The Mongol "Other": Exploring Representations of a Mysterious and Distant Nation in Western European Sources of the 13th Century

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Abstract

The Mongol Empire, founded by Chinggis Khan (Чингис хаан)[1], was the most extense empire in history. It covered a vast area from eastern China to southern Persia, and reached Hungary in the west. The empire's fast growth in the 13th century surprised the whole world, including Western Europe which knew little about the Mongols, often called *Tartars*, at that time. This study analyses how these portrayals were different according to the authors' contact with the Mongols, and how they changed over a few decades, from viewing them as an enigmatic ally against Islam or a negligible pagan society, to being considered "wild barbarians" and eventually an exotic, mysterious and powerful nation. This paper suggests that Mongol representations in chronicles, letters, and travel accounts were influenced by factors such as cultural differences, geographical distance, and European political and religious identities. It provides valuable insight into how the West perceived the Mongols during the 13th century, illuminating the broader cultural and historical context of the time.

Keywords: Mongols, Western Europe, Invasion, Béla IV, 1241, Tartars, Pian del Carpine, Rubruck, Friar Julian

Introduction

The first Mongol invasion of Europe in 1241, known as *Tatárjárás* in Hungarian, is a significant event in western history. Before this event, the Mongols, commonly referred to as *Tartars* at the time, were practically unknown to most Europeans. However, the arrival of Mongol armies in Eastern European countries, including Russia, Great Hungary, and Cumania, was observed by travellers, such as the Hungarian ambassador Friar Julian, and later by the rulers of Central Europe, notably King Béla IV of Hungary. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive perspective of the perception that western Europeans held about the Mongols during the initial six decades of the thirteenth century. To proceed with the analysis, various official documents dating between 1235 and 1253 shall be examined from a linguistic standpoint. The first category consists of letters authored by members of the European aristocracy, many of which are housed in a collection situated in Innsbruck, Austria. The majority of these letters address the pressing necessity for a military campaign aimed at expelling the Mongols from Hungary, with the aim of safeguarding Christendom (Coulter, 2022: 496). After the complete withdrawal of the Mongolian armies from Central Europe, firstly towards Bulgaria and then back to Central Asia, military and cultural curiosity about these unexpected enemies persisted. Consequently, several diplomatic missions were dispatched to meet with them, following the precedent established by Friar Julian, who, in 1235, was amongst the first Europeans to raise a warning about the imminent threat posed by Tartar armies from Central Asia. These envoys included Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (1245), Simon of Saint Quentin (1245), André de Longjumeau (1245 and 1249), and William of Rubruck (1253). The accounts of these missions constitute the second type of documents examined. A third category includes other works and chronicles dated a few years after the invasion written by authors with no direct contact with the Mongols.

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[1] To ensure accuracy and clarity, all Mongolian names will be provided along with their transliterated forms in the Cyrillic alphabet, considering the variations that may appear in Western sources

Socio-political situation of Europe during the 13th Century

The last decades of the 12th century and the first half of the 13th century have a common element in Central Asia and Europe; both regions saw the birth and consolidations of nations and empires which would extend their influence up to our days. In Central Asia, Temujin (Тэмүжин) successfully united the Mongol tribes under his charismatic leadership, ultimately ascending to become Chinggis Khan (Чингис хаан, more commonly spelled in English as Genghis Khan).

Meanwhile, Europe remained highly fragmented during this time. The southern kingdoms, such as Leon and the Eastern Roman Empire, found themselves engaged in a protracted and enduring conflict that spanned over four centuries against the Muslim rulers of the Middle East and North Africa. While this struggle consumed the resources and attention of these southern powers, their northern counterparts such as the Holy Roman Empire (basically modern Germany and north of Italy) France, England, and Russia, recognized the need to solidify their regional dominance by absorbing rival kingdoms and forming strategic alliances with other powerful entities. A third group arose in the form of a series of small central European kingdoms positioned in a buffer zone on the border between the Orthodox and Catholic regions of Europe. Among these, Hungary and Poland became the most influential and powerful (Fig. 1). In their need to preserve their independence, these countries were often at a crossroads, with difficult choices to make between aligning themselves with either the East or the West. European concerns were, therefore, centred around the Mediterranean Sea.

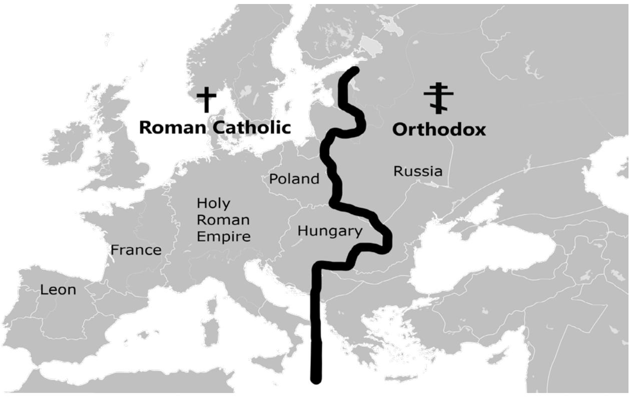

Figure 1. Europe before the Mongol invasion of 1241

For this reason, the terms and names Mongol, Temujin (Тэмүжин), and Chinggis Khan (Чингис хаан) were largely unfamiliar and irrelevant to the majority of Europeans during the time period in question. However, two pivotal events altered the Mongols' status from relative obscurity to one of heightened interest and apprehension. Firstly, the Mongols' rapid expansion into Muslim territories and their advance towards the easternmost Orthodox borders drew wider attention to their military might and strategic prowess. Secondly, the political exigencies of King Béla IV of Hungary led to his seeking alliances with the Magyars of the Urals and other nomadic tribes, bringing the Mongols further into focus as a potential geopolitical force. These converging forces marked a significant turning point in the history of the Mongols and their interactions with other civilizations.

The Mongol Invasion of Europe in 1241

One of the first records of war between Mongols and Europeans dates from the 1223 at the Battle of the Kalka river, not far from the modern city of Mariupol, by the Azov sea. There, Cumans (often also called Polovets or Kipchak), and some Rus principalities where defeated by the Mongols. However, it was not until 1235 when Ogedei Khan (Өгэдэй хаан) commanded Batu Khan (Бат хаан) to conquer Europe (Mitchell & Forbes, 1914).

From that moment, the Mongol armies raided all the kingdoms and principalities of Eastern Europe including Kievan Rus as well as several Turkic and Persian kingdoms situated in the western regions of present-day Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Despite their significant triumphs, it appears that western and central Europeans may not have been perturbed by the idea of a Mongol invasion, and did not even provide any assistance to the oriental kingdoms, all of them Orthodox, pagan or muslim, that had either fallen or were strugling.

The fall of Kiev marks the pivotal moment in which the Mongol Empire set its eyes on Central Europe. Led by Batu Khan (Бат хаан) and guided by the brilliant strategy of General Subutai (Сүбэдэй баатар), the Mongol army swept through Poland in the late 1240s, followed by Hungary and other Central European territories in 1241. Despite encountering little resistance along the way, the Mongols abruptly withdrew from Hungary in the spring of 1242 to return to Central Asia after sacking Bulgaria. This unexpected departure is widely attributed to the death of Ogedei Khan (Өгэдэй хаан) which led the Mongol commanders to return and prepare for the selection of a new leader. However, this explanation cannot be deemed conclusive, since alternative theories postulate challenges faced by the Mongol armies on account of climatic factors (B. Szabó, 2007: 157-160).

The Mongols according to pre-invasion documents

It is safe to say that an important part of the earliest references to the Mongols were not authored from direct interaction with the Mongol people. Instead, these accounts were typically derived from secondary sources. The fact that Mongols were geographically distant and have had little impact on Western history made it difficult for Europeans to get a clear picture of this nation

(Blurton, 2007: 82). This led to many references being vague and uncertain, leaving much to the imagination. Nonetheless, these accounts offer a glimpse into how Europeans perceived the Mongols before the invasion, and may provide some valuable insight into the historical context of the time.

In fact, one of the first references that was applied to the Mongols was the legend of Presbyter Ioannes, or Prester John. John was considered to be a Christian king reigning over a distant land, once thought to be India. However, in 1221, news brought back by Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of Acre, from the Fifth Crusade revealed that King David of India, a supposed successor to Prester John, had amassed his armies to fight against the Saracens or Muslims. The Muslims were seen as the main adversary of Christian Europe at the time, and King David's victories against Persia were celebrated as a win for the Christian faith. This news brought hope to Christians in Europe, who saw Prester John as a powerful ally in the fight against their enemies (Huygens, 1960). While the Prester John narrative purported the triumphs of a legendary dynasty, these achievements were in fact those accomplished by Chinggis Khaan (Чингис хаан). The Mongol connection of this legend is also suggested by René Grousset (1970), who states that it is plausible that the Prester John tale emerged from certain Mongol tribes, such as the Keraits and the Naimans, who had adopted Christianity in the 11th century. In any case, as previously mentioned, the link between the Mongols and the mythological kings is never directly stated by any mediaeval source.

More concrete, but still minimal references to the Mongols would arrive a few years later in Central and Western Europe originating from Hungarian sources. This development was spurred on by King Béla IV of Hungary, who sought to bolster his kingdom and garner political allies (Molnár, 2001: 33, 34). In pursuit of this goal, the king dispatched Friar Julian (*Julianus barát* in Hungarian) in 1235 to venture to the territories where the Eastern Hungarian tribes were still inhabiting, situated in the vicinity of the Urals, approximately comprising modern-day Bashkortostan or Bashkiria in a country tha Julian called "Magna Hungaria" or the Great Hungary (B. Szabó, 2007: 60). Julian found the Hungarian tribes and stated that "*Gens Tartarorum vicina est eis*" (Frater Ricardus, 2009). The etymology of the term "Tartar" and its corresponding country "Tartaria" can be traced back to the Tatar Mongol tribe, although Friar Julian provided a popular ethymology based on the name of a Thartar river, from the land they inhabited (Bendefy, 1936: 40). Interestingly, the inclusion of an additional "r" in the name "Tatar" may be associated with the Greek word *Τάρταρος* (Tártaros), a concept that refers to the prison of the Titans in Greek mythology, and the prison of the sinning angels in Christian doctrine, as noted in 2 Peter 2:4 of the Bible. Traditionally, it has been suggested that this association of ideas through the name is the fruit of the chaos and destruction that the Mongols caused in Europe, as if they were warriors from the hell (Wedgwood, 1855: 72; Saunders, 1969: 124). However, if the document has not been altered by copists, the use of the word *Tartar* for both, a river and a nation, with additional "r" by Julian in this quasi-marginal comment may suggest that, at least in the pre-invasion period, this was a case of phonological convergence, when a new word that was not widely used, *Tatar*, acquired the sounds of an older similar word, *tartar[os]*. The actual meaning of Tartars as *people arrived from the hell* may be acquired either during or shortly after the invadion, as it is considered in the following section. In addition, although the term may have originally been used by westerners to refer to the Mongols, it gradually evolved into a generic name for all tribes residing in Central and North Asia. Throughout several centuries, the appellation *Tartar* or *Tatar* persisted as the predominant exonym used to refer to the Mongols in certain regions of Europe. Even in the present day, it remains customary in Hungarian to allude to medieval Mongols as "*tatárok*", and the Mongol invasion is still called "*tatárjárás*".

The account of Julian's first expedition to the Urals is notably lacking in specific details regarding the *Tartars*. He did, however, inform King Béla IV that the Eastern Hungarians had defeated them and forged a pact of allegiance. While this may have instilled a sense of security amongst the Pannonian Hungarians, it should be noted that Julian also reported from a direct Mongolian source that these Tartars constituted a sizeable population that was mobilizing for a formidable assault on Germany and to destroy any kingdom that does not submit to them once the troops battling the Persians join the forces of the Ural army. The description of the "Tartars" concludes with an intriguing observation that they have "a larger head that apparently does not correspond to their body" (Frater Ricardus, 2009).

The report's brief discussion of the Mongols suggests that Julian's primary focus was on finding allies to support King Béla in his struggle against the potential insubordinations of some nobles, rather than identifying possible threats to Hungary. From 1237, Julian organized other expeditions, which raised concerns among the Pannonian Hungarians as a sense of danger about the Mongols became evident. Unfortunately, Julian was only able to reach the area around Moscow, as the Mongols had destroyed both Magna Hungaria and the Volga Bulgaria. This detail highlights the significant threat the Mongols posed to Hungary during the 13th century (Rimanyi, 2018: 104; Bendefy, 1936: 35 & ss.).

From this moment, the reports about the Mongols became much more accurate and detailed. Julian's *Epistola de Vita Tartarorum*, for instance, offers valuable insights into the political history of the *Tartars*. In addition, he provided an interesting account of the Mongols' fighting techniques, weaponry, and strategies. Had the European powers taken these reports into account, history may have taken a different path as proves the failure of Nogai Khan (Ногай хан) in 1285-1286, which resulted in a severe defeat at the hands of the Hungarians. Julian stated, for example that [the Mongols] shoot their arrows farther than is customary among other peoples and on the first occasion of the battle, not only do they shoot arrows, but it seems as if it were raining arrows. In his analysis, Julian elucidated that the Mongols' combat strategy is characterized by a predilection for fighting at a distance, evidenced by their infrequent usage of swords and spears in battle (Bendefy, 1936: 38)

An anonymous Hungarian bishop authored a pre-invasion document in 1240 that illustrates the rapid progress in knowledge about the Mongols (still called *Tartars*) over just two or three years. The document reveals that the bishop personally gathered all the information directly from Mongolian sources. He regarded the Mongols not as an unimportant nation, but as the most formidable adversary of Christian Europe. Furthermore, the bishop was knowledgeable about the Mongols' writing system. He noted that they used the Uyghurs' alphabet and highlighted the fact that they were fair-skinned, possibly to distinguish them from the darker-skinned Saracens. He also mentions several details about the culture and weaponry of the Mongol soldiers. Towards the end of his brief letter, the author refers to the Mongol King of Kings, whom he calls *Zingiton*, likely a phonetic reference to Chinggis Khan (Чингис хаан). Interestingly, this document may be one of the first in Western history to bestow the Mongols with negative, non-descriptive stereotypes. The author suggests that they may be Gog and Magog, and even likened them to the Pharisees and Sadducees[2], all of them groups with negative connotations in the Bible (Gy. Ruitz, 2003: 163).

The Mongols according to documents written during the invasion

During the spring invasion of 1241, many western rulers and influential members of the aristocracy exchanged letters. Some requested help to combat the enemy, while others commented rather aseptically on the situation and suggested ways to protect the threatened Catholic kingdoms. In many of the surviving documents, the Mongols were described as "non-Christian" and in some cases, as a punishment from God (Gy. Ruitz, 2003: 164-169, 173). However, it is worth noting that many Mongols were actually Christian, and most western leaders were not particularly eager to assist the Christian Kievan Rus kingdom that had been destroyed a few months earlier, since all the references to Russia, Kiev or other eastern cities, are mentioned as an example of what could happen to the Catholic kingdoms. Therefore, rather than being a literal description, this was likely a way of emphasizing the fact that the Mongols had to be stopped because they were different from the western rulers and their Catholic allies. Basically Only a handful of letters from King Béla IV contain descriptions of the Mongol army, in which they are portrayed as behaving like "wild animals" and being "cruel" (Gy. Ruitz, 2003: 164). Other descriptions refer to them as "barbarians" (Gy. Ruitz, 2003: 165). However, it is important to note that these characterizations were not necessarily intended to provide an accurate depiction of the enemy. Instead, they were likely used to provoke a favourable response from western rulers and encourage them to provide aid to threatened Hungary (Coulter, 2022: 519).

The Mongols according to post-invasion documents

The Mongol armies remained in Hungary and Poland until around April 1242, leaving both countries in ruins. According to some scholars, between 50 and 80 percent of the settlements in the plains of Hungary were destroyed, while areas with forests and mountains experienced a demographic loss of between 25 and 30 percent (Sugar, Hanák & Frank, 1990: 28). As a consequence, a few works concerning the Mongols were created shortly after the event. One of them was authored by an English priest who had no contact with the Mongols, Matthew

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[2] Gog and Magog are described in the Bible books of Ezekiel and Revelation (Apocalypse) as the wicked forces that provoke the last attack against the servants of God. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were two Jewish sects that opposed to the teachings of Jesus and instigated the persecution of Christians in the 1st century C.E.

Paris. In his *Chronica Majora*, written between 1242 and *c*. 1250, we find one of the most degrading pieces about the invaders. Matthew Paris stated that "this race of people is wild, outlawed and ignorant of the laws of humanity". Dehumanisation is even clearer in passages such as the one reproduced here:

"The men are inhuman and of the nature of beasts, rather to be called monsters than men, thirsting after and drinking blood, and tearing and devouring the flesh of dogs and human beings ... They have no human laws, know no mercy, and are crueller than lions or bears ... and when they have no blood, they greedily drink disturbed, even muddy water. They have swords and daggers with one edge, they are excellent archers, and they spare neither sex, age or rank; they know no other country's language except that of their own, and of this all other nations are ignorant."

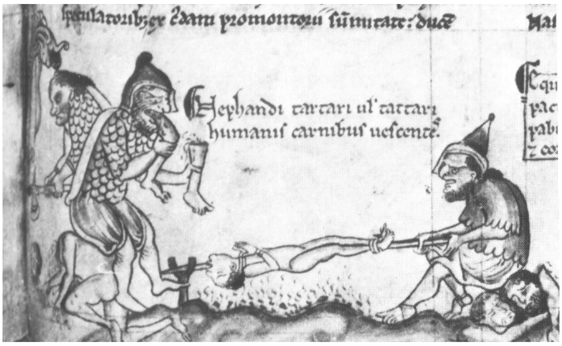
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Fig 2. Cannibalism amongst the Tartars (Illustration on *Chronica Majore*)

However, these narrative about cannibalism and animalization of the enemy, rather than being descriptive of uses of the Mongol tribes, "conveniently locates them in the primary ideological framework available for processing interactions with newly discovered peoples from the East" (Blurton, 2007: 83-84). This reinforces that these Tartars were nothing but primitive people with no connection whatsoever with human natural laws. In following parts of his work, Matthew Paris also repeated the accusations made by the unnamed Hungarian bishop previously mentioned, that the Mongols are the biblical Gog of Magog, the enemies of God's people.

In any case, the emergence of a new view point amongst Western (Catholic) European leaders, in which the Mongol enemies were considered an oddity rather than a natural enemy, became evident in other works and projects undertaken a few years after the end of the invasion. The strongly anti-Mongol sentiment that had spread rapidly through Hungary and Poland either almost dissipated or became much softer, at least in official documents. While many letters, including those of King Béla IV, acknowledge the tragic state of the country during the Mongol invasion, very few documents attribute negative traits to the enemy besides their status as adversaries. Instead, the focus is primarily on rebuilding the kingdom and forming alliances (Gy. Ruitz, 2003: 179-201). In fact, in contrast with the declaration of excommunication, or expulsion from the Church, of the German Emperor, one of the points of agreement at the Council of Lyon in 1245 was the importance of spreading the Catholic faith amongst the Mongols (Blurton, 2007: 81). This may imply that the Catholic world considered the Mongols an *involuntary* enemy that may become a strong ally once they understand the European politico-religious vision of the world.

This aspiration to convert the Mongols, along with the need to gain knowledge about their identity from primary sources, impelled the European leaders to organise expeditions to encounter them. The earliest recorded of these expeditions is the one by Giovanni da Pian del Carpine who, in 1245, travelled to Karakorum (Хархорум) to meet Guyuk Khan (Гүюг хаан) and remained in Asia for more than one year. The chronicle of the journey provided valuable information about the *Tartars* for Europeans at that time.

The first interesting detail of his account can be found in its very title: "*Ystoria Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus*". Up to this point, all the authors had referred to that mysterious nation as *Tartars*. However, Da Pian del Carpine reveals that they are actually called Mongols, adding the explanatory subtitle "those whom we call Tartars".

As corresponds to what could be considered a scientific expedition according to Mediaeval standards, Da Pian del Carpine provides an abundance of details about the Mongols, beginning with their physical appearance. Rather than resorting to subjective or derogatory language, such as "ugly", "beastlike", as could be expected in previous reports about these adversaries, the author describes them in quite an unbiased manner. The author, though, utilizes standard European physical traits to ensure that his European readers can fully comprehend the description:

"Tartars have eyes and cheeks wider apart than other men. Their cheeks stick out a good deal from the jaw and they have a flat middle-sized nose and small eyes and eyelids raised to the eyebrows. They are generally narrow in the waist, except for a few, and almost all are of middling height. Few of them have much of a beard" (Da Pian del Carpine, 1996: 39).

Another interesting point is the attempt to find a common ground in the most important issue, namely religion. Therefore, far from being Gog of Magog or an army of Satanic wild warriors, the priest states that, as Catholics, "the Tartars believe in one God whom they think is the creator of all things visible and invisible, and they believe he gives rewards and punishments in this world". He also reveals that the Mongols have a moral law, although it not always follows the standards of the Western Christianity (Da Pian del Carpine, 1996: 42, 45). The fourth chapter provides an interesting view of *good* and *bad* habits of the nation. Da Pian del Carpine gives a long list of good moral facts, including being obedient, respectful of the authority, peaceful (seldom argue to the point of insult, and there are no wars, quarrels, injuries or murders among them), respectful of property, friendly, helpful and strong. The Mongol women are described as chaste and humble. However, these same men are women are described as heavy drinkers and unrespectful towards those who do not belong to their nation. Da Pian del Carpine also suggest that, when in difficulty, they may eat human flesh (Da Pian del Carpine, 1996: 50-52).

Around the same time that Giovanni da Pian del Carpine was dispatched to Karkorum, Simon de Saint Quentin, also known as Simon of Saint Quentin in English, travelled to the camp of Mongol commander Baiju (Байжу ноён) in Armenia. Although he wrote an account of his travels, it was lost over time. Some parts of it may have been preserved in *Especulum Historiale* by Vincent de Beauvais, who did not have any contact with the Mongols. Despite this possibility, it is impossible to know the actual view points of de Saint Quentin, since de Beauvais altered some accounts attributing negative traits that were not in the original texts. One example can be tracked in the physical description of the Mongols apparently based on the account by Da Pian de Carpine. The original text reads "*forma personarum ab hominibus alijs est remota*", that can be translated as "their appearance is quite different from that of everyone else" (Beazley, 1903: 45; Da Pian del Carpine, 1996: 39). De Beauvai, though, writes "*sunt autem Tartari homines turpissimi*" or "the Tartars are most ugly men" (Saint Quentin, 2019: 71). Another lost volume about the Mongols is the one by André de Longjumeau, who led to embassies to visit the Mongols in the Middle East and Central Asia.

A work that is known to have been composed in 1247 that persistently maligned the Mongols is *Historia Tartarorum*, authored by C. de Bridia, probably a Polish monk. Unfortunately, little information is available regarding either the author or the circumstances surrounding the creation of this particular volume. In general, it appears to be an interpretation of the account presented by Giovanni da Pian de Carpine, but with a negative depiction of the Mongols as punishment from God (Werner, 2016: 84, 85).

In 1253, King Louis IX of France dispatched William of Rubruck on a missionary journey to convert the *Tartars* to Christianity. His account of the journey does not solely focus on describing the Mongols, whom Rubruck still refers to as *Tartars*, although he also mentiones the term *Moal* (Beazley, 1903: 181), but rather encompasses all that the embassy witnessed and experienced. Overall, his volume can be considered a neutral description as it refrains from negatively depicting the Mongols solely based on their identity as enemies, unlike other works. In fact, Rubruck extensively reports on the customs, beliefs, and food of the Mongols, as well as of other nationalities that were encountered in Karakorum (Хархорум) and its surroundings, such as the Alans and Cumans. He also highlights the magnificence (Latin: *gloria*) of the court of Sartach, describes the hospitality extended to the embassy, and delves into some of the Mongol laws. Nonetheless, it is important not to disregard the fact that Rubruck was a Catholic monk, meaning that his cultural background and strict moral standards greatly differed from the rest of the population. For this reason, it is also possible to find a few remarks that Rubruck considered negative from his religious point of view. Mongols, for example, are described as followers of a supertitious idolatry. Also, in a tone that denotes disapproval, Rubruck states that "*drinke they all around both men and women: and sometimes they carowse for the victory very filthily and drunkenly*". Probably the most poignant criticism is related to family/sexual morality, when he writes "*[a]nd herehence ariseth an abominable & filthy custome among them, namely that the sonne marieth sometimes all his fathers wiues except his own mother*" (Beazley, 1903: 190, 191, 197). Other statements that may appear negative could, in fact, be attributed to cultural differences or language barriers. In certain cases, the Mongols have been referred to as "infidels" or "barbarous people," and the headline of Chapter 11 characterizes them as showing "ingratitude" (Latin: *ingratitudine*) (Beazley, 1903: 186, 199). However, upon closer analysis, these terms can be interpreted as describing the Mongols as "non-Christian," "foreign and unknown" or "not sharing European culture", and their ingrate behaviour as simply "ill-mannered".

After Rubruck, the next considerable account about the Mongols in European historiography is the one authored by Marco Polo in *c*. 1300, who also avoids or does not consider necessary to portray the Mongols in negative terms. Chronicles compiled over a century after the initial invasion, such as the "Illustrated Chronicle" (*Chronicon Pictum*) from approximately 1360, support this notion and present the invasion as a historical event in which a foreign nation, the *Tartars*, had attacked Hungary twice (V. Kovács, 1984: 297). It is noteworthy to mention how the "Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland" (*Annales seu cronicæ incliti Regni Poloniæ*), written by Jan Długosz more than 200 years after the events it describes, does mention how the Mongols were a wild and barbarian nation (Długosz 2003: 211). However, as previously discussed, this is an uncommon occurrence in post-invasion Western European political literature.

Conclusion

This article has focused on an exploration of depiction patterns of the Mongols during the first six decades of the thirteenth century, the point at which the first and most successful invasion of Europe was accomplished by Batu Khan (Бат хаан). The sources under examination can be classified into two distinct categories based on the author's level of direct engagement with the Mongols: those with firsthand experience and those without any direct interaction. Furthermore, we have further categorized these sources into three temporal divisions: pre-invasion works, documents authored during the invasion, and finally, documents written subsequent to the invasion.

In all of the accounts, we observed numerous notable details. Based on their interaction with the Mongols, it is apparent that authors who had direct contact with them also maintained a more balanced perspective towards the Mongols. However, it is important to note that this does not imply that these European authors held a favourable opinion of them. It is essential to recall that the Mongols, almost unanimously referred to as *Tartars*, were a non-Christian nation known for their destruction of multiple kingdoms during that era. Some interesting differences were observed based on the time period in which these documents were authored. Pre-invasion accounts are rare and primarily based on fantasy, such as the legend of Prester John. However, Friar Julian's account stands out as a notable exception, providing a concise description of the Mongol armies, their combat tactics, and their potential intentions as they were communicated to him by the eastern Hungarian tribes. As expected, references to the invader are generally negative and often propagandistic. This holds true for the invasion of 1241 as well—almost all the examined documents from this period depict the Mongols using subjective terms like "barbarians" or "wild animals". These descriptions may be attributed to two factors: propaganda to rally European armies and the genuine perception of individuals witnessing their country being devastated by a foreign nation.

Finally, the withdrawal of the Mongols sparked a deep curiosity among Western Europeans regarding the true identity of these warriors, their origins, who their leader truly was, and if they would be open to embracing Christianity. Consequently, this prompted several monarchs to dispatch ambassadors to the Mongol Empire. The preserved accounts of these ambassadors provide a comprehensive understanding of the Mongols during that period. While these accounts also highlight negative aspects and occasional dissatisfaction with certain practices, most authors managed to avoid resorting to simplistic, degrading, and propagandistic descriptions of the Mongols. It is worth noting that the exceptions to this rule were invariably authors who had never had direct contact with the Mongols.

These facts indicate that European leaders did not view the Mongols as an inherent adversary to Western Christianity, unlike Muslims. In fact, some saw them as a potential ally against Arabic and Turkish advancements, while others recognized them as a promising market, as exemplified by the Polo family from Venice.

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