

Maja Kominko

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Constantine's Eastern Looks: The Elevation of the Cross in a Medieval Syriac Lectionary

Maja Kominko
University of York

Portraits of Constantine and Helena dating from their lifetime are immediately recognizable despite their considerable variety in style.¹ While the faces of the first Christian emperors depicted in Byzantine art metamorphose through the centuries,² nowhere is the departure from their original features more dramatic than in a medieval Syriac Lectionary *Vat. syr. 559*. The codex in question is a large (43,5 x 33,5 cm), well preserved manuscript, written in *estranghelo*.³ It contains fifty miniatures, dispersed throughout the text, placed at the beginning of passages marking principal liturgical festivals.⁴ The last miniature (*Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 223; fig. 1) shows Constantine and Helena flanking the True Cross. Their strikingly oriental features, round faces and almond-shaped eyes led some scholars to believe that in guise of Constantine and Helena the miniaturist represented the Mongolian Il-Khan Hülegü and his Christian wife, Doquz Khatun, thus casting them in the role of new protectors of Christianity.⁵ Should that indeed be the case, the miniature provides striking evidence of the hopes that Syriac Christians pinned on their new Mongol overlords.

There are, nevertheless, several problems with such an identification, the first and foremost among them being the issue of the dating. A colophon on fol. 250v states that

¹ WALTER 2006, 9–20. See also HARRISON 1967, 81–96; WRIGHT 1987, 493–507.

² For a survey of representations see WALTER 2006.

³ For a general discussion of the manuscript see JERPHANION 1939; LEROY 1964, 281–302.

⁴ The miniatures are of two sizes, with the most important festivals (Nativity, Baptism of Christ, Entry to Jerusalem, Crucifixion, Ascension, Pentecost and Transfiguration) taking almost an entire page, and the remaining miniatures taking usually space of one column of the text. It seems that only two miniatures of the entire cycle are lost: one showing the remaining two Evangelists, at the beginning and another showing the Dormition of Mary (lacuna after fol. 209v). See LEROY 1964, 297.

⁵ FIEY 1975, 60–63; FOLDA 2004, 324, n. 44. For a discussion of this representation in a very broad context of ceremonial and triumphal representations see ALDÓN 2009.

the manuscript was completed on Saturday, the first day of May in the year 1531 of the Greeks, that is 1220 A.D.⁶ This date appears to exclude any possibility that Hülegü and Doquz Khatun could have been portrayed here, but this has been contested and a strong argument was made for re-dating the manuscript four decades later. To begin with, the date in the colophon is not written clearly and could be easily read as 1571 rather than 1531: in Syriac number 30 is designated by letter *lamed*, while the number 70, by *ayn*, which is essentially a smaller form of the same later. Moreover, the colophon mentions Saturday, 1st of May, which corresponds to the year 1260, but not to 1220, when 1st



Fig. 1. Constantine and Helena flanking the True Cross, *Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 223v (after JERPHANION 1940)

May fell on a Friday.⁷ Finally, we learn that the manuscript, written by a scribe Mubarak from Bartelli, was offered to the monastery of Mār Mattai by Rabban ‘Abdallah, son of Khusho, son of Shim’ûn, which seems to corroborate the later dating, since ‘Abdallah, son of Khusho, is known to be a chief of the village of Bartelli in 1260.⁸ It seems therefore that the evidence of the colophon does not exclude the possibility that it is Hülegü and Doquz Khatun that the miniaturist portrayed as Constantine and Helena. Accordingly, in the following paragraphs I examine the historical conditions which could have inspired such representation.

⁶ JERPHANION 1940, 6; LEROY 1964, 301; VAN LANTSCHHOOT 1965, 78.

⁷ FIEY 1975, 60.

⁸ BAR HEBRAEUS, *Chronography*, 515–516 (trans. Wallis Budge, p. 440); FIEY 1975, 61. We know of one more manuscript attributed to the same scribe, but unfortunately this does not provide any help in dating of the *Vat. syr. 559*: it was written in 1239, and thus is almost equally distant in time from the dates two proposed for *Vat. syr. 559*. See FIEY 1975, 61.

In 1256, the Mongol army of prince Hülegü, son of Tolui and a grandson of Genghis Khan, crossed the Oxus River and advanced west into Iranian territory.⁹ Baghdad, the capital of Abbasid caliphate fell in February 1258, and was subjected to a weeklong massacre and looting. The caliph and the majority of his kinsmen were executed.¹⁰ In 1259 Hülegü invaded Syria, captured and sacked Aleppo and occupied Damascus in March 1260. At this stage the news that his brother, Möngke Khan, had died the previous summer caused him to withdraw to Azerbaijan, where he was better situated to respond to events in the Mongol capital, Khara Khorum.¹¹ The small occupying force he left under the command of his general Kitbuqa was defeated by the Mamluk sultan Qutuz in September 1260 at 'Ayn Jālūt, a battle that proved to be a turning point, marking the western limit of Mongol military success in the Middle East.¹² In 1263 Hülegü sent out a mission to Europe to seek assistance in the war against the Mamluks, but it never reached its goal.¹³ It seems, however, that Pope Urban IV have learnt of the gist of his missive as in 1263 he dispatched the short letter *Exultavit cor nostrum*, expressing his joy at Hülegü's desire for instruction and baptism (or so the Pope thought), and declared that after the Il-Khan's conversion the Pope would send help in the war against the Mamluks.¹⁴ While it is unlikely that Hülegü ever contemplated becoming a Christian, his Christians sympathies may have been inspired by his Nestorian wife Doquz Katun.¹⁵ It also cannot be excluded that Mongols perceived the Eastern Christians as allies in the war against the Muslim rulers. This, however, is never explicitly stated, and certainly

⁹ Hülegü, the fifth son of Tolui and Sarqūtāni Katun, was born ca. 1215. In 1251 Hülegü's oldest brother, Möngke, was proclaimed Great Khan. Soon afterwards he held a *quriltai* (assembly), in which Hülegü and Qubilai were ordered to campaign in Muslim territories and China respectively. See JUVAINI, *Hisotry of World Conqueror* III 607 (ed. Boyle, vol. 2, p. 607); RAŠID-AL- DĪN, *Compendium of Chronicles* III 21 (ed. Thackston).

¹⁰ The method of execution was unprecedented: the caliph was rolled up in a carpet and trampled to death galloping horses so that none of his royal blood could soak into the ground. The few 'Abbasid survivors managed to escape to Cairo, where they became figurehead caliphs for the new Mamluk masters of Egypt. See MELVILLE 2002, 38; BOYLE 1961, 145–61.

¹¹ MELVILLE 2002, 50. As an alternative hypothesis, it has been suggested that the logistical limitations of Syria, that is, the lack of pastureland and water, compelled Hülegü to evacuate the country with the approach of summer MORGAN 1985, 231–35.

¹² SMITII 1984, 307–45. The Mongols did not accept this setback lying down. Almost immediately, a smaller raiding force, perhaps numbering 6,000 horsemen, was dispatched to northern Syria. It was defeated on 11 December 1260 by the Mamluk army near Homs. Hülegü was prevented from further intervention on the Syrian front by his preoccupations elsewhere. Evidently as early as the winter of 660/1261–62, war erupted in the Caucasus region between the forces of the Golden Horde and the Il-khanate. MELVILLE 2002, 50; AMITAI-PREISS 1995, 233–35.

¹³ RICHARD 1949, 294; JACKSON 1980, 484; MEYVAERT 1980, 249.

¹⁴ LUPPRIAN 1981, 216–19.

¹⁵ Although the traditional Mongol tolerance could have also played a role. Marco Polo, who was in China from 1275 to 1292, quoted Khunilai Khan as saying, "There are four prophets who are worshipped and to whom everybody des reverence. The Christians say their God was Jesus Christ; the Saracens Mahomet; the Jews Moses; and the idolaters Sagamoni Burcan (the Shakyamuni Buddha), who was the first god of the idols; and I do honour and reverence to all four, that is to him who is the greatest in heaven and more true, and him I pray to help me." See ROSSABI 2002, 25.

such a relatively benign attitude was not extended to the Franks in Syria, and did not influence the aggressive conduct of Hülegü towards the Frankish states in the Levant in 1260.¹⁶ Whatever his Christian sympathies were, upon his death in 1265, in accordance with Mongol tradition he was interred together with several young women.¹⁷

When the Mongols arrived in Northern Mesopotamia, there were among them Muslims (indeed, the Golden Horde in the North had already become Muslim), large numbers of Shamanists, Buddhists and Christians.¹⁸ Among the latter, the most significant were the Nestorians, whose ranks included Hülegüs chief wife, Doquz Khatun, and his most prominent general Kitbuqa.

Doquz Khatun, a granddaughter of Wang Khan, leader of the Nestorian Christian Kereyit tribe, was first given to Tolui, but the marriage was apparently not consummated and, when he died she passed into the care of his son Hülegü.¹⁹ The latter had considerable respect for her judgment and it was through her efforts that many Christians were spared during the devastation of Baghdad in 1258.²⁰ Muslim historian Rašid al-Dīn reported that she “strongly supported the Christians, so that under her protection they had a great influence. In order to please her Hülegü supported and promoted this community so it was able to build new churches everywhere. Near her tent there was always a chapel set, where bells were rung.”²¹ Although Doquz Khatun produced no children, Hülegü had progeny from several concubines in her entourage, and her influence continued to be felt. She helped to ensure the succession for his son Abakha, and may have played a role in negotiating, or at least fostering, his marriage with Maria, the illegitimate daughter of the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII.²²

Hülegü died in February 1265, followed shortly afterwards by Doquz Khatun.²³ Bar Hebraeus, Syriac polymath and a *maphrian* of the Syrian Jacobite Church (1264–1286), narrates the death of Doquz Khatun as follows “And in the year 1576 of the Greeks (A.D. 1265), in the days which introduced the Fast [of Nineveh], Hülegü, King of Kings, departed from this world. The wisdom of this man, and his greatness of soul, and his wonderful actions are incomparable. And in the days of summer Doquz Khatun, the believing queen, departed, and great sorrow came to all the Christians throughout the world because of the departure

¹⁶ JACKSON 1980, 481–84; AMITAI -PREISS 1996.

¹⁷ Apparently this was the last occasion on which human victims were recorded as having been buried with a Chingizid prince. BOYLE 1968, 354.

¹⁸ BUNDY 2000, 33.

¹⁹ HUNTER 1989–91, 142–63; RYAN 1998, 37.

²⁰ BAR HEBRAEUS, *Chronography*, 574 (trans. Wallis Budge, p. 491); BRENT 1976, 137–39; FIEY 1975a, 24.

²¹ RAŠID-AL- DĪN III 10 (translation after SPULER 1972, 121). See also SPULER 1976, 621–31.

²² LIPPARD 1984, 197; RICHARD 1977, 102.

²³ There is no evidence to support the Armenian historian Stephanos Orbelian’s claim that she was poisoned by the sāheb-dīvān, i.e., the historian Juvaini; STEPIANOS ORBELIAN 66 (ed. Brosset, p. 234–35). See also RYAN 1998, 416 .

of these two great lights, who made the Christian religion triumphant.”²⁴ While Bar Hebraeus does not build an explicit parallel between Hülegü and his wife and Constantine and his mother, he clearly does see them as protectors of Christianity. Indeed, throughout his *Chronicle* Bar Hebraeus refers to Dokuz Khatun as “truly believing and Christian queen”.²⁵ It is, however, Hülegü’s mother that he compares to Helena: “And [the Khan] commanded that his wife, whose name was Sarqûtanî Bagi, the daughter of the brother of king John, should administer his dominion. Now this queen had four grown-up sons: Munga, who ultimately became Khan; Kublai; Hülegü; and Arigh Boka. And this queen trained her sons so well that all the princes marvelled at her power of administration. And she was a Christian, sincere and true like [queen] Helena.”²⁶ Although nowhere in his text does he compare Hülegü with Constantine, the way in which his account of a recapture of Constantinople by Michael VIII, who “entered the city through a gate, which was not opened from the time of Constantine the Great,” is directly followed by the narration of Hülegü’s conquest of Baghdad, may suggest that he places Hülegü in a line of quintessentially Christian rulers.²⁷ We should note, however, that at the same time Bar Hebraeus did not shrink from describing the horrors endured by the people of eastern Anatolia, Kurdistan and Syria at the hands of the Mongol invaders.²⁸

It was not only Jacobite (Monophysite) Syrians who pinned their hopes on the Mongols as the protectors of their church. In 1281 the East Syrian (Nestorians) elected *katholikos* Yahballâhâ, born in China and chosen on account of his Ongüt origins and his familiarity with the language and the customs of the Mongol leaders.²⁹ Some indication of the influential role of the East Syrian Church is also given by the fact that in 1287 Il-Khan Arghun selected Rabban Sauma, Yahballâhâ’s companion from China, to undertake the delicate mission of forging an alliance with the European monarchies and the Papacy against the Mamluks.³⁰ Rabban Sauma reached Rome in 1288 and was sent back the following year with gifts and letters from Pope Nicholas IV, urging the Il-Khan Arghun to convert.³¹ Arghun did not embrace Christianity, but he had his son (later the ruler Öljeitu) baptized Nicholas in the Pope’s honour.³² The result of this mission was the same as those of previous efforts to coordinate an anti-Muslim crusade: by Arghun’s death in 1291, the promised

²⁴ *mnashone d-tawdito mshihoyto* “victory-givers of the Christian confession”, BAR HEBRAEUS, *Chronography*, 521 (trans. Wallis Budge, p. 444).

²⁵ BAR HEBRAEUS, *Chronography*, 491 (trans. Wallis Budge, p. 419).

²⁶ BAR HEBRAEUS, *Chronography*, 465 (trans. Wallis Budge, p. 398).

²⁷ BAR HEBRAEUS, *Chronography*, 503 (trans. Wallis Budge, p. 429).

²⁸ LANE 1999.

²⁹ *IHistory of Yaballaha* (ed. Bedjan, p. 33); TEULE 2003, 113.

³⁰ ROSSABI 1992, 27-31.

³¹ Pope’s letter written to Arghun in 1298 is preserved in the *Vat. Reg. 44*. fol. 89v, reproduced in ARNOLD 1999, fig. 2-3.

³² BLAIR 2002, 112; ARNOLD 1999, 76.

aid from the West had failed to materialize.³³ In September 1295, Ghazan (d. 1304), a convert from Buddhism to Sunni Islam, became Il-Khan. The policy of religious tolerance underwent something of a reversal. Buddhist monasteries and temples in western Asia were closed (some damaged and destroyed), and Buddhism there would never recover from this assault.³⁴ Although Nestorians and Jews fared a little better, and did not suffer the same fate, their political influence, and their liberties and status gradually eroded.

Ultimately the hopes that Eastern Christians may have been pinning on Mongolian rulers were not to be fulfilled. At least initially, however, Mongolian religious tolerance, along with a certain prominence that the church achieved under the Mongol rule, must have given an illusion that a new dawn was rising for oriental Christians. In these circumstances portraying Hülegü and Doqуз Khatun as Constantine and Helena seems a suitable expression of Christian sentiments. Indeed, an Armenian historian, Stephanos Orbelian explicitly described Hülegü and his chief wife as Constantine and Helena of their age.³⁵ While less explicit, the epithet given to them by Bar Hebraeus, “those who made Christianity triumphant” seems to convey the same idea as the representation of Constantine and Helena flanking the True Cross – the image symbolizing the triumphant Christianity, as celebrated in the liturgy of exaltation of Cross, which combined Constantine’s vision and the discovery of the True Cross by Helena.³⁶

An argument in favour of identification of the figures flanking the cross in *Vat. syr. 559* with the Il-Khan and his wife may be found in the similarity of their features with those of Mongolian rulers in Mongolian illuminated manuscripts, most prominently in the Mongol *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), the earliest copies of which date to the first half of the 14th century.³⁷ Moreover, the miniature in the Syriac Lectionary would not be the only case of a Christian representation where prominent Mongolian figures are portrayed under a historical or Biblical guise.³⁸ Another such depiction can be found in one of thirteen icons of the

³³ MELVILLE 2002, 51; ROSSABI 1992, 30–31.

³⁴ BOYLE 1968, 379–80.

³⁵ STEPANOS ORBELIAN⁶⁶ (ed. M.F. Brosset, p. 234–35).

³⁶ TETERIATNIKOV 1995, 170–74. BAUMSTARK 1913, 217–20.

³⁷ For the review of the literature concerning dating of the creation of the illustrative cycle of the *Shahnama*, see SHIREVE-SIMPSON 2004, 11–17. Faces similar to those of Constantine and Helena in the Syriac lectionary appear in the *Shahnama*, manuscripts in Harvard University Art Museum and in Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C, both dated to 1330 and attributed to Iran, probably Tabriz; in the Great Mongol *Shahnama* (probably Tabriz, 1330s) The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY (52.20.2), as well as in the First Small *Shahnama*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (34.24.3), attributed to northwest Iran or Baghdad, ca. 1300–1330, (KOMAROFF, CARBONI 2002, figs. 110; 163, 182, 244, 274); in the *Anthology of Diwans*, in the British Library, *Cod. 132*, dated 1314–1315 and attributed to Tabriz (KOMAROFF/CARBONI 2002, fig. 164).

³⁸ It has been also suggested that in an Armenian manuscript illustrated by Toros Roslin dated 1260, the bodyguards of the Magi, who are mentioned in the apocryphal gospel accounts, are represented as Mongols. FOLDA 2004, 325 n. 51; DER NERSESSIAN 1993, vol. 1, 60 and nn. 45–46, vol. 2 fig. 212. This, however, is not entirely convincing, as their features are not at all oriental.

life of Christ and Virgin on the iconostasis beam at Sinai dated to the early 1260s.³⁹ The Nativity, represented according to standard Byzantine iconography, is combined with the Adoration of the Magi, which is without parallels in Byzantine, or western medieval art.⁴⁰ The third of the Magi, clearly depicted as a Mongol, has been frequently identified with Kitbuqa, the Nestorian Christian general in command of Mongol forces in Syria in the late 1250s.⁴¹ Whereas some scholars saw his presence here as an expression of Christian hopes for an alliance with the Mongols,⁴² recently it has been argued that all three Magi are given certain portrait-like traits and should be identified with historical figures.⁴³ It was suggested that the first of the Magi, the oldest of them, depicted with long white hair and beard and clothed in a red cloak, is in reality Armenian king Hetoum I, while the second Magus, youthful, with a short beard and an Italian's nobleman's cap - Bohemond VI the prince of Antioch, and Hetoum's son in law.⁴⁴ Furthermore, it has been suggested that this representation refers to a particular historical event, which took place after the Mongol conquest of Damascus in 1260. According to the "Templar of Tyre", after Bohemond and Hetoum negotiated peace with the Mongols, they were invited by Kitbuqa to enter Damascus with the victorious Mongol army, and to participate in celebration of the Mass in a Byzantine church, previously used as a mosque, which Kitbuqa restored to Christian use.⁴⁵ The veracity of this account has been contested,⁴⁶ but whether we believe the Templar or not, this icon, showing a representative of Mongols bowing down to the newborn Christ, does seem to reflect hopes for Christian an alliance with the Mongols. In that sense, a representation of Hülegü and Doquz Khatun as Constantine and Helena would not be dissimilar.

Nevertheless, while in the Adoration of Magi the depiction of the Mongol (be it Kitbuqa or not) is strikingly different from all other figures in the icon, the physiognomy of Constantine and Helena is not unique in the Syriac Lectionary in Vatican. In the Lectionary features of the main protagonists are reminiscent of their representations in Byzantine art,⁴⁷ and

³⁹ FOLDA 2008, 121.

⁴⁰ FOLDA 2004, 323 with references.

⁴¹ WEITZMANN 1966, 63. Der Nersessian, argued against such identification, pointing out that Kitbuqa was a Nestorian and a heretic, and therefore unlikely to be included in this scene by a Latin painter (DER NERSESSIAN 1993, 61, n. 46). This argument, however, does not seem to bear much weight in view of the complexity of the situation in particular, in context of Latin involvement with Armenian politics, the Armenian alliance with the Mongols, and papal attempts to bring the Nestorians to communion with catholic church. FOLDA 2004, 326, n. 51; HAMILTON 1980, 357; RICHARD 1969, 45-57.

⁴² WEITZMANN 1963, 181-83; WEITZMANN 1966, 63.

⁴³ FOLDA 2008, 121.

⁴⁴ FOLDA 2004, 324; FOLDA 2007, 150-52.

⁴⁵ *TEMPLAR OF TYRE*, 303 (ed. Crawford, p. 34). See also RUNCIMANN 1954, vol. 3, 307. It has been suggested that the entire iconostasis beam has been in fact made for this reconverted church, FOLDA 2008, 121.

⁴⁶ JACKSON 1980, 493; AMITAI-PREISS 1995, 31.

⁴⁷ See for example Zachariah in the Annunciation to Zachariah, fol. 5r and giving the name to John the Baptist, fol. 11r; Joseph in the dream of Joseph, fol. 12v, and in the Flight to Egypt, fol. 18v; Joseph, Symeon and Mary in the Presentation in the Temple, fol. 48v; Peter in the scene of healing the leper, fol. 67r, see LEROY 1964, pl. 73.2; 75.2; 75.4; 77.2; 81.4.

those of numerous secondary figures are strikingly Semitic,⁴⁸ the round faces and almond-shaped eyes very similar to those of Constantine and Helena, are given to the Three Magi in the Nativity scene⁴⁹ and the bridegroom in the Marriage in Cana.⁵⁰ Because all these figures wear a very similar crown, it cannot be excluded that they all were meant to refer in some way to Mongolian rulers.⁵¹ We should note, however, that king Herod is depicted wearing the same type of crown, although unfortunately the paint has flaked off his face and his features are illegible.⁵² Moreover, similar round faces and slanting black eyes are given throughout the cycle to the soldiers – hardly positive characters in the Gospel narrative.⁵³

The type of crown worn by Constantine and Helena has been described as “Mongolian”,⁵⁴ as it appears it in later representations of Mongolian rulers.⁵⁵ It has been pointed out, however, that such a crown was among the Mongol headdresses introduced into Islamic world in the first half of 13th century, as attested by its presence on Ayyubid metalwork,⁵⁶ and in Christian Arabic manuscripts.⁵⁷

The proposed identification of Constantine and Helena is further undermined by the fact that similar “Mongolian” features appear in another Syriac Lectionary, British Library, *Add. Ms. 7170*.⁵⁸ The codex was made between 1216 and 1220, as stipulated by a note, which states that the book was copied and decorated in the era of the patriarch Mār Ioannis (1208–1220) and Mār Ignatios, *katholikos* of the East (1216–22).⁵⁹ This manuscript, frequently described as a twin of the Vatican Lectionary, contains a strikingly similar representation of Constantine and Helena flanking the True Cross.⁶⁰ Like in the Vatican codex,

⁴⁸ For example three Jews in the scene of naming John the Baptist, fol. 11r; A woman bathing Jesus in the Nativity scene, fol. 16r; Servants in the Marriage of Cana, fol. 57v; the mother and men carrying the body in the resurrection of the youth of Naim, fol. 90r, see LEROY 1964, pl. 75.2; 76.2; 82.2; 84.4.

⁴⁹ *Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 16r, see LEROY 1964, pl. 76.2.

⁵⁰ *Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 57v, see LEROY 1964, pl. 82.2.

⁵¹ The same crowns appear on the heads of David and Solomon in the scene of Anastasis, fol. 146v, both represented with almond-shaped eyes, see LEROY 1964, pl. 92.2.

⁵² *Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 18v, see LEROY 1964, pl. 78.3.

⁵³ In the slaughter of the Innocents, fol. 18v; In the prediction of John the Baptist, fol. 28r; in the decapitation of John the Baptist, fol. 29v; Jesus before Caiaphas, fol. 133r; Crucifixion, 149r; Resurrection, fol. 146v; LEROY 1964, pl. 80.3; 89.4; 90.2.

⁵⁴ LEROY 1964, 286.

⁵⁵ A very similar crown is worn by Mahmud Shah Inju, depicted in the frontispiece of the St. Petersburg illustrated *Shahnama* (St. Petersburg, the Russian National Library, *Dorn 329*, fol. 2a), completed in 1333. In a great majority of representations of rulers in other *Shahnama* manuscripts, its shape is slightly different, with the middle part surmounted by a small conical jewel. See above, n. 38.

⁵⁶ BAER 1989, 38–39 and pls. 31, 32, 123.

⁵⁷ See for example Herod interrogating the Hebrew doctors in the Arabic Infancy Gospels, Florenze, Laurenziana Library, *cod. Orient. 387*, fol. 7v; HUNT 1997, 162, fig.7.

⁵⁸ LEROY 1964, 302–13; HUNT 1997, 385. It has been argued that the London codex is somewhat inferior to the Vatican one; see JERPHANION 1939, 483–84.

⁵⁹ LEROY 1964, 310.

⁶⁰ LEROY 1964, pl. 99.

the outline of their faces is round, but unfortunately, because of the deterioration of the paint, their features are almost illegible, and it is difficult to ascertain quite how similar they were to those in the Vatican manuscript.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the same oriental facial types we encountered in the Vatican Lectionary appear again, in representations corresponding to those in the Vatican manuscript: in the Adoration of Magi,⁶² in the Marriage of Cana,⁶³ and in the depictions of the soldiers.⁶⁴

Whereas it has been argued that the differences in the style and details of the miniatures in each of the Lectionaries are due to the fact that neither codex was the work of a single artist,⁶⁵ this cannot account for the existence of diverse facial types, which frequently occur within the same miniature.⁶⁶ Significantly, there seem to be a consistency in assigning particular type of features to particular types of figures, with the oriental physiognomy particularly pronounced in the faces of soldiers and figures wearing crowns.

Similar physiognomies, in particular Semitic,⁶⁷ and oriental,⁶⁸ appear in the Arabic manuscript from late 12th and the first half of the 13th century. Moreover, frequently there seem to be an analogous correlation of certain ethnic types with the types of the figures to which they are assigned. It is particularly striking that in numerous late 12th and early 13th-century Jaziran manuscripts rulers are represented with oriental features, which set them apart from other figures,⁶⁹ as for example in frontispieces of the illustrated volumes of *Kitāb al-Aghāni*, prepared between ca. 1217 and 1219 for Badr al-Dīn Lu'lu, who ruled in Mosul in various capacities from 1210–1259.⁷⁰ These figures are frequently dressed in

⁶¹ This is probably due to oxidation, and unfortunately is not limited to this page. On the issues of conservation of this manuscript see CLARK, GIBBS 1998.

⁶² *BL add. 7170*, fol. 21r, see LEROY 1964, pl. 76.1.

⁶³ *BL add. 7170*, fol. 67r, see LEROY 1964, pl. 82.1.

⁶⁴ *BL add. 7170*, fols. 145r, 146v, 151r, 163r, see LEROY 1964, pls. 74.3; 89.4; 90.2; 93.

⁶⁵ LEROY 1964, 299.

⁶⁶ A good example is the Nativity illustration *Vat. Syr. 559*, fol. 16r, *BL Add. 7170*, fol. 21r, see LEROY 1964, pl. 76.

⁶⁷ The face of Caiaphas (*Vat. Syr. 559*, fol. 133r, *B.L. Add. 7170*, fol. 145r, Leroy, 1964, pl. 89.4) has been compared to that of Al-Hariri, in a Hariri manuscript in Paris, dated to 1237 AD (Paris, BN, *Ms. Arab. 5847*, fol. 107). See BUCHTHAL 1939, 148, pl. XXII. See also HOLTER 1937a, nos. 31 and 32; KÜHNEL 1922, figs. 7–13.

⁶⁸ LEROY 1964, 301. For example in miniatures of *Kitāb al-Baytara* by Ahmed ibn al-Husayn ibn al-Ahnaf, illustrated in Baghdad in 1210, Istanbul, Topkapi Sarayı Library, *Cod. Ahmed III 2115*, (fol. 58a reproduced by İPŞİROĞLU 1980, pl. 1); In the miniature showing Purple Betony, manuscript of *Kitāb khawāss al-ashjār (De Materia Medica)*, made in 1224 in Baghdad or North Jazira, recto of the detached leaf, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Art Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller; *Maqāmāt* of al Hariri in Paris, dated to the first half of the 13th century (National Library, *MS Arab. 3929*, fol. 69r), ETTINGHAUSEN 1962, 82; Book of Antidotes (*Kitāb ad-Diryāq*) in Paris, dated to 1199 (National Library, *MS Arab. 2964*, fol. 27) ETTINGHAUSEN 1962, 85.

⁶⁹ NASSAR 1985, 88.

⁷⁰ The original comprised of 20 volumes, of which only 6 volumes with frontispieces are preserved, 5 of them showing a ruler (vols. 2, 4, 11 in the National Library in Cairo, *Adab 579*; vols 17 and 19 in Istanbul, Suleymaniyeh Library, Feyzullah Effendi, *Feyzullah 1565* and *1566*; vol. 20, Royal Library, Copenhagen no. 168); *Book of Antidotes (Kitāb ad-Diryāq)* in Vienna, dated to the middle of the 13th century and attributed

Turkish garments, fur-trimmed caps and short, close fitting tunics instead of the turbans, long loose robes, wraps and cloak worn by most of the other figures. Their occurrence in Arabic manuscripts has been attributed to Seljuk influence,⁷¹ which may also account for their presence in the Syriac Lectionaries. Although the garments of the Constantine and Helena in the Syriac codices are not Turkish, they do not seem purely Byzantine either, and the band on their upper arms has been already recognized as *tiraz*, worn by members of the ruling class and their entourage, by educated Muslims.⁷² Moreover, the “vermiculated” or “scroll” folds, which appear in the garments of three Magi and some other figures in both Lectionaries, are commonly found in Arabic manuscripts from early 13th century.⁷³

This are not the only characteristic shared by both Lectionaries with the illustrated Arabic manuscripts of the first half of the 13th century. Indeed, it has been long noted that whereas in terms of the iconography, both Syriac Lectionaries follow the Byzantine tradition, but the illumination and the form of secondary features is closer to that of contemporary Islamic illustrated books.⁷⁴ In that respect it compares well to a manuscript of *Automata* by Al-Jazari in Istanbul (Topkapi Sarayi Library *Ahmet III 3472*) completed according to the colophon in April 1206.⁷⁵ Despite the classical sources of the genre, the miniatures demonstrate influence from Seljuk painting style in their disregard for perspective and volume, and preference for silhouettes, brightly colored shapes and patterns, and certain details of physical appearance and costume.⁷⁶

Not only the figures, in the Syriac Lectionaries, but also the representation of the landscape resemble that in early 13th-century Arabic manuscripts produced in Northern Mesopotamia. The manuscript share almost identical depictions of trees, in particular cypresses with fabulous, ornamental crowns, but also the small plants, and calligraphic, fantastic rocks, as well as depiction of water, with sinuous lines on the surface.⁷⁷ Moreover, both Syriac Lection-

to Mosul (National Library, *MS A.F. 10*, fol. 1r), ETTINGHAUSEN 1964, 92; *Maqāmāt*, of al-Hariri in Paris (National Library *MS Arabe 3929* fols. 31r; 70v and 133v) see BUCHTHAL 1940, figs. 6 and 32; a copy of Persian version of the animal fable book the *Kalīla wa Dimna*, in Istanbul (Topkapi Palace Library, *Hazine 363* fols. 10r, 14r, 23v) PAPADOPOULO 1972, 641, 644–45, fig. 172–74. See also WARD 1985, 76; NASSAR 1985, 88.

⁷¹ NASSAR 1985, 88.

⁷² BAER 1989, 38. See also ETTINGHAUSEN 1962, 79, 84, 87, 91, 106–07, 116, 119.

⁷³ Such folds appear in the garments of the Jews in the scene of naming of John the Baptist and of the three Magi in the scene of the Nativity (*Vat. syr. 559*, fols. 11r, 16r; *B.L., Add. 7170*, fols. 17v, 21r, LEROY 1964, pls. 75, 76). They are very similar to those in the Arabic Galen manuscript in Vienna (*MS A.F. 10*, fol. 5v). See HOLTZER 1937, 14, pl. II.2; BUCHTHAL 1939, 146–147, fig. 4. See also NASSAR 1985; 92 and 96.

⁷⁴ BUCHTHAL 1939, 145–50; JERPHANION 1939, 484; BREHIER 1940, 149; LEROY 1964, 300–01.

⁷⁵ WARD 1986, 69–76.

⁷⁶ WARD 1985, 76.

⁷⁷ Compare for example depiction of trees in *Vat. syr. 559*, fols. 1r, 48r (LEROY 1964, pl. 70.1, 80.1) with those in the Arabic manuscript of *De Materia Medica* dated to 1222 and attributed to Baghdad, formerly in the Martin Collection in Stockholm, MARTIN 1912, vol. 1, pl. B; likewise compare rocks in *Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 206v, LEROY 1964, pl. 98.1 with Arabic manuscript of *De Materia Medica* in Vienna (National Library, *MS 3703*, fol. 29r), ETTINGHAUSEN 1964, 89; see also WARD 1985, 92. Compare representation of water

aries are particularly close to 13th-century Islamic miniatures from Baghdad and Mosul in their representations of architecture,⁷⁸ as well as the architectural and ornamental frames of the illustrations.⁷⁹ Finally, they share with the Arabic manuscripts depiction of furnishings: for example the bookstands in front of the Evangelists are of the shape commonly depicted in the Arabic illustrations.⁸⁰ The link with Islamic illumination is corroborated by another feature of the manuscripts, namely the curious way in which they use haloes. In *Vat. syr. 559* we find nimbi around the heads of unusual figures, for example Herod, and soldiers slaughtering the innocents.⁸¹ While these depictions are missing from *BL Add. 7170*, in both codices there is a profusion of halos surrounding heads of bystanders, and secondary figures.⁸² Such use of the haloes seems reminiscent of the way in which they are employed in the Islamic miniature of the School of Baghdad and Mosul, where they serve to simply emphasize faces of represented figures.⁸³ It seems therefore that both Lectionaries belong to the artistic milieu of the 13th-century Mesopotamia, which cannot be simply defined as Christian or Arabic. Indeed, we know that some manuscripts were produced by Christians and Muslims working together. Such collaboration is documented, for example in a late Ayyubid manuscript of the *De material Medica* in the Topkapi Sarayi Muzesi Library in Istanbul (*Ahmet III, 2127*), where the scribe was a Christian originating from Mosul, but at least one of the painters is recognizable

in *Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 262r, LEROY 1964, pl. 79.1, with water in the frontispiece of the vol. 20 of the *Kitāb al Aghani*, Royal Library, Copenhagen no. 168) See also water depicted in Maqāmāt of al-Hariri, manuscript dated to ca. 1225–1235 (St. Petersburg, Academy of Sciences, Oriental Institute, *MS S 23*, p. 260), ETTINGHAUSEN 1966, 108.

⁷⁸ For the general discussion see JERPIANION 1939, 489–97.

⁷⁹ The frame enclosing busts of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (*Vat. syr. 559*, fols. 93v–94, LEROY 1964, pl. 72) has been compared the ornamental page in Koran manuscript illustrated in Baghdad in 1289 (Paris, National Library, *MS Arab. 6716*), JERPIANION 1939, 486–87, but it also resembles the frontispiece of *Mukhtar al-Hikam* (fols. 1v–2r). The frame surrounding enthroned Mary in *Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 17r is very much like one in a manuscript of *Materia Medica* dated to 1224 and attributed to the area of Baghdad (Verver Collection, *S86.0097*).

⁸⁰ The tables in Evangelists' miniatures (*Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 1r, *BL Add. 7170*, fols. 5v, 6r, LEROY 1964, pls. 70 and 71) are very much like those in Arabic manuscripts, see for example a table supporting a book in front of a physician in the manuscript of *Materia Medica* dated to 1224 and attributed to area of Baghdad (Verver Collection, *S86.0098*); the frontispiece of the early 13th-century manuscript of *Kalīla wa Dimna* in Istanbul (Topkapi Sarayi Library, *II. 363*, fol. 2a), in portraits of the physicians in *Kitāb al-diryāq* in Paris, dated to 1198–1199 (Paris, National Library, *MS Arab. 2964*, fols. 31–32, 34), PANCAROĞLU, 2001, figs. 2a–c, 9a–b. A bed represented in the scene in Joseph's dream and resuscitating of the daughter of Jair (*Vat. syr. 559*, fols. 12v 73v; *BL, Add. 7170*, fols. 19v, 83r, LEROY 1964, pls. 75.1 and 2, 83.1 and 2), can be also found in Arabic illustrations, for example Maqmat of Hariri manuscript in the British Library (*Ms Add. 22114*, fol. 55, BUCIHAL 1939, pl. XXIV).

⁸¹ *Vat. syr. 559*, fols. 18v, fol. 28r, LEROY 1964, pl. 78.3, 80.

⁸² In general, there is a profusion of haloes, and the nimbi surround heads of many figures, which are not usually thus represented, as in the case of the interlocutors of Zachariah in the Temple, (*Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 11r; *BL Add 7170*, fol. 17v, LEROY 1964, pl. 75.3 and 4); all figures in the scene of the preaching of John the Baptist (*Vat. syr. 559*, fol. 28r; *BL Add 7170*, fol. 34v, LEROY 1964, pl. 80.1 and 2) etc.

⁸³ See for example illustrations of Maqāmāt of al-Hariri in Paris (National Library, *MS Arab. 3929*, dated to ca. 1230 and *MS Arab. 5847*, dated to 1237 and attributed to Baghdad) POPE, ACKERMAN 1939, pls. 631–94; JERPIANION 1939, 493.

as a Muslim by his signature on two of the plants.⁸⁴ The interreligious merging and intercultural artistic exchange in the period in question is perhaps most striking in case of Ayyubid metalwork with Christian images, produced in the vicinity of Mosul, that is in the region from which both Syriac Lectionaries most probably derive.⁸⁵ It seems therefore that these codices fit in well to that particular artistic context.

It has been argued that the combination of the western (Byzantine) and eastern (Seljuk) influences is typical for the illustrated codices in the region of Jazīra in the late 12th and the first half of the 13th century, and furthermore that these manuscripts may be divided into two groups: one in which Seljuk style is dominant,⁸⁶ and the other, where the Byzantine influence is prevalent.⁸⁷ It has been suggested that the Syriac illustrated Lectionaries are closer to the latter.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, we should note that the miniatures of both Syriac codices share with the manuscripts quoted as a chief proponents of the “Seljuk” influence the presence of the oriental physiognomies, and predilection for strong colours.⁸⁹ While the iconographic and stylistic similarity has been taken to suggest that both Syriac Lectionaries must be of the same date and come from the same atelier,⁹⁰ the information gleaned from the colophon seems to suggest that their relationship should be reconsidered, and that the Vatican manuscript was produced only after the Mongolian invasion. We should keep in mind, however, that the coming of the Mongols did not put an end to the style that flourished in Mesopotamia in the early 13th century, for perhaps the finest example of the Baghdad style is found in a manuscript of *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā* (*The Epistles of the Sincere Brethren*) copied in 1287 (Istanbul, Library of the Suleymaniye Mosque, *Esad Efendi 3638*).⁹¹ The same physiognomies, similar landscape and architecture appear in the late 13th and 14th-century manuscripts.⁹² Likewise, the custom of surrounding heads

⁸⁴ According to colophone the manuscript was written by a scribe Abu Yusuf Behnam ibn Musa ibn Yusuf al-Mawsili, who was educated in the medical art. It is dated to 25 January 1229 AD with the words “glory to God” added in syriac, see HUNT 1997, 154–155. Two of the plants, on fols. 29 and 29v are signed by ‘Abd al-Jabbar ibn Ali, see also ETTINGHAUSEN 1962, 74

⁸⁵ BAER 1989.

⁸⁶ NASSAR 1985, 86–87 lists the following codices *Kitāb al-Diryaq* in Paris (National Library, *MS Arab. 2964*, dated 595/1199) and in Vienna (National Library, *MS A.F. 10*, datable to the first half of the 13th century), *Automata* by al-Jazari in Istanbul (Topkapi Sarayı, *MS Ahmet III 3472*, dated 602/1205-6) and 6 volumes of *Kitāb al-Aghani* (vols. 2, 4, 11 in the National Library in Cairo, *Adab 579*; vols 17 and 19 in Istanbul, Suleymaniye Library, Feyzullah Effendi, *Feyzullah 1565* and *1566*; vol. 20, Royal Library, Copenhagen no. 168).

⁸⁷ NASSAR 1985, 87–88 lists *Maqāmāt* of al-Hariri in Paris (National Library *MS Ar 6094*, dated to 1222), *Kalila wa Dimna* in Paris (National Library, *MS Ar 3465*), not dated, but stylistically close to the previous one) and *De Materia Medica*, in Istanbul (Topkapi Sarayı, *Ahmet III 2127*, dated 1229).

⁸⁸ NASSAR 1985, 86.

⁸⁹ For the argument that the “Seljuk” connection is mainly evident in the physical appearance of the figures, i.e., the facial types and hairstyles, as well as their garments see NASSAR 1985, 86.

⁹⁰ BUCHTHAL 1939, 137.

⁹¹ BLAIR 1993, 267

⁹² See above, n. 38. Good examples of similar representation of water and trees can be found in St. Petersburg illustrated *Shahnama* (St. Petersburg, the Russian National Library, *Dorn 329*, fols. 88a and 258b), dated to 1333 AD, see ADAMOVA, 2004, figs. 5.5; 5.9.

with nimbi continues.⁹³ It therefore seems that the miniatures of the Syriac Lectionary in Vatican would not be out of place in the context of the second half of the 13th- century manuscript illumination.

The fact that “oriental” physiognomies appear already in the London Lectionary in 1220s undermines the hypothesis that the miniature in the Vatican codex presents an unusual case, the uniqueness of which would permit to immediately recognized Constantine and Helena as Hülegü and Doquz Khatun. Much has been made of one detail, which sets apart the representations of Constantine and Helena in the two Syriac Lectionaries, namely the absence of a cross on the crown of Constantine in the miniature in the British Library codex, which was taken to reflect the fact that Hülegü was not Christian.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, this is a very minor feature, and moreover, a cross is rarely represented on Constantine's crown in the scenes of exaltation of the cross, making the representation in the London Lectionary unusual.⁹⁵

Are then Hülegü and Doquz Khatun represented in *Vat. syr. 559* as Helena and Constantine? Even if we assume that the manuscript was made after the Mongolian invasion, there is little to support this hypothesis. By that time, all the characteristics which make the depiction of Constantine and Helena appear unusual to our eyes had long been a part of the visual language of manuscript illumination in Syria and Mesopotamia. In particular, the oriental features had been associated with representations of the rulers already in the first half of the 13th century. It therefore seems that the artist simply followed an iconography of a king current in his milieu, and it is only our eyes, unaccustomed to the visual language of 13th-century Mesopotamian illumination, that search for Hülegü and Doquz Khatun in Constantine and Helena.

e-mail: maja.kominko@exeter-oxford.com

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⁹³ See for example miniatures of the manuscript of al-Biruni's *Athar-I Baqiya*, dated to 1307–1308, Edinburgh University Library, *Arab 161*.

⁹⁴ FIEY 1975, 63.

⁹⁵ WALTER 2006, figs. 63, 64, 80–84, as well as a miniature showing Constantine and Helena flanking the Cross in the Lectionary in Midyat, fol. 302r, LEROY 1964, 329, pl. 104.2.

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