

« De la “non-négociation” à l’alliance inaboutie. Réflexions sur la diplomatie entre les Mongols et l’Occident latin », in : D. Aigle, P. Buresi, dir., *Les relations diplomatiques entre le monde musulman et l’Occident latin (XII^e-XVI^e siècle)*. Vol. spécial d’*Oriente Moderno*, vol. 88/2, 2008, p. 395-434 [numéro thématique].

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- 1 At the first glance, the Mongol diplomatic correspondence might seem something quite exotic, but without too much historical depth. Quite the contrary, explains D. Aigle, who begins first by reminding us that many historians, beginning with 18th century Laurent Mosheim or 19th century Abel Rémusat analyzed these letters as the remnants of a vast network of exchange and communication from one side of Eurasia to the other.
- 2 The first important point of the current paper is to underline the ability of the Mongol empire to deal with the various languages of its subject peoples, partly as a heritage of pre-Mongol diplomatic practices throughout Eurasia conveyed by Turk peoples. More precisely, through its ability to recruit and train clerks from different origins, Buddhists, Muslims or Nestorian, Armenian or Russian Christians, among others, the

Mongol rulers succeeded in adapting diplomatic documents written in their native Mongol language to many other languages, and D. Aigle describes from the sources in full detail the process of translation, which could actually imply different transitional languages: for instance from Mongol to Persian and then Latin – and most often, if the original version in Mongolian has been lost, for lack of a real desire to store archive documents, we keep today only the translated version. Besides, if we look closely at the texts, two conclusions arise: first, that the translations were precise and well written, though adapted; but precisely, the second point is that the Mongol chancellery, through all these cultural traders, was able to use Muslim as well as Christian rhetoric and to convey Mongol ideology through coranic or biblical citations. And this is the main point: if now we pass to the second and third point of the paper, which deal comprehensively with the topic of diplomacy between Mongols and the West, it becomes obvious that the failure to communicate or, in the context of the Middle East and the rise of an autonomous Mongol power in Persia, the failure to build an alliance is not just a question of misunderstanding, or that Mongol and the West would have been too distant to understand each other. Once again, it could quite be the opposite way.

- 3 The second part deals with the “no-negotiation” attitude of the great-khans at the time of their splendour. Here, the situation was extremely simple: the great-khans considered themselves as the conquerors of the world in the name of the divine force, and D. Aigle points to the correspondence between Mongols myths or historic vision and their diplomatic rhetoric. Hence, all the kings of the world were expected to submit. This situation was transformed when the Mongol unity broke down. The autonomous power of the Ilkhans of Persia, opposed to the Egyptian Mamluks for the control of the Syrian region, needed an ally, obviously the Latin kingdoms of the West engaged in the Crusade movement. But in the end, all of these negotiations accomplished very little, not so much because of a basic inability to understand each other, but because the papacy and the West trusted neither the Nestorian Christians who surrounded the Ilkhans, nor the Ilkhans themselves, who could never forget to make an allusion to their universal power even in their propositions of alliance: at least on this point, the western powers understood only too well what these allusions meant: submission.
- 4 D. Aigle reviews therefore this topic in a broad study, which puts aside many pre-conceived ideas and demonstrates that misunderstanding, if this concept is to be used, was not generated by a cultural incapacity of understanding a different culture, but by the confrontation between the global Eurasian vision of the Mongols and the existence of a rival globalisation in the West, a region organized around the idea of Christianity and whose ultimate power, even in matters of transcontinental diplomacy, was the papacy: it was for the pope to obtain the conversion of all peoples of the world. The papacy could dream of converting the Mongols and toy with an impossible alliance, but never submit to the Mongols and become one of their many subjects.

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Thèmes : 4.1. Histoire médiévale

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