

Princes and Paradise: Rabban Sauma in the Western Mediterranean

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Abstract: This chapter is an analysis of the China-Mediterranean connection of the Nestorian monk Rabban Sauma, the first known Chinese-born person to visit the European Mediterranean, in the *History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sauma*, a Syriac work of unknown authorship about the Ilkhanate composed early in the fourteenth century. Born an Önggüd Turk in Beijing sometime between 1220 and 1230, Sauma and his pupil Mark left Khubilai Khan's China for the Holy Land around 1275. They settled in the Ilkhanate when war re-directed them there. Early in 1287, the Ilkhan Arghun, seeking an alliance with Latin Europe against Islamic states, dispatched Rabban Sauma on a mission to the Latin West as his envoy. An abridged and redacted Syriac translation of Sauma's now lost Persian account of his visit to Latin Europe survives in the *History*, and Sauma's influence on the anonymous author in the composition of the historical work was significant. This chapter suggests that the China-Mediterranean connection of Sauma's story in the book is centered on the imagination of political power within the framework of his journey. The *History* is a mirror of princes that projects good governance and enlightened civilisation onto the Latin European other as a lesson for the Ilkhans. From the Mongol elite to princes of the Latin West, the book delineates Sauma's journey as a series of encounters with princes. And this engagement and study of power is inextricably bound up with the notion of the journey as a process of undergoing trial and attaining visionary fulfillment in the Chinese Buddhist tradition of travel. The European Mediterranean marks Sauma's vision of benevolent rule, order, and paradise beyond a border of ordeal and death. The *History* holds up this vision of the European Mediterranean as a mirror to the princes of the Ilkhanate, a land the anonymous author saw beset by strife.

Keywords: Sino-Western Contacts; Travel Literature; Mongol; Rabban Sauma; Governance

1. Introduction

In 1287, a man from China named Rabban Sauma arrived in Europe as the Ilkhan Arghun's envoy. He was a monk from the Church of the East, popularly known as the Nestorian Church. His visit to Latin Europe marked a significant landmark in history, for it was the first time that a man of Chinese birth reached the western Mediterranean from Asia. Sauma was, technically, the first known Chinese-born person in history to reach the European Mediterranean, even though Isa Kelemechi, a Syriac Christian of western Asian origins based in Khubilai Khan's China, had reached Italy two years earlier (Boyle 1973, 558–60; Borbone 2008, 221–22, 240; Rossabi 1992, 22–23).

Sauma's writing about his mission to Europe has survived, albeit in an abridged and altered form (Borbone 2008, 222). Upon his return to the Ilkhanate

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from the Latin West near the end of the thirteenth century, he wrote an account of his journey to Latin Europe in Persian. That original is now lost, but a shortened redacted version of it in Syriac survives in a work of history of unknown authorship, entitled *History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sauma* (referred to hereafter as *History*). This Syriac work documents the lives and times of Rabban Sauma and Mark, two Nestorian monks who made great contributions to the leadership of the Church once they reached the Ilkhanate from China. In the *History*, the two monks' personal stories chronicle the way the Nestorian Church weathered the vicissitudes of power under the Ilkhans.

As Pier Giorgio Borbone, editor and translator of the *History*, has shown, the portion of the book based in Sauma's writing about Europe retains at least some of Sauma's own phrasing and intentionality as a writer (Borbone 2008, 226–34). Moreover, what has survived of Sauma's writing cannot be understood apart from the *History* as a whole, since Sauma's personal influence shaped and enriched the entire narrative of the *History*. The anonymous author, almost certainly a member of the Church's clerical elite, most likely knew both subjects of his book and worked on the book while the two men were alive, eliciting information and advice from them (Borbone, 2008, 223; Borbone 2021 Introduction, 17–18; Vinci 2013, 344). The book was completed sometime between Mark's death in November 1317 and the middle of 1319 (Borbone 2021 Introduction, 14–15).

This chapter, therefore, analyses the China-Mediterranean connection of Sauma's story in terms of the *History's* form and expression. In particular, it suggests that this connection is centered on the imagination of political power within the framework of the monk's journey. The book is a mirror of princes that projects good governance and enlightened civilisation onto the Latin European other as a lesson for the Ilkhans. The narrative of Sauma's journey unfolds as a sequence of visits to different regions of Asia and Europe, and it serves as a precious witness to the historical encounter between a man from Mongol China and political personalities of two continents. From the Mongol elite to princes of the Latin West, the *History* delineates the monk's journey as a series of encounters with princes. And this engagement and study of power is inextricably bound up with the notion of the journey as a process of undergoing trial and attaining visionary fulfilment in the Chinese Buddhist tradition of travel. The western Mediterranean marks Sauma's vision of benevolent rule, order, and paradise beyond a border of ordeal and death. The *History* holds up this vision of the European Mediterranean as a mirror to the princes of the Ilkhanate, a land the anonymous author saw beset by strife.

2. *The History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sauma*

The *History* provides most of the known facts about Sauma and Mark. Both protagonists of the book were Önggüd Turks from Nestorian families (Rossabi 1992, 23–24, 34). Born in Beijing sometime between 1220 and 1230, Sauma was an only child. When Sauma demonstrated an interest in monastic life as a young man, his parents pressured him to marry. They, however, eventually con-

sented to their son's wish to become a monastic. Mark was Sauma's pupil and about two decades younger. He was the youngest of four sons of an archdeacon from Koshang, a city south of the Gobi Desert.

Around 1275, the two men left the country of their birth for the Holy Land. War re-directed them to the Ilkhanate, where Mark was elected Patriarch of the Nestorian Church. He was enthroned as the Catholicos Mar Yahballaha in 1281. Early in 1287, on the advice of the young patriarch, the Ilkhan Arghun, seeking an alliance with Latin Europe against Islamic states, dispatched Rabban Sauma on a mission to the Latin West as his envoy. Returning to the Ilkhanate by late 1288, Sauma would live out his life there. The narrative of the *History* continues beyond his death in January 1294, to describe increasingly adverse circumstances for the Church under later Ilkhans. Mar Yahballaha's death in 1317 marks the end of the *History*.

The lexicon of the *History*, as Borbone has pointed out, makes "cosmopolitan" use of words from languages as different as Turkic, Arabic, Persian, Chinese, and Latin (Borbone 2021 Introduction, 21–22; Borbone 2023, 333). The text also embodies a plurality of literary forms and rhetorical traditions from diverse civilisations, from the exemplum and historiography to Syriac hagiography and Biblical narrative (e.g., Borbone 2021 Introduction, 15–17). My analysis suggests that the text systematically draws upon the exemplum in the tradition of advice to the prince and the Buddhist pilgrimage writing of Chinese literature. Just as Rabban Sauma visited with princes as a wise man of the Church, the *History* engages with the Mongol political elite in lessons of order and sound rule. The Chinese Buddhist trope of travel as a process of undergoing conditions of ordeal and ideal, trial and bliss, frames the moral basis of the *History's* politics of counsel.

3. The Ilkhanate and the Study of Power in the *History*

As Nestorians both Rabban Sauma and Mar Yahballaha belonged to a minority community within Persia and China that historically depended on the protection of rulers (Baumer 2016, 183, 224). The narrator openly acknowledges the political basis of Mar Yahballaha's elevation to the patriarchate: "They chose him for this reason: the kings who held the reins of government in the entire inhabited world were Mongols, and no-one was more familiar with their customs or proficient in their language" (85).¹ It was because of Mar Yahballaha's connections and familiarity with the Mongol elite and its ways that the Church fathers elected him as catholicos (Borbone 2008, 226). The narrator's comment on the relation between political condition and the Church's leadership affirms the Church's historical policy of deference and accommodation to reigning power (Borbone 2021 Introduction, 29, 32).

¹ References to the *History*, ed. and trans. Borbone, are to page numbers and they will appear in the text proper.

In the *History*, the Ilkhanate under rulers from Abaqa to Öljeitü represents the political centre that is the basis of the book's study of power, for the survival of the Church is intimately bound up with elite power for the anonymous author. Ilkhans receive more concrete and detailed descriptions on the whole than other rulers. With the exception of Ahmad, who is openly denounced in the book, the *History* refers to individual Ilkhans with flattering characterisations, regardless of their religious faith and personal moral condition. Geikhatu, whose brief reign as Ilkhan ended in violent death, is the "undefeated king Geikhatu," "blessed king Geikhatu" (139, 141). Likewise, Öljeitü, who ruled as a Muslim despite having been baptised as a child, is the "undefeated king" (213, 229).

The two protagonists reached this centre after undergoing extreme conditions of war and famine in Central Asia. Indeed, the period between the two men's westward journey from China and Mar Yahballaha's death in 1317 saw turbulent struggles between Mongol princes, as Khubilai's ascension as Khagan in 1260 marked the irreversible fragmentation of the Mongol empire (e.g., May 2018, 181). Informed by this historical reality, the book alludes to the horror and devastation of Mongol warfare that Sauma and Mark braved to reach the Ilkhanate. The war between Mongol princes and specifically the atrocities afterwards were disastrous, in the two monks' recollections:

At the time of their arrival in Khotan there had just been a conflict between the King of Kings, the Qa'an, and King Oqu. The latter, having escaped from the Qa'an, had arrived there, where he had slaughtered thousands of people. The roads and tracks were interrupted, and the wheat supplies had run out. Since wheat could not be procured, many died of starvation (73).

After their stay at Khotan, the two protagonists came upon Kashgar, yet another community that was "depopulated," having been "looted by enemies" (73).

The two men reached the Ilkhanate as the new centre of their lives after suffering the extreme trial of their journey. In the narrative, the ordeal of travel vividly demonstrates the protagonists' resolve to make the Ilkhanate their new home: "We have not come from there to return, and we do not think we would be able to endure all the hardships we have experienced a second time" (81). The trope of enduring unspeakable pain and suffering to reach one's new home in a foreign country in the narrative here draws on the discourse of Chinese Buddhist travel writing (Tian 2011, e.g., 88–110). This trope, in fact, frames the entire narrative of the *History*. As a Nestorian monk Sauma came from a religious tradition that had assimilated the influence of Buddhism in its doctrinal articulation and aesthetic expression in his native China (Baumer 2016, e.g., 188–89, 220–22). Both he and Mark as well as the anonymous author would also have been familiar with Buddhists at the Ilkhanate, where they prospered under the favor of three generations of rulers, from Hülegü to his son Abaqa, and then to his grandson Arghun, before the fourteenth century. Certainly, during Sauma's lifetime, Buddhists interacted with Muslims and Nestorians at court, and like the other religious groups they sought to engage the Ilkhans in their ideas of kingship and authority (Brack 2023, e.g., 19–82).

The political centre of the Ilkhanate that Sauma and Mark achieved after risking their lives to travel through Central Asia was itself fraught with danger and suffering. The Mongol-ruled state periodically lapsed into crises of authority, as it was increasingly plagued with succession disputes and factional tumult (De Nicola 2017, e.g., 65). Changes in fortune for the Church under different Ilkhans inform the core of the *History's* study of princely power. After Abaqa's approval for his elevation to the patriarchate, Mar Yahballaha was imprisoned by the Muslim Ilkhan Ahmad, who, "devoid of far-sightedness and wisdom," accused him of attempting to turn Khubilai Khan against him (89, 91). At the heart of stories of princes and the two Nestorian monks' relations with them is the *History's* politics of legitimation. The figure of the ruler who respects counsel and surrounds himself with wise men is a major trope of authority in the political tradition of the steppes of Inner Asia (Amitai 2014, e.g., 16–18). Whereas Ahmad was a tyrant who oppressed a holy man such as Mar Yahballaha, his successor Arghun was the good ruler who respected the patriarch's leadership of the Church.

In the *History*, to investigate power is to peel off or to remove irrelevant and superfluous material, to condense the historical narrative down to its proper focus, and to extract the lesson of wise counsel from the dense reality of history. While the book is conceived overall as a work of history (Borbone 2021 Introduction, 15–17), its narration constantly distils historical material in order to present the essential lesson of political counsel, that is, "essential" in authorial terms. Such a strategy does not just apply to the content of the book, but also to its very style. Within the text, the effect of this is an overall abstraction of the historical narrative into a series of emphatic contrasts and exemplary forms.

The anonymous author maintains that his abridgement of the narrative material about Sauma is intentional: "Since it is not our aim to write a full account of what Rabban Sauma did and the things he saw, we have considerably shortened what he personally wrote in the Persian language" (131). Speaking in the first person, he leaves out Sauma's description of non-religious architecture of Rome in order to focus strictly on the religious buildings of the city (Borbone 2008, 230–31). The author characterises the excluded material as distracting from the "aims of our narrative" (113).

Beyond the detailed material descriptions of the Ilkhans, economy of expression shapes mentions and characterisations of rulers in the *History*. All Mongol rulers discussed in the book are named except Khubilai, who is "King of Kings, the Qa'an" (71, 91). The Khagan Möngke, to distinguish him from Khubilai, is named: "King of Kings Möngke Qa'an" (157). The caliphs are "Arab kings" (153). Borbone has shown that the author retains in the text Sauma's practice of identifying rulers of Europe as embodiments of their nation or dignity rather than by their regnal names (Borbone 2008, 234). Philip IV of France is "King Fransis" (115, 117). Edward I of England is "King Ingaltar" (119), and the Byzantine emperor is "King Baselios" (101, 103). The King of Aragon is "Irada Arkon" (103), that is, *roi d'Aragon*, as it would have been a practice in Sauma's Turkic to add a vowel before the initial "r." Sauma's identification of the Angevin ruler of Naples, however, is by his regnal name, "Irada Sharlado," *roi Charles deux* (105;

Borbone 2008, 228; see also Borbone 2021 Commentary, 276). For both Sauma and the author, the comparison with the Mongol ruling elite underlines references to European kings. Sauma notes that the “king of kings,” the Holy Roman Emperor and the Latin European counterpart to the Khagan, was crowned and invested by the pope (111).

The *History*'s pursuit of the pure idea and abstraction of princely power even strips women from its narrative, especially in association with power. Remarkably for a book about two men from the Turkic-Mongol elite, the book takes little interest in the powerful ladies of the Mongol nobility, whose political influence and advice Sauma and Mar Yahballaha must have been aware of at the Ilkhanate. Besides victims of unspeakable violence, most of the other women in the *History* are portrayed flatteringly as sweet royal mothers and kind religious patrons. The book minimises any political influence that they wielded in the kingdom.

The *History* corroborates the fact that the Ilkhan Ahmad released Mar Yahballaha from prison on the advice of his mother and others. But the royal mother, Qutui Khatun, a formidable political personality who was known to have been actively involved in her son's rule, is not named in the book (De Nicola 2017, e.g., 94–95, 97–99, 107). Downplaying her role as a royal manager and adviser, the *History* ascribes the catholicos' release to the “guardian angel who protected the holy patriarchal see” by making use of the “king's mother and the amirs” (93).

The effect of this radically masculine imagination of political power is to elevate the stature of the Nestorian clergy, a male body represented in the *History* by Sauma and the *catholicos*, as advisers to the Ilkhans. In scene after scene of visits with rulers, the two men appear as wise men whose blessing and kind advice legitimate the Ilkhanid throne. Geikhatu, who did not “stray or depart from justice” (135), “remained for three days with the *catholicos*; he rejoiced greatly and presented lavish gifts” (137). The narrative also portrays Ghazan as a good king who received Mar Yahballaha and other high churchmen as holy men: “The king [. . .] had him seated to his right and, having had wine brought, he bid the *catholicos* and all the bishops who accompanied him a cup” (155). Even Öljeitü, a Muslim ruler, sought religious advice from Nestorian monks (185). Despite his favor for Islam, wise counsel prevailed. His decision to reverse his adversarial policy against the Church was the result of visits with Mar Yahballaha: “The king honoured the *catholicos* a great deal”; “the king again summoned him to Tabriz, where he presented him with a saddle mule and a precious robe. [. . .] God had reawakened the mercy in him” (185, 187). The politics of counsel as portrayed in these instances reflects a prevailing trope as well as time-honored practice in Mongol history. Famous Chinggisid princes such as Khubilai and Hülegü frequently staged the reception of counsel and cultivated the image of themselves as rulers who sought learning and wisdom (Rossabi 1988, 137–39; Amitai 2014, 16–18).

The narrative refers to the hospitality of two kings who married Khubilai's daughters when the two protagonists visited Koshang, Mar Yahballaha's hometown. The two royal sons-in-law's effort to retain them indicates their interest in recruiting wise learned men in their government: “We strive to summon fathers

and monks from the West; how can we afford to let you leave?” (71; e.g., Rossabi 1992, 50). Their lavishing them with “gold, silver, and robes,” gifts and supplies for their journey, is another sign of their appreciation of wisdom and talent (71). A crucial scene took place between Mar Yahballaha and Arghun after the fall of Ahmad: “The *catholicos* thus saw King Arghun and blessed him, praying for the stability of his reign. The king honoured him and exalted his position” (95). Even though Arghun had removed Ahmad from power violently, the scene was meant to legitimate his ascension as Ilkhan.

4. The Paradise of Christian Order: A Vision of the Western Mediterranean

Sauma’s recollections of his visits with Christian princes of Europe are consistently favourable, compared with his varied assessments of rulers in Asia. The European Mediterranean represents the westernmost point of Sauma’s journey. While Sauma’s personal journey from China to the Ilkhanate had taken place within the Mongol empire, his visit to the Latin West marked his movement beyond Mongol dominion. His vision of the western Mediterranean as a land of Christian order and unity came not only at the end of an extended journey, but it was attained by crossing a major divide between continents and civilisations. Beyond the familiar empire of the Mongols, Sauma entered a land that was utterly unknown to him. Sauma’s favorable impressions of the European Mediterranean and its Christian princes, therefore, were inextricably bound up with the dynamic process of his crossing boundaries and engagement with otherness.

As Renata Vinci has pointed out, the *History*’s economy of expression and basic simplicity of observation in its account of Sauma’s diplomatic mission reflect the influence of Chinese travel writing (Vinci 2013, 344). This influence, moreover, can be traced specifically to Buddhist pilgrimage writing that has had a powerful impact on the popular imagination in China from the early fifth century, when the account of the Chinese monk Faxian 法顯 (337–422 CE) about his journey to India began circulating in China. In her pioneering scholarship on Chinese travel literature, Tian Xiaofei has shown that the tale of the Buddhist monk journeying from China to India to obtain sacred texts is a prevailing “cultural narrative,” a story long embedded in the Chinese imagination with popular themes and images of travel (Tian 2011, 89). In this cultural narrative, the votary crosses borders under dire conditions to reach the far western land of India, where he witnesses an ideal society under good rule and peaceful order. The extreme opposition of hell and paradise organises the narrative in temporal as well as spatial terms, for paradise is achieved only after the pilgrim endures the hell of deadly terrain in the deep interior of Central Asia. The very act of moving through an area of catastrophic devastation signals the crossing of a crucial border beyond which lies paradise (Tian 2011, e.g., 88–118).

Sauma’s westward journey also resembles the Buddhist monk’s pilgrimage to India in its paradoxical conception of encounter as the achievement of one’s true centre or identity (Tian 2011, e.g., 3, 97–104). The Chinese monk braved unfamiliar terrain to arrive at India as the spiritual centre of his world. Travel

through foreign and harsh terrain to attain the ideal state of enlightened Buddhist teachings was bound up with who he was as a Chinese Buddhist. Likewise, Sauma and Mark were joyful to arrive at the home of the Nestorian Church in Mesopotamia. Immediately upon arrival, they settled in a monastery as their new home (81).

In Sauma's account of his mission to Latin Europe, paradise lay beyond the infernal conditions of travel. While Latin Europe was entirely alien to him, well beyond the vast Mongol empire that he had travelled, it was also a place of Christian dominance that appealed to him. The sight of an active Mount Etna served as the liminal boundary of otherness that Sauma crossed to reach the civilised world of the western Mediterranean:

Then he got on a ship and, once out in the open sea, he saw a mountain from which smoke rises all day, while at night fire appears on it; no-one can venture nearby because of the smell of Sulphur. People say that there is a great snake there, and that is why the sea is called Sea of the Dragon. It is indeed a scary sea, where many ships full of men have been lost (103).

The recorded eruption of Mount Etna on 18 June 1287 marked Sauma's arrival in Sicily and his very first moment of encounter of the western Mediterranean. The *History's* description of the active volcano, however, is based on a formula in the work of geography, *Athar al-bilad wa-akhbar al-ibad* (*Monuments of the Lands and Historical Traditions about Their Peoples*), written in 1275 in Arabic by Persian writer Zakariyya al-Qazwini. While Qazwini's work might have been familiar to the anonymous author as well as to Sauma, geographical lore about volcanoes was printed and circulated in China before Sauma departed the country, and it might also have shaped Sauma's own observation of Mount Etna (Vinci 2013, 342–45; Vinci 2019, 39–44; Borbone 2008, 227–28; Borbone 2021 Introduction, 21). The fact that this passage is taken from a stock description in Arabic geography suggests that it serves a formal function of marking a liminal, unstable site of deadly otherness which the traveller must cross in his undertaking to reach the land of the Christians.

Beyond the border of disastrous nature and death lay an ideal place of grace and order. In contrast to Mongol turmoil and pluralism, this ideal place shone forth as a mirror of Christian discipline and unity. Even a war between Christian kings stood in sharp contrast to the conflict between Mongol rulers. Sauma stresses that Europeans did not harm civilians, as he and his entourage watched the battle between the troops of Aragon and Charles II from afar on the rooftop of his residence and “wondered at the customs of the Franks, who did not harm anybody, apart from the combatants” (105). Borbone reasons that Sauma very likely never witnessed the killing and devastation of civilians that occurred after this particular battle (Borbone 2008, 228). Beyond Sauma's historical experience, the assertion that European soldiers did not kill civilians is a deliberate rhetorical projection of the land of the Franks as a community of order and good rule. While in Central Asia Sauma and his pupil Mark suffered the ordeal of famine, violence, and death in the wake of military conflicts, in the European Mediter-

anean, warfare became a picturesque experience observed from the rooftop, removed of any sense of threat. Certainly, the assertion of the orderliness of European warfare in the *History* is meant to contrast with Sauma's experience of the dire conditions of Mongol conflicts in Asia.

At the heart of this mirror that Sauma holds up for the princes of the Ilkhanate is Genoa. No prince ruled there. The brief allusion to the city's popular election of its leader is quickly followed by an extensive description of the city's great church that shows the piety of its citizens (115). Designated specifically as a "paradise," it is the city where Sauma met his counterpart in the Roman Catholic Church, a visitor-general: "We went back to spend the winter in the city of Genoa. When we arrived there, we saw once again that it resembled the garden of paradise: its winter is not cold, nor is its summer hot; there, greenery lasts all year round" (121). It is there, in a city blessed with ideal natural conditions and without monarchs, that he spoke candidly about why he served infidel rulers. He spoke about princes rather than to them. To his equal in the Roman Church, he made the case for Latin Europe's alliance with Mongol power in political terms. The Mongol rulers were not the model of Christian piety; their heart was "harder than rock," he admitted to the Catholic prelate. But Christians could work with them to achieve the Holy Land: "Yet they are hoping to conquer the Holy City, while those whose duty it would be do not even consider doing it or think of such an undertaking" (121).

The natural affinity between Sauma as a wise man of the Nestorian Church and the Catholic prelate extends beyond the conversation with the visitor-general in Genoa. The cardinals of the Roman Church accepted Sauma as their equal. Their first concern, upon meeting him, was to make sure that he was rested and had received proper care and attention in Rome (105). Other princes of Latin Christendom, from the kings of France and England to the newly elected Pope Nicholas IV, also presented themselves as figures of empathy and intimate conversation. The pope "honoured Rabban Sauma more than usual" (123). Philip IV of France, a gracious host to Sauma, responded favorably to the envoy's proposal of alliance (117). Edward I eagerly received Sauma's embassy and likewise indicated an interest in his proposal (119). He impressed upon Sauma the unity and complete dominance of Christianity in the Latin world: "In the land of the Franks there are no two religions, only one, the one professed by Jesus Christ, and everybody is Christian" (119).

Later in the narrative, the ideal of faraway lands remains a powerful trope. Responding rhetorically to a political proposal to force Christians under siege at Irbil to leave the citadel, Mar Yahballaha resorted to the trope. Rather than support such a proposal, he would wish to "return to the East," his homeland, or end his life in "the land of the Franks," the home of Christian unity that could never be for him (165). The rhetorical appeal of Sauma's memoirs continued to exert an influence, even after his death, on both Mar Yahballaha and the anonymous author.

The account of Sauma's mission in the *History* holds up the land of the European Mediterranean as a mirror of ideal governance and order under which civilians lived unharassed by princes, blessed and united in their faith in the one

true God. Informed by Chinese-Buddhist ideas of crossing extreme borders and attaining enlightenment, the story of Sauma's mission to the Latin West functions as a masterful rhetoric of counsel in the *History's* study of princely power. Rabban Sauma, the wise man of the Nestorian Church, tells the story of his journey to the ideal land to address the turmoil of the Mongol ruling elite.

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