and called him upon Babylon. And they [Mongols] too confess to do everything that is of God and say that they came [here] upon His command.

Thus, believing in the command that had appeared to them, they were divided into three parts by the decision of their king whom they call Ghan. The first part went towards India, the second part arrived at the northern deserts, and the third part came through the Persian lands until reaching us. They say that they had three leaders. The one who was kinder than the other two was named *Chaghrman*. After the destruction and massacre of many countries they sat [together] for a council which they call *ghurult‘ay*. And *Chaghrman* said: “It is enough to destroy and massacre. Let us not completely exterminate those who have submitted to us, lest God be angered with us.” But the two [other] leaders opposed him and said: “We should not let anyone live, since God grants us success.” And they slept sadly that night and during that night both of the [men] who wished [to commit] atrocities died. And the army was surprised and delivered the word [of what happened] to the Ghan. And he sent a confirmation [to follow] the wishes of *Chaghrman*: protect those who have submitted by the law and levy taxes on them. And he appointed him [i.e. *Chaghrman*] as the only leader: “Since—he said—that is the will of God.” And this is why they are still [in the same condition] until today.

And Nersēs the Great says this [about] the time of their arrival: “This will start happening 700 years after I pass away.” Thus, according to the Saint’s

article. *At‘l* refers to the Volga, while *Emawon* must be the Himalayas.

affirmation their victories gathered force for 50 years after which they entered the eastern land of the Armenians 28 years ago. They committed evil deed[s]: destruction of the country, sacking of cities and fortresses, ruining of churches, deaths of all kinds and driving [people] into captivity. After this they made peace with those remaining through the princes of the land and established alliances, facilitating the remaining churches and churchmen, [allowing] them to stay in their religion with free will. But they [required] the paying of the exact taxes as never before them and pitilessly on the head of men and animals, excepting the clerics and all those who had the form and rank of those who pray.

All this is written down fully in various places and we shall not confuse the style of [this] narrative's order, which requires specifically the division of time and commentary [upon it], as well as the verification of events by eye-witnesses. However, we saw with our own eyes everything that [seemed] to be from the calamities predicted by the holy martyr Nersēs: our church was tarnished, the holy altars were destroyed, divine books were burned and trampled upon, holy vessels and the Sign of Christianity touched by an unworthy hand, polluted and used for inappropriate purposes, our country became a desert, the cities became abodes of beasts since our mountains and deserts were filled with fugitives and fields with piles of bones of those massacred, and our cultivated fields and valleys were watered with blood and we who were left ate the grain of nourishment from such fields. Our nobles became servants and our delicate ones [suffered] unbearable tortures, our high ones became humble and our glorious ones were subjected to contempt, grazing lands of shady mountains were scorched by the Sun, our virgins were given to foreigners and our youths became shepherds and guards for the horses¹³⁹ of a foreign race. We were in need of the Laments of Jeremiah and we suffered the disasters of the Old Israel. Our children became orphans and their mothers widows. The sons of Supernal Zion worth gold were hit against the rock as useless vessel[s].

[...]

¹³⁹ “guards for the horses,” կուտպանք. The Armenian text in this location has two variants. Those are կուտպանք, as in Ališan, *Hayapatum*, p. 453 and MSA I, p. 619, and կաւտպանք as in Yovsēp ‘ean, *Colophons*, p. 994, and Mat‘evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 247. Of the two, կաւտպանք or “border guards” is a more common lexeme and seems to be the *lectio faciliior*. However, կուտպանք is preferable not only as the *lectio difficilior*, but also due to its meaning, which fits much better in the given context. In fact, Ališan (ibid.) glosses it as “one who guards beasts.” The “regular” orthography of the lexeme according to the *Nor Baṙgirk’ Haykazeaṇ Lezui* (New dictionary of the Armenian language) (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1836), vol. 1, p. 1115, is կոյտպաւսն and means “guard or overseer who looks after a herd of horses.”