

An Unremembered Hungarian Friar's Martyrdom in the Golden Horde

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In the last decades of the 13th and in the first half of the 14th century, Hungarian Franciscans played an important role in Christian conversion of the Golden Horde. Some of them achieved a great career in the court of the Golden Horde's Khans. Elias of Hungary was not only a trusted friend of Özbeğ (r. 1313–1341) and also his son, but he was entrusted with a mission to the Pope; others died as martyrs in the 14th century. The Hungarian Franciscan friar, Stephan (Stephanus de Hungaria) was executed in Sarai, the centre of the Golden Horde in April of 1334. His martyrdom is mentioned frequently in the sources of the Franciscan Order and some of them contain details of the events leading to his execution and about his death. Although Stephan's passio is characterised by general particularities of its genre, it contains a lot of useful information on the history of Golden Horde and the history of the missions on its territory. The data of the passio can contribute to refining and clarifying other disputed data regarding the history of the region.

The missions of the Latin Christianity among the non-Christian people of the south Russian steppe started in the first half of the 13th century. The first missionaries who appeared on that territory were from the Dominican Order.¹ First, the Dominicans' missions were focused on Cumans in the 1220s.² The

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¹ Incidentally, when the presentation of this article was made in 2016, the Dominicans celebrated the 800th anniversary of the founding of their tradition of preaching, prayer, study, and community.

² Although, the Order of Friars Preachers, established in 1216, had two apostolic tasks ("preaching and the salvation of souls"), the Dominicans originally were active in the heartlands of Christian Europe. At the beginning, their aim was to reform the "faith and morals" of heretics and, in this sense, their missions were internal ones. However, it is important to mention that, on the basis of a tradition that emerged in the 1230s, St. Dominic himself (who died in 1221) had once intended to proselytise among the pagan Cumans. Despite St. Dominic's missionary ambitions, the fifth master general, Humbert of Romans (1254–1263), elected in Buda (Hungary), was the first, who urged to bring "the name of the lord Jesus

Kingdom of Hungary cooperated with the friars in converting the Cumans living in East Europe and organising a Cuman bishopric in 1228.³ Shortly after that, the Hungarian Dominicans learned about non-Christian Hungarians who were left behind somewhere in the East while the rest migrated to the Carpathian Basin. The Dominicans' aim was to find and convert those Hungarians. That is why they travelled to the East in the 1230s.⁴ However, the Mongol Invasion between 1236 and 1242 terminated these first missionary efforts.

Just over a decade after the Mongol Invasion, missionaries reappeared again on the south Russian steppe. At that time, the territory belonged to the Ulus of Jochi (i.e. the Golden Horde).

Christ... to all the barbarians and peoples of the world (*barbaris et gentibus universis*).” R. Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*. Cambridge 2009, 21–59.

³ On the missions of the Dominicans from the Kingdom of Hungary see: N. Pfeiffer, *Die ungarische Dominikanerprovinz von ihrer Gründung 1221 bis zur Tatarenverwüstung 1241–1242*. Zürich 1913, 75–92; B. Altaner, *Die Dominikanermissionen des 13. Jahrhunderts: Forschungen zur Geschichte der kirchlichen Unionen und der Mohammedaner- und Heidenmission des Mittelalters*. Habelschwerdt 1924, 141–148; K. Szovák, “A kun misszió helye és szerepe a magyarországi domonkosok korai történeti hagyományában,” [The Place and Role of Mission among the Cumans in early tradition of the Hungarian Dominicans] In: *A Szent Domonkos rend és a kunok*. Szerk. Barna G. Szeged 2016, 115–126; I. Ferenc, *Cumanii și episcopia lor*. [Cumans and their Bishopric] Blaj 1931, 115–152; L. Makkai, *A milkói (kún) püspökség és népei*. [The bishopric of the Cumans of Milcov and its people] Debrecen 1936; V. Spinei, “The Cuman bishopric – genesis and evolution,” In: *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages. Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans*, ed. Fl. Curta with the assistance of R. Kovalev. Leiden–Boston 2008, 413–456.

⁴ In the 1230s, four groups of Dominicans started to look after the inhabitants of Magna Hungaria (Great Hungary): 1. At the beginning of the 1230s (1232?), four Dominican friars travelled to the East (only one of them, Otto, returned). 2. After that, four friars (among them Gerard and Julian) started their journey again and found Hungarians near the river Volga in 1236. 3. While Julian was in Rome, another four missionaries set off in the spring of 1237, but they did not reach Magna Hungaria. 4. Finally, Julian was on his way to the East with other friars, but they had to return because of the Mongol invasion, see L. Bendefy, “Ottó testvér 1231–1234 évi utazása,” [The Journey of brother Otto in 1231–1234] *Földrajzi Közlemények* 1937/8–10, 211–224; L. Bendefy, *Kéziratos kútfők Fr. Julianus utazásáról. Richardus beszámolója és Julianus levelei*, [Manuscripts about Fr. Julian's journey. The report of Richard and the letters of Julian.] Budapest 1943; Gy. Györffy, *Julianus barát és a napkelet fölfedezése*. [Friar Julian and the discovery of the East] Válogatta, a bevezető tanulmányt és a jegyzeteket írta Györffy Gy. Ford. Györffy Gy. és Gy. Ruitz I. Budapest 1986, 7–57; H. Dörrie, *Drei Texte zur Geschichte der Ungarn und Mongolen: die Missionsreisen des Fr. Julianus, O.P., ins Uralgebiet (1234/5) und nach Russland (1237) und der Bericht des Erzbischofs Peter über die Tartaren*. Göttingen 1956, 125–182; R. Hautala, “Early Hungarian Information on the Beginning of the Western Campaign of Batu (1235–1242),” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 69/2 (2016) 183–199.

After the Mongol Invasion, another mendicant order, the Franciscans acted in the Dominicans' place. The first record about the Franciscans' mission on the territory of the Golden Horde is from 1278.⁵ However, we have only sporadic information regarding their missions; it seems that an increasing number of the Hungarian Franciscans participated in the building of *Vicariatus Tartariae Aquilonaris*. That vicariate embraced the territory of the Golden Horde in the second half of the 13th century. The sources from the 13th and 14th centuries mentioned the Hungarian Franciscan brothers' excellent knowledge of languages. More precisely, the Franciscans' letters referenced that the Hungarian brothers learned the language for the mission easily and quickly.⁶ That language was probably the *lingua franca* of the south Russian steppe, the Kipchak Turkic language of the Cumans. Hungarian Franciscans had some advantages from this aspect. Firstly, there is a typological closeness between the Hungarian and Turkic languages. Secondly, Hungarian Franciscans had the opportunity to learn the Turkic language among the Cumans who settled down in the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom after the Mongol Invasion.

The protagonist of my paper is a Franciscan brother, Stephen of Hungary, "who came from the town of Várad" (today Nagyvárad/Oradea, Romania). Although there is a relatively long *relatio* (or *passio*, that is an account of martyrs suffering) about his martyrdom, Stephen is not as well-known as his brother, who calls himself brother Iohanca of Hungary (*frater Iohanca Hungarus*).⁷ Various versions of Stephen's *Passion* exist.⁸ The longest and most com-

⁵ That is Hungarian related information: Pope Nicholas III (r. 1277–1280) asked his legate to the Hungarian Kingdom to inquire about the situation of the bishopric on the Milcov River. On the same day (7th October) the pope wrote a letter to the Hungarian provincial of the Franciscan Order and instructed him to send Franciscans in Cumania (*Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia maximam partem nondum edita ex tabulariis Vaticanis*. I. (1216–1352) Deprompta collecta ac serie chronologica disposita ab A. Theiner. Romae 1859, 337).

⁶ M. Bihl and A. C. Moule, "De duabus epistolis Fratrum Minorum Tartariae Aquilonaris an. 1323," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 16 (1923), 109; M. Bihl and A. C. Moule, "Tria nova documenta de missionibus Fr. Min. Tartariae Aquilonaris annorum 1314–1322. Textus trium novorum documentorum e Tartaria Aquilonari an. 1314–1322," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 17 (1924) 67; cf. L. Bendefy, "Fontes authentici itinera (1235–1238) fr. Iuliani illustrantes," *Archivum Europae Centro-Orientalis* 3 (1937), 48.

⁷ As reported in his letter, Hungarian brother Iohanca travelled to Bascardia with his company (that is the land of the people then called Bashkirs, near the juncture of the Volga and Kama rivers). See the letter Bihl–Moule, *Tria nova*, 65–70; Bendefy, *Fontes*, 50–47.

⁸ A shorter version, perhaps an abridgement of the primary source, can be read in the chronicle of John of Winterthur (*Iohannes de Vitoduranus*). That story concentrates on the tribulations of Stephen and the miracles and provides less relevant information than the longer version. Cf. *Chronica Iohannis Vitodurani*. (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, Nova series* 3.) Ed. F.

plete texts of his *Passion* can be found in the Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals of the Order of Friars Minor (*Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum*) written between the 1360s and 1370s.⁹ The author of the chronicle is considered to be Arnald of Sarrant, although no manuscript bears his name. The chronicle tells the history of the Franciscan order from the time of Saint Francis until the beginning of the Western Schism in 1378.¹⁰

Stephen of Hungary's (...*Stephani de Hungaria de civitate Narodin oriundi*...) martyrdom is discussed in the chronicle in a relatively detailed manner.¹¹ According to the date in the beginning of the source, he died "in the year of the Lord 1334, on the 22nd day of the month of April" (*anno Domini MCCCXXXIV, XXII. die mensis Aprilis*).¹² In that year, the 22nd day of April was a Friday. However, we can read at the end of the account that he was put to death on the Saturday, the day of Saint George (*sabbato, in festo sancti Georgii Martyris*), that is the 23rd day of April.¹³ Of course, it is also possible that he in fact died on 22nd of April, but due to his martyrdom, Franciscans changed his date of death

Baethgen, C. Brun, Berlin 1924, 147–149). I refer to the significant differences when they are relevant.

- ⁹ *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, In: *Analecta Franciscana sive chronica allaque varia documenta ad historiam Fratrum Minorum spectantia*. Tom. III. Edita a Patribus Collegii S. Bonaventurae. Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi), prope Florentiam 1897, 515–524; for the Hungarian translation of the source, see: Ö. Bölcskey, "Várad István magyar ferencrendi áldozópap vértanúsága a tatárok városában, Bakcsi-Szaráiban, 1334-ben," [Martyrdom of the Hungarian Franciscan priest, Stephen of Várad in the city of the Tatars, Bakhchysarai, in 1334] *Ferences Közlöny* 8 (1928) 80–83, 113–116, 144–146; for the English translation of the source, see: Arnald of Sarrant, *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals of the Order of Friars Minor [1369–1374]*. English trans. by N. Muscat OFM, Malta 2010, 695–708. The story in Wadding's work goes back to the passion in the *Chronica XXIV Generalium* (L. Wadding, *Annales Minorum seu Trium Ordinum a S. Francisco institutorum*. Tomus VII. (1323–1346). Editio secunda. Romae 1733, 159–166).
- ¹⁰ The Chronicle contains the history of the Franciscan Order from the time of its foundation to the Minister General Leonard Giffoni (1373–1378). The greater part of the sources was written before 1369 but it was finished in 1374, since the author of the chronicle mentions the Cardinal Protector Guillaume of Limoges (*Chronica XXIV*, 575; *Chronicle*, 775), who died in that year (*Chronicle*, 7–8).
- ¹¹ In the chronicle of Winterthur: *frater Minor, nomine Stephanus, de Ungaria oriundus* (*Die Chronik*, 147).
- ¹² In the chronicle of Winterthur: *Passus est autem anno Domini MCCCXXXIII. sub Osbosecho imperatore Tartarorum XI. kalendas Aprilis* (*Die Chronik* 149), i.e. he died on 22 April 1334.
- ¹³ "...Saturday, which was the feast of the Martyr Saint George..." (*Chronica XXIV*, 515, 522; Bölcskey, *Várad István*, 80, 145; *Chronicle*, 695, 705). Although there are some countries (for example, Hungary) where Saint George's Day is celebrated on the 24th of April, in other countries the day of the saint is 23rd of April. The source denominates Saturday, and also according to the inner chronological order of events, Stephen died on Saturday. Based on the Julian calendar in 1334, the 23rd of April was Saturday.

to 23rd of April, to the feast of Saint George, a martyr who was one of the most venerated saints in Christianity.

Stephen died “in the town of Saray in the northern regions of the empire of the great king Osbeth, emperor of the Tartars” (*in civitate Saray imperii magni regis Osbeth, imperatoris Tartarorum in parte aquilonari*).¹⁴

In the following, I will briefly summarise the history of the ten days as described in Stephen’s Passion. The 25-year-old friar¹⁵ was detained in the Saint John convent, which was three miles away from Saray and he was “closed in a cell in order to discipline himself and make penitence for his sins” by the vicar of the North (although we do not know anything about those sins). He managed to escape from there, so his brothers wanted to send him to the town of Caffa, where they had a good friary in which he could be guarded properly. Brother Stephen escaped again and went to the town of Saray. On his way, he met a Muslim acquaintance and told him that he wanted to become a Muslim. His Muslim acquaintance took the Franciscan to the cadi of the city. Before the cadi, Brother Stephen expressed his intention to become a Muslim once more (*Volo effici Saracenus*). On the next day, Friday, Stephen was led to the mosque and recanted his Christian faith and he confessed Islam in front of a congregate of Muslims. However, Stephen regretted his conversion on the same day. Accordingly, he welcomed the Franciscans’ messenger from Saray. The Franciscans asked Stephen to come back to the Order and return to his old faith. Having agreed, Stephen confessed his sins to the guardian of the convent, Henry of Bohemia (*Henricus de Bohemia Guardianus*) on Sunday. On Monday, Stephen went to the mosque again during the morning prayer and publicly confessed his faith in Christ and blackguarded Muhammad and the rules of Islam: “your religion is false and wicked and that Mohammed is a pseudo-prophet and a deceiver” (*legem vestram falsam et iniquam et Machometum pseudopropheta et deceptorem fuisse comprobavi*). After that, Stephen was tortured in various ways by the Muslims from Monday to Saturday, but due to some miracles he lasted until the day of Saint George when he finally died.¹⁶

However, Stephen’s schematically described Passion is somewhat naive, but it contains some useful information from a historical perspective. Firstly, it mentioned three convents of the Franciscans: the first one was near Saray (named Saint John), the second one was in the town of Saray and the third one was on the Crimea Peninsula, in the town of Caffa.¹⁷ The existence of the three convents is confirmed by other Franciscans sources.¹⁸ It seems that there were

¹⁴ *Chronica XXIV*, 515; Bölcskey, *Váradi István*, 80, 145; *Chronicle*, 695.

¹⁵ *Chronica XXIV*, 519; Bölcskey, *Váradi István*, 113; *Chronicle*, 700.

¹⁶ *Chronica XXIV*, 519; Bölcskey, *Váradi István*, 113; *Chronicle*, 700.

¹⁷ *Chronica XXIV*, 515; Bölcskey, *Váradi István*, 80; *Chronicle*, 696.

¹⁸ Franciscans had seventeen convents in the territory of the Golden Horde in cca. 1334 (G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell’ Oriente francescano*. Tomo II. Annali di Terra Santa. Addenda al sec. XIII, e Fonti pel sec. XIV. Con tre carte geografiche dell’ Oriente francescano de’ secoli XIII-XIV. Quaracchi presso Firenze 1913, 72, 268). Conforming to some scholars a part of the

more Franciscans from Eastern Europe. For example, the convent at the Saray had a Bohemian guardian. Not only the Franciscans' convents were ethnically diverse, but there were Armenian Christians (who had been in union with Rome)¹⁹ and schismatic Christians in Saray as well (*mulier christiana, quamvis schismatica*),²⁰ who could be the adherents of the Church of the East (i.e. the Nestorian Church), or the Armenian Apostolic Church or the Orthodox Church. Therewith, the city had a Jewish population, too.²¹

Secondly, it seems that there was a status quo in Saray between the Muslims and Christians and none of them wanted to break it. According to the Passion, the Christians feared that their churches would be destroyed if the Muslims learned about Stephen's reconversion,²² because the Christians from Saray had experiences in this field.²³ At the same time, the Muslims' cadi was also afraid of the consequences of the Franciscan's execution. Therefore, the cadi twice visited the lord of the city to consult regarding the Franciscan's fate or to ask permission to execute him. However, the lord of the city answered: "It is none of my business." That means, he did not want to get involved in the

famous Codex Cumanicus was compiled in the convent of Saint John near Saray (W. Bang, "Über die Herkunft des Codex Cumanicus," In: *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 1913, 244–245; V. Drimba, "Sur la datation de la première partie du Codex Cumanicus", *Oriens* 27/28 (1981) 388–404; Gy. Györffy, "A Codex Cumanicus keletkezésének kérdéséhez," [To the history of Codex Cumanicus' birth] In: *A magyarság keleti elemei*. Budapest [1942] 1990, 220–241, see especially 229–230, 239–241; L. Ligeti, "Prolegomena to the Codex Cumanicus," in: *Codex Cumanicus*. Ed. by G. Kuun, with a Prolegomena to the Codex Cumanicus by L. Ligeti. Ed. by É. Apor. Budapest, 1981, 52. A newly converted ruler of the Golden Horde (named by Franciscan sources Iohannes) is said to have been buried also in that convent (*Chronica* XXIV, 456; *Chronicle*, 616–617).

¹⁹ "...a certain devout Armenian woman, who was a great friend of the friars and faithful to the Roman Church" (...*quaedam domina devota Armena, amica maxima fratrum et Ecclesiae Romanae fidelis*) (*Chronica* XXIV, 517; Bölcskey, *Váradí István*, 81; *Chronicle*, 698).

²⁰ Nevertheless, the son of the schismatic woman recovered from an illness at the scene of Stephen's martyrdom (*Chronica* XXIV, 523; Bölcskey, *Váradí István*, 146; *Chronicle*, 707). Cf. Winterthur, where a son of an Armenian man was healed: *In eodem loco filius unius Armeni liberatus est a quadam gravi infirmitate* (*Die Chronik*, 149).

²¹ *Chronica* XXIV, 523; Bölcskey, *Váradí István*, 146; *Chronicle*, 707. As reported by the chronicle of Winterthur, Muslims (*Sarraceni*), Latin Christians (*Latini*), Greeks (*Greci*) and Armenians (*Armeni*) lived in the city (*Die Chronik*, 149).

²² *Chronica* XXIV, 518; Bölcskey, *Váradí István*, 82; *Chronicle*, 699.

²³ In the Crimean town of Solqat (modern Старий Крым, Eski Qırım) the Christians' church and its bells were demolished during a conflict between the Christians and the Muslims (Golubovich, *Biblioteca*, 444). Various sources refer to the tensions caused by the usage of bells (Sz. Kovács, "A ferencesek és Jajlak katun," [The Franciscans and Yaylak Khatun] In: *Középkortörténeti tanulmányok* 8. Szerk. Maléth Á.–Tóber M. Szeged 2015, 155, note 31).

case.²⁴ Based on this, it appears that Özbek Khan's *yarliq* (i.e. decree of the khan) was valid at that time too.²⁵ That *yarliq* was given to the Franciscans in 1314 and granted privileges to the Friars Minor (i.e. the Franciscans) exempting them from military service and acknowledging the khan's protection of their churches and convents. This is supported by the fact that although Stephen was executed, attacks against the Christians, demolitions of their churches and convents in the city are not mentioned.

If we compare Stephen's Passion with other Franciscan accounts (such as letters), we can see some contradictions; one of them is the letter written by the Hungarian Brother Iohanca in "a Tartar camp in Bascardia" (the land of Bashkirs) in 1320. In that land, Iohanca and his English companion, William (Anglicus Willelmus) asserted in an argument with Muslims, that their religion is "empty and profane" (*eorum legem friuolam et prophanam*) and it is from the devil (*legem esse diabolicam*). The two Franciscans were imprisoned and persecuted, but the "Saracens" were afraid of the Mongols and thus they did not dare to kill the Franciscans.²⁶ In some way, the case of Paschalis de Victoria is the same. Paschalis, a Spanish Franciscan, set out for the Ulus of Chaghatay in 1333. During his travel, he stayed at Saray for one year, where he learned the Kipchak Turkic language of the Cumans and the Uyghur script. In his letter, Paschalis mentioned a Franciscan brother, namely Stephen, who was executed in the city. Furthermore, after Paschalis departed from Saray to the Ulus of Chaghatay, he was forced to stop at the border of the Ulus of Chaghatay. In a city of Muslims, in front of the mosque, he disputed with the Muslims "on theology, and about their false Alchoran and its doctrine, for five-and-twenty days". As it is stated in Paschalis' letter written in Almaliq in the August of the year 1338, the Muslims pelted him with stones and put fire to his face and his feet, plucked out his beard and so on, but he escaped alive and he could travel to Almaliq (one of the capital city of the Ulus of Chaghatay),²⁷ where, in 1339, he finally achieved his martyrdom, that he sought so very much.²⁸

²⁴ The source explains the cadi's reluctance to execute the Franciscan, being frightened by the miracles occurred with Stephen. For the first time, the lord of the city said: "Since you made him become a Saracen without consulting me, now you kill him also without asking for my advice". The second time, the lord remained away from the case because he was afraid of the curses of the "Franks". In both occasions, he emphasised that he did not want to intervene in the case (*Chronica XXIV*, 520, 521; Bölskey, *Váradí István*, 115, 144; *Chronicle*, 702, 704).

²⁵ Bihl-Moule, *Tria nova*, 65; P. Хаутала, "Ярлык хана Узбека францисканцам Золотой Орды 1314 года: латинский текст, русский перевод и комментарии," *Золотоордынское обозрение. Golden Horde Review* 3 (5) (2014) 31–48.

²⁶ Iohanca adds that the Muslims are afraid of the Mongols because they "love the Christians but hate and persecuted the Saracens" (Bihl-Moule, *Tria nova*, 68; Bendefy, *Fontes*, 49).

²⁷ A. van den Wyngaert, *Sinica franciscana. Itinera et relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*. Quaracchi-Firenze 1929, 501–506.

²⁸ Wyngaert, *Sinica*, 511, 527.

Thus, all of the four Franciscan friars preached against Muhammad and the doctrines of Islam. At that time, preaching against Islam²⁹ and apostasy were crimes that were usually punished with the death penalty by Islamic law.³⁰ The apostasy was often justified based on *ḥadīth*, and rarely on Qur'anic texts. In the opinion of some scholars, the early views regarding the death penalty reflect the socio-political realities of that time; they argue that the death penalty was prescribed for apostasy because that threatened the stability, unity and identity of the Muslim community.³¹ In the Middle Ages, there was a close bond between religion and ethnic identity. This connection was especially important in those territories where followers of different religions lived together. In this way, when a person converted to another religion, they became a member of another community. This meant that apostasy was not only regarded as a religious issue, but it had serious social and political consequences too. It was considered to be such a grave crime that communities reserved the most severe punishments for it.³² Blasphemy (i.e. speaking evil of sacred matters) and conversions (or reconversions) caused tensions among the involved communities.³³ Fundamentally, societies regarded both crimes as a form of treason

²⁹ In the classical doctrine, offering insult to the prophet Muḥammad is a blasphemy, incurring the death penalty for the perpetrator (R. Peters, *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law. Theory and Practice from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-First Century*. (Themes in Islamic Law 2.) Cambridge 2005, 180.)

³⁰ The punishment for apostasy is one of the most discussed and debated issues in Islam. There are many excellent books and papers on this topic. In the classical doctrine, all the Sunni and also the Shia schools regard the apostasy a serious crime, but in most of the schools the apostate is granted a delay of three days for repentance and return to Islam, especially if the apostate was not born a Muslim. However, "if the apostasy consisted in insulting the Prophet (*sabb al-nabī*), according to most schools the apostate is not given an opportunity for repentance, but is killed immediately after the sentence" (Peters, *Crime and Punishment*, 64–65). Based on Iohanca's letter, among the Saracens there existed a "sect" known for its piety: its "brethren" were called *faqīrs* (*falsarios vocant*), they wore swords and killed those who spoke against their religion. These "brethren" did not raise objections against Christians who "commend our religion, Christ, Maria and the saints" if they do not contempt Muḥammad (Bihl-Moule, *Tria nova*, 66; Bendefy, *Fontes*, 48).

³¹ A. Saeed, "Muslim Debates on human rights and freedom of religion." In: *Human Rights in Asia*. Ed. T. W. D. Davis, B. Galligan, Cheltenham–Northampton 2011, 25–37, 28–32.

³² Cf. that parts of the statutory code compiled during the reign of Alfonso X of Castile (r. 1252–1284), conforming to which a Christian who becomes a Jew or a Moor (i.e. Muslim) deserves death (*Las Siete Partidas. Underworlds: The Dead, the Criminal, and the Marginalized (Partidas VI and VII)*. Vol. 5. Trans. S. P. Scott. Ed. R. I. Burns, S. J. Philadelphia 2001, 1435, 1439–1440.

³³ There is a good example in the work of a Persian historian, Jūzjānī, in Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī (13th century). In the city of Samarkand, a youth adherent of the Church of the East converted to Islam. The Christian community made a complaint with a high-ranking Mongol against the Muslims, because they converted the Christians'

against their social, religious and political order. Thereby, the law of apostasy was a religious and political tool to avoid those difficulties.

What could be the reason that some of them escaped from death thanks to the *yarliq* of Özbeg Khan given to the Franciscans, but others were killed? In my opinion, the explanation is in a letter written by the Franciscans in Caffa in 1323. The Franciscans explained the execution of Toqta Khan's two sons after their father's death, for they left their Christian religion in order to achieve power.³⁴ As claimed by the Franciscans, although the Mongols are "pagans" (i.e. infidels) they appreciate constancy in religion and they consider it as a sign of deception (unreliability) if someone leaves his original faith, "whether it is the Christian or another faith". Friars' conversion to Islam must not have been a frequent event. Apart from Stephen's case, I found only three cases when a Franciscan and two Dominicans gave up their Christian religion in that time.³⁵ This is corroborated by the gathering of a great multitude of people at the mosque who wanted to see "the important Christian priest" who became a Saracen (*unus magnus sacerdos Christianorum factus est Saracenus*).³⁶ It seems that the enraged Muslims dared to kill the Franciscan brother for blaming their faith because they knew that the Mongols did not have a high opinion of a man who changed his religion. Therefore, the Muslims of Saray thought they could

children. By order of the Mongol, the Christians tried to reconvert the youth with different favours, but as he remained firm to Islam he was executed. After that, the Muslim community applied to Berke Khan, who sent an army to the city and the Christians were killed and their church was demolished (*Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī. A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia including Hindustan from A.H. 194 (810 A.D.) to A.H. 858 (1260 A.D) and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islam*. By Maulānā, Minhāj-ud-Dīn, Abū-'Umar-i-'Usmān. II. Translated from Original Persian Manuscripts by H. G. Raverty. London 1881, 1289–1290; *Сборник материалов, относящихся к истории Золотой Орды*. Т. II. Извлечения из персидских сочинений, собранные В.Г. Тизенгаузенем и обработанные А.А. Ромаскевичем и С.Л. Волиным. Москва–Ленинград 1941, 18).

³⁴ The name of the khan is not mentioned in the letter, but "the lately deceased Emperor" (*imperator nuper defunctus*) could be only Toqta, who died in 1313 (Bihl-Moule, *De duabus*, 106–112; A. C. Moule, "Fourteenth-century missionary letters." *The East and the West: a quarterly review for the study of missionary problems*. Vol. 19 (1921), 357–366).

³⁵ Besides Stephen, there were one Franciscan and two Dominicans who converted to Islam at that time. The two Dominicans were missionaries without a doubt in the territory of the Golden Horde, and the Franciscan Jacobus de Pistorio probably was also active there (*Jean XXII (1316–1334). Lettres communes analysées d'après les registres dits d'Avignon et du Vatican* par G. Mollat. Vol. 13, Paris 1933, 174, no. 63644, 193, no. 63892). O. Raynaldus, *Annales ecclesiastici*. Tom. XV. (1305–1335) Coloniae Agrippinae 1691, 459, no. 44). It is possible that Winterthur reports one of the two Dominicans' conversion just after Stephen's martyrdom (*Die Chronik*, 149–150).

³⁶ *Chronica XXIV*, 517; Bölcskey, *Váradi István*, 81; *Chronicle*, 697.

go unpunished or without serious punishment because of the execution of Stephen.

The third point is that, as stated in Stephen's Passion, "The wife of the emperor of the Tartars, who was the daughter of the emperor of the Greeks, took pity on the friar when she heard what had befallen him, and full of compassion, sent him food and drink."³⁷ Although the name of the wife was not mentioned in the source, it can be identified as Bayalūn, the third wife of Özbek Khan.³⁸ She was in fact the illegitimate daughter of the Byzantine emperor Andronikos Palaiologos II (r. 1282–1332).³⁹ In his itinerary, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa mentioned that the wife of Özbek asked permission from her husband for travelling home to see her father and to give birth to her child. Özbek Khan was asked by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa whether he could accompany the khatun. Since Ibn Baṭṭūṭa mentioned only that they departed on the 10th day of the month Shawwāl in the itinerary,⁴⁰ the beginning of their travel to Constantinople is dated on 5th July in 1332⁴¹ or 22nd June in 1334.⁴² If the sentence of Stephens's Passion, which concerned the khatun, rests on an eyewitness' account, then we have another evidence, that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and Bayalūn khatun could not start to Constantinople before the summer of 1334.

Finally, I would like to turn to the knowledge of the author on Islam. He did not know too much, but the information given by him is mostly appropriate. Muslims appeared in the sources as Saracens. The author knew that Jesus was accepted as a prophet in Islam, but he was not considered godly. He also knew the *Shahāda* (i.e. the Testimony), namely "There is no god but God. Muhammad is the messenger of God." This is proved by the sentence in which we can read "I truly believe that there is only one God and that Mohammed is his prophet." The *cadi* is also mentioned in the Passion, but the writer had no precise information regarding his function, because he states that the *cadi* "gov-

³⁷ *Chronica XXIV*, 519–520; Bölcskey, *Váradi István*, 114; *Chronicle*, 701.

³⁸ *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325–1354*. Vol. II. Trans. with revisions and notes from the Arabic text ed. by C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti by H. A. R. Gibb. Cambridge 1962, 488; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Voyages*. II. De La Mecque aux steppes russes. Trad. de l'arabe de C. Defremery et B.R. Sanguinetti (1858). Introduction et notes de S. Yérasimos. Paris 1982, 185.

³⁹ The emperor married his illegitimate daughter Maria to Toqta Khan in 1297 or 1299 (Georges Pachymérès, *Relations historiques*. III. Livres VII–IX. Éd., Trad. franç. et notes par A. Failler (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24/3.) Paris 1999, 294–295) and after his death she became the wife of Özbek Khan (*Сборник материалов, относящихся к истории Золотой Орды*. Vol. I: Извлечения из сочинений арабских. Собранные В. Тизенгаузен. Санктпетербург 1884, 316, 323).

⁴⁰ *The Travels*, 498.

⁴¹ *The Travels*, 498, 528, 531.

⁴² Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Voyages*, 195. R. E. Dunn: *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta. A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*. Updated with a 2012 preface. Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 2012, 170.

erns the Saracens with the same authority a Bishop has for us.”⁴³ Furthermore, he knew about the importance of Friday and mentioned a great Muslim feast called *Mereth* (*Meret*, *Merelth*), which was on the 15th of April.⁴⁴ I attempted to identify the feast. If we convert the date from the Christian calendar to the Islamic Hijri era, it transpires that the feast should be on 9th of Sha‘bān month of the year 734 A.H. However, there is only one important holiday in Sha‘bān which is on the 15th day of the month and that holiday was on 21th of April in 1334. On the 15th of Sha‘bān, there is *Shab-i barāt* (i.e. Night of Salvation or Mid-Sha‘bān).⁴⁵ The Persian word *barāt* might have been transformed to *Meret*.⁴⁶ The chronicler’s source probably remembered that in those days the Muslim holiday (*Laylat al-Bara‘at*), in contrast with the source, did not last four days.

Finally, there is a tavern in Stephen’s Passion. In that tavern was “produced and sold a certain drink made of water and honey”, called mead (*medone*). When Stephen and the Muslims passed in front of the tavern on the way to the place of execution, a certain vagabond (*trutanus*) amputated Stephen’s ear in the hope for more mead. This movement was put in the Passion because the amputated ear was thrown in the fire but did not burn and suddenly flew in the direction of some Christians who received it and gave it to the Franciscans, perhaps as a relic.⁴⁷

In conclusion, Stephen’s Passio seems to be a rather naive story which does not contain too much useful historical information. However, if we read it

⁴³ *Chronica* XXIV, 516; Bölcsey, *Váradí István*, 81; *Chronicle*, 697. The misunderstanding of the cadi’s function reappears almost verbatim several times in the *Chronicle* (*Chronica* XXIV, 413, 474, 534, 556, 599; *Chronicle*, 555, 639, 720, 749, 810).

⁴⁴ *Chronica* XXIV, 516; Bölcsey, *Váradí István*, 81; *Chronicle*, 697.

⁴⁵ According to a tradition, in the middle night of Sha‘bān Allah forgives all His creatures, except a polytheist or one having malice (*Mishkat al-Masabih* by Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh Khafīb al-Tibrizī. English trans. with explanatory notes by J. Robson. Lahore 1970, 272–273).

⁴⁶ The feast is named *berat kendili* in Turkish. The initial *b-* can change to *m-* in many Turkic languages, mostly if there is another nasal consonant in the word, for example Persian *bayrām* ‘a fest’ is *mayram* in Kirghiz, *méyram* in Kazakh (G. Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*. Oxford 1972, 308). However, the change may have happened even if there is no nasal consonant in the word, see Arabic *bakra* ‘pulley, block’ > Ottoman *mak(a)ra* (M. Stachowski, “On the Consonant Adaptation of Arabic (and some Persian) Loan-Words in an Ottoman Turkish Dictionary by Arcangelo Carradori (1650).” *Studia Linguistica Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis* 129 supplementum. 2012, 372–381; for more examples see M. Stachowski, “Turkologische Anmerkungen zum altaischen etymologischen Wörterbuch.” *Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia* Vol. 10. Kraków 2005, 227–246, at 234–235). I would like to thank Zsuzsanna Olach, Mihály Dobrovits and István Zimonyi for their help on linguistic matters.

⁴⁷ Cf. the miraculous healings attributed to the ear in Winterthur (*Die Chronic*, 149).

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with a critical eye, we can discover a lot of information that can complete our knowledge about the Golden Horde, the Franciscans' working on that territory, their knowledge of Islam, and their relationship with other Christian communities.