



## DAVID OF ASHBY

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**DAVID OF ASHBY** (fl. 1260-75), Dominican friar and visitor to Il-khanid Persia. Early in 1260 he was sent from Acre by Thomas Agni di Lentino, bishop of Bethlehem and papal legate to the Kingdom of Jerusalem, on a diplomatic mission to the Mongol prince and future Il-khan Hulāgu (Hülegü, r. 1256-65), who had recently taken Aleppo (Scheler, p. 27). Ashby must have accompanied Hulāgu when the prince withdrew to northwestern Persia with the bulk of his forces later that year, since a report by envoys from Hulāgu's son and successor, the Il-khan *Abāqā* (r. 1265-82), arriving at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 under Ashby's escort, states that he had spent many years in Il-khanid territory and witnessed several Mongol campaigns (Lupprian, p. 230). It is unclear as to when he returned to the West, but he is described at Lyons as the ambassador of both the patriarch of Jerusalem (then the above-mentioned Thomas Agni) and of King Hugues III of Cyprus and Jerusalem (Lupprian, p. 229), while Edward I of England would shortly refer to him as a member of the patriarch's household and his chaplain ('capellanus et familiaris'; see Rymer, I, pt. 2, p. 144).

*Abāqā*'s embassy was designed to gain Western European cooperation against the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt (Amitai, pp. 646-47). In their report the envoys cited Ashby as a witness that both Hulāgu and *Abāqā* had seen to the liberation of Christians previously enslaved by the Muslims and had sent them on to the Mediterranean coast (Lupprian, p. 230), and that the former had returned the Holy Land to Christian rule (Idem, p. 229). These claims, which presumably relate to the brief Mongol occupation of Palestine in 1260, are not



corroborated in any other source. Hulāgu was also alleged to have opened his heart to Ashby concerning his attachment to the Christian faith and his desire for baptism (Idem, p. 229). Much of this is highly tendentious, and it was doubtless intended to convince the West that the Il-khan was a reliable ally, though the Armenian historian Vardan Arewelc'i claims to have heard Hulāgu express similarly pro-Christian sentiments (Thomson, pp. 220-21). Nothing came of the negotiations at Lyons, and Edward I, responding on 26 January 1275 to a letter from Abāqā that Ashby had brought him, was unable to guarantee that a crusade was imminent (Rymer, I, pt. 2, p. 144). Ashby then disappears from sight, having no doubt returned to the East as the English king's envoy to the Il-khan.

Ashby produced a treatise on the Mongols, entitled *Les fais des Tartares*, of which the only known text, contained in a manuscript in the royal library at Turin, was destroyed by fire in 1904; there survives merely a description of the manuscript, published in 1867 together with a transcription of one chapter (Scheler, pp. 26-28). The fact that the language was evidently closer to that of Languedoc than to Anglo-French presents no problem if, as is possible, the Turin text represented a translation made by someone else at Lyons from Ashby's Latin original. The chapters appear to have been concerned with the Mongols' lifestyle and particularly with military matters. Although the presence of Abāqā's envoys at the Council had aroused great optimism in Western Europe, Ashby himself was seemingly no advocate of the Il-khanid alliance, since he describes the Mongols, at the beginning of *Les fais*, as 'this accursed race' ('ceste malite gent').

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(Peter Jackson)

March 6, 2009