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Doctoral Dissertation

**Conquest and Withdrawal: The Mongol Invasions of Europe in the
Thirteenth Century**

By

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Central Issue, Existing Theories, and the State of the Field Today

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The primary aim of this study is to provide an explanation for the abrupt Mongol withdrawal from Europe, or more precisely Latin Christendom, in 1242. A lesser aim is to explore the Mongols' intentions during their exchanges with European powers for the next half-century. In pursuing these tasks, I have attempted to offer a more thorough, holistic analysis of source references to the initial invasion and its short- and long-term aftermath, combining the use of relevant archaeological findings, than exists in any monograph in English or possibly any language at present.

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If there existed a persistent aim amongst Mongol leaders to subjugate the territories of Latin Christendom within the framework of a project of worldwide conquest,¹ we might consider that their total withdrawal from Hungary in 1242, and the refusal of Hungary and other polities in Latin Christendom to submit to Mongol demands for submission in the following decades, all represent the frustration of Mongol goals. Thus, the overriding questions for consideration regard why the Mongols decided to withdraw in 1242, and, by extension, why they did not subsequently incorporate much of Europe into their unified empire (or the Golden Horde and Ilkhanate successor states after 1260). After all, the decision to withdraw and the failure to follow up their surrender ultimatums with a successful conquest in the ensuing decades could imply that the Mongol leadership was somehow deterred from carrying out a project they had formerly begun.

¹ The Mongol Empire's highest authority in 1246, Güyük Khan, was in his own words quite adamant on this point; a slaughter had occurred in Europe during the first invasion because the people there had not submitted to the khan, and the only way that Europe could avoid a future slaughter was for the pope and all its other magnates to come to Mongolia in person and offer their submission. See: Christopher Dawson, *The Mongol Mission* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 85-86.

A “single, satisfying explanation” for the sudden withdrawal of the Mongols remains a desideratum in medieval, military and Eurasian historiography as Greg S. Rogers noted over two decades ago.² Regarding the withdrawal, many theories have been offered over the last century though none has reached a consensus. Rogers’ own article on the topic is an extraordinarily useful piece as it systematically and concisely categorized and laid out theories for the Mongol withdrawal in 1242, noting both the evidence for and against each type of theory. He broadly defined four types of explanation for the withdrawal, which he termed: the “political” theory, the “geographical” theory, the “military weakness” theory, and the “gradual conquest” theory. The political theory, which still tends to be largely favored in literature, rests mainly on the testimony of John of Plano Carpini who visited Mongolia as a papal emissary a few years after the withdrawal and reported that the Mongols were essentially forced to withdraw upon receiving news of the death of Ögedei Khan which occurred in December 1241. The geographical theory, first suggested by Denis Sinor in the 1970s, offered an alternative – the Mongols, he argued met with insufficient pasturage on the Hungarian Plain to conduct their campaigns, though scholars like Vernadsky had argued previously that Hungary was an ideal location at the end of the steppe belt to serve as a base for the conquest of Europe.³ The military weakness theory, holding that the Mongols were too weakened to continue their conquest, has some support in primary sources but could be criticized in light of the fact that the Mongols conquered so many other great powers like the Jin Dynasty. Besides, nationalistic feeling could drive scholars to support it. Lastly, the theory of the “gradual conquest” held that conquest in 1242 might not have been the intention. This explanation has proven harder to criticize, possibly because the Mongols were good at keeping intentions and

² Greg S. Rogers, “An Examination of Historians’ Explanations for the Mongol Withdrawal from Central Europe,” *East European Quarterly* 30 (1996): 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

plans secret, even from the eager gaze of later historians. But a major problem with it is that our best textual source on the Mongol invasion, that of a churchman, Rogerius, who was taken prisoner during the occupation, points out that the Mongols set up a highly effective administration in Hungary during their occupation. Rogerius was even taking part in the administrators' regular meetings.⁴ The creation of a local government could be interpreted as an intention for permanent occupation. Thus, all the vying explanations had points for and against their acceptance, making the total agreement among researchers impossible.⁵

In the decades since Rogers wrote his analysis, newer viewpoints and innovative approaches to the problem have emerged in the work of Timothy May, Peter Jackson, Ulf Büntgen and Nicola Di Cosmo, and János B. Szabó, sometimes reflecting the interdisciplinary push that characterizes the present era in the humanities. However, the ideas the authors have recently advanced still basically fall within the broad categories of explanation laid out by Rogers.⁶

Awkward as such an outlook could come off today, the significance of the Mongol invasion and withdrawal was long considered relevant or interesting because of the perceived consequences for world history that might have emerged from a Mongol conquest of Europe. In a discussion of counter-factual historical scenarios, Geoffrey Parker and Philip E. Tetlock argued that a Mongol conquest of Europe would have prevented the social and technical developments of the

⁴ Ibid., 14; János M. Bak and Martyn Rady (trans.), *Master Roger's Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tatars* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010), 209. Please note that I have opted to refer to the captured churchman with the Latinized "Rogerius" to distinguish him from the historian, Greg S. Rogers, who also figures heavily in the present work.

⁵ (Lindsey) Stephen Pow, "Deep Ditches and Well-Built Walls: A Reappraisal of the Mongol Withdrawal from Europe in 1242," Master's thesis supervised by David Curtis Wright (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2012), 11-12. József Laszlovszky, Stephen Pow, Beatrix F. Romhányi, László Ferenczi, and Zsolt Pinke, "Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary in 1241-42: Short and Long-term Perspectives," *Hungarian Historical Review* 7:3 (2018): 436.

⁶ Laszlovszky et al., "Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary," 437.

Renaissance.⁷ Their viewpoint was long a commonplace of historians in their discussions of the Mongol Empire,⁸ though present trends in scholarship regarding a *Global Middle Ages* would lead toward more nuanced discussions than one revolving around how closely the Mongols came to snuffing out the Renaissance. In any case, the mysterious Mongol evacuation from Europe, which, as has been so often repeated, was close to being subjugated or at least had not shown clear demonstrations that it could resist effectively, is a remarkable historical episode. Despite being neglected as a major focus of researchers of the Mongol Empire, these events are widely perceived as being significant for world history. Without giving way to sensationalism or hyperbole, it can at least be conceded that the consequences of the Mongol decision to evacuate Europe left an impact far beyond Hungary which had borne the brunt of the year-long invasion of 1241-42.

Regarding that first Mongol invasion of Europe, it forms the most significant element of the present study because it appears to be the most serious military effort the Mongols ever made toward conquering some or all of the territory comprising Latin Christendom. Arriving in Poland and Hungary in February and March 1241 respectively, Mongol forces reached the coast of the Adriatic in Dalmatia by early 1242. The king of Hungary fled to the Dalmatian coastline where he waited in vain for aid from the Latin West as dispossessed Russian princes arrived in Europe as refugees.⁹ Yet, that same year, all the Mongols abruptly withdrew from Europe to the Eurasian steppes, pulling back thousands of kilometers so that Hungary, Croatia, and other overrun areas were able to avoid being integrated into the Mongol Empire. Batu and his followers then

⁷ Geoffrey Parker and Philip E. Tetlock, "Counterfactual History: Its Advocates, Its Critics, and Its Uses," in *Unmaking the West: "What-if?" Scenarios That Rewrite World History*, ed. Philip E. Tetlock, Richard Ned Lebow, and Geoffrey Parker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 381.

⁸ J. J. Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 187.

⁹ George A. Perfecky (trans.), "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," in *The Hypatian Codex, Part II: The Galician-Volynian Chronicle*, Harvard Series in Ukrainian Studies 16:2 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1973), 49.

consolidated their hold over the Pontic steppe and Russia where they established heavy taxes and exerted an important political role there in the ensuing decades.¹⁰

Too often in works dealing with the Mongol Empire and its relations with Latin Christendom, it is suggested that 1242 marked the end of any threat or continued interest from the Mongols. This is found in literature that deals specifically with the Mongol Empire and is also perpetuated in general textbooks which provide an overview of European or global history. In the popular and longstanding school textbook, *Western Civilizations* (Judith G. Coffin and Robert C. Stacey, 2005) we read this account of the Mongol withdrawal:

How much farther the Mongol armies might have pushed will forever remain in doubt, for in December 1241 the Great Khan Ögedei died, and the Mongol forces withdrew from eastern Europe. It took five years before a new great khan could establish himself, and when he died in 1248, the resulting interregnum lasted three more years. Mongol conquests continued in Persia, the Middle East, and China, but after 1241 the Mongols never resumed their attacks on Europe. By 1300, the period of Mongol expansion had come to an end.¹¹

The viewpoint presented here can hardly be called unique or be interpreted as the result of independent research on the part of the textbook editors. Rather, this might be called the standard viewpoint and the one most likely to reach general students of history who are introduced to the topic. Yet, it is a curious mixture of fact, conjecture, and outright falsehood. Not least of the problems with this description is that it presupposes that a Mongol messenger could have undoubtedly reached Hungary so shortly after the death of the khan; thus, by extension, it also

¹⁰ John Fennel, *The Crisis of Medieval Russia, 1200-1304* (New York: Longman, 1983), 141.

¹¹ Judith G. Coffin and Robert C. Stacey (eds.), *Western Civilizations* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 414. Their viewpoint actually seems to come more or less in tact from Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* – a popular notion that a the Mongols' "glorious and voluntary retreat" saved a hopelessly outmatched Europe from certain conquest at the hands of Batu, and that the ensuing internal strife in the Mongol Empire caused the hour of danger to pass for Latin Christendom. Probably much of the persistence of this viewpoint has to do with its occurrence in the authoritative work of Gibbon which has enjoyed continued popularity up to the present. See: Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 8 (London: G. Cowie and Co., 1825), 52-53.

presupposes that the Mongols had already established an unbroken postal network running across the entire Empire, including thousands of kilometers of newly conquered and hardly pacified territory across the Pontic Steppe. The issue of whether it was even possible for Batu to have received news of the great khan's death when the evacuation commenced in early 1242 forms one of my central research questions detailed in this dissertation. Something we see in the *textbook* summaries that is clearly factual, on the hand, regards the period of interregnum and political uncertainty followed the death of Ögedei in 1241. Still, it is hardly the consensus of scholars today, particularly those whose expertise relates to the Mongol Empire, that Ögedei's death was the direct cause for the Mongol withdrawal. In fact, Denis Sinor questioned that theory already in the 1970s,¹² noticing that it did not make sense as Batu and other leaders did not return to Mongolia for the election of a new khan. Since Sinor's time, alternative explanations have increasingly been sought by scholars who are increasingly sceptical of the "old wisdom" that Ögedei's death necessitated a withdrawal.¹³

The most egregiously false statement we encounter in the *textbook* summary of the withdrawal, and one that totally misleads readers about the nature of Mongol intentions and relations with the Latin West in the thirteenth century, is that the Mongols never resumed their attacks on Europe or expressed any further interest in conquering it. On the contrary, the source composed in European and Mongol contexts document this continued interest, and one could justifiably argue that 1241-42 marked the *beginning* rather than the end of the Mongol threat to Europe. In fact, the Mongols continued to both attack and issue threats and ultimatums to various

¹² Denis Sinor, "Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History," *Oriens Extremus* 19 (1972): 171-183.

¹³ Joseph Fletcher discussed a variety of theories to explain the withdrawal. See: Joseph Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46 (1986): 45-46. After discussing the merits of various theories, he still held that the "old wisdom" made the most sense, if only because he found the other theories being posited by scholars including Denis Sinor to be even less convincing.

European powers both in the immediate aftermath of the 1242 withdrawal and in the following decades. Of course, there was the well-known ultimatum letter with which Carpini returned to the papal curia from Güyük's court in Mongolia in 1247. It called for the pope and all European magnates to come in person to Mongolia and render their submission to the great khan.¹⁴ The tenor of that message closely resembled the message which Simon of Saint-Quentin brought back from the general Baiju's encampment in Armenia in 1248; it was also an ultimatum for Europe's leaders to offer submission in person or face destruction, and it echoed the message that the previous slaughter in Europe had occurred because the Mongols had a divine mandate to rule the world so that all people were obliged to submit or be annihilated as rebels to the divine will.¹⁵ More significantly, however, real Mongol attacks eventually resumed. In 1259 they invaded Poland, Lithuania, and the territory of the Teutonic Knights. The following year or in early 1261, Berke, the successor of Batu, sent an embassy to Paris demanding submission from the French monarch and threatening invasion of France.¹⁶ Simultaneously Berke's pressure increased on the Hungarian king, Béla IV, to enter into a marriage alliance with the Mongols and join in a campaign against his Latin neighbours.¹⁷ Charters, Latin, Chinese, and Persian sources agree that the Mongols put considerable military pressure on Hungary through the ensuing decades, and they launched a "major" invasion of Hungary in 1285 that pushed as far as Pest, before coming to ruin. Shortly afterwards the Mongols were driving into Poland again and besieging Cracow.¹⁸

¹⁴ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 85-86.

¹⁵ Jean Richard (ed.), *Histoire des Tartares* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1965), 113-115; Stephen Pow, Tamás Kiss, Anna Romsics, Flora Ghazaryan. *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*. XXXII, 51. Accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org

¹⁶ Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), 123-124.

¹⁷ For the original source basis of this claim, we rely on two extant responses of popes to Béla IV's messages found in the registers of Alexander IV and Urban IV found in the *Archivio Segreto Vaticano*. For both primary source documents, see: Agost Theiner (ed.), *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, (Rome, 1859), 239-241; 264-265.

¹⁸ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 204-205.

Moreover, in these same decades of the later thirteenth century, the Mongols actually did subjugate several regions and played a powerful political role in the Balkans as Vászary elucidates in great detail in *Cumans and Tatars*.¹⁹ All of this suggests that the Mongols had a continuing interest in Europe throughout the thirteenth century, so we must seek explanations beyond simple disinterest on their part to explain how Latin Christendom in general, and Hungary in particular, were able to retain independence from the Mongol Empire, both in 1242 and in the subsequent years.

As Felicitas Schmieder advised me at the outset of this project, it is important to be aware of the “*Standortgebundenheit*” of modern historians – their own context from which they view historical questions. Regarding the “old wisdom” that Batu’s withdrawal was casually tied to the death of the great khan in Mongolia in December 1241, it is understandable that this argument has been so persistent in the historiography of the invasion. Carpini, the most well-known papal emissary to reach the Mongol court, reported as much, stating that the Mongols had been prepared to fight in Europe for thirty years, but the fortuitous death of Ögedei Khan compelled them to withdraw.²⁰ Evidently, European scholars, who showed a strongly increasing interest in the topic of the Mongols and their invasion of Europe from the nineteenth century onward, had access to Carpini’s report in its entirety and in portions of it repeated in the well-known *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais. A reading knowledge of Latin was of course common amongst European historians in past generations, and this important textual source would have been widely accessible. Thus, for European scholars who were becoming increasingly aware of the scope of the Mongol Empire and thus particularly eager to know how Europe escaped the thirteenth century’s

¹⁹ István Vászary, *Cumans and Tatars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70-71; 86-90.

²⁰ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 45.

“shipwreck of nations,”²¹ as Edward Gibbon termed it, Carpini’s explanation would have appeared singular and authoritative. Resultantly, as modern scholarship on the Mongol Empire accumulated based on the efforts of researchers whose work was in many languages and focusing on diffuse corpuses of sources, Carpini was already perceived as a metaphorical *qutb* – an infallible authority – and his explanation already fixed as a sort of pole around which the historiography subsequently developed. Amongst historians, the mystery already appeared to be solved even by the time that a broader knowledge of the Eurasian sources, in translations or in the original, would have introduced a more complex picture of the events. After all, Rashid al-Din noted that as the Mongols abandoned their pursuit of Béla IV and withdrew eastward, they were not yet aware of the Ögedei Khan’s death.²²

Recently, much has changed in Mongol Empire historiography, and this is a very fortunate time to be a researcher of the period. A much fuller and clearer picture of it has been offered scholars working in diverse fields, their research being made widely available to an unprecedented degree. Thus, this dissertation is a “re-visiting” of all the relevant issues pertaining to the first Mongol invasion, the reasons for the withdrawal, and the subsequent role of the Golden Horde in Europe. It is my view that a satisfying explanation to the Mongol withdrawal in 1242 has not yet been offered by modern scholars, despite their wide recognition that such an explanation would be both important and useful for understanding what played out in subsequent centuries with European efforts at exploration and cross-cultural contacts. Determining what Mongol policies vis-à-vis Europe were meant to achieve in the thirteenth century is also important, along with what role fortification building played in Europe’s continued independence. This is useful for better

²¹ Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall*, v. 8, 53.

²² J. A. Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan* (New York: Columbia, 1971), 71; W.M. Thackston (trans.), *Rashiduddin Fazlullah's Jami'u'tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Harvard University, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1999: 2nd edition in PDF), 332.

understanding the Mongol military system and the factors which determined the borders of that empire. The Mongol interaction with Europe stimulated both interest and fear in the wider world outside of Europe's borders and this episode is not a mere curiosity in world history. While my previous master's thesis work was also a discussion of this issue, it provided a more general overview of the issue and used a wide range of sources to take a comparative look at Mongol problems with fortifications. In the present effort, my intention has been to take a much deeper look at the sources more directly related to the invasions of Europe.

The present work represents a deviation from persistent ideas that still prevail in the scholarship. In the twentieth century, especially in the second half, the idea was popular in the general and scholarly literature that the Mongols that Europe had been "saved" through no merit of its own,²³ a salvation story that seems to have been motivated by a desire to remove the agency of the local peoples from the explanation for the withdrawal, rather than to suggest some divine favoritism toward them as medieval Latin authors such as Carpini had perceived it. The popular historical work of Winston Churchill touched on the Mongol invasion, re-echoing the notion of a prostrate Europe escaping from further destruction and the fate suffered by other regions on account of Ögedei's death.²⁴

Beyond popular works, the salvation narrative was the prevailing point of view in scholarship as well, and it seems to have emerged as a direct reaction or consequence of the preceding period, particularly the nineteenth century, when rising national movements drove a sort

²³ For a highly influential though popular text which took the viewpoint that "Europa war gerettet" by a messenger arriving to Batu's army with news of Ögedei Khan's death, see: Michael Prawdin, *Tschingis-Chan und sein Erbe* (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1968), 188-189. Lev Gumilev, a major figure in Soviet historiography, noted that Europe was "saved" by the death of Ögedei's successor, Güyük, in 1248. If one accepts that salvation narrative, one might imagine then that Europe was saved by khans' deaths multiple times within a single decade. See: Lev Gumilev, *Searches for the Imaginary Kingdom*, trans. R.E.F. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 189.

²⁴ Winston Churchill, *The New World, Volume 2 of a History of the English Speaking Peoples* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956), 9.

of mythmaking around the Mongol invasion – almost every country in Eastern and Central Europe seemed to have its own story of local heroism that repelled the Mongols. Historians now are quick to see agendas and dynastic interests in our sources, influencing the descriptions of the Mongol attacks found in charters, chronicles, and hagiographic works. A result of this is that modern historians tend to think any European account of even a minor success over the Mongols can be dismissed offhand as products of nationalistic mythmaking – wishful thinking. This has in turn led to a sort of hyper-scepticism toward the primary sources composed in a European context that touch on the topic of the Mongol invasions.

The withdrawal has remained a mystery in part because the primary sources say so little about what prompted it. As a general trend, medieval annalists or writers in the Latin Christian world did not attempt to “get into the heads” of the Mongols and their leaders, nor did they make serious efforts to understand the reasons for their actions, whether invasions, threats, or withdrawals. An important factor in explaining this was the persistent assumption shared by Hungary’s monarch in the 1240s and by the Papacy, after the return of Dominican and Franciscan embassies in 1247-48, that the Mongols were going to soon return and finish the job they had begun of conquering all of “Europa” or “Christendom.” After all, the Dominican mission headed by Ascelin (1245-48) and the Franciscan mission headed by John of Plano Carpini had both brought back messages from Güyük Khan (r. 1246-48) that essentially bore the same underlying premise – all of Europe’s rulers had to choose between heeding the khan’s call for submission or facing their imminent annihilation as rebels against a divine mandate for the Chinggisids’ world rulership. There was no room for negotiation on this issue.

Thus, for Latin writers of the period of the first invasion and its immediate aftermath, their silence is largely a reflection of priorities; any curiosity regarding an explanation of the withdrawal

was dwarfed by the much more pressing issue of a likely, and promised, Mongol return to Europe. In explaining how this existential threat had arisen, it was enough for authors to simply state that the Mongols were barbarians, acting as a force of nature or evil, like demons set loose from Tartarus, to borrow the phrase of Matthew Paris. The sudden arrival of the Mongol threat was some malevolent natural force – their brutality and barbarism made the search for their reasons and motivations *almost* pointless.²⁵ Others, such as the Russian chronicler who first described their appearance on the borders of Rus', saw the arrival of the Mongols as a divine punishment which had happened "for our sins."²⁶ In general it was common for medieval commentators to assign the cause of defeats and disasters to the sins of the victims and this is also reflected in our major primary sources for documenting the invasion of Hungary. Thomas of Split did so by at least criticizing the frivolity of Hungary's young people in the lead-up to the invasion, while a poem of lament on Hungary's destruction noted that God's justice avenges evil, and Rogerius at least half-heartedly prefaced his account by noting that stripes were visited on the people for their iniquities, even while he "accused" the divine of abandoning Hungary.²⁷

Thus, in the view of many contemporaries, the Mongols were simply agents of a divine plan and what they were doing was simply what wild barbarians do when permitted by God's decision to do so. This is probably a large part of the reason that the authors of the time did not

²⁵ Attempts to understand the Mongols are not totally absent in the sources. Simon of Saint-Quentin, for instance, described how the Mongol plan for world conquest had emerged as a result of Chinggis Khan's extraordinary military successes against powerful adversaries like Ong Khan and the Khwarazmian Shah. See: Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 51-52.

²⁶ Stephen Pow, "Nationes que se Tartaros appellant: An Exploration of the Historical Problem of the Usage of the Ethnonyms Tatar and Mongol in Medieval Sources." *Golden Horde Review* 7:3 (2019): 548.

²⁷ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, XLV, 132-133. The translators/editors of this edition point out that Rogerius was something of an exception to his contemporaries because, beyond simply attributing Hungary's downfall to the local people's sins, he sought explanations in the internal political crises in the Kingdom of Hungary which had weakened the kingdom's unity and contributed to its downfall when Batu invaded.

make a more serious effort to explain the withdrawal, though of course it would have been in their interests to know why it happened, since they could then prepare better for a return invasion.

Regarding the argument which will be advanced here for the withdrawal in 1242, I share a view of it as a complex decision stemming from multiple drivers. As several co-authors and I noted in a collaborative work, if it cannot be reduced to a single factor, this partly explains why a single, satisfactory explanation has eluded scholarship up to the present.²⁸ However, it also appears that one could argue broadly that the Mongols withdrew initially due to the resistance they were encountering. As I will attempt to demonstrate in this work, strong resistance and the presence of military challenges is the *one* tacit explanation on which contemporary sources composed in both Europe and within the Mongol Empire agree. Moreover, it is evident that in the aftermath of the invasion, Mongol leaders were increasingly reluctant to use military means to achieve their goals in Europe as the decades of the thirteenth century progressed; this was probably in large measure because they had experienced great difficulty reducing stone fortresses in many of the regions affected during their initial foray. Campaigns in other regions had already made them aware and continued to make them aware of the problem of conquering sedentary populations in regions with strategically situated fortifications. Nevertheless, regions with fortresses had been conquered and brought under a Mongol administration, so the situation in Europe that accounts for the total withdrawal is more complex and fortifications cannot be seen as an all-explanatory factor.

I argue that in addition to the problem of fortresses, Batu's forces must have been highly aware of the potential attacks to come from unconquered states surrounding Hungary; that is, he and his fellow leaders seem to have decided against simply remaining in Hungary because of the

²⁸ Laszlovszky et al., "Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary," 437-438.

potential of facing a carefully organized counterattack if they left some or all of their forces there.²⁹ In the aftermath of the 1241-42 campaign, likely tempted to a more cautious approach by political instability within their empire, the Mongols strove to gain the voluntary submission of Europe's rulers through ultimatums and false offers of alliance – something which Peter Jackson's scholarship on the topic of methods of Mongol conquest demonstrates was essential to their successful conquest of other regions during the thirteenth century.³⁰ Nonetheless, they did continue at times to resort to quite serious invasions of Europe, such as the attack on Hungary in 1285, and these later attacks require a more thorough analysis than has been provided in the English-language historiography up to the present.

1.2 Methodology and Chapter Structure

Previous research, both in my MA thesis which represented my first foray into this topic, as well as later publications often undertaken in collaboration with specialists in a variety of fields, has led me to employ a comparative approach to the primary sources on the Mongol Empire. These materials are incredibly diffuse in terms of genre as well as geographic and literary contexts, emerging from authors writing in Persian, Chinese, Mongolian, Russian, Latin, Arabic, Greek, French, Turkic, etc. It is simply not realistic for any scholar to access all the available sources on the thirteenth-century Mongols in their original language. In the case of Latin, French, German, and Chinese sources, I attempted to do so, preferably alongside translations when they were

²⁹ I argued this point already in my MA thesis, albeit without expounding on it in great detail. See: Pow, "Deep Ditches and Well-Built Walls," 78.

³⁰ Peter Jackson, "World-conquest and Local Accommodation: Threat and Blandishment in Mongol Diplomacy," in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honour of John E. Woods*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 11-15. As Jackson points out, the Mongols did not conquer solely by means of military force. Very frequently, they resorted to negotiated settlements. In the cases where they lacked major military advantages, they often opted for a less than total subjugation by allowing the native rulers to retain a greater deal of autonomy. The usage of flattery and promises was also not uncommon, and at least at first, many of their subjects entered into pacts with them as would-be allies.

available. When a passage seemed of high importance to my arguments, I often consulted experts in those source languages directly, which yielded excellent results, or attempted by various means to access the original myself. In many cases, I relied on secondary scholarship and translations by well-respected researchers.

While it poses linguistic challenges, one of the advantages for a researcher of the Mongol Empire is the huge range of sources, diffuse in both the sense of genre and the geographical and social contexts from which they emerged. Relevant materials were recorded in such distant geographical and linguistic contexts that it is unlikely their authors could have influenced each other in very many cases. Yet, despite that lack of borrowing between authors in distant regions, there is often remarkable correlations in their descriptions of historical episodes or the various behaviors and attitudes of the Mongols.³¹ The extent to which one can employ a source-comparative approach to the Mongol Empire's history appears to be completely unique for a medieval topic. As an example, we might consider the descriptions of the use of prisoners to perform labor and essentially perform the role of cannon fodder in sieges. Describing this tendency, the account of Rogerius, an Italian clergyman captured by the Mongols in Hungary in 1241, matches quite well with the Juvaini's description of events that took place at Central Asian cities during Chinggis Khan's war on the Khwarazm Shah in the 1220s and with the account of a Song Dynasty diplomat who visited the Mongols in 1221.³² As another example, we might consider the descriptions of Mongols' regular use of vanguard units provided by several Mendicant friars, Carpini, C. de Bridia, and Simon of Saint-Quentin, who used the terms *praecursores*, *cursores* and

³¹ Stephen Pow, "Climatic and Environmental Limiting Factors in the Mongol Empire's Westward Expansion: Exploring Causes for the Mongol Withdrawal from Hungary in 1242," In *Socio-Environmental Dynamics along the Historic Silk Road*, eds. L. Yang et al. (Heidelberg: Springer, 2019), 305-306.

³² Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 213; J.A. Boyle (trans.), *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror by 'Ala-ad-din 'Ata-Malik Juvaini* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), 92; Peter Olbricht and Elisabeth Pinks, *Meng-ta pei-lu und Hei-ta shih-lieh: Chinesische Gesandtenberichte über die Frühen Mongolen 1221 und 1237* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980), 53.

cursarios respectively. Their descriptions correlate remarkably with the descriptions of vanguard units (前鋒/先鋒) found in the *Heida Shilue*, composed by Song emissaries in the 1230s. Down to the specifics of tactics and reconnoitering, we see much agreement.³³ The Mongols' own *Secret History* likewise describes Chinggis Khan and his former lord, Ong Khan, dispatching "vanguard" units in their conflict with Jamuqa, the troops operating identically to what we find in sedentary works by establishing observation posts on high vantage points such as mountains.³⁴ Thus, we can see the use of these vanguard guards in the Mongols' own account of their history, and moreover we can see this represented a military practice that had emerged in the steppes of Mongolia long before Chinggis Khan rose to power, rather than being an innovation of the imperial period.

The pattern of observable similarities across the sources is quite remarkable, though all authors of the aforementioned works had no ties to one another and were describing wars fought thousands of kilometers apart and at different times. In cases such as this – and there are many – we would do well to conclude the similar descriptions largely reflect real and accurately described conditions and events rather than trying to imagine that they all reflect identical biases and misrepresentations of the Mongols employed by the respective sedentary authors. Thus, my approach is to never squander the chance for wide-ranging comparisons which allow us to better approach specific events and issues. A unique strength and advantage the historian has in analyzing the Mongols is that one encounters something very rare for any medieval and ancient period – multiple angles and viewpoints in the sources describing the same event. This means that when we

³³ Stephen Pow and József Laszlovszky. "Finding Batu's Hill at Muhi: Liminality between Rebellious Territory and Submissive Territory, Earth and Heaven for a Mongol Prince on the Eve of Battle," *Hungarian Historical Review* 8:2 (2019): 268-269.

³⁴ Igor de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 63. Interestingly, since the battle described by the author happened in Mongolia, a landscape that would have been familiar to the readers, the mountains which vanguard units occupied are actually named in the text.

triangulate source accounts, so to speak, we sometimes arrive at results with which we can formulate arguments with a rare persuasiveness for a topic in medieval history.

As the comparative approach relates to Mongol interactions with Hungary specifically, I make the effort not to separate the events in Hungary from what happened in other regions, particularly the Balkans. In the historiography, the 1241-42 events in which Hungary was the primary target often seem cut out of the larger contextual picture and isolated in a way that inevitably distorts what we are seeing. Over the course of the thirteenth century, there were several attacks, several ultimatums, several interactions, and there were lasting conquests in the Balkans and area of present Romania. The episode of the Mongol invasions did not start and end in 1241-42. As such, this justifies my dissertation's approach of proceeding in a somewhat chronological manner, when possible, so that we see clearly how 1242 fits into a continuum of interactions.

It is also useful to compare events that happened at different times but occurred in the same place. After all, there were two major Mongol invasions of Hungary with related sources. In my view, the much larger body of sources that survive describing the 1241-42 invasion of Hungary is silent on the Mongols suffering from the effects of climate. By comparison, the much smaller body of sources we have for the 1285 invasion almost always refer to the devastating impact of famine and extreme weather on the Mongols specifically, whether these descriptions were recorded in Egyptian, Russian, Latin, or German sources. A comparison of the two events is used to reveal what we should expect to see in the textual sources if the Mongols did indeed experience a climate or environmental disaster during any invasion of Europe, and this helps to rule out that such an extreme scenario was encountered in the earlier episode.

Two key implications emerge from a comparative, interdisciplinary approach that must be highlighted here. One is that we should not doubt the brutality of the conquests that characterized

the Western Campaign; when accused by the pope of massacring the Hungarians and Poles, Güyük Khan never denied it in his reply in 1246. Rather, in his message, he mentioned that “God has slain and annihilated these lands and peoples” because they had not accepted the Chinggisid divine mandate of world rulership.³⁵ Furthermore, archaeological finds in Hungary are now showing that even the most horrible aspects of this pattern of slaughter, found in the textual accounts, were not dreamt up by imaginative writers.³⁶ The recently published finds related to a mass grave at Yaroslavl show victims of all ages and gender,³⁷ suggesting that such massacres were just as commonplace as the sources repeatedly recorded. The second implication is that assertions in the Latin sources that the campaign was very difficult for the Mongol side cannot be dismissed merely as wishful thinking on the part of Franciscans, since we find complementary claims in the non-European sources as well.³⁸ This agreement on the issue in two unrelated sets of sources is one of the more compelling reasons that I argue resistance must have been the deciding factor in the 1242 withdrawal.

Despite the aforementioned advantages, serious problems are encountered in pursuing the withdrawal question in the present study. If diffuse, the available sources often discuss the first Mongol invasion quite cursorily, providing meagre details. There are vast gaps in the narrative picture for anyone attempting to reconstruct it. Precise dates for specific events are a rarity, and the sequence of events is confused in the sources, owing in part to the reality that so many military actions were taking place simultaneously. Even our most detailed Latin narrative sources, written by Rogerius and Archdeacon Thomas of Split, are frustrating in what they neglect to explain; their

³⁵ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 85.

³⁶ Laszlovszky et al., “Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary,” 425–427, 442.

³⁷ “Researchers reveal new insights into mass graves from the Mongol Invasion of Russia,” *Medievalists.net*
Accessed at: <https://www.medievalists.net/2019/09/researchers-reveal-new-insights-into-mass-graves-from-the-mongol-invasion-of-russia/?fbclid=IwAR0AcZcgiBYy-8c4XXWXQgtSHdDX5RC2ZNtbkDh0TiOsRzCczl3cq8rfD0M>

³⁸ Pow and Laszlovszky, “Finding Batu’s Hill at Muhi,” 273–274.

lack of details on the reasons behind the withdrawal is a glaring example. Relatedly, there are many more European sources which discuss the invasion than those written by authors outside of Europe. Some texts composed in a Mongol imperial context describe the invasion but often very briefly and the descriptions are confused. Scholars, faced with this situation, have occasionally considered the toponyms and ethnonyms found in the sources composed in Mongol-ruled courts to be too muddled to merit an identification, or they have assumed the authors were simply uninformed. My methodology sometimes sees attempts to identify what the Asian authors intended by employing a close comparison with Latin sources, based on the assumption that the sources can be correlated well enough to narrow down identifications. I tend to presuppose our sources are providing material that stemmed from reliable records and so we ought to search for correlations before discounting any statement as useless or even misinformed. A recent study on the comparison of the Asian and European sources on the Battle of Muhi, fought in 1241 between the Mongols and the Hungarians, is illustrative of the way these sets of sources can compliment one another and clarify our picture of events.³⁹

Another method I employ for approaching the problem of the withdrawal through these sources is to consider a sort of process of figurative *taphonomy* that has occurred in the texts. By this, I mean to refer to natural loss of source materials over time. For instance, we see in Jan Długosz's fifteenth-century account of the first Mongol invasion much material that clearly comes from Thomas of Split's extant account. However, especially when dealing with the details of the invasion of Poland, Długosz evidently employed sources that have not survived to the present. There has been skepticism in German and Polish historiography since at least the later nineteenth century regarding the chronicler's account of the attack on Poland, specifically because we do not

³⁹ Pow and Laszlovszky, "Finding Batu's Hill at Muhi."

know what sources he employed.⁴⁰ As well, there have been efforts in Polish historiography to reconstruct or at least identify a lost Dominican chronicler which the author is presumed to have employed.⁴¹ The point is that much has been lost for modern scholars that, presumably, would have been available for chroniclers in the late medieval and Early Modern periods who were composing texts on thirteenth-century events. Moreover, even if authors in the immediate centuries did not explicitly refer to all their sources, we might imagine they had access to certain materials that shaped their overall judgement of the events. In the second chapter, I have attempted to use this consideration in employing a sort of *Quellenkritik* of later European texts, such as those of Długosz, Antonio Bonfini and the French *Grandes Chroniques* as well as the works of Asian authors, such as Khwadimir, Ötemish Hajji, and Abu al-Ghazi Bahadur, who discussed the Mongols' Western Campaign from their standpoints in subsequent centuries. I looked for hints in such writings of what those authors believed had impelled the Mongol withdrawal with an awareness that they might have been informed by materials to which we no longer have access.

Another important consideration is that for the European authors who had been affected by the Mongol invasions and were writing from a clerical standpoint, the events were often perceived as a humanitarian tragedy, and the authors approached the topic with the prerequisite topoi and rules of genre to describe it as such. Thus, these authors were not motivated to write accounts of heroic last stands or successful resistance, even when there were examples of these things. In our Latin sources, I suspect that generally we are encountering an unduly negative assessment of the military performance of the local peoples. Whether it be the reports of friars, or the letters of European rulers asking for urgent military assistance against the Mongols, or hagiographic

⁴⁰ Joseph Girgensohn, *Kritische Untersuchung über das VII. Buch der Historia Polonica des Dlugosch* (Goettingen: Robert Peppmüller Verlag, 1872), 69-73.

⁴¹ Gerard Labuda, "Wojna z Tatarami w roku 1241," *Przegląd Historyczny* 50.2 (1959): 190-191.

literature describing the martyrdom of righteous and meek victims of the invaders, it was seldom in the authors' interests to emphasize any examples of local successes. For the friars, there was going to be an imminent sequel to the first invasion which required better preparation and cooperation on the part of Europe's leaders to avoid losses like were seen the first invasion; for others, the newly arrived Mongol menace was an ongoing life-or-death crisis.

Regarding the division of chapters, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to outlining the first invasion of Europe and the larger westward advance of the Mongols (1236-44), while drawing attention to some problematic issues. For the subsequent chapters, I have arranged this study somewhat along the lines set by Greg S. Rogers over two decades ago for exploring competing theories for the withdrawal – namely the “political,” “geographical” (and climatic-environmental), “military weakness,” and “gradual conquest” theories. My aim is to approach the existing theories for the withdrawal obliquely, asking specific questions which help to focus on what appear to be the crucial issues at play, and establishing a framework in which to find a multi-causal answer. The second chapter looks into Mongol preconceptions of Europe and Hungary, as well as the conventional theory that the Mongols withdrew from Europe owing to the death of Ögedei Khan. The third chapter looks at theories that attribute the Mongol withdrawal to environmental or climatic factors, while also exploring the explanation that the Mongols never intended a lasting conquest in Hungary or any other European state in 1241. The fourth chapter explores the merits of the theory that strong resistance compelled the Mongols to withdraw, and while I do not agree with this theory as it has appeared in past works, my own explanation is most closely tied to it. After all, this is the explanation in which we see some European sources show some agreement with the scanty materials on the events recorded outside of Europe. Thus, having described the theory, I then present my own nuanced explanation of a complex series of factors that likely

brought about the withdrawal. The fifth chapter pertains to the oft-neglected details of Mongol-European relations for the remainder of the thirteenth century which reveal that the Mongols still intended to subjugate Europe, even as preparations in East-Central Europe especially reduced the likelihood that a lasting conquest could ever be achieved by military means. Specifically, we see across the entire region that fortification reforms and social adaptations reinforced the ability of those areas to combat future invasions. As a result, the major Mongol inroads of the 1280s were military failures, though, in an interesting twist, environmental and weather-related factors were also serious factors in the outcome of those events.

1.3 A Readjusted Outline of the Western Campaign

The purpose of this section is not simply to outline the sequence of events of what shall be referred to throughout this work as the larger “Western Campaign” (1236-43), something which has been done already in many discussions of the Mongol Empire’s history. Here I also wish to highlight elements of the episode which have sometimes been misrepresented and appear to be need for a scholarly reassessment in light of archaeological research of recent decades and close textual comparisons. There are three purposes that justify reiterating the general outline of events. First, it is frustrating that we see claims regularly made in secondary literature pertaining to the invasions that appear utterly baseless. Following the trail of many claims leads only to other secondary works which fail to cite where their claims originated. Secondly, there are some issues that appear to be persistently misrepresented even in serious scholarship and which need to be adjusted, such as the main withdrawal route of the Mongols from Hungary. Thirdly, there are some novel points I would like to raise which seem unduly overlooked in the general narrative of the invasion thus far, such as the evidence that Jebe died campaigning against the Rus’ and Kipchaks (Cumans).

Since my preliminary research on the topic of the first Mongol invasion of Europe relied heavily on secondary works written by careful modern historians, I do not want to understate my debt to that secondary literature in the present work. The general picture presented in those works seems to reflect an accurate and reliable reconstruction overall. Yet, certain problems clearly persist in the historiography of the events of 1236-42. The Western Campaign and invasion of Europe attracted popular attention and stimulated popular works already in the nineteenth century, or perhaps earlier. The result has been that spurious assertions were interwoven with primary source-based claims. I collaborated on a work about Sübe'etei which noted this same tendency for baseless myths and source-based facts to be so tightly intertwined that even otherwise reliable and well-researched works can often record long-cherished fictions about the famed Mongol general.⁴² One might infer that the persistent fiction around Sübe'etei and the Mongol invasion of Europe are connected in the sense that the Western literature on both themes is closely tied. The invasion and the famed general who played a leading part in it have long attracted interest among Western authors and readers specifically. In the secondary literature on both topics, it is still hard to tell the difference between source-based statements and those based on the overenthusiastic interpretations of popular writers. Moreover, as far as I can tell, the only monograph-length work specifically devoted to the Mongol invasion of Europe is that of James Chambers – an author who readily added spurious and baseless details but whose work is nevertheless still perceived as an authoritative work by general readers.⁴³

As well, archaeological studies which have found coin hordes, sites of active resistance, evidence of destruction, unburied bodies, etc. are creating a much fuller picture of the events of

⁴² Stephen Pow and Jingjing Liao, "Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction Surrounding the Mongol Empire's Greatest General," *Journal of Chinese Military History* 7:1 (2018): 41-48.

⁴³ James Chambers, *The Devil's Horsemen* (Edison: Castle Books, 2003).

the Mongol campaign in Hungary and elsewhere. There have even been recent archaeological studies at the Muhi battlefield site which are enriching our understanding of that decisive engagement. This work is being steadily augmented by settlement studies, monastic network studies, and archaeological work pertaining to the subsequent settlement of the Cumans in Hungary from the 1240s.⁴⁴

In modern historical literature, the standard narrative of the Western Campaign usually follows an oft-repeated narrative sequence, and essentially limits itself to the following points.

- The Kipchaks and Rus' fell rapidly in 1237-1240 and became submissive and integrated subjects of the Mongol Empire from the moment of the Mongol attacks.
- Regarding the invasion of Europe, we read that it comprised two major drives – one into Poland to stop reinforcements, while the main body drove through the Carpathians into Hungary.
- The Mongol forces crushed two major armies, two days apart, at Liegnitz in Silesia and at Muhi in Hungary. At that point, European resistance collapsed.
- The Hungarian monarch's calls for help from the papacy or any other Western potentate fell on deaf ears. In Europe there was a disorderly response or none at all, and internecine war raged between the pope and Holy Roman Emperor who were indifferent to the great danger facing them.
- The Hungarian king was pursued to the sea in 1242.

⁴⁴ For archaeological evidence of the destruction, see Laszlovsky et al., "Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary," 419-450. For new evidence of organized (unsuccessful) resistance on the Great Hungarian Plain, see: Szabolcs Rosta, "Egy új lehetőség kapujában – tatárjáráskori védművek a Kiskunságban," in: *Genius Loci Laszlovsky 60* (Budapest: Archaeolingua, 2018). For a study on some novel approaches to archaeology being presently attempted at the site of Muhi, see: József Laszlovsky, Stephen Pow, and Tamás Pusztai. "Reconstructing the Battle of Muhi and the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241: New Archaeological and Historical Approaches." *Hungarian Archaeology E-Journal* Winter (2016): 29–38.

- There is widespread fear, confusion, panic which spread beyond the invaded areas and across Europe.
- The Mongols withdrew. Europe was spared from further attacks. This part of the story is sometimes preceded by the observation that the Mongols had managed to cross the Danube and were poised to continue driving deep into the Holy Roman Empire and the whole of Western Europe. Sometimes we read that nothing stood in their path all the way to the Atlantic Ocean.

As mentioned, this oft-recited sequence of events is a great story and one that often implies Europe was “saved” from destruction by the convenient death of the great khan in Mongolia. It seems to lack nuance, however – particularly the suggestion that there was no state or ruler capable of offering resistance to the invaders all the way to the Atlantic. Relatedly, it overlooks the context in which the Western Campaign was organized and the magnitude of the undertaking. It makes light of the problems the Mongols encountered in the region.

A first point I want to raise is that the preliminary Mongol campaign waged by Jebe and Sübe’etei against peoples to the north of the Caucasus in 1222-4 did not go well for the invaders though they won famous victories. It seems to have been a major war and the sources are unequivocal that they managed to inflict great destruction. News of the events reached Europe quite early despite an occasionally appearing canard in secondary literature that the Latin West had no knowledge about the Mongol conquests before they were directly affected. For instance, Alberic of Trois-Fontaine in distant France recorded a wealth of details about the campaign under the heading of the year 1221. While he seems to have recorded his chronicle later in the 1230s, and his dating is off, it is crucial to note that he stated news about the campaign was brought to

France *in the same year* that the events took place.⁴⁵ Thus, that information is which he recorded in his chronicle which reflects the low level of understanding of the Mongols in the 1220s, best evidenced by the fact that, while Chinggis Khan's campaign against the Khwarazm is somewhat accurately detailed, he was still referred to as King David. In any case, regarding the Mongol campaign of 1222-1224, the chronicler stated that King David or some in his service waged war for five months, during which the Mongols killed mainly Cumans (Kipchaks), but also the Rus' who came to resist them. Interesting he also mentioned that an incalculable number of "pagan Prussians" (*de Prutensis paganis*) were also killed in the course of the war.⁴⁶ This could of course refer to Baltic auxiliaries of the Rus' contingents but that is extremely unlikely in my view, nor do I feel that this should be merely dismissed as an "error" of a distant clerical author without even a basic understanding of geography on the frontiers of Christendom. Rather, I suspect that the French chronicler, or the source which he borrowed, misinterpreted a report which conveyed that the Burtas had been massacred, or it might even refer to the Brodniki (Бродники) who showed up in Mongol service during the Battle of the Kalka in the Russian chronicle record of the event.⁴⁷

However, despite the wide and persuasive range of sources, including those from Latin authors, which record that Jebe and Sübe'etei won resounding victories in the course of their campaign, I have contended, and continue to content, that it was not actually a resounding success

⁴⁵ MGHS XXIII, 911. The specific wording (*in isto quoque anno nunciatum est in Francia*) implies that the news about the battle was brought by official messengers of another ruler. That is, this information was shared in an official capacity by messengers rather than being a mere rumor.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Perhaps it does not have to be one group or other, as I want to cautiously put forward the idea that the Burtas and Brodniki might well have had some sort of connection, even if the latter ethnonym seems to have had ambiguous meanings. As something in support of this point of view, Niketas Choniates referred to a branch of the Tauroscythians ("οἱ ἐκ Βορδόνῃ") and this is often taken as a reference to the Brodniki, but in my view, the term "Bordonae" bears a resemblance to Burta. For details on the Burta tribe which lived north of the Caspian as steppe nomads and had embraced Islam much earlier than neighbors to the north, see: Hansgerd Göckenjan and James R. Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm: Berichte von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen 1235-1250* (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1985), 155, n. 21.

from the Mongols' perspective. As I argued in an earlier paper, a record of Jebe Noyan's death a week before the decisive Battle of the Kalka, seems to have survived in the *Novgorod First Chronicle*. It makes no sense to me that a Mongol leader's death would have been recorded in great detail in an otherwise laconic account of the campaign if the "Gemya Beg" named by the chronicler were not a major leader. Indeed, Gemya Beg is referred to in the chronicle as the war leader (*voivode*) of the Tartars. Only high-ranking leaders such as princes are named in the entire account as it survives in Rus' chronicles – the so-called *Tale of the Battle of the Kalka*. Crucially for my argument, we see the Turkicized forms of the names of Chinggis Khan and Jochi Khan show up in the same account.⁴⁸ Thus, one could argue that it makes sense that the name of Jebe Noyan would also appear in a Turkicized (Kipchak) version, and we know from authors like al-Nasawi and Juvaini that Jebe's name appeared as "Yeme" in its Turkic form, while "Beg" was the Turkic equivalent of the Mongolian "Noyan."

Regardless of whether my argument on this point is correct, it seems clear that Jebe did not return from the campaign alive, and sources composed in the Mongol Empire are remarkably reticent about what happened north of the Caucasus in 1222-24.⁴⁹ Jebe was just one individual, but he was an important figure, and his death must have troubled the Mongol court. As well, the Mongol survivors of the Kalka campaign were recorded by Ibn al-Athir to have been badly mauled by the Volga Bulgars on their return to their homeland, and this account seems to be indirectly corroborated by Friar Julian's statement that the Volga Hungarians defeated the Mongols in their first engagement. All of this might explain why the *Heida Shilue* recorded that the Kipchaks were recorded to be redoubtable enemies and why Chinggis Khan decided that the Jin Dynasty had to

⁴⁸ Stephen Pow, "The Last Campaign and Death of Jebe Noyan," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27.1 (2017): 15, n. 90.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

be finished off before renewing any major offensive against the northwestern peoples. Chinggis Khan himself had concluded in the aftermath that the conquest of the Kipchak would be extremely difficult to conquer.⁵⁰ It was only after the Jin fell in 1234 that attention immediately turned to the conquest of the regions on the northwestern frontiers of the Jochid ulus.

How the Mongols gathered intelligence on Europe, the Rus' principalities, and other peoples in the larger northwestern region at this point is a key question. An answer would help make sense of their actions during their westward drive of 1241-42 that resulted in huge territorial expansion and saw Mongol forces reach the borders of Austria before withdrawing. Evidently, from the very start of their planning, they expected the Western Campaign headed by Batu would be difficult. This is best indicated by descriptions of planning sessions in the *Yuan Shi* where a proposal was raised in 1235 that levies of Chinese troops be marched westward to carry out the conquest – a proposal that was ultimately rejected by Yelü Chucai on the basis that the different climate of the western region would cause epidemics in the Chinese troops.⁵¹ We also have the *Secret History's* record of Chaghadai's suggestion around the same time that the army should comprise all senior princely contingents and therefore be larger than any Mongol army ever previously assembled. Such assumptions about the need for a large army may well have emerged as a result of the aforementioned difficulties Sübe'etei had experienced in the early campaigns against the Kipchak, Rus', Volga Bulgars, and Bashkirds in 1222-1224.⁵² The *Secret History* states that such a causal relationship existed between Sübe'etei's past military "difficulties" experienced in the earlier campaign and the decision to return with an army of unprecedented strength.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., 10, 16.

⁵¹ *Yuan Shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 3460.

⁵² For an explanation of my decision to use the ethnonym "Bashkird" rather than the present convention of Bashkir, and for a wider discussion of the historical evolution of the ethnonym and its bearers, see Chapter 3, subsection 3.3.

⁵³ De Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 201.

A key, but sometimes overlooked, issue regards the implications found in the structure of Mongol leadership of the Western Campaign as it was planned in 1235; specifically, the identities of the leaders who took part in the operations is meaningful. After all, the role of the leaders in the empire carries significance even regarding Mongol intentions during the campaign. As to the identities of the Mongol leaders in the campaign, we must be cautious sometimes with Rus' and Latin sources because I detect an occasional tendency in them to attribute every attack and siege to the commander that they imagine to be the supreme chief or leading personality. Those under attack were facing a largely unknown enemy and did not have an insider's view of the internal dynamics amongst the commanders; it was probably often the case that they did not know who was leading various armies in their attacks. So, for instance, Rogerius imagined that Batu was leading the vanguard that approached Pest to lure the Hungarian army prior to the Battle of Muhi, something which stands at odds with our Asian sources and the normal military practices of the Mongols.⁵⁴ Jan Długosz, later writing of Poland's experience of invasion, assumed that it was Batu who fought the Poles at the Battle of Liegnitz, when the earlier and more reliable evidence suggests the chief leader was in Hungary and it was his elder brother Orda, along with the Chaghadaid prince Baidar, who headed the expedition in Poland. Yet, the fifteenth-century Polish chronicler even named "Kaijdu," a grandson of Ögedei and important figure in Marco Polo's *Travels* but far too young to have taken part in the Western Campaign, as one of the leading commanders in Poland. Seemingly, the Polish historian had substituted the name of Qaidu for Qadan who took part in the invasion of Europe, though not Poland, and features heavily in Thomas of Split's history which Długosz undoubtedly employed. Yet, even if Qadan were intended, this would be wrong since Qadan invaded Transylvania and later Croatia. Thomas seemed to attribute every siege in both

⁵⁴ Pow and Laszlovszky, "Finding Batu's Hill at Muhi," 274.

Hungary proper and Dalmatia which took place in 1242 to Qadan,⁵⁵ yet it makes no sense if that prince had been charged with pursuing and capturing Béla IV in Croatia, before he could escape, that he would have first engaged in time-consuming sieges in Hungary.

However, it is not always the case that our Latin and Rus' sources drew an overly simplistic picture of which Mongol leaders performed which operation. Sometimes the Western sources could actually be quite nuanced on this topic. Even in the early 1500s, Matthias Miechovius (Maciej Miechowita) was trying to correctly sort out the routes of the various Mongol leaders. Quite correctly, he noted that that a frequent claim in Polish chronicles that Batu commanded forces in Poland could not be true because Batu led the forces from Russia into Hungary, as Rogerius had recorded.⁵⁶ Despite the tendency toward oversimplifications, my impression is that the Latin accounts tend to corroborate the more reliable but unfortunately very limited sources on the Mongol leadership structure recorded by Asian authors who had an insider access to official records, and fortunately, the details of which Mongol leaders took part in the campaign is something that is relatively well documented in our sources composed in Mongol courts.

The *Secret History* names the leading princes of the campaign as Batu, Büri, Güyük, and Möngke.⁵⁷ The naming of these particular leaders by the author was not random. They all represented the preeminent representatives of the third generation of each of the four branches of the Chinggisid dynasty. Moreover, they represented the senior or acting senior figure from each branch; in the same passage, Chaghadaï mentioned that he would send Büri as his "eldest son."

⁵⁵ Damir Karbić, Olga Perić, and James Ross Sweeney (trans.). *Thomas of Split, History of the Bishops of Salona and Split* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006), 288-291.

⁵⁶ Albin F. Gombos (ed.). *Catalogus Fontium Historiae Hungaricae*, 4 vols [reprint] (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 1938), 1605.

⁵⁷ De Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 205; Francis Woodman Cleaves, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 215.

Büri was in fact the son of Chaghadaï's favored son and intended successor who met a premature death during a siege. As such, "eldest" would seem to imply that Büri was perceived as "senior" in regard to hierarchy – the leading prince in the Chaghadaid branch. Based on this, we might conclude that no campaign had ever been approached with such seriousness and emphasis on the part of the Mongols since the war against the Khwarazm Shah, in which Chinggis Khan and all four of his chief sons took part. However, at that time, the Mongol Empire was in its infancy and its forces were divided on fewer fronts than in the 1230s when they essentially were engaged in a world conquest in all directions.

From a report originally composed in Mongolian, and surviving in Rashid al-Din's work, we receive the fullest account of the leading princes who took part in the Western Campaign: Jochids: Batu, Orda, Shiban, and Tangut; Chaghadaids: Büri and Baidar; Ögedeids: Güyük and Qadan; Toluids: Möngke and Böchek. In addition, Kölgen, the son of Chinggis Khan took part, along with Sübe'etei, the most accomplished living army commander at the time.⁵⁸ Additional Jochid princes, Berke and Shingur, are also mentioned as taking part in operations outside of Europe proper, with Berke leading an operation against Kipchaks in 1238 (perhaps somewhere between the Don and Dnieper Rivers),⁵⁹ and Shingur suppressing a Kipchak rebellion (likely on the Pontic Steppe to the rear of the main Mongol armies in Bulgaria) in 1242.⁶⁰

Juvaini provided a similar, though less full picture, than that of Rashid al-Din, noting that the following princes had been deputed by Ögedei Khan to take part in the Western Campaign and assist Batu: among the Jochids: Orda and Tangut, with Shiban later being named as a key participant at the Battle of Muhi; Chaghadaids: Büri and Baidar; Ögedeids: Güyük and Qadan;

⁵⁸ J.A. Boyle, *Successors of Genghis Khan*, 57, 59.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

Toluids: Möngke and Böček, along with Kölgen, a prince with an apparently special status, and Sübe’etei among the chief noyans.⁶¹ Among those who continued the invasion into Hungary, the longest surviving biography of Sübe’etei, found in the *Yuan Shi*, confirms the veteran general’s special role in the operation and mentions Batu and Shibān of the Jochids, Qadan of the Ögedeid, and Hülegü (sic!) who, if not the famous Toluid founder of the Ilkhanate, was perhaps Orda’s seventh son, or perhaps he was simply included in the list by mistake.⁶² Though it is confusing, this biography may also name a certain prince, Qabichi, playing a role in the campaign; in other sources we read that a certain Qabichi operated alongside Qadan, playing a decisive military role in the war between Khubilai and Ariq Buqa in the 1260s.⁶³ In any case, since the senior representatives of each Chinggis branch were taking part in the Western Campaign, it creates the impression that all four branches were intended to hold a stake in the future territorial conquests.

A few Rus’ and Latin sources, written soon after the events, provide lists of Mongol commanders that largely corroborate the picture in the well-informed Asian sources to a degree. The Galicia-Volhynia Chronicle notes that a prisoner named Tovrul (Torughul?), captured at the siege of Kiev in late 1240, provided details on the Mongol army. It was led by Batu, and “his brothers, the strong voyevodas,” Orda, Baidar, Büri, Qadan, Böček, Möngke, and Güyük, along with the generals Sübe’etei and Boroldai (Burundai) among others who were not named.⁶⁴ Right after the campaign, Rogerius, who had been a captive of the Mongols and therefore likely encountered informants with some insider knowledge, mentioned that the supreme leader of the “five hundred thousand” invaders who entered Hungary was Batu, and “the most powerful chief of the army below him was called “Bochetor.” Evidently that was Sübe’etei Bahadur, being

⁶¹ Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 269-270.

⁶² Pow and Liao, “Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction,” 65, n. 141.

⁶³ Ibid., 64, n. 136.

⁶⁴ Perfecky, “Galician-Volynian Chronicle,” 48.

recognized by the epithet attached to his name. The most courageous was said to be Qadan. The others listed were Coacton (Güyük?),⁶⁵ Seyban (Shiban), Peta (Baidar?), Hermeus (Orda?), Cheb (Jebe?), and Ocadar (Ögedei).⁶⁶ Curiously this list included living and dead leaders of high repute and even supreme khans who never set foot in Hungary. In a state of confusion about the newcomers, Rogerius evidently included the top leaders of the empire among those who actually took part in the attacks of 1241-42 without being able to differentiate between them. He simply recorded names he had heard as prominent leaders among the Mongols, though undoubtedly most of them were actual participants in the invasion of Hungary. Among Latin authors, a much more accurate emerged when Carpini drew up a report on his return from Mongolia and the court of Güyük in 1247. He mentioned that Orda, Batu, Büri, Shiban and Tangut had taken part in the invasion of Hungary, but he wrongly thought that Sübe'etei had not taken part.⁶⁷ He also might have been wrong that Tangut took part in the attack on Hungary, as Simon of Saint-Quentin mentioned that only two of Batu's brothers accompanied him to Hungary.⁶⁸ Based on the range of sources, we can be certain that his brothers, Orda and Shiban, took part.

⁶⁵ The identification of Coacton is not certain, but Hansgerd Göckenjan identified Coacton as Güyük, which is quite plausible, and as such repeated by Bak and Rady suggested it in their translation: Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 162-163. Strangely, though Rogerius had completed his text already by 1244, well before Güyük had been enthroned, the form Coacton might imply the title "khan" was added to this name.

⁶⁶ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 162-165. The translators did not offer a suggestion for Hermeus but it seems to me that Orda would be the closest name of a prominent figure. Regarding Cheb, it is mysterious why Jebe who is widely thought to have died around 1223-24, and whom I have argued was killed by the Kipchak before the Battle of the Kalka, appears in this list. However, we also see Ögedei who never took part in the campaign included, so perhaps Rogerius had recorded various names of major Mongol potentates which had heard, lacking the knowledge to distinguish those who had taken part in the 1241 invasion from those who were not present or even alive. As an idle speculation, I might point out that the bones of Chomaqan were carried around with the army in the Caucasus after his death, according to Kirakos, and we read in C. de Bridia's report of Henry II of Silesia, before his execution, being forced to bow down to the corpse of a Mongol prince. Might Rogerius' statement hint that Jebe was being said at the time to be with Batu and Sübe'etei's forces in spirit during the invasion or did the author merely hear that Jebe was one the Mongols' great military leaders?

⁶⁷ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 27.

⁶⁸ Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 94.

Why is it crucial to emphasize who took part? It is simply to highlight an important question at the outset. How can the Western Campaign be justifiably depicted in modern scholarship as a sort of sideshow to the larger project of Mongol Empire building when, clearly, the lives of the future hereditary leadership of the entire dynasty were being gambled on this campaign? Moreover, despite the rather extensive source material from which to identify the leading participants in the campaign, I suspect that the tally of major figures in the empire who took part in the campaign has not been fully acknowledged in the scholarship. There is a Mongol commander, Boroldai, who figures in Rashid al-Din's description of the Western Campaign.⁶⁹ As touched upon, a certain Boroldai also played a prominent role campaigning against the Rus' and Poles in the Rus' chronicle sources, particularly the *Galicia-Volhynia Chronicle*, where he appears as Burundai. I share a viewpoint raised by Sarolta Tatár that these are in fact the same figure.⁷⁰ It seems plausible that this was Boroldai, the son of Bo'orchu who had been one of the earliest followers, a childhood companion, and later a leading marshal of Chinggis Khan – the preeminent member of his four horses in the *Secret History*. Rashid al-Din noted that Bo'orchu had been given command of the right wing of the Mongol army, 38,000 men, and that after his death in the reign of Ögedei, command of this elite unit fell to his son Boroldai.⁷¹ If this were the Boroldai waging ongoing warfare in the west throughout the 1240s and 1250s, it might explain why Rashid al-Din did not mention such a prominent figure more often; he essentially spent his career outside of the region of the author's focus and knowledge.

⁶⁹ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 56-57.

⁷⁰ Sarolta Tatár, "Roads Used by the Mongols into Hungary, 1241-1242," in: *Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Mongolists. Volume I. Prehistoric and Historic Periods of Mongolia's Relations with Various Civilizations* (Ulaan Baatar: 2012), 334.

⁷¹ Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 288.

If the Boroldai described in the Western Campaign were the son of Bo'orchu, it is in keeping with what we see with other sons of prominent noyans – Uriyangqadai, the son of Sübe'etei took part in the Western Campaign and was still in the region even after the withdrawal from Hungary. We read in his biography in the *Yuan Shi* of his waging a campaign westward against the Bulgars and Germans in 1246.⁷² Thus, we have a record that his son stayed in the western frontier even after Sübe'etei returned to Mongolia. As well, we know from an unfortunate insult offered to Batu at a banquet in 1240 that Harqasun, the son of Eljigidei, was present on the Western Campaign as well.⁷³ Under Ögedei and his successor, Güyük, Eljigidei had risen to become the most influential noyan in the entire Mongol Empire.

The general picture that emerges is that there was a body of preeminent royal princes, leading noyans, and their children, all taking part in the Western Campaign, much as Chaghadai had originally intended. When the Mongol camp was a veritable who's who of the highest Chinggisid princes, including two future khans of the unified empire, and many leading noyans, it is difficult to imagine that this campaign did not have a very high priority in the minds of Ögedei Khan and his court. It would be rather indefensible to paint the westward drive of 1236-1242 as an insignificant sideshow, ranking low in the list of Mongol priorities. Faced with evidence, we ought to dispense with such preconceptions and instead imagine a campaign against respected enemies which the Mongol high command approached with deadly seriousness.

Impressions that the Mongols initially might have received of Europeans, or peoples dwelling west of the Volga more generally, could have influenced the preparations for the campaign. This intelligence would have been increased by what they directly experienced during

⁷² *Yuan Shi*, 2979. I take this to be the Lesser Bulgarians and Germans, i.e. German settlers in East-Central Europe.

⁷³ De Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 206.

the campaign, and there is evidence in the sources to determine how the Mongols gained information about their enemies during the invasion itself. A report by Chinese officials who visited the Mongol imperial court on diplomatic and fact-finding missions in the 1230s noted that when the Mongols invaded hostile territory, they sent their light scouts out to climb hills and reconnoiter the location while also seizing the local inhabitants and travelers, interrogating them about the local area.⁷⁴ Rogerius documented that the son of Ögedei, Qadan, recruiting some Transylvanian soldiers and their *ispán* into his army as it advanced during the campaign in Hungary – their local knowledge was highly valued by Mongol planners.⁷⁵ These guides from Rodna in eastern Transylvania then led Qadan along the route to Oradea which they successfully stormed.⁷⁶ These sorts of practices could explain why the biographies of Sübe’etei in the *Yuan Shi*, originally translated from Mongolian into Chinese, contain geographical and ethnic terminology that seems to have originated from Turkic, Slavic, and Hungarian-speaking informants who were likely brought into Mongol service, *nolens volens*, during the invasion. For instance, we find the Caspian Sea with the Turkic name “Köl Tenggis” (寬田吉思). The Hungarian people are referred to as the “Majar,” (馬札兒) and their ruler’s name, Qielian (怯憐) is a transcription of “Keler” – a corruption of Király. The name of the Danube, Hungary’s major river, is transcribed as “Tuna” (禿納) from the Hungarian *Duna*.⁷⁷ Interestingly, the Carpathian Mountains are termed the “Khazar Mountains” (哈嘑里山) in the biographies, which too could hint at Turkic or maybe East Slavic informants.⁷⁸ The Mongol term for Transylvania’s Saxons – “Sas” – seems to have come

⁷⁴ Obricht and Pinks, *Meng-ta pei-lu*, 183.

⁷⁵ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger’s Epistle*, 166-167.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 188-189.

⁷⁷ Pow and Liao, “Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction,” 56, 65-67.

⁷⁸ In the contemporary Hungarian accounts, it does not appear that they viewed the entire Carpathian Range as a single range. However, the *Deeds of the Hungarians* (*Gesta Hungarorum*, c. 1200), written by a native Hungarian, consistently referred to the same northeastern portion of the Carpathians through which Batu and Sübe’etei passed as Havas (*Hovos* in Latin). The term originates from the Hungarian word for “snowy” – a term which implied high

from the Hungarian *szász*.⁷⁹ These examples strongly suggest that the Mongols received information from local informants in the areas overrun during the invasion to supplement what they could discern from their own direct observations.

Following the quriltai of 1235 in Mongolia, the appointed Mongol leaders disbanded to mobilize their contingents. They met together at a predetermined location to begin the campaign in 1236. The site of the initial muster is specifically the Chaman/Jaman River in Rashid al-Din's account. The suggestions of J.A Boyle was that this name might be a corruption of Jayiq, i.e. the Ural River, following the suggestion of Minorsky.⁸⁰ In his own translation of a portion of Rashid al-Din, Wheeler Thackston did not offer a suggestion for the Chaman besides the Danube, but he noted that Minorsky was confused but suggested it related to the earlier stages of the campaign before the invasion of Hungary.⁸¹ The Ural River was suggested as it seems to have been a frontline of the Mongol advance from the time of the Kalka campaign to the Western Campaign, roughly from 1223 to 1236, owing to Jochi's refusal to conquer the Kipchaks, Bulgars, and Bashkirds.

Nevertheless, I would suggest that Chaman actually indicates the Kama River on the basis that this river is still called Chulman (Чулман) in the Tatar language; this detail might imply that the river's name as it appears in Rashid al-Din's work originated from the language of the local Turkic-speaking people in its vicinity. We know from Friar Julian's eyewitness experience in the region that the peoples dwelling near the Volga were still unconquered in the mid-1230s. In c.

mountains. In an interesting coincidence, the migrating Magyars of the ninth century were recorded to have invaded Hungary through the same pass by which Batu later proceeded. See: Martyn Rady and László Veszprémy (trans.), *Anonymous, Notary of King Béla, The Deeds of the Hungarians* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010), 26-27 30-31, 34-35. For a discussion of the parallels between Batu's invasion route and that of the semi-legendary chieftains, Álmos and Árpád, recorded before the Mongol invasion of Hungary, see: Pow and Laszlovszky, "Finding Batu's Hill at Muhi," 284.

⁷⁹ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 70, n. 331.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 57, n. 227.

⁸¹ Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 322, n. 3.

1235-36, when the friar was in Magna Hungaria, he noted that the Mongols were assembling only five days distant from the Bashkirds and were waiting for more troops to show up from Mongolia.⁸² This supports an identification of the Kama. As well, Rashid al-Din specifically indicated that the river which marked the rallying point was very close to Volga Bulgar. Faced with these multiple pieces of evidence, I would contend that it is almost certain the campaign began at the Kama, basically on the immediate edge of the Bulgar and Bashkird heartlands. This suggests the local peoples did not have the power or will to drive them away and were compelled to simply watch, likely with great nervousness, as the Mongol royal contingents gathered essentially in their territory in 1236, while the locals received regular orders and threats from Mongol envoys to submit to the khan as Friar Julian noted as it was happening.

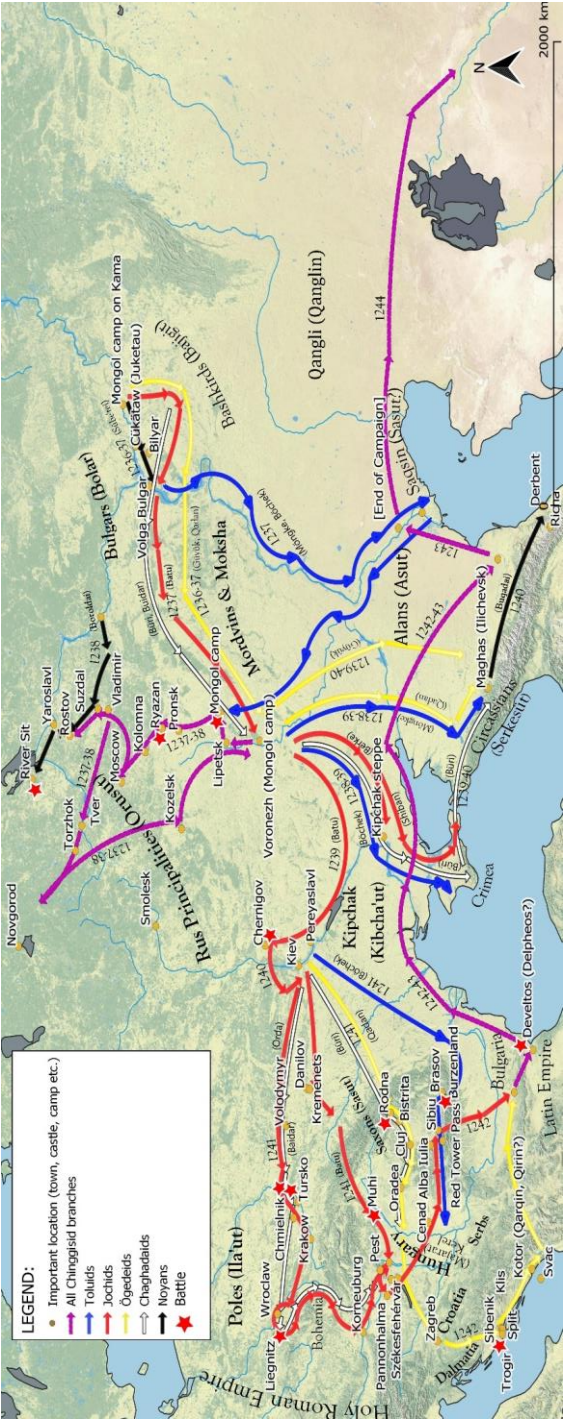
As this confusion regarding even the starting point of the campaign highlights, there is much persisting uncertainty about the events. I have attempted to reconstruct the movement of the Mongol princes over the course of the entire campaign (Map 1). The resulting map owes much in particular to segments of what appear to be a dry report of the entire operation, originating in Mongolian. Two sections of it were recorded in Rashid al-Din's work and it is probably the most valuable source we have for getting an insider's view of the Western Campaign.⁸³ I then supplemented it with what other sources, often written by local authors who were directly affected, record. Unlike map depictions in the past, I have attempted to highlight the role of princes from the four distinct branches of Chinggis Khan's dynasty because this seems to be significant not merely for reconstructing the events, but also for highlighting the relations between the princes.

⁸² Heinrich Dörrie (ed.), *Drei Texte zur Geschichte der Ungarn und Mongolen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 158.

⁸³ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 56-61, 69-72.

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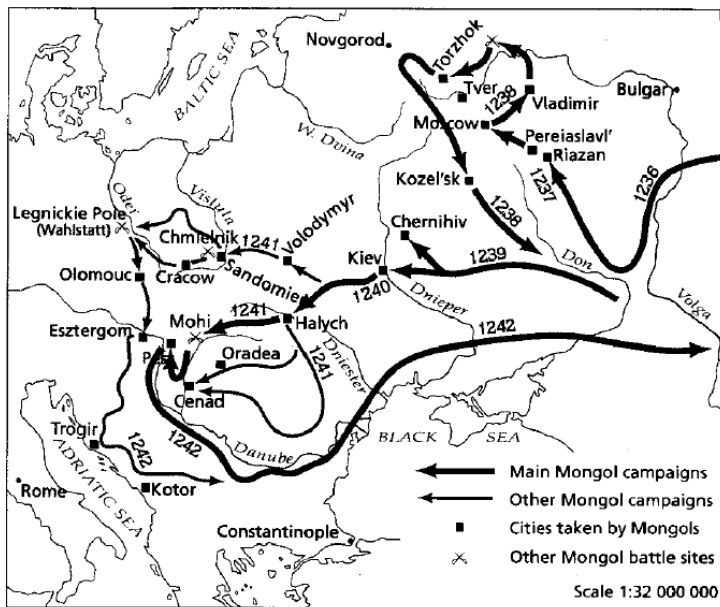
Perhaps something of the conflict and dissensions between the princes is even revealed or the way they intended to distribute conquered land and wealth.



Map 1. Military movements of princes of the four Chinggisid branches during the Western Campaign, 1236-1244, reconstructed on the basis of primary sources. Map designed by Stephen Pow and László Ferenczi. Map realization using QGIS 3.4 and Inkscape 0.92: László Ferenczi.

A new, more accurate map seemed particularly needful because many previous spatial depictions of the invasion suffer from being overly simplistic (Map 2) and often full of inaccuracies and errors.

6a The Mongol invasions



Map 2. A simplistic though largely accurate depiction of the Western Campaign. Source: Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of Central Europe* (University of Washington Press, 1995), p. 19.

Regarding the outset of campaign, the Bulgar and Bashkird lands were quickly overrun, starting in the winter of 1236-37. Many of the princes continued west of the Volga and subdued the Mordvins and Moksha in 1237, while Möngke and Böchek, the two Toluid representatives, pursued Bachman along the Volga, eventually successfully capturing and executing him. Sübe'etei

might have been tied to the operation against Bachman with the Toluid princes. His biography in the *Yuan Shi* mentions his involvement,⁸⁴ though this could be an error. Still, it could also explain the claim in Rashid al-Din, originating from the dry Mongol report on the campaign, rather than the more detailed narrative of Möngke's capture of Bachman, that Sübe'etei campaigned in 1237 against the Alans, as well as Bulgars, early in the campaign.⁸⁵ We know they chased Bachman to the vicinity of the Caspian Sea from the biography in the *Yuan Shi*. Sübe'etei clashing with Alans along the lower Volga makes more sense than in the region of Bulgar. Thus, I think it possible that Sübe'etei might have accompanied Möngke for at least part of his pursuit of Bachman, perhaps on account of his past experience in the region.

The next major operation fell against the Rus' in the winter of 1237-38. I would next like to highlight that a combined use of diverse sources shows that the course of the operations against the Rus' principalities was carefully planned out by the Mongol leaders long beforehand. Several contingents moved into positions. This was evidently known to Russian leaders, as is indicated by Friar Julian's report which reflects this precise knowledge. Julian was in Suzdal in the summer or autumn of 1237 and seems to have departed from it only shortly before the Mongol assault brought that city to ruin and countless others. Julian's account provides startling details about the Mongol positions shortly before their invasion that reveal they adopted a similar strategy they applied later in Hungary. They were divided into apparently four armies that moved from different directions simultaneously. Besides insinuating that one of the Mongol army groups was in recently overrun Mordvin territory, he recorded:

We heard the truth that the whole army of Tartars coming against the West is divided in four parts. One part is situated at the Volga River on the borders of Russia on the eastern side of Suzdal, but another part is in the south already at the borders of Ryazan, which is another

⁸⁴ Pow and Liao, "Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction," 62.

⁸⁵ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 57.

principality of the Rus' which they [the Tartars] have never conquered. The third part is at the River Don, near the city of Voronezh which is another principality of the Rus'. Yet, they [the Tartars] are waiting – as the same Rus', Hungarians, and Bulgars who had fled from them told us personally – until the ground, rivers, and swamps freeze in the coming winter which will make it easy for the whole multitude of them to plunder the whole of Russia, along with the whole land of the Rus'.⁸⁶

It appears meaningful that the army was divided in four parts when one considers that representative members of the four branches of the Chinggisid Dynasty were all taking part in the campaign – these divisions described by Julian might have at least partially reflected such family divisions. More significantly, such divisions already in late 1237 might reflect tensions between the princes relating to claims over plunder, territory, captives, etc. That is, the detectable separation of the branches at times might to some extent reflect the need to keep the rival princes widely separated from one another to minimize potential and existent conflicts. Nevertheless, all the major leaders united and coordinated their attacks on the Rus' urban centers from late 1237 to spring 1238, suggesting that the Mongol commanders perceived that stage of the campaign to be a major military undertaking which required close coordination and maximum force.

Based on how events were to play out, it seems that the Mongol chief commanders had reached the conclusion that their best option for rapidly subjugating the Rus' princes, dwelling in a heavily forested region without suitable conditions for a long-term occupation by nomadic forces, was to rapidly advance through it and destroy its relatively weakly defended major cities which happened to be the centers of princely power, along with surrounding towns. As such, they appear to have gambled that the shock of such an attack, and the fear of subsequent punitive attacks, would bring about the submission of the larger region. Their strategy appears to have been

⁸⁶ Dörrie, *Drei Texte*, 173-174. This is unpublished translation as part of a larger work being prepared for publication.

successful and subsequent years bore out that the plan was largely successful, albeit such a conclusion can belie the many years that passed before the whole of the Rus' principalities submitted.

Judging by Rashid al-Din's comment from the Mongolian report that a quriltai of the Mongol princes was held in the autumn of 1237, and the observation that Möngke Khan rejoined Batu and the assembled princes for the ensuing campaign against Ryazan in December but was not listed amongst the princes who campaigned against the Moksha and Mordvin,⁸⁷ it appears that the designated meeting point of Mongol forces was in the general vicinity of the Voronezh River. This was designated as the Mongol camp in the Russian sources. So, it seems probable that it was along this boundary of Ryazan's territory where the Toluid princes rejoined the others after the capture of Bachman. Batu appears to have been waiting for full strength before initiating the campaign – in the Rus' sources, one detects an element of delaying on the part of Batu's forces. In the *Tale of the Destruction of Ryazan*, we read that the prince of Ryazan had time to send an embassy directly to Batu while he was encamped on the Voronezh River.⁸⁸ The *Novgorod Chronicle* records that when the army of Ryazan at last advanced southward to confront the Mongols,⁸⁹ they pulled back to the Nukhla River, which unfortunately has not been identified. In any case, since Friar Julian noted a Mongol army encamped at Voronezh, near the Don River, and another farther away south of Ryazan and on the outskirts of its territory, we might speculate that these were the respective encampments of Batu and the Toluid princes who were returning from

⁸⁷ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 59; Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 322-323.

⁸⁸ Serge A. Zenkovsky, *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales* (New York: Dutton, 1963), 199.

⁸⁹ Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes (trans.), *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016-1471* (London: Camden Society, 1914), 81-82.

successful operations against Bachman in the Lower Volga region. Once they were in place and the rivers had frozen, the attack from three or four major army groups commenced.

Regarding the fall of Ryazan in December 1237, the first great Rus' principality and urban center to fall to the Mongols, Rashid al-Din mentioned the participation of Batu, Orda, Büri, Güyük, Qadan, Möngke, Kölgen in its fall.⁹⁰ It is thus evident that all four Chinggisid branches were represented in the assault, along with Chinggis Khan's son by a wife other than Börte. Yaroslavl was taken later in February, shortly after the fall of Vladimir, according to the *Laurentian Chronicle*.⁹¹ Recently published archaeological finds confirm the Rus' sources' account of slaughter that took place there. The bodies of victims found in a mass grave, showing signs of brutal and largely indiscriminate violence, were not buried until the late spring of 1238. Boroldai was the general who pursued and destroyed Prince Yuri II of Vladimir and his remaining forces. Yuri had fled to the vicinity of Yaroslavl after abandoning the city of Vladimir and his family to their destruction and had been trying to muster his remaining forces there. However, after sending out a scouting force, its leader returned and announced they had been surrounded by the Mongols, news which prompted a retreat northwestward into the wilderness.⁹² Yuri and his forces were finally overtaken at the River Sit, and the *Novgorod Chronicle* tells us that "much was said" about the manner in which Yuri died, suggesting rumors of a horrible end.⁹³ The *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle* imputes a measure of blame to Yuri for what happened, noting that he had not posted sentries and that is why he fell into Boroldai's hands.⁹⁴ The *Laurentian Chronicle*, composed by a chronicler of Vladimir, notes Yuri's final defeat by Boroldai and his death occurred at the Sit on

⁹⁰ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 59.

⁹¹ PSRL_1_1927, col. 464.

⁹² Michell and Forbes, *The Chronicle of Novgorod*, 83.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Perfecky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 46.

4 March 1238, and that Vladimir's prince was beheaded. John Fennell has suggested that perhaps what happened to him was less savory, based on the mysterious comment in the *Novgorod Chronicle*.⁹⁵

Based on the given date of decisive clash to early March, it makes sense that we should imagine a separate army under Boroldai, or at least including him, had pursued Yuri northward from Yaroslavl and eventually to the River Sit, while the main Mongol army under Batu had moved on the road westward, destroying Tver, and reaching Torzhok shortly afterwards. The *Novgorod Chronicle* tells us that the Mongols invested Torzhok on the first Sunday of Lent (21 February 1238) and did not take the town until 5 March 1238. The Mongols surrounded it with an enclosure as at other towns and employed battering rams for the better part of two weeks. Afterwards they advanced as far as "Iganti's cross," only a hundred kilometers from Novgorod before pulling back.⁹⁶ It should be noted that the chronicler did not attribute the Mongol decision to abandon their advance to anything other than divine protection – no environmental issues were cited that might have been to blame for an attack on Novgorod being abandoned. In any case, the Laurentian Chronicle and Simeonovskaya Chronicle both mention that it was Batu who had taken Torzhok and who then marched southward toward the steppes, investing Kozelsk at the very end of March.⁹⁷ Obviously, Batu could not be at Torzhok on 5 March and likewise at the River Sit on 4 March, so this demonstrates that at least two Mongol armies were conducting major operations simultaneously and quite distant from one another.

⁹⁵ John Fennell, *The Crisis of Medieval Russia* (New York: Longman, 1983), 80-81.

⁹⁶ Michell and Forbes, *The Chronicle of Novgorod*, 83-84.

⁹⁷ PSRL T. 1, Issue 3, col. 522; PSRL, T. 18, (1913), p. 58.

The Kipchaks, Alans, Circassians, Crimea were all subdued in operations beginning in the autumn of 1238, documented by Rashid al-Din.⁹⁸ Following the fall of Kozelsk in May 1238, the Mongol forces appear to have retired from waging war for a period of several months. Perhaps they had returned to Voronezh where the entire operation against the Rus' had begun several months earlier. At this stage, Batu seems to have distanced himself from the other Chinggisid branches. After a summer likely characterized by planning and the recuperation of men and livestock, several southerly conquests were launched under princes starting in autumn of 1238. Rashid al-Din mentioned that Möngke and Qadan proceeded against the Circassians and finally killed their king in the winter of 1238-39. Shiban, Büri, and Böçek simultaneously invaded Crimea. Meanwhile Berke led an attack against the Kipchak and captured three chieftains named as leaders of the Mekrüti, an ethnonym which has remained unidentified in scholarship. I want to cautiously advance the possibility that the people named here might well be the Brodniki (Бродники) who featured in the *Tale of the Battle of the Kalka* featured in several Rus' chronicles. In the winter of 1239-40, Güyük, Büri, Möngke and Qadan took the Alan capital of Magas. Thereafter, they dispatched a noyan, Buqadai to take Derbent in 1240.⁹⁹

The southwestern Rus', including the great capital of Kiev all fell in 1239-40. Toward the end of that series of campaigns, in the autumn of 1240 ("Year of the Rat"), Güyük and Möngke, departed from the campaign, returning on the orders of the great khan in Mongolia.¹⁰⁰ From Rashid al-Din indicates that they did not take part in the capture of Kiev in December 1240.¹⁰¹ The departure of two of the most preeminent figures to be dispatched on the Western Campaign – both of them would later become great khan of the unified Mongol Empire in succession – might have

⁹⁸ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 60.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 60-61. Probably Buqadai Qorchai later executed with Harqasun. Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 587.

¹⁰⁰ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 69.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Rashid al-Din mentioned the participants in the fall of Kiev. Möngke and Güyük were absent.

demoralized those who were left to proceed into Latin Christendom. Afterall, the two Chinggisids ostensibly left with their troop contingents comprised of the many people that they owned. Yet, it is a crucial observation that even with the departure of Güyük and Möngke, princely representatives from all four Chinggisid branches remained in the Mongol army to continue the war. This seemingly intentional arrangement might imply that the original driving principles and objectives of the Western Campaign – permanent conquest and the submission of rebels – remained in place even as the advance continued into Europe in early 1241.

It is worth noting that at this stage, the role and status of the Chaghadaid princes seems to have been marginalized in relation to the representatives of the other Chinggisid branches. This subservient or supportive role of the Chaghadaid princes is evident in the later historiography by authors writing under Toluid auspices. Rashid al-Din's history implied this lesser role by only referring by name to the chief representatives (Batu, Möngke, Güyük) of three branches of the dynasty, leaving out the Chaghadaids, in his description of the planning stage of the campaign in 1235. Then, in his account the beginning of the Western Campaign, he only listed in order the participating sons of Tolui, Ögedei, and Jochi.¹⁰² This could be related to the ultimate ascendancy of the Toluids in the unified empire and then in its Yuan and Ilkhanate successor states after 1259. They were after all the patrons of the authors of our major historical sources.

Juvaini, writing during the reign of the first Toluid khan, Möngke (r. 1251-59), likewise listed Batu, Möngke, and Güyük specifically as the chosen leaders of the campaign during its planning.¹⁰³ Elsewhere, in Juvaini's listing of the leaders deputized to help Batu, the Toluid princes are recorded first, followed by Ögedei's sons. Chaghadaid's descendants, Büri and Baidar, were

¹⁰² Ibid., 55-56.

¹⁰³ Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 199.

only then included in the category of “other princes” after Kölgen – a figure who was not one of Börte’s offspring.¹⁰⁴ All of this hints at an intentionally hierarchical scheme was being intended by our Persian authors, though it is worth remembering that the *Secret History* referred to members of all four branches as the campaign’s leaders. The longer *Yuan Shi* biography of Sübe’etei refers by name to Jochid, Ögedeid, and Toluid as the princes who invaded Hungary without mentioning any Chaghadaid figures. However, it could be the case that this inferior role of Chaghadaid’s descendants does not simply reflect later biases of authors, but rather this was already becoming a reality during the time of the invasion of Europe proper in early 1241. Such a scenario is implied in dry reports of the events; Rashid al-Din’s account, based on a Mongolian report, referred to “Orda and Baidar” heading the operation against Poland.¹⁰⁵ The statement that Baidar was operating in Poland in conjunction with Orda, the elder brother of Batu, is supported by European sources as well.¹⁰⁶ The other major Chaghadaid prince on the campaign, Büri, was operating in conjunction with Qadan in Transylvania. Judging by a range of source material, such as Rogerius, Qadan was known to be the chief Mongol leader in that field of operations.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 269.

¹⁰⁵ Moḥammad Rowshan & Moṣṭafā Mūsavī (eds.), Rashīd ad-Dīn Faḏl Allāh, *Jāmi' at-tavārīkh : Tārīkh-i Ghāzānī* (Tehran: Nashr-e Alborz, 1994), vol. I, p. 678/(Tehran: Mīrāt-e Maktūb, 2016), vol. I, p. 608. In Boyle’s translation, only Orda is mentioned leading the attack on Poland. See: Boyle, *Successors*, 70; 328. However, that is because Boyle used Blochett’s text of Rashid al-Din’s work which lacks the reference to Baidar found in other examples of the text. Many thanks to Simon Berger for his assistance with this point.

¹⁰⁶ Rogerius documented the role of Baidar (“Peta”) in the Battle of Liegnitz and atrocities at Wrocław, and how he eventually made his way through Moravia to join the Mongols forces occupying Hungary. Bak and Rady, *Master Roger’s Epistle*, 164-165. It was D’Ohsson who first suggested that this figure should be identified with Baidar, the sixth son of Chaghadaid, something which fits with the larger context of the source descriptions. See: Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, 221. After all, Baidar is mentioned as a leader of the campaign in Persian, Rus’, and European sources as a major leader of the Western Campaign. The Franciscan friar, C. de Bridia, writing soon after the events like Rogerius, confirmed the preeminent role of Orda as chief commander of the invasion of Poland, suggested by our Asian source material, but did not mention Baidar. See: George Painter, “The Tartar Relation,” in *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation*, R. Skelton et al. eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 80-81. Later Polish chronicles mentioned two commanders in Poland but were totally misguided about who they were, often mentioning Batu, Qadan, or even Khaidu! However, Jan Długosz referred to necessary cooperation between two Mongol commanders in Poland, with one reinforcing the other; the general outline of Mongol forces was remembered. D’Ohsson’s inference that the “Peta” in Rogerius is the Baidar in Rashid al-Din’s work is very reliable.

The intriguing evidence of a diminished status among the Chaghadaids is meaningful for our general understanding of the events, since not only were the Chaghadaids mentioned among the other branches in the leadership of the campaign in the *Secret History*, but a key role in the planning of the campaign and advising Ögedei was imputed to Chaghadai in that source. As was clearly shown, this demotion is partly a retrospective reflection of the Toluid imperial agenda in later sources composed under Toluid rulers; it is partly the result of historical revisionism characteristic of the imperial agenda of the time.¹⁰⁷ However, crucially, the weakening status of the Chaghadaids seems to be evident visually as well in the respective support roles of Baidar and Büri in the final stage of the Western Campaign into East-Central Europe in 1241-42.

To make sense of that phenomenon, a key event seems to be the infamous feast held sometime after the fall of the Alan capital Magas (February 1240) and before the recall of Güyük and Möngke (autumn 1240). In the *Secret History* version of events, Batu named Güyük and Büri as the two Chinggisid princes who had publicly insulted him at the feast for his presuming preeminence among them. István Zimonyi has argued that Büri must have retrospectively incriminated with Güyük by the Secret Historian as one of those who had insulted Batu. He argues that Büri's conflict with Batu actually emerged long after the Western Campaign and related to Möngke's succession.¹⁰⁸ After all, Zimonyi points out, Büri continued as a participant in Batu's service during the invasion of Hungary means that we instead should look at Rashid al-Din's account of Büri's fate, which matches that of William of Rubruck. In both their accounts, Büri

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Atwood, "Jochi and the Early Western Campaigns," in: *How Mongolia Matters: War, Law, Society*, Morris Rossabi (ed.), (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 36-38.

¹⁰⁸ István Zimonyi, "The Feast after the Siege of the Alan Capital in the Western Campaign of the Mongols," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 22 (2016), 254-256.

much later uttered a drunken criticism of Batu for which he was handed over to the Jochid ruler and executed shortly after the ascension of Möngke Khan (c.1251).¹⁰⁹

I assume that Büri could have drunkenly spoken ill of Batu on more than one occasion, and therefore the account in the work of Rashid al-Din does not necessarily offer grounds to discount that found in the *Secret History* – which seems to have been based on an official memorial sent by Batu to Ögedei in Mongolia.¹¹⁰ In fact, Rashid al-Din stated it was customary for Büri to carelessly utter harsh words when he was drinking. This suggests his vocal contempt of Batu that ultimately got him executed in the early 1250s could have been something rather habitual on his part – which could explain the severity with which Batu eventually responded to it when he had the opportunity. The occasion on which he was executed was merely the *last time* he spoke ill of Batu. Besides tensions between the princes flaring up on the Western Campaign, we might also consider that some of the animus that had existed between Jochi and Chaghadaï was inherited, in a sense, by their offspring. The *Secret History* records them coming to blows during the siege of Urgench, a major Khwarazmian urban center, and Chinggis Khan deciding to separate their territories by such a distance that they would not even be forced into the situation of having to cooperate.¹¹¹ As such, the apparent marginalization of the Chaghadaïd princes in the last stage of the campaign might just be another reflection of rising tensions and continued rivalries that could have negatively affected the campaign's final stage.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 253-254.

¹¹⁰ Christopher Atwood's close analysis of this important text has found that there is good reason to believe that several source documents on which the *Secret History* was based stem from bilingual versions or else were transferred into Mongolian by non-native speakers. Moreover, the historian who composed the document seems to have copied older historical documents of various types verbatim into his text, following a well-known and common medieval practice. These included lost early Mongolian biographies of illustrious figures in the rise of the empire and government documents were employed as well. See: Christopher Atwood, "How the *Secret History* of the Mongols was written," *Mongolica* 49 (2016): 32, 36, 38, 48.

¹¹¹ De Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, 183, 187.

Regarding the first moves of this stage of the Western Campaign as it advanced from overrun Rus' territory into Europe, sources from Mongol courts note their forces were divided along five routes as they advanced on Hungary in the first months of 1241.¹¹² The northern, or "right," group certainly under Orda (a Jochid) and Baidar (a Chaghadaid) moved swiftly through Poland, which at the time was fragmented into five principalities. Mongol forces were apparently surprise attacked, suffering an initial defeat on the borders or later at Tursko.¹¹³ Afterwards, Mongol forces regrouped and swiftly won a number of victories as they proceeded westward, sacking Lublin and Sandomir in February. Following the defeat of Duke Boleslaw V's army at Chmielnik on 18 March, Krakow was burned as the duke became a refugee and his citizens fled for the forests. In Silesia, the wealthiest and most westerly duchy, the Mongols besieged but failed to take Wroclaw, something which was attributed to a celestial prodigy which terrified the Mongols into retreating.¹¹⁴ Further west, the high duke of Poland, Henry II, managed to assemble a coalition army at Liegnitz (today Legnica in Poland), comprising his own contingents, local miners, and some elite units of Templars and Teutonic Knights. These combined forces fought a decisive and hard-fought battle with the Mongols. Early annalistic documents record that the site of the battle was a site called Wahlstatt ("the chosen place") near Liegnitz and that the clash took place on 9 April 1241.¹¹⁵ If we believe a Polish friar, the Mongols personally told him a few years later that they were on the point of flight when suddenly the Polish lines collapsed.¹¹⁶ Subsequently, this Mongol army made a few half-hearted advances on Bohemia. Sources agree they passed

¹¹² Boyle, *Successors of Genghis Khan*, 70.

¹¹³ Joannis Dlugosz, *Historiae Polonicae*, XII. Edited by Ignatius Zegota Pauli and Alexander Przezdziecki (Krakow: Kirchmayebiana, 1873), 267; Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 80-81.

¹¹⁴ Dlugosz, *Historiae Polonicae*, XII, 271-272.

¹¹⁵ For instance, the *Epitaphia Ducem Silesiae* mentions these details. See: MGHS XIX, 551. The *Annales Lubenses*, which recorded events only to the early fourteenth century, mentioned the same details in its first entry. See: MGHS XIX, 549. The brief summary of the date of the battle and its outcome occurs in a huge number of chronicles from the region of Poland.

¹¹⁶ Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 80-82.

through Moravia very rapidly in late April or May, only laying waste to the countryside without besieging fortified towns.¹¹⁷ They arrived in Hungary to assist in its conquest of what was always the intended target.

The other princely contingents had simultaneously moved directly on Hungary. The main force under Batu and Shiban (both Jochids) and accompanied by Sübe'etei moved through the Verecke Pass in Hungary's northeast. One army under Qadan (an Ögedeid) and Büri (a Chaghadaid) passed through the Borgo Pass and launched an invasion of eastern Transylvania's Saxon centers. Böcek (a Toluid) led the assault from the south, advancing into the Carpathians through Vlach territory (later Moldavia and Wallachia). He likely entered Hungary probably through the Turnu Roșu Pass.¹¹⁸ Since this outline is accompanied in Mongol sources by a mention of "five routes," it is possible that Büri and Qadan's units entered the Carpathians via slightly distant routes, or that Böcek's forces entered from two routes simultaneously.

An interesting feature of this invasion is how the division of Mongol armies might reflect a planned appanage distribution. Representatives of all four filial branches of Chinggisid family were taking part and were divided in a way that seems to provide for their tidy division of Hungary's territory or at least plunder from overrun areas. This is especially evident in Rogerius's account of his escape from Oradea. He mentioned that Qadan's forces had advanced westward through northern Transylvania from Rodna to Oradea. Watching smaller settlements and improvised defensive sites in the northern half of Transylvania fall to the Mongols, the terrified churchman fled southward to Cened, situated on the southern side of the Mureș River, only to discover that the town had already been devastated by the forces of Böcek which had emerged

¹¹⁷ Tomáš Somer, "Forging the Past: Facts and Myths behind the Mongol Invasion of Moravia in 1241," *Golden Horde Review* 6:2 (2018): 240.

¹¹⁸ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 70.

from the Carpathian passes of Wallachia and had destroyed Alba Iulia earlier. Rogerius returned northward and ultimately surrendered to the forces under Qadan.¹¹⁹ Later, he recorded that these troops marched southward toward Arad, near the Mureş River.¹²⁰ Thus, it seems probable based on this very direct, personal eyewitness account of events as they unfolded in the spring of 1241 that Qadan, supported by Büri, was responsible for conducting the major operations north of the Mureş while Böček was in charge of taking the major targets and objectives south of it. If not coincidental, there seems to be a component of planned wealth distribution as well; Qadan and Büri's attack fell on the silver mining region, while Böček had taken the salt production area and major trade routes. The Jochid princes, Batu and Shibān, seemed to have moved on the pastures between the two major rivers of the Great Hungarian Plain – the Hungarian heartland was perhaps being prepared as an appanage for Shibān.

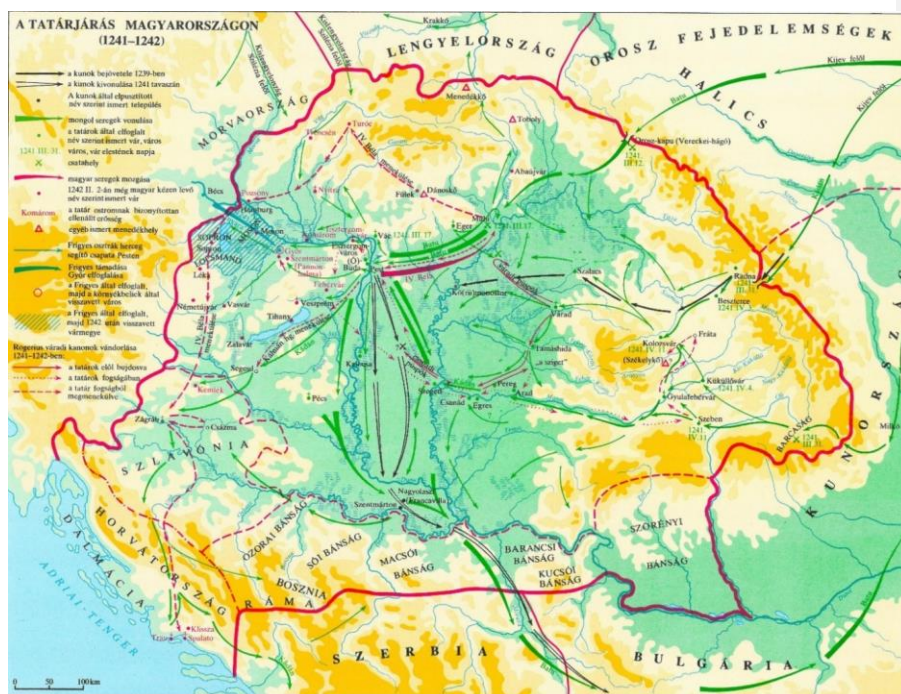
A neglected source, the *Annales Frisacenses*, reveal some dates of these more or less simultaneous attacks on different parts of the Kingdom of Hungary. The contingent that must have been commanded by Qadan and Büri took Rodna on 31 March and they took Bistrița on 2 April. They then advanced westward to take Cluj and Oradea at unspecified dates in April. The forces that must have been commanded by Böček only entered Burzenland on 1 April, fighting a battle against the lord there. They took Braşov on 4 April and they took Sibiu 11 April, the very same date as the Battle of Muhi.¹²¹ Based on the timeframe, it seems doubtful that all the Chinggisid armies could have gathered at Muhi. Thus, a major consequence of the chosen strategy was that

¹¹⁹ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 202-203, 208-209. Rogerius mentioned that Cenad had been destroyed by the "Tatars who had entered Hungary from the other side" which earlier he specified was an army that entered Hungary from the direction of Seret River and bishopric of Cumania under the command of "Bochetor." I view that as an error for Böček – perhaps a later editor's mistake. See: Ibid., 166-167. As such, there is remarkable agreement between Rashid al-Din and Rogerius on how the Mongols entered Hungary.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 210-211.

¹²¹ MGHS XXIV, 65; Gombos, *Catalogus*, 131.

Batu, Shiban, and Sübe’etei might have faced the Hungarian royal army at the decisive Battle of Muhi on 11 April 1241 without the assistance of other contingents (Map 3). The earliest sources tend to refer to the battle site merely as the Sajó, but the early fourteenth-century *Chronicon Posoniense* specified that the battle occurred “by the Sajó River, near the town of Muhi” (*iuxta fluvium Seo, prope villam Muhi*).¹²² This could be merely because Muhi had grown into a significant market town in the fourteenth century, so that it was associated at that time with the battle, but based on nearby archaeological finds, it seems probable that the battle really was in its rough vicinity and this was preserved in local memory.



Map 3. A depiction of the Mongol invasion of Hungary, 1241-42. Source: Ferenc Glatz (ed.), *Virágkor és pusztulás: A kezdetektől 1606-ig (história könyvtár 1)* (Budapest, MTA, 1995), p. 25.

¹²² Imre Szentpétery, *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum*, Vol. II (2nd edition: Budapest: Academia litter. Hungarica, 1937), 42.

It has regularly been described in the literature that Batu and the whole Mongol army moved up to Pest, provoked Béla IV to pursue them, and then retreated as a body to their chosen site at the Sajó River to do battle. However, a closer comparison of the most detailed European account with Asian sources suggests that Batu remained in northeastern Hungary after breaking into the Carpathian Basin and before the battle. The Mongol practice of sending ahead vanguard forces is well attested in contemporary sources, and it appears Batu sent ahead his brother Shibān with 10,000 men and perhaps Sübe'etei.¹²³ It was their job to “lure” the Hungarians to the chosen site, something which they carried out successfully.¹²⁴ Interestingly, the same Asian sources testify to intense anxiety felt amongst the Mongol troops and by Batu who ascended a hill to pray and lament to Tengri in conscious imitation of Chinggis Khan's habit before his greatest military undertakings. In any case, the Mongols won the battle by crossing the Sajó in the darkness of the night and surrounding the Hungarian camp at dawn. This eventually led to a panicky retreat with the Hungarian king barely escaping along with his brother, Coloman, who died a few months later from his wounds. In one fell swoop, the ability of the Hungarians to provide resistance organized by a central authority was shattered. Béla IV fled to Croatia (then part of his kingdom) and eventually in 1242, he fled to an island on the Adriatic when Qadan crossed the Danube and renewed his pursuit in early 1242. From the Mongol perspective, it appeared Béla had boarded a ship and put to sea, abandoning his kingdom.¹²⁵

For about a year between the king's defeat at Muhi and the Mongol withdrawal, the inhabitants of Hungary were on their own, responsible for organizing their own defense. As a testament, many improvised earthworks of concentric circles built around churches have been

¹²³ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 260-261; Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 270-271. For the viewpoint that Batu stayed in the northeast before the battle: Pow and Laszlovszky, “Finding Batu's Hill at Muhi,” 273-275.

¹²⁴ Pow and Liao, “Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction,” 63-65.

¹²⁵ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 71.

found in the Great Hungarian Plain, often accompanied by traces of a last stand against the Mongols.¹²⁶ These earthwork forts were evidently not effective, but they were the only option for many communities. The exact numbers of casualties will never be known, but the distribution of abandoned villages, archaeological traces of destruction, human remains showing signs of mass killing, and buried coin hordes dated to the invasion all point to the devastation being highly concentrated on the Great Hungarian Plain.¹²⁷ The area which the Mongols actually occupied for most of the year-long invasion suffered most heavily.

Though less well documented in textual sources, the Mongol presence in the area of today's Slovakia is represented by finds of arrowheads, appearing in forms typical for the thirteenth century. Mongol arrowheads have been clearly identified at the medieval fortified towns of Banská Štiavnica,¹²⁸ which was a mining area, as well as Nitra,¹²⁹ the deserted castle of Zvolen,¹³⁰ and unknown site in the vicinity of Púchov.¹³¹ Based on these finds, it is possible to partially reconstruct the path of Orda and Baidar's forces coming from Poland and entering the Kingdom of Hungary through the mountain passes of today's northwest Slovakia before moving along the Váh River to the lowland plains. But the evident presence of the Mongols in the mountainous area of central Slovakia, hitting regional centres of commerce, hints at more sustained and complex Mongol operations in the region. Also, other sites are in recent years showing signs of Mongol

¹²⁶ Szabolcs Rosta, "Egy új lehetőség kapujában – tatárjárás kori védművek a Kiskunságban," in: *Genius Loci Laszlovszky 60*, Dóra Mérai et al. (eds.) (Budapest: Archaeolingua, 2018), 186–192.

¹²⁷ Laszlovszky et al., "Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary," 424–426.

¹²⁸ Jozef Labuda, "Pozoruhodné nálezy zo Starého mesta v Banskej Štiavnici," *Archaeologia historica* 25 (2000): 3, fig. 5.

¹²⁹ Alexander Ruttkay, "Waffen und Reiterausrüstung des 9. bis zur ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts in der Slowakei (II)," *Slovenská archeológia* 24 (1976): fig. 32.

¹³⁰ Václav Hanuliak, "Doklady hmotnej kultúry Starého Zvolena (Pusého hradu) od 12. do 17. Storočia," *Archaeologia historica* 24 (1999): 11, fig. 4.

¹³¹ Ruttkay, "Waffen und Reiterausrüstung," 4, 6, fig. 19.

attack and further analysis of the find material is needed to clarify the exact scale of the invasions of 1241–1242 and 1285 in this region.¹³²

The archaeological distribution of destruction agrees with textual accounts which mention the Mongols were prevented by Hungarian defenders from crossing the Danube until the severe winter of 1241–42 caused it to freeze over, enabling a crossing. Reaching western Hungary, resistance was increasingly staunch, and we read of citadels like Esztergom, fortified cities, and monasteries vigorously holding out against Mongol attacks.¹³³ In any case, the onslaught did not last long, with the Mongols suddenly and mysteriously withdrawing, making their way in the direction of Bulgaria and perhaps considering an attack on Constantinople that never materialized.

As a final point, regarding the Mongol withdrawal in 1242, scholarship seldom pays heed to the route of the main withdrawal. On maps that depict the movements of Mongol troops we regularly see a southward movement of the Mongols along the Danube. This is not at all what was described by Rogerius, who actually took part in the withdrawal and recorded his experience soon afterwards. He stated that “by the order of their chief kings,” the Mongols and their prisoners marching back “slowly” eastward “across the wastelands” toward Transylvania. Crucially, he mentions that they moved through territory that they had *already overrun* during their advance, searching to destroy and plunder that which they had missed during their advance. Then, Rogerius stated, they advanced into the forest on the frontier of Cumania. The churchman escaped there, hiding in a nearby creek bed which might imply a larger river was nearby, and after leaving the

¹³² Michal Holeščák, “Late nomad arrowheads from the area of today’s Slovakia,” in: G. Fusek (ed.), *Archäologische studien zum frühen Mittelalter* (Nitra 2017), 45–51.

¹³³ Stephen Pow, “Climatic and Environmental Limiting Factors in the Mongol Empire’s Westward Expansion: Exploring Causes for the Mongol Withdrawal from Hungary in 1242,” In *Socio-Environmental Dynamics along the Historic Silk Road*, eds. L. Yang et al. (Heidelberg: Springer, 2019), 315–316.

forest, he reached Alba Julia by walking in eight days.¹³⁴ This seems to have been the major route of withdrawal since he stayed hidden for two days and could still hear the army passing the entire time, and he also mentioned that there were huge carts full of plunder, etc. Those taking part in the withdrawal were also travelling on a highway (*via publica*) going into the forest.

Based on this eyewitness description, it seems that the majority of Mongol forces withdrew along routes they already advanced, which does not fit with the assumption of a withdrawal along the Danube. Rather, it appears that they withdrew along the Mureș River which at the time was a highly populated corridor connecting Pannonia to Transylvania.¹³⁵ Next, I infer that the bulk of those withdrawing proceeded into the Red Tower Pass (Turnu Roșu) along the Olt River. Despite its frequent depiction on maps, I can find no textual evidence whatsoever that the main body of Mongols withdrew southeastward from Hungary along the Danube River. As a last point, it appears that the Mongols continued to meander their way slowly back to the Volga River – both Rashid al-Din’s Mongol report and another Mongolian account surviving in the Chinese biography of Sübe’etei record that Batu and the other Mongols reached their base at the Volga around 1243-44. In fact, they wintered in the northern Caucasus region in 1242-43 while still campaigning against the peoples there.¹³⁶ How well the above-mentioned details correspond with a standard narrative of the Mongols’ Western Campaign is debatable. There are certainly aspects of the source accounts that stand at odds with prevailing notions that they were forced to rush back home by developments in Mongolia.

¹³⁴ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger’s Epistle*, 220-225.

¹³⁵ Florin Mărginean, “The Lower Mureș Valley, a Link between Central Europe and Transylvania in the Early Middle Ages (Archaeological Evidence,” *Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica* XIII (2016): 85-86. Up to the mid-1200s, the Mureș, as a navigable watercourse was a major trade route for salt, timber, etc. and the corridor was filled monasteries, settlements, wealth, and a large population. This could explain why it was the dividing line between the operational zones of Böček and Qadan.

¹³⁶ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 71-72; Pow and Liao, “Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction,” 68.

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Chapter 2: Establishing the Framework for an Explanation of 1242

2.1 Preliminary Discussion

In attempting to explain the mysterious and abrupt withdrawal of the Mongols from Hungary in 1242 and their somewhat circuitous return to the approximate starting point of their campaign (the Volga River) by 1244, it is important to note that I already attempted to answer this question in my MA thesis work which offers the viewpoint that fortifications were probably the crucial factor in convincing the Mongols to pull back, though several factors were likely at play. Before expounding on my fortress-related explanation, I first provided an analysis the already existing theories.¹³⁷ It is not useful here to simply reiterate those previous arguments at length or to highlight, point for point, the same textual details that I previously discussed. Rather, I wish to propose that the present chapter be arranged as a series of questions and answers that will provide the framework for a nuanced, multi-causal explanation which will be laid out in the fourth chapter. Proceeding here with this quasi-catechistic arrangement, the responses to the questions will contain implications for the validity of existing theories and simultaneously build a contextual picture of the historical events in which one can arrive at novel explanations. The methodology employed here is to obliquely approach existing explanations in a way that allows multi-causal alternative possibilities to emerge. Six questions are dealt with – three here, two in the next chapter, and one in the subsequent chapter. The first two questions relate to general issues that appear crucial to any explanation, and the next four ask a question directly related to each of the broad theories for the 1242 withdrawal outlined in Greg S. Rogers' important article.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Pow, "Deep Ditches and Well-built Walls, 9-45.

¹³⁸ Greg S. Rogers, "An Examination of Historians' Explanations for the Mongol Withdrawal from Central Europe," *East European Quarterly* 30 (1996): 3-26. This article seems to be unique in devoting its entire length to systematically exploring the withdrawal question.

1. What intelligence and preconceptions regarding Latin Christendom did the Mongols have before the invasion and how did they gather such information? Answers on this neglected issue would provide nuance to any withdrawal theory.
2. Are there alternative explanations for the withdrawal found in the sources? It could be that an overlooked primary source contains a valid explanation that has not yet been considered in the modern scholarship.
3. Could a messenger have reached Hungary in the timespan between 11 December 1241 and late March 1242? The **political theory**,¹³⁹ which is the prevailing and conventional explanation in modern scholarship, holds Batu's army withdrew upon hearing of the death of khan, but it is questionable if a messenger could even bring the news from Mongolia in the given timeframe.
4. Is it plausible that environmental and ecological factors played the deciding role? Denis Sinor first argued this in his **geographical theory** (1972), and similar drivers were advanced in Ulf Büntgen and Nicola Di Cosmo's **environmental hypothesis** (2016) for the withdrawal.¹⁴⁰ These theories are well known and must be considered in any study.
5. Was permanent conquest the purpose of the invasion? There are differing opinions about Mongol objectives in their first invasion of Europe, and some scholars have opted for a **gradual conquest theory**,¹⁴¹ suggesting it was intended as a raid, either

¹³⁹ For the political theory and the points raised for and against it, see: Rogers, "An Examination," 8-9, 15-18; Pow, "Deep Ditches," 12-24.

¹⁴⁰ For what Rogers termed the "geographical theory" which I referred to as the "ecological theory," see: Rogers, "An Examination," 10-11, 18-19; Pow, "Deep Ditches," 24-34. For the more recent environmental hypothesis, see: Ulf Büntgen and Nicola di Cosmo, "Climatic and Environmental Aspects of the Mongol Withdrawal from Hungary in 1242 CE," *Scientific Reports* 6:25606 (2016): 1-9.

¹⁴¹ For the merits and criticisms of what Rogers termed the "gradual conquest theory," but which I thought was more suitably labeled the "limited goals theory" since some historians argue that conquest was never intended, see: Rogers, "An Examination," 14-15, 20; Pow, "Deep Ditches," 34-41.

for the simple purpose of punishment and plunder or to pave the way for a future long-term occupation. To arrive at the motivations behind the withdrawal, it is crucial to determine what the balance of evidence suggests the purpose of the invasion was in the first place.

6. Is there veracity to any accounts of the Mongols being defeated, wishing to flee from Europe, or suffering high casualties? The **military weakness theory**,¹⁴² which argues that the Mongols were deterred by losses or the strength of their opponents, tends to be found in older historical work. Later twentieth-century scholarly work tended to dismiss this theory offhand, owing to the questionable nature of the source material on which it is based. Therefore, any study of the withdrawal question requires a closer analysis of the claims in the sources.

2.2 What perceptions of the West did the Mongols have going into the invasion? How did they acquire intelligence on Europe?

A key question to making sense of Mongol actions during their westward drive of 1235-1242 regards how they gained any information on Europe and what impressions Mongols might have received of Europeans, or northwestern peoples more generally, in the first place. There are many excellent studies such as the work of Gian Andri Bezolla and Felicitas Schmieder which look closely at European impressions of the Mongols during this period, but the reverse is not so thoroughly explored. But these are highly relevant questions. How the Mongols gained information about enemies *before* a campaign is a mysterious process that impels us often to resort to conjecture. There are many questions that arise regarding how early perceptions and initial

¹⁴² For the military weakness theory and its support and criticisms, see: Rogers, "An Examination," 12-14, 19-20; Pow, "Deed Ditches," 41-45.

information could have influenced the campaign. For instance, did the Mongols perceive that European peoples would pose difficult adversaries before they invaded? Would the subjugation of Europe even be a feasible task or worth the effort? More specifically, what information could they have received about Hungary which was evidently their main target in Europe? Related to all the above issues is the broader question of what sort of general perceptions of Europe and Europeans existed in outside regions that the Mongols might have encountered if they sought to gain intelligence on Europe?

In exploring these questions, the present study offers several arguments. The first is that the limited extant source material allows us to adduce that medieval non-European attitudes and assessments of Europe were ambiguous. An analysis of them challenges a somewhat widespread notion that Europe was generally perceived as a militarily weak region lacking any cultural and economic development. At least, the preconceptions and reports on it found in the little surviving literature we have does not support such a view. Yet, there is a sort of persistent assumption among historians that medieval Europe was a sort of cultural and economic backwater compared to other Eurasian societies.¹⁴³ This view that Europe was culturally and militarily weak in the period might have been a more prevalent scholarly stereotype of the mid-twentieth century and less fashionable amongst specialists today, but it still prevails as a common viewpoint. For instance, Ian Blanchard, in his important and relatively recent study on mining and minting in the Middle Ages, opens a volume with the following: “Prior to the twelfth century, the populations of Europe existed in what

¹⁴³ Roy Lowe and Yoshihito Yasuhara, *The Origins of Higher Learning: Knowledge networks and the early development of universities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 149. Historians have often viewed Europe’s millennium as a cultural wasteland as beginning with the closure of the Academy of Athens by Justinian in 529. For recent and nuanced scholarship which shows how experts particularly are breaking from the traditional picture of outside perceptions of Europe, see: Daniel G. König, *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West: Tracing the Emergence of Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

was little more than a western appendage to the civilized world, inhabiting lands on the periphery of a world system whose epicenter lay in Central Asia.”¹⁴⁴

This widespread impression of Europe as a cultural fringe did not emerge from nothing; we can find for instance some famous, oft-cited passages from the twelfth-century Syrian soldier and author, Usama ibn Munqidh, recording his dismissive attitude to the medical, hygienic, legal, and marriage customs of the Franks. In his view their only virtue was courage, albeit courage existing paradoxically without honor or a sense of propriety.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps more significant to the creation of the general impression of Europe’s backwardness and marginality in the period is the silent indifference with which it was generally treated by authors in the Islamic sphere immediately outside of Latin Christendom. Of course, we have to be cautious of taking the Muslim authors’ disinterest as evidence of the cultural and economic development in Europe; the Islamic community of the period viewed itself by necessity as “the sole repository of truth and enlightenment, surrounded on all sides by an outer darkness of barbarism and unbelief.”¹⁴⁶ The silence of Muslim sources toward Western Christendom can be partly explained by the latter presenting a rival religious and political system which essentially denied the universal mission of its Islamic rivals in terms that would have been uncomfortably familiar to Muslims.¹⁴⁷ Indifference could have arisen as a solution to a sense of cognitive dissonance which could have been

¹⁴⁴ Ian Blanchard, *Mining, Metallurgy, and Minting in the Middle Ages. Vol 2. Afro-European Supremacy, 1125-1225* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001), 553. It should be admitted that Blanchard also characterized the period 1125-1225, relevant to my study, as a time when the European silver industry assumed a position of “world dominance.” *Ibid.*, 789. It is obviously problematic to characterize the entire European Middle Ages as a single period and to ignore these shifts in its development.

¹⁴⁵ Usama ibn Munqidh (trans. Paul M Cobb), *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades* (London: Penguin, 2008), 144-153. While interacting closely with them in the Levant, Usama ibn Munqidh (1095-1188) reacted with horrified disbelief at the lack of cleanliness of the Franks, their practices of trial by ordeal or combat, their relative indifference to marital infidelity, and the apparent tendency of their surgeons to lop off limbs as a go-to treatment for a variety of ailments.

¹⁴⁶ Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 39.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

encountered when one was faced with a rival ideology and society. Yet, it is also true that beyond the Islamic cultural world, Europe created even less of an impression in the period leading up to the Mongol conquests, being largely unknown or unworthy of mention in Chinese medieval records for instance.

The observation that there are relatively scanty details on Europe in medieval non-European sources is accurate. Moreover, European authors of the thirteenth century like Marco Polo and Roger Bacon themselves helped create an impression by emphasizing the wealth, population, or immensity of the world outside compared to Christendom;¹⁴⁸ there is a justifiable reason for historians often holding these opinions. Nonetheless, what should be challenged is the generalization that the limited references to Europe in *non-European sources* regularly described a region that was considered culturally undeveloped or poor in comparison to others. Particularly when we move from non-European materials that might be laden with biases, such as the memoirs of an aged life-long enemy of the crusaders, to the rich collection of geographical works compiled from the reports of merchants and government officials who could draw comparisons of different parts of the world, we encounter nuanced contemporary descriptions. These often stand at odds with the general assessment being touted in secondary literature today of a medieval Europe so

¹⁴⁸ Nigel Cliff (trans.), Marco Polo. *The Travels*, 87-88. Polo emphasized the greatness of Asia compared to Europe in terms of urban development, commerce, population, etc. Roger Bacon, who benefited from William of Rubruck's direct travel experience, concluded that Asia Major had to cover more than half the Earth, and Europe and Africa were not even half of it. See: John Henry Bridges (ed.), *The "Opus Majus" of Roger Bacon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1900), 355. Poggio Bracciolini, who recorded the testimony of Niccolò de' Conti about his time in India in the fifteenth century, mentioned that he met a Nestorian who had journeyed from India to Europe, visiting Venice, Florence, and Rome at the order of his pontiff. The Indian told the Italian author that the cities in Asia were much larger than those in Europe, that the churches were more magnificent, and that there was much more gold and silver there. In the author's view, "He appeared to be a truthful person." See: R.H. Major (ed.), "The Travels of Niccolò Conti in the East in the early part of the Fifteenth Century," in: *India in the Fifteenth Century Being a Collection of Narratives of Voyages to India* (London, Hakluyt Society, 1857), 33-34.

mired in poverty and barbarism that it might well have owed its narrow escape from Mongol conquest to its sheer economic and cultural irrelevance to outsiders.

The anonymous Persian geographical treatise, the *Hudud al-'Alam*, completed in 982, groups the Byzantine Empire along with France, Britain, and most of Europe excluding Slavic regions beyond the Balkans under the broader rubric of Rūm. This basically corresponds to European Christendom in the period and is described by the author in the following terms: "This country is extremely vast; it abounds in amenities beyond description and is extremely prosperous. It has many towns, villages, and great provinces, all with extensive fields, running waters, wealth, and troops."¹⁴⁹ The Andalusian writer Abdul Aziz al-Bakri, composing his geographical work in 1068, described France as a fertile land with well-constructed town surrounded by solid fortifications. He offered much praise for Constantinople, but more surprising still is his admiration for Rome, situated in a Western Europe we might imagine very much in state of decrepitude at the time. He flattered the Romans as the greatest beings in creation and provided a florid description of the magnificent architectural features of St. Peter's Basilica.¹⁵⁰ Yaqut al-Hamawi (1179-1229), who wrote his geographical work in the 1220s and personally fled westward as a refugee from Chinggis Khan's forces during the fall of the Khwarazmian state, described Rome as "one of the wonders of the world" for its buildings and size, adding the disclaimer that he based his account on what he had heard from many reliable and learned informants who had described it that way.¹⁵¹ Regarding cultural development in Western Europe, the testimony of the Spanish Jewish traveler,

¹⁴⁹ Vladimir Minorsky, *Hudūd al-'Ālam, "The Regions of the World": A Persian Geography 372 AH–982 AD*, 2nd edition (London: EJW Gibb Memorial Trust, 1970), 156-158. The term "Rūm," was already used in the Quran to refer to Eastern Romans (Byzantines) but could be applied more broadly by Muslim authors to "central and western Europe, making it roughly the equivalent of Christendom." Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery*, 140.

¹⁵⁰ Samia Bouamrane, "Kitāb al-Massālik wa-l-Mamālik (Le livre des itinéraires et des royaumes) d'Abī Ubayd al-Bakrī (XIe siècle): édition partielle avec traduction notes et commentaires," Doctoral diss. (Paris: Univ. de Paris I, 1993), 176-177, 196.

¹⁵¹ Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery*, 143-144.

Benjamin of Tudela (d. 1179) is useful for an outside opinion. Describing Paris, he stated that it “contains many learned men, the equal of which are to be met with at present nowhere upon earth.”¹⁵² Admittedly describing only the fringes of Europe with close ties to the Islamic world, the Song government official Zhao Rugua (趙汝适) mentioned Rum as having impressive fortifications and southern Spain as being a fertile land with extraordinary produce in his early thirteenth-century compilation on foreign trade.¹⁵³ Sharaf al-Zaman al-Marwazi (d. 1125) recorded that the Chinese, being the most skilled nation in handicrafts, had a saying that “all men are blind in craftsmanship except the people of Rūm who are one-eyed, that is to say they know only half the business.”¹⁵⁴ Equivocal it may be, but nonetheless it was a compliment.

In light of such examples, it should not really surprise us that some scholars in recent times have challenged the long-established notion that Arab-Muslim writers were utterly without curiosity about Europe; there was actually a long-established trend in the Arab geographical works of the ninth and tenth centuries to speak of Rome in hyperbolic terms regarding its grandiosity.¹⁵⁵ Much of what was recorded about Europe in the Middle Ages described it in favorable terms. By the twelfth century, al-Idrisi’s *Book of Roger* (1154) portrayed it as a complex network of roads and kingdoms, more state-controlled and urbanized than in previous writings, while in the

¹⁵² Manuel Komroff (ed.), *Contemporaries of Marco Polo* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1928), 322.

¹⁵³ Friedrich Hirth and W.W. Rockhill (trans.), *Chau Ju-Kua: His work on the Chinese and Arab trade in the twelfth and thirteenth century entitled Chu-fan-chi* (Republished: Taipei: Literature House Ltd., 1965), 141-143.

¹⁵⁴ Vladimir Minorsky (trans.), *Sharaf al-zaman Tahir Marwazi on China, the Turks and India* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1942), 14. Minorsky suggests the author lived from the mid-eleventh century and his work was known by 1120 at the latest. Interestingly, the apparently Chinese adage regarding the people of Europe was recorded a century earlier by Al-Tha’alibi and it persisted in the Islamic milieu during the Mongol period, when we find it used by the Armenian prince, Hayton (Het’um), in his popular *Fleurs des Histoires d’Orient* (c. 1307). The Spanish diplomat Clavijo also recorded it in the record of his embassy to the court of Timur. See: Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol IV.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 602, note c. Interestingly, Niccolò de’ Conti (c. 1395-1469) who had travelled extensively in India mentioned that the natives of central India stated that *they* had two eyes, the “Franks”- meaning Europeans – had one eye, and the rest of the world was blind! See: R.H. Major (ed.), “The Travels of Nicolò Conti,” 31.

¹⁵⁵ Jean-Charles Ducène, “Mediaeval Europe as seen by the Arab Geographers (10th - 15th c.)” (Presented at: University of St Andrews, 2015), 1, 9.

thirteenth century, Ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi's (1214-1286) up-to-date information depicted a Europe filled with economically active towns producing crafts for international export.¹⁵⁶ By and large, what we encounter in Arabic and Persian (*viz.* non-European) writings are stock descriptions of Europe as vast region of the world with military, economic and cultural development. Moreover, this image stayed rather consistent in the sources throughout the Middle Ages right through the rise of the Mongol Empire. That has implications for what preconceptions the Mongols themselves might have received of Europe in the lead-up to their major campaign, had they sought any information from their Muslim subjects.

All the same, can we find any real evidence that Mongol leaders received intelligence on Europe from their Muslim subjects in the form of the recycled statements found in various Islamic geographical works? I contend that we can see textual evidence of indirect information sharing taking place between Mongols and their new Islamic subject peoples by comparing a short passage found in the *Secret History* on the "people at the end of the world" to a longer passage in the *Athar al-Bilad* of Persian author Abu Yahya Zakariya al-Qazwini (1203-1283) pertaining to the "Franks." Regarding the former text, it remains quite mysterious but was likely composed at the Toluid court in 1252 or 1264 (a coda states it was written in the year of the rat in the twelve-year cycle) with some additions. Regarding, the latter text, there is an earlier recension of it dating from c. 1262-3 and a later recension from c. 1276. C. E. Bosworth described al-Qazwini as a "compiler and plagiarist, in an old established tradition of Islamic scholarship," who seems to have compiled his brief description of the Franks from several sources; the initial part could have come from the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 10-11. Ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi produced his work, often called *Kitab al-Jughrafiya* (*Geography*) at some point in the third quarter of the thirteenth century with the last datable event it mentions occurring in 1260 and he mentions the Laskarid Dynasty still reigning over the Byzantines. See: Jean-Charles Ducène, "The Map entitled Geography used by Ibn Sa'id (13th C.) and al-'Umarī (d. 1348) as a Source," (Presented at: Cartography between Europe and the Islamic World 1100-1600, Queen Mary University, September 8-9), 1-2.

earlier work of Ibrahim ibn Yaqub (fl. 961) whose work al-Qazwini extensively cited for other details about Western Europe.¹⁵⁷ However, as Bosworth suggested, the subsequent part referring to the warlike character of the Franks and their territory “in the midst of the lands of Islam” undoubtedly stems from material, no longer independently extant, which emerged from the Crusade context.¹⁵⁸ The passage reads as follows:

أفرنجة
بلدة عظيمة ومملكة عريضة في بلاد النصارى، بردها شديد جداً وهوأؤها غليظ لفرط البرد. وإنها كثيرة الخيرات والفواكه والغلات، غزيرة الأنهار كثيرة الثمار، ذات زرع وضرع وشجر وعسل، صيودها كثيرة الانواع. بها معادن الفضة، وتضرب أمضى من سيوف الهند افرنجة بها سيوف قطاعة جداً، وسيوف وأهلها نصارى. ولهم ملك ذو بأس وعدد كثير وقوة ملك، له مدينتان أو ثلاث على ساحل البحر من هذا الجانب في وسط بلاد الإسلام، وهو يحميها من ذلك الجانب، كلما بعث المسلمون إليها من يفتحها يبعث هو من ذلك الجانب من يحميها. وعساكره ذوو بأس شديد لا يرون الفرار أصلاً عند اللقاء، ويرون الموت دون ذلك. لا ترى أقدر منهم وهم أهل غدر ودناءة أخلاق...¹⁵⁹

Frank-land,

A mighty land and a broad kingdom in the realms of the Christians. Its cold is very great, and its air is thick because of the extreme cold. It is full of good things and fruit and crops, rich in rivers, plentiful of produce, possessing tillage and cattle, trees and honey. There is a wide variety of game there and also silver mines. They forge very sharp swords there, and the swords of Frank-land are keener than the swords of India.

Its people are Christians and they have a king possessing courage, great numbers, and power to rule. He has two or three cities on the shore of the sea on this side, in the midst of the lands of Islam, and he protects them from his side. Whenever the Muslims send forces to capture them, he sends forces from his side to defend them. His soldiers are of mighty courage and in the hour of

¹⁵⁷ C.E. Bosworth, “Āṭār al-belād,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*. Accessed at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atar-al-belad-geographical-work>. Bosworth notes that the first version of al-Qazwini’s geographical work was completed in 1262-1263 and revised over a decade later. It was heavily based on Yaqut’s earlier work. See also: Aglaia Iankovskaia, “Travelers and Compilers: Arabic Accounts of Maritime Southeast Asia (850-1450),” in *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, Vol. 24, 40-49, eds. Gerhard Jaritz, Kyra Lyublyanovics, and Ágnes Drosztmér (Budapest: CEU Press/Archaeolingua, 2018), 48. In general, al-Qazwini can be said to belong to a period of encyclopedism in Arab geographical literature, often criticized for the high degree of compiling and synthesis of older materials. The tendency to compile and plagiarize was, however, hardly unique to Islamic scholars of the period. In Latin or Chinese records, copying directly from past authorities was not frowned upon.

¹⁵⁸ Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery*, 146.

¹⁵⁹ Zakarya Al-Qazwini, *Athar al-Bilad* (Beirut: Dar Bayrut, 1984), 498.

combat do not think of flight, rather preferring death. But you shall see none more filthy than they. They are a people of perfidy and mean character...¹⁶⁰

Certain, key descriptions bear notable similarities to the following passage found in the *Secret History*, particularly evident if one highlights the corresponding sections:

“...čínadu dayyisun gü’ün olon qarin // büi tere üjü’ür-e keče’ün irgen tede kilingla’asu ö’erün mese- // düriyen ükükün irgen tede meses qurčatan...”¹⁶¹

"The enemy people beyond consists of many states, and there, at the end of the world, they are hard people. They are people who, when they become angry, would rather die by their own swords. I am told they have sharp swords."¹⁶²

Rearranging elements of the preceding Arabic text about the Franks for comparison, we see striking similarities to the briefer Mongolian text on certain themes:

A mighty land and a broad kingdom in the realms of the Christians. They are a people of perfidy and mean character; possessing courage, great numbers, and power to rule, [their] soldiers are of mighty courage and in the hour of combat do not think of flight, rather preferring death. They forge very sharp swords there, and the swords of Frank-land are keener than the swords of India.

There appears to be a relationship between the two texts, though one is a pastiche of recycled Arabic geographical statements and the other is found in a Mongolian-language literary historical work evidently created in part to promote an imperial agenda. So, what happened here and what is the significance? The *Secret History* and al-Qazwini's *Athar al-Bilad* were probably composed around the same time and so there is no way that one directly influenced the other or that direct borrowing took place at any point. Moreover, the similarity between the passages could be simply a case of *topoi* coincidentally occurring in unconnected texts. Indeed, we do not have to

¹⁶⁰ Translation: Bernard Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, v. II (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1987), 123. It is perhaps important to note that al-Bakri also mentioned in his description of France that the Franks' swords were sharper than those of India. See: Bouamrane, "Kitâb al-Massâlik," 197.

¹⁶¹ Igor de Rachewiltz, *Index of the Secret History* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1972), 162-163. Paragraph 270, lines 11211-11213. Special thanks to Ágnes Birtalan and Dorottya Uhrin for their guidance and assistance.

¹⁶² Translation: Igor de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 202.

drastically reconsider the *Secret Historian* as a polyglot author interspersing his own work intended for a Mongol aristocratic audience with details inserted from encyclopedic works by Islamic writers. Rather, the context in which the author recorded this statement offers a strong indication how similar ideas appeared in a thirteenth-century Mongolian source and an Arabic-language Islamic geography. It would appear that the *topoi* that appear in both sources were commonplaces regarding the Franks in the Islamic milieu, or else the much older sources which al-Qazwini copied into his work for the relevant passage were also used by Islamic subjects of the Mongols to inform them in the 1230s about the people in the northwest part of the world, i.e. the Franks.

Specifically, the passage appears in a quotation of Ögedei Khan, reporting the advice of his elder brother, Chaghadaï, regarding the preparations in 1235 for the great westward campaign which ultimately was to terminate in Europe in 1242. Chaghadaï had advised that the eldest princes take part and supply an enormous army, larger than ever before, because the people at the northwest extremity of the world were difficult adversaries.¹⁶³ Such being the case, the content of the passage seems to have perhaps originated from a Mongol administrative record of a consultation between the leading princes that was then incorporated into the *Secret History*.¹⁶⁴ Chaghadaï, ruling over the eastern parts of the Islamic sphere in the 1230s, must have consulted his new subjects for information on the people of the northwest and received information pertaining to the “Franks” – an exonym employed for Europeans. At the time *Frank* functioned

¹⁶³ Ibid., 201-202.

¹⁶⁴ There is contextual support for the viewpoint that the author of the *Secret History* used administrative records to inform his references to the Western Campaign led by Batu and Sübe’etei (1236-1242). Later in the *Secret History* § 275, we read “the following report” which Batu sent to Ögedei Khan through messengers during the campaign, in which he complained of treatment he received from other Chinggisid princes. Batu’s letter opens with a formula found in many examples of Mongol royal correspondence, “By the strength of Eternal Heaven,” which suggests to me that the *Secret History* used authentic documents kept at the imperial court to provide material on the Western Campaign in which the author had very limited involvement or knowledge. See: Ibid., 206-207.

outside of Europe as a broad rubric for all Christian European peoples. Regarding Frank as an ethnonym, Simon of Saint-Quentin noted in a surviving portion of the report on his embassy from the Levant to a Mongol headquarters in Armenia in 1247, “For thus they [the Mongols] and all people across the sea call all Christians, having taken the term in a large sense.”¹⁶⁵ Conti in his time in India in the fifteenth century likewise noted that the natives referred to all Europeans as Franks, and many sources from the Crusader period confirm this trend outside of Europe.

The wording of the passage supports the proposed scenario. The *Secret History* has Chaghadaï specifically indicating that he was “told” by informants about the qualities of the swords of the people at the western extremity of the world (and presumably his other claims came from the same informants). The paraphrasing and even confused understanding of a concept, specifically the suicidal anger of the local people, all hint at this information being provided to Chaghadaï via interpreters or that elements of the statement were muddled in the attempt at translation.¹⁶⁶

That Chaghadaï would have had the opportunity to receive this type of information about distant countries fits with the context of his rule that we encounter in the sources. Juzjani mentioned that Chaghadaï situated his territory along the narrow route going between Turkestan and the territory of Chin (China). Between the passes, he placed strong barriers, “and guards were there posted and overseers stationed, in order that they might examine every person who proceeded

¹⁶⁵ Pow et al., Simon of Saint-Quentin, XXX, 81. Accessed at www.simonofstquentin.org; Jean Richard (ed.), *Histoire des Tartares* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1965), 52.

¹⁶⁶ I presented this argument previously with “Mongol Methods for Collecting Information about the European ‘Other,’” at the workshop, *‘Foreign Knowledge’ – Medieval Attitudes toward the Unknown*, organized by Manuel Kamenzin and Friederike Pfister at Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany (June, 2018): <https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-36464>

towards Chin, or who entered the territory of Turkestan from Chin, and have information respecting his condition.”¹⁶⁷

As a pure speculation for how similar topoi to those in the *Secret History* ended up in al-Qazwini’s material on the Franks, it could simply be that this was the limited information available about the Franks in source material that had been written earlier and existed in the early decades of the thirteenth century. One of those sources has been identified as Ibn Yaqub. It might be that al-Qazwini’s summary on “Frank-land” as we have it, evidently a mix of Ibn Yaqub’s older work (the material on the Frank territory being a broad land with many kingdoms; its agricultural produce and land; manufacture of sharp swords) with much more current information on the “Franks” in Palestine from the twelfth or early thirteenth century (despising their lives during battles; their king coming across the sea to fight and holding castles in Muslim territory; their harsh and perfidious character; and their shaving habits which do not appear in the *Secret History* obviously because this information would be irrelevant). An important question regards the context and dating of the material about “Frank” Crusaders which appeared in al-Qazwini’s passage. It implies that the king of France was involved which could relate to Seventh Crusade (1248-54) led by Louis IX, in which case my hypothesis does not work. However, French kings also directly took part in the Second (1145-49) and Third Crusade (1189-1192) in the twelfth century, and I rather think this material stems from that earlier period. Specifically, the material about reinforcements being sent by ship to possessions under regular attack by Muslim forces in the Levant relates very well to the context of the end of the Second Crusade and the struggle for Ascalon in the early 1150s described by William of Tyre:

¹⁶⁷ H. G. Raverty (trans.), Juzjani. *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, vol. 2 (London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1881), 1147.

The Egyptians were accustomed to send yearly four fresh expeditions to that city, that the strength of the Ascalonites might be continually renewed. Thus they were enabled to sustain the ever-present conflicts with the Christians and the continual losses so incurred. The new arrivals were generally eager to try an encounter with our forces, for they desired to test our strength and at the same time to give conclusive proof of their own valor. It frequently happened in these skirmishes that many were captured or even slain by the sword, for the Egyptians were not acquainted with the country and had not attained full experience in warfare.¹⁶⁸

William of Tyre also notes that regularly groups of Frank reinforcements arrived by sea to shore up the defense of Ascalon: “That monarch and his princes felt the utmost solicitude for Ascalon, realizing that if it should fall and come into the power of the Christians there would be nothing to prevent our leaders from invading Egypt without let or hindrance and seizing that kingdom by force. They regarded Ascalon as a bulwark, therefore, and four times a year with lavish munificence they furnished assistance to the city, both by land and by sea.”¹⁶⁹ This picture of an ongoing struggle for cities with regular attacks by Muslims troops being met with European reinforcements arriving by ship seems to mirror the description found in al-Qazwini’s work so we might imagine that his source was from an Islamic author documenting events around the time of the Second Crusade.

Originally the combination of considerably earlier Islamic texts pertaining to Franks both in France and in the Levant could have emerged in the form we have it as a summary that had been requested from that scholarly community by Mongol rulers. At least, it is possible that the curious assemblage of references to the Franks surviving in al-Qazwini’s work was also the material that was used to inform Chaghadaï about the peoples living at the northwestern fringes of Eurasia.

¹⁶⁸ Emily Atwater Babcock and August Charles Krey (trans.), *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea by Archbishop William of Tyre*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 26. Many thanks to Benjámín Borbás (ELTE, Budapest) for drawing my attention to these passages.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 220.

Moreover, the association of al-Qazwini with the literary and administrative circle in former Khwarazmian territory eventually headed by Juvaini might hold some implications when we note the similarities between the two passages, but that is purely speculative.

I must reiterate here that I do not feel that either of these texts directly influenced the other. Nonetheless, the significance of a possible connection between the two texts is huge as we have possible textual evidence for how the Mongol leadership was obtaining information from subject people, probably local literati, on the mysterious northwestern peoples against whom they were planning a major campaign. Whether recycled statements regarding Frankish military capacity and valor,¹⁷⁰ or the prosperity of their lands, had a basis in fact is not relevant here. What matters is that such preconceptions had currency outside of Europe and that they influenced the Mongol leadership in the lead-up to the major Western Campaign of 1236-1242.

Turning from Europe at large to Hungary specifically, since it was the major focus of Mongol operations during their attack on Europe from 1240 to 1242, we might consider what intelligence the Mongols might have received on it. Based on sources that have survived from the High Middle Ages, the kingdom was perceived neither as an easy target nor as being without wealth. Perhaps the best outside perspective comes from Abu Hamid al-Gharnati (d. 1170) who stayed in Hungary for three years in the mid-twelfth century. He described a vast kingdom, “cheaper and more prosperous than any other,” containing gold and silver mines. It had seventy-eight cities, each possessing great numbers of fortresses and gardens. The inhabitants he described as brave and innumerable, some of them being Muslim settlers from Khwarazm and the Maghreb

¹⁷⁰ Such descriptions were common. Usama ibn Munqidh related several acts of bravery he witnessed from Frankish enemies. See: Munqidh (Cobb trans.), *The Book of Contemplation*, 76-83. The biographer of Saladin, Ibn Shaddad (1145-1234), obviously no partisan of the Franks, still described a formidable and fear-inspiring army, like a “solid wall,” and some memorable Franks who fought to the death, including a female archer, at the siege of Acre. See: D. S. Richards (trans.), *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 157-158.

who performed military service for the king.¹⁷¹ Regarding military strength, he described the Király – the king of Hungary – having armies “without number” with which he made frequent inroads against his Byzantine and Frankish neighbors. He claimed that every surrounding country feared the Hungarian ruler for both his numerous armies and courage.¹⁷² When Abu Hamid al-Gharnati intended to return to the Volga region, the Király commissioned him to recruit “poor, humble people, Muslims and Turks, who are good at shooting arrows” for his army. Somewhere in the steppes, the Muslim merchant managed to recruit a force of Turkic archers and sent them to Hungary.¹⁷³ Another later twelfth century source, al-Idrisi describes the population of Hungary consisting mainly of wealthy, powerful agriculturalists, some still living a nomadic way of life, and the whole country being covered with villages and farmhouses.¹⁷⁴

In terms that might resonate in modern Hungary, the kingdom was regularly portrayed in accounts written by neighbors as something on the fringes and at odds with them, being neither Frankish, nor Byzantine, nor Turkic in character. Hungary, even when largely Christianized and sedentary, still comes across as “the other” in European sources, and yet many of its described qualities match what we find in al-Gharnati’s account. Writing in the late twelfth century, John Kinnamos characterized the Hungarians as “barbarians,” drinking before battle and defending an enormous standard that had to be transported in a cart.¹⁷⁵ In a famous passage, the German bishop Otto of Freising (d. 1158) compared Hungary’s fertile land to the “paradise of God.” The people, however, he described as having a barbarous nature, crude and uncultured; they had done little to

¹⁷¹ Caroline Stone and Paul Lunde (trans.), *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 2012), 78-80.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 81-83.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

¹⁷⁴ P. Amédée Jaubert, *Géographie d'Édresi*, vol. 2 (Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1840), 377-378.

¹⁷⁵ Charles M. Brand (trans.), *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus by John Kinnamos* (New York: Columbia Press, 1976), 204-205. The description relates to the Battle of Sirmium in 1167. Kinnamos noted with amazement that 2000 Hungarian breastplates fell into Byzantine hands as plunder.

develop the landscape or build an infrastructure, being content to live in huts of reeds or even in tents during the summer. The bishop went so far as to wonder how such delightful land could be bestowed by God upon such wretched denizens. All the same, he granted that the king possessed unmatched authority and the people were so quick to obey him that he could quickly assemble a huge army fully equipped to campaign, accompanied by great hordes of foreign mercenaries, at very short notice.¹⁷⁶

Thus, ideas of the Hungarian kingdom's natural abundance and military strength seem to have had currency among outsiders. Again, we must wonder if these commonplaces reached the Mongols and I would argue that there is evidence they did. In the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*, we read that Dmytro, the military overseer of the defense of Kiev who was captured by the Mongols in late 1240 during its downfall, urged Batu to invade Hungary before its people muster, since the country was strong and the Mongols would never be able to enter the country if they delayed.¹⁷⁷ Better evidence that intelligence of this kind was received by the Mongols is found in a letter from Ögedei Khan which was addressed to the king of Hungary: "I know that you are a wealthy and powerful king, that you have many soldiers under you, and alone you rule a great kingdom. And, therefore, it is difficult for you to submit yourself to me voluntarily."¹⁷⁸ Chinese

¹⁷⁶ Charles Christopher Mierow (trans.), *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa by Otto of Freising and his Continuator, Rahewin* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1953), 65-67. One must wonder if the "foreign mercenaries" were actually the Muslim and Inner Asian groups of troops that Hungarian kings settled and employed.

¹⁷⁷ Perfeky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle, 49." The English translation of Perfeky is imperfect on this point. The original chronicle states that the Mongols would not be able to enter Hungary if they delayed, likely referring to a strengthening of the border obstacles. For the Russian original, see: Ipat'evskaya letopis' [Hypathian Chronicle]. A.A. Shakhmatov (ed.), PSRL - *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisey*, Tom II [Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles. Vol. 2] (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiya A.A. Aleksandrova, 1908), 786. For confirmation of this interpretation, see: Алексей Карпов [Aleksey Karpov], Батый [Batu] (Moscow: Молодая гвардия, 2011), 107.

¹⁷⁸ Haultala От Давида, 380; Dörrie, *Drei Texte*, 179. English translation by the author. The close resemblance of this message in its structure and certain wordings to a similar message from Chinggis Khan to the Khwarazmian Shah Muhammad II, recorded by al-Nasawi, an official of the Khwarazmian rulers, points to its authenticity. See Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 125-126. Regardless of who dispatched it, the letter represents Ögedei Khan's own word and authority.

and Persian accounts, discussed later in this chapter, continued to reflect perceptions of Hungary as a dangerous, militarily powerful adversary in the lead-up and during the invasion.

Limited evidence offers us clues that the intelligence the Mongols received on European territories from texts written or compiled by outsiders in the medieval period was supplemented by the direct testimony of spies, merchants, and perhaps wandering adventurers in their employ. When the Hungarian Dominican, Julian, was staying with the pagan Hungarians (Bashkirds) in the Volga region, he encountered an emissary of the Mongols who apparently spoke Hungarian, Russian, Cuman Turkic, German, Saracenic (Arabic or Persian), and German.¹⁷⁹ Evidently this figure had travelled broadly and we can assume he shared his knowledge with the Mongols after joining their service. Likewise, we read of a mysterious Englishman, captured in 1241 by Dalmatia's ruler near Vienna. He was subsequently identified by the duke of Austria as an envoy of the Mongols who had previously gone twice to demand the king of Hungary's submission.¹⁸⁰ Such being the case, it is possible he was the same envoy of the Mongols that Friar Julian met already in 1235 in Magna Hungaria amongst the Bashkirds. In any case, if this individual is not the creation of fiction writers, we can assume he imparted information on Europe to the Mongols during their conquests that was based on real knowledge. In fact, the English prisoner revealed that after becoming destitute in Acre, he had been dwelling in Chaldea (Iraq or Persia) when the Mongols heard about him through their spies and then enticed him into their service with gifts, "for they were in much need of persons to be their interpreters."¹⁸¹ Just as this individual told his European captors in 1241 much useful and accurate information about the Mongols, he likewise

¹⁷⁹ Hautala, От Давида [From David], 362; Dörrie, *Drei Texte*, 158.

¹⁸⁰ J.A. Giles (trans.), *Matthew Paris, English History: From the Year 1235 to 1273*, Vol. 1 (George Bell & Sons, London, 1889), 470-473.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 471.

earlier provided his Mongol masters insights on Europe. Moreover, his was probably not an isolated case.

Besides that, we see some evidence that the Mongols had more organized ways of gaining information that relied on large groups of people. The Czech chronicle of Dalimil from the early fourteenth century records that groups of wandering people called Kartas came into Europe before the Mongol invasion, advancing as far as the Rhine. In fact, they were spying for the Mongols before their arrival in Europe.¹⁸² This claim is unique in the sources but it is worth noting that Hungarians also believed the Cumans had been sent ahead into their country to learn the language and provide intelligence when the Mongols arrived. If either report is true, it would certainly fit with Mongol practices from the reign of Chinggis Khan to use innocuous merchants to gather information on enemies.¹⁸³ When a large group of merchants arrived in Otrar on the northern frontiers of the Khwarazmian Empire, its governor placed them under arrest and ultimately executed them, having written to the shah, “These men came to Otrar under the guise of negotiators whereas in fact they are spies who meddle in affairs that are none of their business.”¹⁸⁴ The governor went on to claim that when they were alone with simple people, the spies warned them that war was imminent. It is feasible that similar tactics were employed in Europe. Many in Hungary were convinced that the Cumans who came and settled in Hungary a few years before

¹⁸² Václav Hanka (ed.), *Dalimil's Chronik von Böhmen* (Stuttgart, 1859), 182-183; Tomáš Somer, “Forging the Past: Facts and Myths behind the Mongol Invasion of Moravia in 1241,” *Golden Horde Review* 6:2 (2018): 242.

Regarding the identity of the *Kartas* people, there seems to have been no studies. If not a poetic fiction, one might speculate if their name is related to *Kartli* which is a term attached to a region of medieval central Georgia. Could these be Caucasus people or Circassians (Cherkes) driven into Mongol service? The Jász people (As/Alan), Ossetian-speakers from the same region, ended up in Hungary permanently as refugees from the Mongol conquests in the 1230s and 1240s, and many places through modern Hungary and Romania still bear the name of their settlements.

¹⁸³ Allsen, “Mongolian princes and their merchant partners, 1200-1260,” 89, 124.

¹⁸⁴ Levi and Sela, *Islamic Central Asia*, 126.

the invasion in 1241 were in fact spies who had come to learn the language and situation of the country to provide useful intelligence for the Mongols when they arrived.¹⁸⁵

To conclude, the key message emerging from the investigation of this particular question is that both Europe and Hungary specifically were perceived as having economic value and military strength, even in texts which were written far outside of Europe. Notions that this region completely escaped the attention of the Mongols cannot be supported, nor ideas that it would have been perceived as worthless. Moreover, we see that the Mongols had sophisticated methods to find out about a kingdom or a larger region, including Europe, before the inhabitants knew next to anything about them.

2.3 Are there alternative explanations for the withdrawal in the primary sources?

Before moving on to the most representative theories for the 1242 withdrawal in present-day scholarship, it is worthwhile here to look at the primary sources for the possibility that they provide an alternative explanation that has missed the attention of historians. Among medieval authors' explanations for the event, it is Carpini's statement that the Mongols left because of the death of Ögedei Khan which still forms the cornerstone of later scholarship's interpretation of the event. However, I have encountered several statements in both European and Asian sources that directly present other explanations for the withdrawal or at least imply a driver behind it. We will explore these in turn here. It is evident that what constituted a satisfying explanation for a medieval author and readership might prove insufficient to the scrutinizing gaze of modern researchers. As well, medieval authors evidently lacked any preoccupation with explicitly laying out the nuanced

¹⁸⁵ Bak and Martyn Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 156-159.

causes for historical events, at least in this case. Nevertheless, it is important to look at contemporary or later medieval accounts that touch directly or indirectly on the withdrawal, especially those which are not part of the discussion at present.

Regarding the body of European primary sources, we come across interesting statements, generally recorded by the clergy members who tended to make annalistic records and compile chronicles. Unsurprisingly, the will of God played the decisive role in events according to their interpretations. The *Annales Scheflarienses maiores*, Bavarian contemporary annals for 1092-1248, provide a rather vivid picture of the fear that reverberated through the Church network along with the enthusiastic German response to the call for a crusade as a reaction to the news of the death of one king of Hungary and the flight of the other (referring to Coloman and Béla IV respectively). But then, the annals record that the Mongols did not penetrate “our borders,” presumably referring to Bavaria, since the territory was defended by the “right hand of God.” The annalist expressed uncertainty about the subsequent Mongol pullback, noting that only God knows how the Mongol withdrawal from the borders of Christendom came about.¹⁸⁶ The Swabian *Annales S. Trudperti*, composed in the second half of the thirteenth century, offer a more concrete cause-and-effect explanation of the Mongol withdrawal. They record that huge numbers of people were enthusiastically taking the sign of the cross after the defeats of their eastern neighbors in Poland and Hungary. When the Mongols learned about this, they fled.¹⁸⁷ Seeing as this echoes statements we also encounter in Bavarian annals about the large numbers of people signing up to crusade against the Mongols, we probably should not dismiss the explanation as worthless even if it has a

¹⁸⁶ Gombos, *Catalogus*, 201. For the dating of these and other German annalistic works, see: Repertorium “Geschichtsquellen des deutschen Mittelalters.” Accessed at: <https://www.geschichtsquellen.de/index.html>

¹⁸⁷ Gombos, *Catalogus*, 205.

self-congratulatory air. Matthew Paris also stated that the Mongols abandoned Europe and retreated quickly eastward lest they face an attack from the emperor.¹⁸⁸

On the other hand, if we turn to the *Annales Garstenses (Continuatio Garstensis)*, recorded in Upper Austria and contemporary to events, we read that though the crusader response was indeed huge and universal among Germans, the crusaders lacked a leader, and nothing really materialized from the preparations. Rather, this account holds, the Mongols withdrew either moved by their own free will or because God made them do so.¹⁸⁹ Bartholomew of Lucca (c. 1236-1327), a Dominican friar, historian, and pupil of Thomas Aquinas, again saw God's will behind events. He suggested that God made it so that discord erupted between the Mongols – meaning evidently among their princely leaders – and they withdrew.¹⁹⁰ It is not certain of Lucca's explanation was inspired solely by Carpini's report or if there existed some wider body of work in which details about Mongol princely rivalries were found.¹⁹¹ Like the crusader deterrent, the theme of discord among Mongol leaders as a problem during the campaign cannot be dismissed outright since these issues crop up even in the sparse Mongolian and Chinese mentions of these events which will be discussed in the following chapter.

An interesting and particularly Hungarian explanation for the withdrawal relates to the birth of Béla's daughter, Saint Margaret of Hungary (1242-1270). The *Vita* of Saint Margaret attributes the Mongol withdrawal to a miracle essentially. During the height of the invasion, Queen Maria Laskarina was pregnant, and she and her husband, Béla IV, essentially made a votive offering to God that if they and their kingdom were rescued, their daughter would be dedicated to

¹⁸⁸ Henry R. Luard (ed.), *Chronica Majora*, vol. 4 (London: Trübner & Co., 1877), 299.

¹⁸⁹ MGHS IX, 597.

¹⁹⁰ Gombos, *Catalogus*, 2007.

¹⁹¹ Bartholomew of Lucca mentions a certain *Gesta Germanorum* as a source for his account of the Mongol invasion.

the Church as a sort of sacrifice – something apparently unprecedented in Hungary’s royal history. When Hungary’s deliverance took place shortly afterwards and the Mongols left, Margaret did indeed become a Dominican nun and eventually a revered Hungarian royal saint.¹⁹² The story clearly resonated in Hungary through the centuries; when the Soviets were advancing against Hungary in the later stages of World War II, the intercession of Saint Margaret was sought as she had come along to save the country in a past existential crisis. It is no coincidence that she was officially canonized by Pope Pius XII in November 1943.

Antonio Bonifini (1434-1503), an Italian humanist and historian at the court of Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary, recorded a statement that seems to hold implications for the withdrawal. He recorded that a rumor broke out that the Mongols had decided to abstain from attacking the south or Germany in the west, and that by “public edict” they were to recall their forces back to their former place of residence,¹⁹³ meaning the steppes east of Hungary to which they indeed returned. This passage is fascinating because although Bonifini’s account is largely based on Rogerius, and the court historian explicitly declared his reliance on the churchman’s text at several points,¹⁹⁴ it contains additional details not found in the earlier work. Rogerius only mentioned the Mongols were suddenly recalled and that he heard they rumor they abandoned their plan to conquer Germany.¹⁹⁵ Thus, an important question is raised here; do the details about a public edict on the withdrawal, along with added implications that the Mongols’ mission had been

¹⁹² Szentpétery, *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum*, Vol. II, 685. The relevant passage reads: “Quam cum adhuc mater sua, regina gestaret in utero, tempore Tartarice persecutionis pro liberatione sua et regni pariter cum rege, marito suo quasi piaculum quoddam, si filia nasceretur, ut sanctimonialem eam facerent, devoverunt. Nam praetor ipsam nulla unquam de stirpe regum Hungarie sanctimonialis fuerat effecta.” Many thanks to Dorottya Uhrin for bringing this passage to my attention.

¹⁹³ Antonio Bonifini, *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades Quator Cum Dimidia* (Frankfurt: Wechelus, 1581), 301. The passage reads: “Rumor post haec omnia, non mediocris effunditur, Tartaros statuisse, Australibus & Alamannis abstinere manus, ac publico edicto revocare castra, ut rebus felicissime gestis, in pristinas sedes pedem referrent.”

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 298-299.

¹⁹⁵ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 218. The relevant sections read “fuerunt subito revocati” and “Auditis itaque rumoribus, quod Tartari aspernabantur Theutoniam expugnare...”

successfully accomplished and that they also abandoned an attack on the southern regions (the Balkans or perhaps Austria was intended) reflect mere embellishments or rather the usage of additional sources available to the fifteenth-century historian? If these claims originated from contemporary sources, they ought to dramatically alter our picture of the withdrawal. However, since Bonifini's invasion account otherwise contains not a single significant detail or unique episode found outside of Rogerius, my own conclusion is that the additions here merely reflect embellishments by the Renaissance author. It could be that he was himself a little baffled by the lack of attention paid in his source material to the process of the withdrawal and its reasons – so he built on the few relevant statements that he encountered in Rogerius' work.

Turning from European to Asian sources, we come across several works, roughly contemporaneous with Bonifini or from a later period, which contain statements regarding the withdrawal. The most compelling is found in the *Shajarat al-atrak*, an anonymous Persian work based on historical material compiled at the Timurid court of Ulugh Beg (1394-1449) and edited into its extant form by the early sixteenth century. It is a text that has been curiously neglected in studies of the Mongols in the view of Devin Deweese.¹⁹⁶ On the invasion of Europe, it provides a narrative focused on the Battle of Muhi that clearly originates from Juvaini who was a contemporary of the events. However, unlike Juvaini's account which abruptly breaks off with the Mongol victory and a statement about the successful subjugation of Hungary ("Keler and Bashgird"),¹⁹⁷ the later Timurid account adds the following: "These countries, therefore, being subdued, Batwi [Batu], by the orders of Ookaie Khan [Ögedei], marched to the desert of Kupchak

¹⁹⁶ Devin Deweese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 101-103. Since the work is still obscure and confined to a manuscript, my own access to it is through a nineteenth-century English translation. Deweese notes that though the translation muddles proper nouns, it faithfully conveys the narrative. Thus, the 1838 translation is sufficient for my purposes here.

¹⁹⁷ Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 269-271.

[Dasht i-Kipchak], and was again seated on the throne of that country.”¹⁹⁸ This remarkable statement holds that the withdrawal took place as a direct result of the great khan’s order, and if it is reliable, then it provides a compelling explanation of the event. The *Shajarat al-atrak* occasionally contains statements that seem to reflect unique traditions missing from the major Persian histories of the Mongols. For instance, it states that Khubilai Khan had his formerly rebellious brother, Ariq Böke, placed in an enclosure of thorny bushes until he died.¹⁹⁹ However, the veracity of Ögedei ordering the withdrawal is doubtful mainly because this claim appears uniquely in the later Timurid work but is absent from Juvaini’s contemporary account. The statement is likewise absent from Rashid al-Din’s universal history (c. 1300) which also included Juvaini’s account of the invasion of Hungary. As in the case of Bonifini, we are faced with a situation in which we encounter almost total reliance on an older source which is lacking any explanation of the withdrawal. Another problem regarding the added material is that, in addition to their reliance on such Persian authorities, Barthold noted that works composed in Timurid courts, including the *Shajarat al-atrak*, made use of Uyghur historical accounts that he opined had a fundamentally legendary character, while the stories disseminating in the Jochid realm were “similarly tendentious.”²⁰⁰

The historian Khwandamir (c. 1475-1535), who during his career wrote for Timurids, Safavids, and eventually the rising Mughal Dynasty in India, followed a professional tradition of literary historiography in the composition of his *Habib al-Siyar* (1520-1524). Often reliable, he was also a courtier willing to recast events to the liking of his patrons.²⁰¹ In his work, he offered a

¹⁹⁸ Col. Miles, *The Shajrat Ul Atrak or Genealogical Tree of the Turks and Tatars* (London: Wm. H. Allen and Co., 1838), 228. Until the statement cited here, the account appears to be a mere abridgement of Juvaini’s account.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 215.

²⁰⁰ W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 52-53.

²⁰¹ W. M. Thackston (trans.), Khwandamir, *Habibu's-Siyar. Tome Three. The Reign of the Mongol and the Turk* (Cambridge: The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1994), ix-x.

contradictory explanation to that found in the *Shajarat al-atrak* – his version casts Batu himself as the decisionmaker behind the withdrawal. Like what we encounter in the earlier Timurid work, Khwandamir clearly provided an abbreviated version of Juvaini’s account of the invasion of Hungary focused on the Battle of Muhi. However, Khwandamir made the following addition: “Having conquered that realm, Batu returned to the Qipchaq Steppe, mounted the khan’s throne, and gave the princes permission to withdraw.”²⁰² We encounter here an explanatory conclusion not found in Juvaini, the source which provided every other detail of the account, and one which does not agree with an earlier Timurid work’s version of events. Elsewhere, Khwandamir mentions that the westward campaign was a success and the Chinggisid princes returned after seven years, safe and laden with plunder. In this case, the author struggled to identify named peoples of the West and distorted Juvaini’s original “Keler and Bashgird” into “Kashgar,”²⁰³ something which suggests little interest or knowledge of the invasion of Europe among Khwandamir and his literary circles.

A comparison of the two Timurid statements above which build on Juvaini, along Bonifini’s statements which build on Rogerius, hints at two possible explanations. One is that we are encountering a sort of literary *taphonomy* – that is, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century authors had access to earlier sources that have since disappeared in a steady process that saw the loss and destruction of textual records. Thus, the authors inserted details from sources which are now lost, leaving modern historians with the impression that these references are mere additions from the authors’ imaginations. Another possibility is that later medieval and Early Modern authors found

Khwandamir noted that his history of Chinggis Khan and thus the Mongol Empire relied on Juvaini while his section on the Ilkhanate relied on Rashid al-Din and Vassaf.

²⁰² Ibid., 43.

²⁰³ Ibid., 28. If nothing else, this statement is helpful in challenging the notion that Europe was perceived as being poor pickings for a plundering army.

it problematic that their sources lacked any real explanation for Batu's withdrawal. In a sense, they were obliged to invent one. Thus, our Timurid authors placed the decision in the hands of a different supreme authority – Ögedei or Batu – in their two respective works.

In the later Middle Ages, Timurid courts likely had a greater consciousness of Europe as an entity, owing to more intense diplomatic contacts than had previously existed in that part of Asia.²⁰⁴ This changing context could have made an explanation of the Mongol withdrawal more pertinent than it would have seemed in the past. That is, an awareness of the Franks and their neighbors could have been accompanied with an awareness in Asia's historians that they escaped Mongol conquest. We see clues of this in the Turkic-language *Zubdat al-athar*, written around 1525 by a former Timurid scholar for his new Shibanid ruler in Tashkent. It mentions that the mandate received by Batu, the ruler of the Jochid ulus, and other Chinggisid princes and military leaders was "to attack and bring in the possessions of the courts of the Rus and Cherkes, and Bulghar, and Europe."²⁰⁵ The author then described that Batu's brother, Shiban, performed most valiantly in the campaign and the conquest of "these kingdoms" was achieved – something that would have been of obvious interest to his patrons.

Owing in part to changing perceptions, the events of the Western Campaign seem to have taken on an increasingly legendary quality in later histories by Asian authors. Writing a history of the Jochid Ulus in the 1550s, Ötemish Hajji claimed that Shiban invaded Hungary ("Kurel") and established it as his capital (*ordo*) after many battles. The author insisted that he reigned there until

²⁰⁴ We might think of Clavijo's memoir of his 1403 mission as one of several diplomats from Spanish courts to Timur's court and the generally enhancing communication and mutual awareness between European and Asian powers as the Early Modern Period progressed.

²⁰⁵ Levi and Sela, *Islamic Central Asia*, 205.

his death and indeed the rulers of that country were still descendants of Shiban.²⁰⁶ Abu al-Ghazi Bahadur (1603-1664), a khan of Khiva with a penchant for authoring histories, wrote that the seven-year-long Western Campaign ended in complete success, seeing the conquest of all the Mongols' enemies including Hungary. Güyük and all the other princes returned to Mongolia in glory. Ögedei Khan, apparently still alive, held a great feast for them, having assembled the heads of all the families of all his subjects.²⁰⁷ All the unhappy, embarrassing, or difficult issues found in the earlier accounts have simply been removed from the narrative.

It is interesting to note as well how the targets or antagonists in the campaign changed to suit the audiences' contexts so that the events of the Battle of Muhi are shifted to Moscow in Abu al-Ghazi Bahadur's work.²⁰⁸ This could be an innocent mistake but it is easy to imagine that Muscovy would have appeared as a more relevant opponent for the Mongols to a seventeenth-century Inner Asian author. In his history of the Jochid Ulus, Munis Khorezmi (1778-1829) summarized Batu's campaign against the west, providing a list of enemy nations that one typically finds in much earlier histories that refer to campaign. Yet, the Uzbek poet and historian added the

²⁰⁶ Inur Mirgaleev (trans.), *Ötemish Hajji, Qara Tavarikh – The Black History* (Kazan: Sh.Marjani Institute of History, 2017), 32-33. It should be noted that for the sixteenth-century author, his audience, and even for rulers in the post-Golden Horde successor states, the term Kurel (Курел) seems to have undergone a curious evolution so that it synonymously meant Poland-Lithuania while also clearly meaning Hungary in the context of the events described here. That Hungary was intended here is clear when Ötemish Hajji referred to this invasion being directed at both Kural and Lak (Курал и Лак), designations stemming from Király and Lech. Those terms are found much earlier in Rashid al-Din's work, evidently coming from the Mongols' own terminology for Hungary and Poland respectively (Boyle, *Successors*, 70). The evolution of Kurel/Kural in the intervening years so that it became associated primarily with Poland-Lithuania could have been related to confusion by Islamic authors reporting on the successive invasions of Hungary (1285) and Poland (1287), the close cooperation and periodic political unions between Hungary and Poland in the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries, and the perceived cultural similarity of these regional powers from a Golden Horde perspective. In any case, Ötemish Hajji related that the story of Shiban's descendants still dwelling in "Kurel" was confirmed by Sheik Ahmed (d. 1529), the last khan of the Great Horde, after he was released from years of captivity in Lithuania. See: Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Abu al-Ghazi Bahadur, *History of the Turks, Moghuls, and Tatars, Vulgarly Called Tartars together with a Description of the Lands They Inhabit* (London, 1730), 151-152. The account of an enormous feast is likely tied to the real event of Güyük's coronation ceremony in 1246.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 205-206. He maybe conflated the Muhi account in Juvaini and Rashid al-Din with Hajji's record of Shiban winning victory over Moscow which seems to be a separate tradition: Mirgaleev, *Ötemish Hajji, Qara Tavarikh*, 30.

“Nemesh” – Germans – to the usual list we see in Rashid al-Din.²⁰⁹ We must wonder if this reflects historicity or only a greater awareness of Germans in nineteenth-century Khiva.

An illustrative example of this phenomenon is found in literature recorded much closer to the events of the invasion. In the *Yuan Shi*, we encounter the biography of a mysterious Guo Kan, possibly a composite figure. It states that he joined Hulegu Khan on his expedition to the Middle East in the 1250s and captured huge numbers of cities while campaigning against western Islamic powers. Then the story takes a bizarre turn as Hulegu allegedly ordered Guo Kan to proceed westward across the sea and take possession of the *Fulang* (富浪). In short, it records that a Chinese general crossed the Mediterranean and conquered the Franks in 1258.²¹⁰ Indeed, the “sultan” of the Franks, realizing his opponent was a divine general, immediately surrendered to him.²¹¹ This is obviously an ahistorical event documented nowhere else. Moreover, in the tale of Guo Kan’s successful conquests of the Mamluks and the Frankish sultan, we read nothing of the Mongols’ historical defeat at Ayn Jalut in 1260. This might illustrate a process by which historians of the Mongol Empire and later dynastic courts could simply invent more satisfying narratives of full-scale conquest to describe what happened in the distant west, even to hide ambiguous or embarrassing events. Perhaps authors simply did not know how to handle the topic of unconquered regions. Their readership likely knew as little as they did about such distant regions as Europe, so the historical facts of what happened there were neither relevant nor useful.

Summing up the entirety of these overlooked explanations in the sources, the earliest European accounts do not reflect a strong interest in the question of the Mongol withdrawal, in

²⁰⁹ Yuri Bregel (trans.), Munis Khorezmii. *Firdaws Al-iqbāl: History of Khorezm* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 21-22.

²¹⁰ In the mid-thirteenth century, the term “Frank” functioned as a catch-all term for Europeans in the Islamic world and among Mongols according to Simon of Saint-Quentin.

²¹¹ *Yuan Shi*, 3526-3527.

part because a return was widely expected. Besides, there was a tendency to see divine deliverance at work behind all events, especially mysterious ones – which the withdrawal certainly was. In later sources, we encounter fascinating statements regarding the withdrawal which, if factually based, would certainly change our picture of the events. Perhaps lamentably, it is doubtful that these later authors were privy to any information on the issue originating from on high. Contemporary and later sources provide occasional attempts to make sense of the events, but such explanations are mere guesses. Broadly, we can see a pattern among authors to attribute the withdrawal to some higher authority's command – be it a ruler or the divine. Hints of a feared counterattack and discord among the Mongol princes come across as credible.

Some statements reveal contemporary authors who simply had no answer and conceded that only God knew why the withdrawal happened. Later authors seem to have been obliged to fill the *lacunae* in the sources in order to satisfy readers in a more inquisitive age. The reason behind this all is likely the vigorous efforts of Mongol leaders like Batu to keep their motivations and plans secret. Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi (1162-1231), a contemporary of the early conquests, noted why so little was known with any certainty about the Mongols; intelligence about other peoples reached them, but not vice versa. Scouts could seldom approach them, and it was impossible for a stranger to infiltrate their ranks. Crucially, when the Mongols planned to go somewhere, they kept their intentions tightly concealed before rapidly rushing upon some place. Its people could not collect together or muster an army, their plans and escape routes blocked.²¹²

²¹² Josef von Somogyi, "Ein arabischer Bericht über die Tataren im Ta'rīḥ al-Islām von aḏ-Ḍahabī," *Der Islam* 24:2 (1937), 114.

2.4 Could a messenger or messengers, carrying news of Ögedei Khan's death, travel between Mongolia and Hungary in less than four months?

The long-standing political theory for the withdrawal traditionally holds that Batu and all his forces suddenly evacuated Europe upon receiving news of Ögedei Khan's death which necessitated their return to the homeland. The argument is typically that the leading princes were required to take part in a *quriltai* of the imperial family in which they would choose a successor to reign over the Mongol Empire. Until 1972 when Denis Sinor proposed an alternative,²¹³ it seems that this explanation was basically a consensus among twentieth-century Western historians. It is illustrative of the political theory's long hold over scholarship that Joseph Fletcher referred to it as "the old wisdom found, for example, in Grousset,"²¹⁴ when discussing the Mongol withdrawal.

As mentioned in the introduction, this theory largely hinges on the testimony of John of Plano Carpini, a Latin author whose report evidently formed a key text in Western scholarship on the Mongol Empire since its inception. He wrote, "The [aunt] of the Emperor [Güyük] had been arrested; she had murdered his father [Ögedei] with poison when the army was in Hungary and as a result the army in these parts retreated."²¹⁵ Elsewhere, the Franciscan friar made it clear that the Mongols had planned to fight for a full thirty years when they arrived in Poland and Hungary in 1241, but the khan was killed by poison and "consequently they have rested from battle until the present time," meaning in 1246-47.²¹⁶ Though this is the best-known record of this version of

²¹³ Sinor, "Horse and Pasture," 181.

²¹⁴ Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," 45-47. Published in 1939, Grousset's very influential work helped consolidate the status of this theory and the idea seems to have been unchallenged, at least in Western scholarship, until Sinor in the early 1970s. See: René Grousset, *L'Empire des Steppes* (Paris: Payot, 1939), 333.

²¹⁵ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 65; Anastasius van den Wyngaert (ed.), *Sinica Franciscana*. vol. 1. (Florence: Collegium S. Bonaventura, 1929), 121. It is very important to note that the term *amica* (mistress) as it appears printed texts of Carpini such as the edition of Van den Wyngaert (and thus in the English translation found in Dawson) likely represents a transcription error. George Painter took the original form to be *amita* (aunt). Thus, Carpini in fact reported that Ögedei was said to have been poisoned by Güyük's paternal aunt, viz. Ögedei's sister. See: Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 83, n. 2.

²¹⁶ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 45.

events, Carpini's claim is not alone in the strictest sense. Another Franciscan, C. de Bridia, echoed the notion of the withdrawal being connected to Ögedei's fatal poisoning in his *Tartar Relation*, a source which was newly discovered in the mid-twentieth century.²¹⁷ C. de Bridia made the connection more explicit, noting, "While Batu was in Hungary, however, he heard of the death of Ogedei Khan who died after being poisoned by his sister and was buried with the rich man in hell, and immediately returned to Comania."²¹⁸ Much of C. de Bridia's work appears verbatim in Carpini but this passage is unique material written by the Polish Franciscan friar. An original draft seems to have formed the basis of both reports, but the supplementary details found only in C. de Bridia's work reflect his greater knowledge of historical events in Eastern Europe or additional bits of information ostensibly supplied by the notes of those who took part in the mission like Benedict the Pole.²¹⁹ As such, this statement is useful since it confirms that the Franciscans believed Ögedei's sister, rather than mistress, had poisoned him and, more pointedly, that it was Batu's hearing of this news that precipitated the withdrawal of the Mongols from Europe in 1242. In any case, this explanation originates from the same pool of medieval Latin sources – namely the Franciscan records of the embassy in 1245-1247 to Güyük Khan's court in Mongolia. It is not a version of events corroborated by any outside sources.

²¹⁷ Though the *Tartar Relation's* curious attachment to the controversial Vinland Map has caused scholars to express doubts about its authenticity for decades, Gregory G. Guzman's 2006 publication of the discovery of a second manuscript of the *Tartar Relation*, again found appended to a manuscript of the *Speculum historiale* but isolated from any spurious maps, must put such doubts to rest. See: Dorottya Uhrin, "Kutyafejűek és marhalábúak: 13. századi mongol kifejezések a Historia Tartarorumban," *Világtörténet* 5 (37): 44-46; Gregory G. Guzman, "The Vinland Map Controversy and the Discovery of a Second Version of the *Tartar Relation*: The Authenticity of the 1339 Text," *Terrae Incognitae* 38.1 (2006): 19-25. For the digitized scan of the more recently identified manuscript, see: https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/zh/P0013-2-4/372r?fbclid=IwAR0_HxooFYn1XR37MnppmsfQeK9B6FuwgwbASg5lon3pipjl7o4jAGeoVI

²¹⁸ Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 82-83.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 44-45. Judging by wide knowledge of Mongolian terms, C. de Bridia may have Franciscan mission, perhaps staying at Batu's encampment on the Volga while the others advanced to Mongolia.

Other primary sources could easily *appear* to contain statements that corroborate the friars' version of events while in fact they suggest something else. For instance, if one relies on Zenkovsky's English translation of the *Nikonian Chronicle*, it states that Batu Khan "retired when he learned of the death of the Great Khan." In fact, this is an error; the original Russian text, describing the leadership of the Mongols at the time of the siege of Kiev in December 1240, states that Güyük retired when he heard of the death of the Great Khan.²²⁰ A comparison reveals that this passage from the sixteenth-century chronicle was based almost entirely on the earlier thirteenth-century *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle* which records – in its description of the siege of Kiev – that Güyük departed for home, having heard of the Great Khan's death, and became khan himself.²²¹ Regarding the connection of the ruler's death to his son's withdrawal, this point cannot be correct since Ögedei did not die until December 1241. The statement in the thirteenth-century chronicle contains additional confusion since it then states that Güyük was the leading general of the Great Khan (or of Batu – it is unclear) rather than his kinsman – something the later *Nikonian Chronicle* compiler appears to have tried to fix by altering the statement so that Batu, rather than Güyük, was the leading general of Ögedei but not his kinsman.²²² In any case, these related statements in the Russian chronicles cannot be taken as a corroboration of the Franciscan reports' version of events because they only state that Güyük left the campaign because of the khan's death.

²²⁰ Serge A. Zenkovsky and Betty Jean Zenkovsky (trans.) *The Nikonian Chronicle*, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Kingston Press, 1984), 321; PSRL, vol. 10, 116.

²²¹ Perfecty, "The Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 84; PSRL, vol. 2, 784-785. The relevant passage reads: Яша же в них татарина именем Товруль, и тѣ исповѣда имѣ всю силу ихъ. Се бяху братья его силныи воеводы: Урдю и Байдарь, Бирюй, Кайдань, Бечакъ и Меньгу и Кююкъ,— иже вратися увѣдавъ смерть канову, и бысть каномъ, не от роду же его, но бѣ воевода его перьвый — Себѣдай богатырь и Буруньдаи багатырь,— иже взя Болгарьскую землю и Суждальскую,— инѣхъ бе-щисла воеводъ, ихже не исписахомъ zde.

²²² Neither chronicle is ambiguous regarding who left the campaign around the time of siege of Kiev – it was Güyük. However, the unclear wording of the following statement leaves the possibility that the *Nikonian Chronicle* actually designated the Great Khan as Batu's leading general! It seems impossible that a sixteenth-century Russian chronicle could make that mistake, so the statement is probably conveying that Batu was not related to Ögedei – something perhaps connected to his Jochid paternity. Many thanks to Roman Hautala for his assistance with these passages.

C. de Bridia's *Tartar Relation* corroborates the idea found in the Russian chronicles that "Ögedei's son," Güyük, did depart from the Western Campaign in which he had taken part for many years "after learning secretly of his father's death."²²³ Again, the documented chronology makes this order of events impossible, but at least it can be pointed out that many Asian sources written by authors who were insiders in the Mongol Empire reecho the point that Güyük had been recalled in 1240 and that he had received secret news of his father's death at some point.²²⁴ The *Yuan Shi* describes how during the campaign in early 1240, Güyük sent back messengers from the "western region" to the Great Khan to declare victory despite the fact that all the enemy tribes were not yet subjugated. At the end of same year, an imperial decree ordered Güyük and his troops to return.²²⁵ Since we know the campaign raged on after his departure, perhaps his early recall was prompted by his documented personal conflicts on the campaign,²²⁶ indicated by his premature declaration that the mission was complete when Batu evidently disagreed, or Ögedei's severe illness and worsening health necessitated the decision. It seems that an account of Güyük's mother, Töregene, secretly informing him to hurry back to Mongolia had disseminated broadly amongst new subjects of the Empire, including Russians, in the 1240s.²²⁷

²²³ Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 80-81.

²²⁴ Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 248; Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 61, 69; Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 348.

²²⁵ *Yuan Shi*, 36-37; Waltraut Abramowski "Die chinesischen Annalen von Ögödei und Güyük: Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des Yüan-shih," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 10 (1976): 134. Abramowski's interpretation of the line in question is that Güyük sent a premature report of the campaign's completion. The relevant line in the original reads: 貴由克西域未下諸部遣使奏捷.

²²⁶ De Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 206-208. The Secret History describes Batu and Güyük coming to conflict at a feast and the latter parting afterwards. It also describes Ögedei railing at his eldest son for demoralizing the entire army during the campaign and (falsely, I believe) imagines that the Great Khan upbraided his son upon his return to Mongolia – something that could have been written simply to retrospectively enhance Güyük's disgrace. Though the Mongolian work does not provide a precise timeframe for feast, it seems to fit the approximate timeframe of the fall of Kiev (December 1240) and before Batu and the others continued their advance into Europe in early 1241. As such the feast could have been a farewell feast for those leaving the campaign. See: Pow, "Deep Ditches," 53.

²²⁷ This is evident since this claim appears in a Russian chronicle from the thirteenth century, C. de Bridia's work, and even Bar Hebraeus repeated it from Juvaini's account. If it were a secret, it did not remain one for long.

It could well be that the recall of Güyük in 1240 and his subsequent return to Mongolia where he eventually managed to succeed Ögedei as Great Khan were anachronistically tied to the withdrawal of Batu and the remaining princes from Europe in 1242 by observers and informants, meeting and sharing information in the context of the new khan's enthronement in 1246. After all, another part of the Franciscan explanation can be found in insider sources written in the Mongol Empire – namely, the claim that Ögedei had been poisoned by his sister. Rashid al-Din recorded that there were persistent rumors that in the aftermath of the khan's sudden death that Sorqoqtani Beki's sister, Ibaqa Beki, had poisoned him. In fact, this was the sister-in-law of Ögedei's younger brother, but this could have easily been interpreted simply as a sister in their particular social framework. Her son was a steward of the khan and she had a habit of visiting annually and acting as Ögödei's cupbearer at a banquet. Since the khan's abrupt death had coincided with her and her son acting as cupbearers, initially some accusations were made toward them. However, the very high-ranking *noyan*, Eljigidei who was destined to become the leading figure in Güyük's regime, finally silenced the accusations by protesting, "What foolish words are these? Ibakha Beki's son was the *ba'urchi* who always held the cup, and Khan was always drinking to excess. Why should we slander Khan by saying that he died at the hands of others?"²²⁸ As Rashid al-Din then noted, "Being a sensible man, he realized that the cause of death was excessive and habitual drinking." Nevertheless, it is evident that rumor of poisoning was still current in 1246 and the Franciscans as well heard it from their informants.

Thus, the political theory has a somewhat tenuous basis, perhaps stemming from rumors based on inferred connections between events which would have seemed related from an outside

²²⁸ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 65-66.

perspective and which were then repeated to the Franciscans.²²⁹ Nonetheless, it is remarkably persistent. Though nuanced and novel alternative explanations have come along, world history textbooks and popular histories presently tend to provide Carpini's explanation for the withdrawal. Even after Denis Sinor raised the point that Batu never actually returned to Mongolia or took part in the election of a new khan, the theory simply adapted and continued to be advanced. Stephen G. Haw recently argued that Batu indeed withdrew because of the death of Ögedei Khan but "his purpose seems to have been to frustrate the succession of Güyük as Khagan: from his own ulus, he could hope to exert some influence on the succession, while at the same time delaying any final decision in Güyük's favour by his refusal to attend a khuriltai."²³⁰ Just as Fletcher earlier noted the delicate nature of Mongol imperial power, "so closely tied to the ruler's person,"²³¹ Haw has similarly recognized the grave risk posed to the stability and unity of the empire in the interregnum periods. This uncertainty about the future would have necessitated Batu's withdrawal deep into the heartland of the Empire even if he evidently never returned to Mongolia. In short, the necessity for an election caused Batu to withdraw, even if he did everything he could to avoid participating in the subsequent election. The similarity of the 1242 withdrawal events with what followed the death of Möngke Khan in 1259 in terms of the abrupt discontinuation of major campaigns against both the Mamluks and Song China can be used to support this argument.²³²

The political theory has a certain persuasiveness to scholars whose work has given them a familiarity with the inner workings of the Mongols' administration and customs. On the surface,

²²⁹ Carpini specifically mentioned his heavy dependence on Russians during the mission as interpreters and informants. See Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 70-71. Since there is corroboration on certain points between the Russian chronicles and the Franciscan reports surrounding the relevant events, this could support the view that Carpini's party received an explanation of the withdrawal from these very informants.

²³⁰ Stephen G. Haw, "The deaths of two Khaghans: a comparison of events in 1242 and 1260," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 76 (2013): 370.

²³¹ Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," 47.

²³² Haw, "The Deaths of Two Khaghans," 367.

the line of argument makes sense. However, I propose here that the simplest way to test its plausibility is to turn aside from the motives and complex relations of Mongol leaders for a moment and simply explore whether messengers could have feasibly achieved the feat of conveying the news in the given historical timeframe. That is, we must simply investigate if the message reporting the death of the khan on 11 December 1241 could have been transferred from Mongolia to Hungary and Dalmatia before the withdrawal commenced in the early spring of 1242. Thomas of Split stated that the Mongols withdrew southeastward from Dalmatia by the end of March.²³³ This timeframe allows only a few months for the message to be carried through Inner Asia in the dead of winter – and much of the territory through which would be carried was recently pacified or still in the turmoil of open resistance or at least a post-invasion social breakdown. On the surface, these do not appear as ideal conditions in which to run a timely relay race across the breadth of Eurasia.

Investigating the necessary timeframe raises questions about the state of the Mongol postal system, designated as the *jam* (Mongolian) or *yam* (Turkic) in 1242. Just as we think of the Mongol Empire as an evolving, expanding entity over the course of the thirteenth century, we must likewise view this postal system as something which progressively evolved and developed – and not uniformly. It would be overly simplistic to imagine that a series of completely functional *jam* stations popped up effortlessly and immediately in whatever region the Mongols arrived. The *jam* system of course represents a costly type of infrastructure which also depended on a degree of stability, planning, maintenance, an adequate population, etc. Scholars have long debated the origins and etymology of the term *jam* and whether the system as it existed in the Mongol Empire was essentially invented at the time or had major antecedents, models, and influences. The state of

²³³ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 300-301. Melting snow and ice are also described in the last stages of the campaign in Hungary itself.

the field at present is that the Mongol system was not the result of any direct institutional transfer, but that it nonetheless seems to owe much to Chinese models; David Morgan, for instance, thought that its origins were ultimately Chinese and that the parallels between the Mongol's postal system and that of the earlier Khitan Liao (907-1127) are too compelling to ignore, and Adam J. Silverstein more recently concluded that at least initially the Mongol system was based heavily on the *Yi* (驛) – the traditional Chinese postal system.²³⁴ As Márton Vér has recently pointed out, there were likely key Uyghur influences on the Mongol Empire's *jam* since it is demonstrable that some form of post system was existent in Central Asia since the seventh century, including in the Western Turkic Khaganate (581-657) and that these Inner Asian institutions might have even influenced the Chinese Tang Dynasty.²³⁵

From the perspective of Western scholarship, perhaps the most well-known and widely cited description pertaining to the Mongol post system is that of Marco Polo. Mentioning the “yamb” system as it radiated out from Khanbaliq (Beijing), he stated that there was a post station every twenty-five to thirty miles “along the main roads leading to the provinces” of the wider empire. These official stations had lodgings for emissaries and 400 horses in order that tired mounts could be promptly replaced with fresh ones.²³⁶ Marco Polo noted that in more rugged and remote regions the stations became more distantly spaced – about every thirty-five to forty miles and that the emperor essentially relocated people in these areas for the purpose of running the post stations. Marco Polo states that the whole network had over 10,000 stations, 200,000 post horses, and this system was essentially the greatest achievement of Khubilai Khan – the greatest in fact

²³⁴ Márton Vér, “The Origins of the Postal System of the Mongol Empire,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 22 (2016): 232-234.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 235-239.

²³⁶ Cliff, *Marco Polo, The Travels*, 128.

that any emperor could ever have. On top of the mounted couriers, there were unmounted couriers in the villages between the postal stations whose belts were covered in bells and who ran messages in three-mile relays to the next courier. By this system, Polo observed, these couriers could transmit a message to a place ten days' journey away in the space of a single day and night, and thus in ten days a message could be transmitted to a place that would ordinarily be 100 days' journey distant.²³⁷ However, Polo's most extraordinary claim is that in the cases of emergency or when a message of vital importance had to be quickly dispatched, messengers could ride 250 miles. He noted that the messengers, bandaged up and carrying a gerfalcon *paiza* as a sign that they were on an express mission, raced the twenty-five miles between each post station, sounding a horn before their arrival as a signal for the station attendants to have mounts already saddled and ready. Thus, without delay, they could mount fresh horses and continue until nightfall, having presumably reached their tenth station. If necessary, they could ride through the night and travel 300 miles in a full day.²³⁸ A letter written by an archbishop of Soltaniyeh, a city in the Ilkhanate, to the king of France in 1330 noted many of the same details of the postal system in the territory of the Yuan Dynasty specifically, but noted in somewhat less staggering figures than those provided by Polo that a message that would ordinary take three months (c. ninety days) could be transmitted in only fifteenth days – i.e. one ninth of the time.²³⁹

In casual discussions of the topic of the 1242 withdrawal, it my experience that one regularly encounters an assumption that the data European witnesses provided in the territory of China under Yuan rule should be uniformly applied across the whole Mongol Empire regarding the typical speed of couriers. In order to find out how long it would take for a message to reach its

²³⁷ Ibid., 129-130

²³⁸ Ibid., 132.

²³⁹ Henry Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, vol. 3, 92.

destination, some are quite content to simply assume that the messengers carrying the news of Ögedei's death travelled 250 miles per day, 1750 miles a week, and so they would have covered 7000 miles in February alone! In such a case, the message could have easily reached Batu before late March 1242. But any notion that we should take Marco Polo's claims for the speed of couriers in the Yuan state of the late thirteenth-century (which inherited a complex bureaucracy and infrastructure along with a large population) and apply that concept uniformly across the entire breadth of the Mongol Empire in the early 1240s seems utterly misguided. It is unrealistic to imagine that a system which was present in China in the fourteenth century was duplicated, for instance, in the area between the Aral Sea and the Volga in the early 1240s! Marco Polo specifically mentioned that a huge population and great abundance was a prerequisite to the yam system he observed in Khubilai Khan's state (i.e. China and Mongolia) and that in that context there were deserts which took many days to cross and could not support any habitation, in which case the nearest city to the desert was responsible for the postal station and providing an escort across the desert.²⁴⁰ Even in the Yuan state, there were patches of ground where the postal system had to adapt to the geographical and infrastructural realities.

There was certainly some rudimentary form of postal network in place toward the front lines of the Mongol conquest already during the invasion of Europe. The Franciscan C. de Bridia mentioned that the Mongols, while advancing on campaign, created *ad hoc* stations, leaving behind bodies of troops to form them.²⁴¹ This is an important detail because the Franciscan seems to have based his knowledge of Mongol military practices largely on the Eastern European experience which then carries the implication that such basic stations already existed deep into Mongol-

²⁴⁰ Cliff, *The Travels*, 131.

²⁴¹ Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 98.

occupied territory in 1241-42. Carpini mentioned that there were “Tartar posts” west or southwest of Kiev during his return trip in 1246-47 because his Mongol guides accompanied him beyond Kiev until “the last Tartar post” ostensibly somewhere in today’s Ukraine.²⁴² However, Carpini also described “often” sleeping in the open on the snow in the wasteland on his return journey, something that makes no sense if regular postal stations to accommodate envoys actually dotted the entire route from Karakorum to the Danube in Hungary.²⁴³

Evidence for the earliest stages of the development of a postal system in the area corresponding to the Golden Horde is found in the reign of Ögedei Khan.²⁴⁴ A discussion in the *Secret History* has Chaghadaï stating to his brother Ögedei that an effort should be made to join their postal stations together, and messengers were likewise being dispatched to Batu to request the joining of his own postal station network to that of Chaghadaï.²⁴⁵ Thus, it is evident that likely toward the latter stage of the reign of Ögedei, there was a serious effort to make the postal system function effectively across the entire expanse of the Mongol Empire including the recent conquests of Batu from 1236-42. Ögedei’s surrounding statements as well make it clear that many resources in terms of animals and subject people were being devoted to the project of creating a united and effective postal system with defined routes across the entirety of the unified empire because at that time, “the pace of riding messengers is slow and they are an affliction on the people.”²⁴⁶ Moreover,

²⁴² Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 69.

²⁴³ Ibid. Carpini mentions that the journey across the country of the Qangli, east of the Urals, was particularly harrowing, as there were almost no people and a scarcity of water. He reported many Russians had recently died of thirst in the wasteland following Prince Yaroslav II to Mongolia. Moreover, the journey across this “desert” until they reached the land of the “Bisermins,” i.e. the Syr Darya and Khwarazmian territory, was just over a month. Ibid., 58-59. William of Rubruck reported that his crossing Qangli territory took from 27 September to 1 November 1253. When there were stations, they could change horses but often three days passed with no stations so their horses would become exhausted and slow. See: Peter Jackson (trans.) and Peter Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck* (Ashgate, 2010), 140.

²⁴⁴ Baohai Dang, *The Stage Transport of the Mongol Empire* (Kunlun Press), 349.

²⁴⁵ De Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 215.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 214. Ögedei was referring to the costs incurred by local populations who had to host and supply the passing envoys who were somewhat arbitrarily showing up in their communities. The plan therefore in the reign of Ögedei

it is evident that already at that point, attempts were made to create a uniform and orderly system throughout the empire; referring to Ögedei's establishment and construction of Karakorum as his capital, Rashid al-Din mentioned that stations were established every five leagues (parasangs) between the "provinces of Cathay" (northern China) and the new capital, complete with military protection and regular arrivals of supplies.²⁴⁷ Thus, the distance between stages established by Ögedei approximates those later observed by Marco Polo – there was a standard expectation of a day's journey along the Mongol Empire's postal system that appears to have been relatively consistent through its history.

Yet, the results of this ambitious project were clearly not uniform even by the fourteenth century. Vassaf (fl. 1312) claimed to hear from reliable reports that the journey from Almaliq (modern Huocheng, Xinjiang) to Beshbaliq (Turfan and Jimsar, Xinjiang) was two weeks, while forty days were required for the much longer journey from Beshbaliq to Khanbaliq (Beijing).²⁴⁸ So again, it appears that travel times were faster in the vicinity of China where the resettlement of large populations to run and maintain the postal system was feasible. Elsewhere, the postal system existed in a much more rudimentary state. We should imagine that the plan to unify the various postal stations was proposed before 1242 (when both Ögedei and Chaghadai were still alive and when Batu's dominion had emerged). In the years following Chaghadai's recorded proposal, when linkages between the various princely *ulus* were in their infancy, the gaps in the postal network

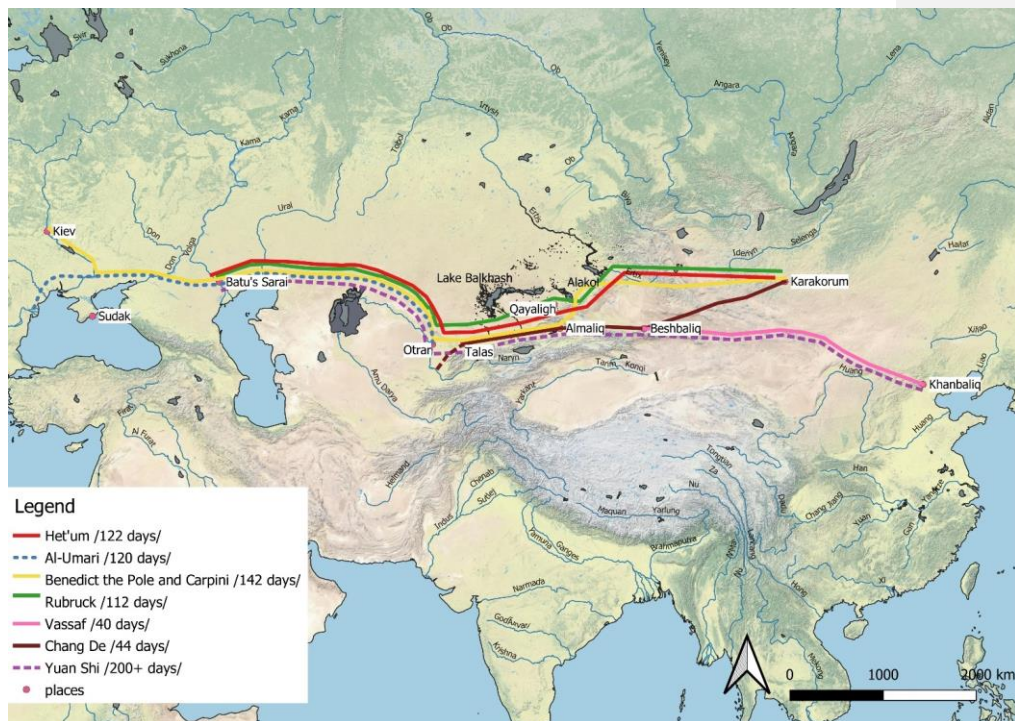
was to devise very specific routes with regularly placed jam stations for envoys and messengers. Simon of Saint-Quentin mentioned the crushing costs of maintaining passing envoys for a certain ruler in Greater Armenia, Ewag, in the 1240s after the region submitted to the Mongols. See: Jean Richard (ed.), *Histoire des Tartares* (Paris: Librairie orientale Paul Geuthner, 1965), 36.

²⁴⁷ Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 324. The parasang, a Persian measurement, could vary through the region's long recorded history, but Thackston uses "league" in his translation on the grounds that it corresponded to the league in the relevant period.

²⁴⁸ Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (trans.), *Geschichte Wassaf's* (Vienna: 1856), 24. The Hexi Corridor was used for the journey to Khanbaliq. Vassaf mentions the shorter distance between Ganzhou (Kanchow, Polo's Campçio) in Gansu and Khanbaliq was forty days, as was the distance between Karakorum and Khanbaliq. His claim of forty days of riding likewise from Gansu to Karakorum gels closely with Polo. See: Cliff, *The Travels*, 65-66.

must have been even more pronounced than in the time of Vassaf, particularly in regions like that corresponding to the future Golden Horde where no such postal system evidently existed before the Mongol conquest.

Returning to the main issue at hand, we should now explore what our sources indicate about the feasibility of messengers transmitting a report of the khan's death from Karakorum to the Danube River in Hungary in the space of 110 days at most. This timeframe is only possible in the improbable conditions that a messenger was dispatched without any consultation or hesitation immediately upon Ögedei being found dead and that the withdrawal took place more or less immediately upon the message being received by Batu in Hungary. In the dangerous conditions of a power transition, noted by Fletcher, Haw, and other scholars, it seems to me truly remarkable that the main powerbrokers in Karakorum such as Töregene would immediately allow word to be sent to Batu, an enemy of her son in command of an enormous army, that the khan was dead without any careful consultations first about how the power transition should unfold. Moreover, it seems remarkable as well that Batu and the other princes would withdraw immediately upon receiving the news without protracted discussions. Still, if we allow that the timeframe for the message to travel from Karakorum to Hungary was indeed 11 December 1241 to c. 31 March 1242, then we ought to compare the timeframes provided in our sources by those who had travelled the entire route or at least portions of it. I have compared some details from contemporary sources and arranged a map which hints that the notion that messengers could have travelled across Eurasia and reached Batu in Hungary is unlikely (Map 4).



Map 4. Travel times and routes across Eurasia in the thirteenth century as documented by contemporary sources. Map designed by Stephen Pow and László Ferenczi. Map realization using QGIS 3.4 and Inkscape 0.92: László Ferenczi.

Carpini mentioned that his own journey as a papal envoy with Mongol escorts across the Mongol Empire to Karakorum was five and a half months.²⁴⁹ This rough timeframe is confirmed by descriptions of the itinerary provided by himself and Benedict the Pole. The latter made the journey from Poland to Mongolia as Carpini's interpreter, and stated that it took more than five

²⁴⁹ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 6.

weeks to travel from a Mongol camp on the Dnieper to Batu's camp on the Volga, while travelling with appointed Mongol guides and using multiple horses for each rider.²⁵⁰ Carpini recorded leaving Batu's camp on the Volga on 8 April 1246 and travelling eastward, reaching Güyük's *orda* in Mongolia on 22 July 1246. The Mongol guides forced them to make this journey at "great speed" so that they would arrive in time for the election ceremony.²⁵¹ C. de Bridia adds some very telling details about the brutal pace that the Franciscans were forced to travel in the company of their Mongol guides: "I shudder therefore to describe or enumerate the hardships undergone by the friars [...] Oh how often they rode more than thirty Bohemian miles [c. 210 kilometers] in a single day on the Tartar's post horses [...] That they rode so far is not surprising, for as soon as their horses grew weary, even before they could begin to rest, the Tartars brought up fresh strong mounts."²⁵² Thus, making use of Mongol guides and their horses, and moving at a crushing pace, Carpini's party took about five months, or 142 days, just in terms of days they were actually travelling to cover the distance between Kiev and Mongolia.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 79-80.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 60. Carpini's journey from Batu's camp on the Volga through the Qangli desert to the Syr Darya was thirty-two days, the journey through the Khwarazm territory was from 17 May to 16 June 1246. The journey then proceeded into the Kara Khitai's Emil region and travelled along a lake, likely Alakol in eastern Kazakhstan. The party entered Naiman territory in the Altai Mountains on 28 June – a land described as mountainous and extremely cold. Ibid., 58-60. Since they reached Güyük's headquarters on 22 July, it is evident that travel was faster close to Mongolia which might suggest a better yam system had already been established closer to the Mongol homeland.

²⁵² Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 94-97. The operative term for the post horses implies horses that were taken off the specific purpose of conducting emissaries: "super equos subductitios Tartarorum..." George Painter found the claim that friars travelled thirty Bohemian miles (Bohemian mile = seven kilometers) in a day to be an impossible exaggeration and imagined "xxx" was a transcription error for xx or xv. Painter based his opinion on a single manuscript, but since then a second fourteenth-century manuscript of C. de Bridia's Tartar Relation has since been found which also records "xxx boemica miliaria." For the Swiss manuscript from 1339 and the relevant passage, see: <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/zh/P0013-2-4/377r/0/Sequence-1187>. For perspective, Rubruck implied he travelled sixty modern miles a day through Qangli territory if we rely on Marco Polo's claim for the spacing between postal stations of roughly 25 to 30 miles. See: Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 96, n. 2. It could be that the papal emissaries meant Roman miles but C. de Bridia mistakenly imagined Bohemian miles. If there was no transcription error, it is interesting to note that the daily distances would be approaching Marco Polo's claims. The fact is that the Franciscan reports are quite clear that the spacing between *yam* stations was intended to be about a day's journey – by the standards of the Mongols who were arranging the system.

There would have still been a considerable distance from Kiev to the vicinity of Esztergom on the Danube for any messenger carrying news of Ögedei's death in 1242. William of Rubruck, another Franciscan who followed in Carpini's footsteps as an envoy along much of the same northern route in 1253-54 provides some details on that leg of the journey. He stated that the territory stretching from the Don River to the Danube was two months' journey "if one rides swiftly, at the Tartars' speed."²⁵³ He also mentioned a ten-day journey between Don to the Volga Rivers.²⁵⁴ Peter Jackson has carefully laid out and precisely dated each stage of William of Rubruck's journey from Batu's camp on the Volga to Möngke Khan. He departed on 15 September 1253 and arrived at Möngke Khan's headquarters in Mongolia on 27 December. This camp was another eight-day journey from Karakorum.²⁵⁵ His Mongol guide on the journey had advised him before they set out to expect a journey of four months and such brutal cold that it could split rocks and trees.²⁵⁶ It seems that they were able to make the journey in less time than expected because they started travelling through two *jam* stations per day from 6 December in the Naiman territory after they saw heavy snow covering the mountains which alarmed the escort. Rubruck specifically mentioned that there were no habitations at all besides the *jam* stations, positioned a day's journey apart. To reach a second station they were forced to travel day and night.²⁵⁷ Elsewhere, like Carpini, he mentioned halting at night and camping in the open country as a habitual activity which evinces that the *jam* system was not a permanent fixture on certain parts of the route.²⁵⁸ Taking Rubruck's

²⁵³ Jackson and Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 105.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, xii-xiii. Rubruck's journey from the Batu's camp on the Volga to Karakorum saw 112 days of travel. He builds on the details provided by Carpini. He also went through Qangli country, then along the Syr Darya, then to Kenjek close to Talas (modern Taraz), crossing the Chu River by boat, going to Quyas (on the Ili River or near modern Huocheng, Xinjiang), and then Qayaligh (modern Koylyk). Then, like Carpini, he moved along Alaol's east shore before proceeding into the Altai (Naiman country) and coming into Mongolia. *Ibid.*, 141-148, 165.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

actual itinerary with his estimate of the expected length of the journey from the Don to the Danube, we reach an approximate journey of around 174 days. That is considerably more than the 110 days with which hypothetical messengers are supposed to have achieved this feat in the coldest part of winter. Yet, winter would undoubtedly slow the journey. Carpini's return journey from Mongolia to the Volga in the dead of winter took from 17 November 1246 to 9 May 1247. By comparison, Rubruck, making his return journey in the summer, covered the distance from Möngke's court to Batu's court in two months and ten days, though it took another fourteen days' journey to reach Sarai.²⁵⁹ There is an important nuance regarding Rubruck's rather swift return journey which is easy to overlook. Rubruck specifically mentioned that during his return trip, he journeyed by a much more northerly route because it was summer. In fact, they travelled north of Lake Balkhash, as he clarified elsewhere. Regarding the nature of the northern route, he mentioned that there was not a single town or even graves during the journey. It was necessary to keep close to a river since the only grass available would grow along the riverbanks. Moreover, the journey was extremely hazardous, and they were out of provisions and dangerously close to taxing their mounts by the time they reached other people and safety.²⁶⁰ Thus, it appears the shortcut he took in the summer was a seasonal route, made possible for use only during a limited period when there was grass along the riverbanks to sustain the mounts. It would not have been used in the winter of 1241/42.

Turning to Asian sources, they appear to corroborate the distances suggested by the friars. The *Xi shi ji* (西使記) is the personal report of a Chinese envoy of Möngke Khan, Chang De (常德), regarding his westward journey as an ambassador to Hülegü in 1259. It is instructive because from Karakorum to Beshbaliq, Almaliq, and Emil, he undoubtedly followed a similar route to that

²⁵⁹ Pow, "Deep ditches," 20.

²⁶⁰ Jackson and Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William Rubruck*, 254. See especially n. 2.

Carpini and Rubruck used. The Chinese emissary describes Chinese settlers, route guards, and townspeople along the route in certain places between the points. It mentions that he departed Karakorum on 13 February, obviously taking the post for emissaries. He reached Talas (modern Taraz near the border of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) on 22 March and the Syr Darya by 28 March.²⁶¹ He did mention that there were post stations having glass windows in that area so the postal system was quite functional and it seems to be that the infrastructure of the route had been augmented by the likely resettlement of some of the Mongol Empire's Chinese subjects on this important route. He also mentioned that the Kyrgyz actually using sledges pulled by dogs and another nearby group along the route used sledges pulled by horses in the winter moving from station to station quite quickly.²⁶² So it seems there were possible innovations that emerged to make movement along the postal route efficient in winter. Nonetheless, we still encounter the situation that it took this emissary travelling in winter on extremely important business (as envoy from Möngke to his brother in charge of operations in Western Asia) a month and a half (forty-four days) to arrive only at the Syr Darya stage of the route, some distance southwest of Lake Balkash and considerably east of the Aral Sea in the area of Tashkent and the modern Kazakh-Uzbek border. There was still a great journey to go if one were then continuing to Hungary.

The general timeframe in the 1259 emissary's report is augmented by another important official document composed from Yuan records – namely, the biography of Jochi, Chinggis Khan's eldest son, found in the *Yuan Shi* in juan 117. Though useless as a biography, it contains a vital piece of information about the travel time between the Yuan state based at Khanbaliq (Beijing) and the Golden Horde's territory. It states that traveling urgently by postal relay horses, the journey

²⁶¹ Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, vol. 1, 122-130.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 129.

between the Yuan capital city (modern Beijing) and the Jochid realm (likely Sarai) was more than 200 days.²⁶³ Of course, this passage describes a greater distance than from the starting point of Karakorum, but we can still see that such a substantial period was required even to reach Sarai along the official postal route for envoys that it makes the supposed feat of messengers in 1241-42 seem increasingly doubtful.

Building on forty-four-day journey to the Syr Darya in the heyday of the unified Mongol Empire's *jam* system described by Chang De in 1259, we can note the report of the Syrian historian, Al-Umari (1300-1349), that it took four months to travel from the Syr Darya to the Danube. So, if we add forty-four days to the four months, we end up with roughly a 164-day journey which seems to corroborate William of Rubruck's own claims on travel times for a similar distance (c. 174 days). Of that journey, al-Umari mentions, the travel time from the Dniester to the Danube was one month.²⁶⁴ He elsewhere recorded that from the Sea of Marmara in the vicinity of Constantinople to the Irtysh River was a six-month journey according to another informant.²⁶⁵ Ibn Arabshah (1389-1450) recorded the expected time for another specific journey, noting that the journey by wagons from Khorezm (Urgench) to Crimea was three months (c. 90 days).²⁶⁶ The journey of King Het'um of Lesser Armenia serves as another rough approximation of the expected travel times. He

²⁶³ The exact statement reads as follows: 術赤者，太祖長子也。國初，以親王分封西北。其地極遠，去京師數萬里，驛騎急行二百餘日，方達京師，以故其地郡邑風俗皆莫得而詳焉。- "Jochi was Taizu's [Chinggis Khan] eldest son. At the inception of the empire, this prince was conferred the northwest as his enfeoffed territory. His lands are extremely far away; travelling from Jingshi [modern Beijing] is a distance/journey of tens of thousands of li. Urgent riding on relay station horses [the good horses supplied for the purpose of relaying messengers] takes more than 200 days. It is so far away from Jingshi that the place's commanderies, towns, and customs are not known in detail." (My translation). Hamdallah Mustawfi (1281-1349) described "Khazar" as the chief city of the Golden Horde on the northern bank of the Caspian, possibly Samandar, as more important than the old and newer Sarai. See: Guy Le Strange (trans.), *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulub* (Leyden: Brill, 1919), 231, 251. Perhaps travel was somewhat slower in the fourteenth century owing to the rivalries and wars amongst khanates.

²⁶⁴ Klaus Lech (trans.), *Das mongolische Weltreich, Al-'Umari's Darstellung der mongolischen Reiche in seinem Werk Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār* (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1968), 142.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁶⁶ J. H. Sanders (trans.), *Tamerlane: or Timur the Great Amīr, from the Arabic Life by Ahmed ibn Arabshah* (London: Luzac & Co., 1936), 77.

left Batu's camp at the Volga on 13 May 1254 and reached Möngke Khan's court on 13 September.²⁶⁷

The famed Moroccan traveler and merchant, Ibn Battuta (1304-1369), stated that the journey across the steppe of the *Dasht-i-Qipchaq* was six months by wagon. He did not define any precise start and endpoint, but he mentioned that three months of that journey was in the realm of Özbeg Khan (r. 1313-1341), i.e. the Golden Horde, and three months "in those of other princes."²⁶⁸ That could imply he was describing the travel time across much of the Eurasian steppe from the modern Ukraine to Mongolia. Friar John of Montecorvino who proceeded toward China and resided in Khanbaliq (Beijing) as a missionary wrote back to the Church establishment in Europe in 1305 that for any friars being sent there, the journey from Crimea ("the land of the Goths") along the northern route of official envoys ("letter carriers") from the Golden Horde was safest and would require "five or six months."²⁶⁹ A guide for European merchants engaged in commerce far outside of Europe, the mercantile handbook of Francesco Pegolotti, dating anywhere from 1335 to 1343, recorded that it took eight months to travel from Tana to Khanbaliq by wagons.²⁷⁰ From these examples, it would appear that for merchants the route was longer than for those taking the route of envoys, either because they were travelling with wagons loaded with merchandise or perhaps other factors were at play.

²⁶⁷ J.A. Boyle, "The Journey of Het'um I, King of Little Armenia, to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke," *Central Asiatic Journal* 9:3 (1964): 180-181. This would be 122 days. The only details provided are that he crossed the Ural River and came to halfway point between Batu and Möngke's territory in the Chu River valley before crossing the Irtysh River into Mongolia.

²⁶⁸ H.A.R. Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, vol. 2 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1962), 470.

²⁶⁹ Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, vol. 3, 48. This would be the land route from Tana in the Crimea to Sarai and on to Mongolia and China.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, n. 2. Another manual related closely Pegolotti but containing additional details is that of the so-called "Tuscan Anonymous" author, whose work likewise dates to the first of the thirteenth century. See: R. H. Bautier, *Points de vue sur les relations économiques des Occidentaux avec les pays d'Orient, au Moyen Age // Sociétés et compagnies de commerce en Orient et dans l'Océan Indien* (Paris: École pratique des hautes études, 1970), 315-316.

Regarding al-Umari's claims, they likely originated from informants engaged in commerce and therefore transporting goods as well; a messenger could likely cover the distance between the Dniester and Danube in less than two months on roads. In Europe there were roads and a long-established medieval trade network. A later but illustrative case of the maximum speed of land travel using horses in Europe is Charles XII of Sweden's rapid journey from Târgoviște on the Ottoman Empire's frontier to Stralsund in Pomerania in 1714. This journey of about "300 leagues" (c. 1666 kilometers) was accomplished in sixteen days and Voltaire tells us that Charles and his single companion rode all day and slept in a coach that continued the journey through the nights so that they were constantly moving.²⁷¹ Voltaire's claim that they never stopped is doubtful – a commemorative plaque on a building in Budapest marks a location where Charles XII received accommodation – but assuming he was mostly travelling day and night, he still averaged something over 100 kilometers per day and arrived with legs so swollen that his boots had to be cut off. It is an impressive feat but one that is illustrative of the physical limitations of land travel with horses. Imagining a messenger sustaining a pace like that for months on end even through uninhabited tracts of Inner Asia seems unrealistic.

In winter, travel seems to have been greatly impeded. John of Marignolli, an envoy of the Avignon pope who travelled to China in the 1330s, did not provide any useful information regarding the travel time from Tana to Khanbaliq, but he did mention that he his embassy waited out the winter in Sarai, hosted by the Golden Horde's Özbek Khan, before proceeding eastward in more favorable conditions.²⁷² Marco Polo mentioned that travel was difficult and much slower in Inner Asia during the winter.²⁷³ Describing travel around the Syr Darya River in the midwinter of

²⁷¹ Winifred Todhunter, trans., Voltaire's History of Charles XII King of Sweden (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1908), 289-291.

²⁷² Ibid., 210.

²⁷³ Pow, "Deep ditches," 20.

922, Ibn Fadlan stated that they encountered “a land which made us think a gate to the cold of hell had opened up” – a cold which killed camels in the night, froze his cheek to a pillow, and split rocks and the ground apart from its intensity.²⁷⁴ The sources are replete with references to the Mongols displaying a high degree of endurance and fortitude in difficult conditions, and their horses were inured to the cold and foraged in the snow, but they still had to operate within the constraints of animal physiology; travelling at an extremely rapid pace for prolonged lengths in the extreme cold and in areas with no inhabitants or infrastructural support would be taxing enough to place both the humans and their animals in life-threatening danger.²⁷⁵ There are also limits to how fast horses can travel. Carpini states that he and his party went as fast as the horses could trot on their journey to Mongolia. They still took considerably longer than the amount of time between Ögedei’s death and Batu’s troops turning eastward from Hungary.

All the above is directed to making the point that the timeframe seems impossibly short for a report of Ögedei Khan’s death in Mongolia to reach Batu’s forces campaigning west of the Danube in Hungary and even along the Dalmatian Coast in early 1242. A wide range of sources from Europe and Asia that provide information on the travel times seem to loosely corroborate each other on details. We see no sources that specifically indicate the northern route was ever traversed in as short a time as three or four months, but we find many accounts that describe longer timeframes. Marco Polo’s claims would make it possible but applying his regional observations to the entire empire in 1242 would be misguided. If C. de Bridia were correct that Carpini’s party travelled 210 kilometers per day, then their journey would not have taken over five months.

²⁷⁴ Stone and Lunde, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 8-9.

²⁷⁵ Rubruck related that on his return journey in the summer between Möngke and Batu’s realm through a much more northerly latitude, it was “very hazardous” because their mounts were exhausted, and they could find no people to provide provisions. They had to stick close to rivers as their banks often had the only available grass. Even from Batu’s summer camp south to Sarai, there was only one village, and they almost died of thirst at one point, encountering no other people for five days. Jackson and Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 254,259.

Broadly, one could say that for the journey from Mongolia to the fringes of Europe, even for those travelling along the route as messengers, a timeframe approaching half a year could be expected even if one were riding, as Rubruck noted, “as the Tartars ride.”

This makes a statement found in a section of Rashid al-Din’s work that stems from a Mongolian original document especially persuasive. It notes that when Batu and his forces turned eastward and moved from Hungary and back into the Pontic Steppe in 1242, news of the death of the great khan had not yet reached them.²⁷⁶ Moreover, it seems that when Ögedei died, his wives immediately became embroiled in a power struggle. Initially power was placed in the hands of Möge Khatun, but her rival, Töregene, being much shrewder than her rival took power in the interregnum and then systematically targeted her enemies, according to Juvaini. He does note that Töregene did send messengers “to the princes, i.e. the brothers and nephews of Qa’an,” but it seems that only considerably later in 1243-44 did she call a quriltai of the princes.²⁷⁷ By the time Juvaini’s former superior in Khwarazm heard about the death of the khan while on the road to Karakorum, he simultaneously heard that the government had descended into chaos.²⁷⁸ The biography of Yelü Chucai supports this account of instability in the immediate aftermath of Ögedei’s death with Töregene almost fleeing the court out of fear of a coup in the spring of 1243.²⁷⁹ In this situation, one can imagine that caution was necessary and Töregene probably did not immediately dispatch messengers to the princes without some period for deliberation. As for Batu

²⁷⁶ Boyle, *Successors*, 71; Pow, “Deep ditches,” 16-17.

²⁷⁷ Boyle, *The World Conqueror*, 240, 244. This dating is supported by the biography of Sübe’etei in the *Yuan Shi* which records that Batu was refusing to attend the quriltai that was called in 1243. See: Pow and Liao, “Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction,” 67-68.

²⁷⁸ Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 502-504. Juvaini knew Körgüz well and described his receiving news of the death of Ögedei while on his way to stand trial in Chaghadai’s orda. A clue that this event happened around 1243 or so might be Juvaini’s use of an epithet for Chaghadai’s court rather than using his personal name might hint that the last of Chinggis Khan’s four sons by Börte was no longer alive at the time and his name was taboo.

²⁷⁹ Geoff Humble, trans. “*Yuanshi* biography of Yelü Chucai, *Yuanshi* 146.3455-65,” 12.

and his troops, they took a meandering route eastward, first diverted from Hungary southeastward into the Balkans and then made their way into the area of Caucasus not arriving to the Volga until the end of 1243; this dating is supported by the *Yuan Shi* biography of Sübe'etei which mentions that Batu and the other princes (presumably those mainly Jochid princes who were taking part in his entire campaign) met at the Volga in 1244.²⁸⁰ This certainly does not suggest Batu or others were hurrying back to Mongolia in 1242, nor does it suggest they were ordered to do so.

There are larger circumstances as well that challenge the explanation offered by Carpini. The notion that the Mongols were obligated to “rest from battle” until a new khan was elected is challenged by the documented events that followed in the interregnum period (1242-46). The Mongols launched two offensive-es against the Song Dynasty in the period in 1242 and 1245.²⁸¹ Baiju Noyan also launched a major invasion of Anatolia and won a major victory over the Seljuks of Rum in 1243 and gained their submission. This event ranks among their major successes with the Kingdom of Lesser Armenia submitting shortly afterwards as a result.²⁸² An army under Yasa'ur Noyan drove into Syria the following year and demanded the submission of various Ayyubid rulers. Bohemond V of Antioch also received a demand to dismantle his fortifications.²⁸³ Yasa'ur's army withdrew from the region without attempting any sieges but it seems clear that the Mongol conquests were very much continuing unabated. Scholars have used the parallel of Hulegu's withdrawal from Syria in 1260 following the death of Möngke Khan as evidence that there was a traditional obligation or precedent for Chinggisid princes to disrupt campaigns and

²⁸⁰ Boyle, *Successors*, 71-72; Pow and Liao, “Subutai,” 63, 68.

²⁸¹ Waltraut Abramowski “Die chinesischen Annalen von Ögödei and Güyük: Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des Yüan-shih,” *Zentralasiatische Studien* 10 (1976): 135-136.

²⁸² Richard, *Histoire de Tartares*, 78-80, 86-87; Robert Bedrosian (trans.), *Kirakos Gandzakets'i. History of the Armenians* (New York: Sources of the Armenian Tradition, 1986), 84-85. Kirakos suggests that Baiju replaced Chormaqan who had died and immediately launched his campaign against the Seljuks in 1242-43.

²⁸³ Jean Richard, *Au-delà de la Perse et de l'Arménie* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 63-64; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 74.

return on the death of a khan. However, Hulegu's own words to Louis IX of France in 1262 do not support that argument. He stated that he was only performing an annual customary return to the highlands of Mughan when the Mamluks emerged from Egypt and defeated the rump force he left in the region at Ayn Jalut.²⁸⁴ Scholars might doubt the Mongol leader's own testimony, suspecting an ulterior motive in his correspondence with another ruler, but the Armenian historian and cleric, Vardan Arevelc'i, separately confirmed that it was in fact Hulegu's custom to pass the winters in Mughan.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, I cannot find any evidence that Hulegu returned to Mongolia for an election or ever indicated the intention to do so.

In summary, the preceding discussion of travel times does not on its own prove that a messenger did not reach Batu before the withdrawal. It only demonstrates that the sources which describe travel along the northern route specifically do not support the view that such a feat was possible. Taking this point together with Rashid al-Din's claim that Batu did not know the khan was dead, and the description of the Mongols' meandering exit from Europe and slow return to the Volga, it seems probable that they were already withdrawing before they received any news. When faced with the secrecy and silence of the Mongol decision makers, historians are forced to read into their mysterious actions like medieval authors, attempting to situate certain activities within a larger context to infer motivations. It is easy in that situation to draw false connections or assume causation when we might be only witnessing correlation. The real and substantiated recall of Güyük was a strange event and possibly related to the tensions erupting between him and Batu. These tensions worsened in the interregnum period and during Güyük's reign (r. 1246-48) so that

²⁸⁴ Richard, *Au-deal de la Perse*, 181; Malcolm Barber, *Letters from the East: Crusaders, Pilgrims and Settlers in the 12th-13th Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 156.

²⁸⁵ R. Thomson (trans.), "The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arevelc'i," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989): 218.

civil war was only narrowly averted by his timely death.²⁸⁶ It could be that Ögedei's serious illnesses and declining health in his last years played a role in recalling Güyük and that Batu and others were aware of his health situation – something which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. The political theory is compelling, but a range of sources do not support the old wisdom of Grousset regarding the withdrawal in 1242.

²⁸⁶ Boyle, *Successors*, 120-121. Rashid al-Din attributed the khan's death to a chronic illness.

Chapter 3: Alternative Scholarly Explanations

3.1 Preliminary Discussion

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Greg S. Rogers' article noted four broad theories for the 1242 withdrawal.²⁸⁷ Having discussed the predominant and most common one, namely the "political theory," in the last chapter, the present chapter will continue with the next two types of explanation, attempting to answer two overarching questions surrounding these theories. Both broad theories discussed here were first suggested by leading scholars several decades ago but have been further developed in very recent years by several of the preeminent scholars working today on the Mongol Empire and the history of Mongol-European relations.

1. Is it plausible that environmental and ecological factors played the deciding role?

Here the merits and problems with Denis Sinor's **geographical theory** (1972), and Ulf Büntgen and Nicola Di Cosmo's **environmental hypothesis** (2016) for the withdrawal will be discussed.²⁸⁸

2. Was permanent conquest the purpose of the 1241-42 invasion of Europe? Here the **gradual conquest theory**,²⁸⁹ as it was termed by Rogers, will be investigated, looking at the possibility that Batu's invasion of Hungary might have been intended as a simple plundering raid, a punitive expedition of the type found in the Chinese imperial tradition, or whether it was an initial softening up of Hungary's defenses to pave the way for a future long-term occupation.

²⁸⁷ Rogers, "An Examination," 3-26.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 10-11, 18-19; Büntgen and Di Cosmo, "Climatic and Environmental Aspects," 1-9.

²⁸⁹ Rogers, "An Examination," 14-15, 20; Pow, "Deep Ditches," 34-41.

3.2 Is it plausible that environmental and ecological factors played the decisive role in the Mongol withdrawal from Europe?²⁹⁰

Owing to the problems and lasting uncertainties surrounding the “political theory,” environmental theories proposed by prominent scholars have received consideration since the early seventies. In an article published in 1972, which has gone on to exercise some influence on the field of Mongol history as far as the question of the 1242 withdrawal is concerned, Denis Sinor expressed doubts about the standard explanation. He noted that if the great khan’s death required the princes to return to Mongolia for the election of a new khan, then it was a serious problem that our available sources make it clear that Batu – the commander of the entire westward campaign and the senior prince of the entire dynasty – never returned to Mongolia to take part in the election of a successor.²⁹¹ In fact, he assiduously avoided returning to Mongolia using an illness as a pretext; a source certainly originating from a Mongol point of view indicates that in 1243 he openly expressed a desire not to attend the *quriltai* to choose the next khan and Sübe’etei attempted to persuade him of his obligation, owing to his senior role in the princely hierarchy, to take part.²⁹² This is an important point which forms parts of my own arguments.

As an alternative explanation, Sinor made the argument that the Great Hungarian Plain simply had insufficient pasturage for the Mongols’ horse needs, and therefore the Carpathian Basin was unsuitable for long-term occupation by nomadic armies. In fact, he made a calculation to show

²⁹⁰ The content of the following section relies heavily, though far from entirely, on two of my earlier publications: Stephen Pow, “Climatic and Environmental Limiting Factors in the Mongol Empire’s Westward Expansion: Exploring Causes for the Mongol Withdrawal from Hungary in 1242,” in *Socio-Environmental Dynamics along the Historic Silk Road*, eds. L. Yang, H.R. Bork, X. Fang, and S. Mischke (Heidelberg: Springer, 2019), 301-321. See also my case study on the withdrawal in: Stephen Pow and Yehoshua Frenkel, “The Use of Environmental-Climatic Theories to Explain the Expansion and Contraction of the Saljuq and Mongol Empires: Are We Getting ‘Warm’ or ‘Cold’?” In *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU, Vol. 25*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz, Kyra Lyublyanovics, and Ágnes Drosztmér (Budapest: CEU Press/Archaeolingua, 2019), 29-52.

²⁹¹ Denis Sinor, “Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History,” *Oriens Extremus* 19 (1972): 181 n. 44.

²⁹² Boyle, *Successors*, 120; Pow and Liao, “Subutai,” 68. This latter point is useful for indicating that Sübe’etei was still in Batu’s service likely west of the Volga in 1243. Like Batu, he had not rushed back to Mongolia in 1242.

that even a modest Mongol army could not have been sustained in Hungary – and this must have been the cause for the withdrawal. Though Sinor’s discussion of the invasion of Hungary has had an enduring impression on at least the English-language scholarship touching on the Mongol role in Europe,²⁹³ he dealt with it rather briefly, only the last three pages of the article discussing his argument for the driver behind the withdrawal. In the argument’s first iteration, Sinor argued that the Great Hungarian Plain could support a herd of 205,920 horses, and assuming three horses per soldier, that meant the entire area could support a maximum of 68,640 occupying troops.²⁹⁴ Thus, the Carpathian Basin had insufficient pasturage to support an occupation by a nomadic superpower, quite unlike Mongolia which had adequate pastures for an almost unlimited supply of horses. This difference between the two regions allowed nomadic forces north of China to have more success in conquering and ruling China throughout the centuries, whereas the successes of the Huns and Avars in Europe were modest owing to their inability to muster enormous cavalry forces. Sinor viewed it as a vindication of his overarching viewpoint that the Magyars who did stay in the Carpathian Basin gradually gave up their nomadic lifestyle and adopted the sedentary ways of their neighbors – an indication that the region was incapable of sustaining a nomadic power.²⁹⁵ The Mongol withdrawal in 1242 was but one dramatic indication of what Sinor saw as a general trend.

Though it underwent changes, Sinor persisted with this explanation for decades even up to the very end of his lengthy career.²⁹⁶ His theory was an interesting combination of very broad comparative study of European and Asian interactions with nomads over the long term, hinging on a calculation on Hungary’s carrying capacity. While this equation seemed too precise to be

²⁹³ In Peter Jackson’s important monograph, *The Mongols and the West*, this theory features prominently among the various explanations for the withdrawal. See: Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 72.

²⁹⁴ Denis Sinor, “Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History,” *Oriens Extremus* 19 (1972): 182.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

²⁹⁶ Denis Sinor, “The Mongols in the West,” *Journal of Asian History* 33.1 (1999): 19-20. Greg S. Rogers refers to Sinor’s explanation as a “geographic theory,” but calling it an “ecological theory” is more appropriate in my view.

credible among many scholars, the overarching theory nevertheless gained support among some leading experts on the Mongol Empire since its appearance. David Morgan, for instance, stated that although the exact details seemed doubtful, Sinor's theory still "provides a much more satisfactory explanation of the Mongols' precipitate and permanent withdrawal."²⁹⁷ Others like Joseph Fletcher rejected it owing to doubts that the Mongols ever made their conquests on the basis of such sober calculations as those related to an area's carrying capacity. Sufficient pasture and climate factors did not stop the Mongols from "mounting campaigns on horseback through the rice paddies of south China and Vietnam or on elephants into Burma, and lack of fodder did not deter them from launching naval expeditions against Japan and Indonesia."²⁹⁸ Charles Halperin too thought that Mongol victories and conquests, often in areas not suited to nomadic pastoralism, were the real driver behind their continued conquests, and so he doubted that the geographical situation of Hungary played a role in the withdrawal.²⁹⁹

Much more recently, Büntgen and Di Cosmo proposed a novel combination of paleoclimatic data with documentary evidence to reach an explanation. The results of their findings formed the basis of their "environmental hypothesis" which ascribes the Mongol withdrawal in 1242 to "a general syndrome in which the effectiveness of nomadic armies was constrained by a short-term, regional-scale climate fluctuation." With dendroclimatological evidence, they were able to represent a weather situation in Hungary which saw above-average temperatures from 1238-1241 followed by a sudden fluctuation to unusually cold and rainy conditions in early 1242. Owing in part to landscape and soil conditions, "marshy terrain across the Hungarian plain most

²⁹⁷ David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 124-125.

²⁹⁸ Fletcher, "Ecological and Social," 47.

²⁹⁹ Halperin, *Russia and Golden Horde* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1984), 47-48.

likely reduced pastureland and decreased mobility” for the Mongols, bringing about their decision to withdraw.³⁰⁰

The 2016 article attracted a great deal of international media attention soon after its publication, with the findings being discussed in ordinary news stories and popular scientific websites, often announcing the resolution of a centuries-old historical mystery. Nicola Di Cosmo clarified that the climate may have been one of several factors at play; its being the major driver behind the Mongol withdrawal did not preclude other factors playing a role in the decision. Nonetheless, he compared the weather’s role in Batu’s campaign in Hungary with the Russian winter’s effect on Napoleon’s disastrous campaign in 1812, asserting that to ignore it is “like saying the winter in Russia had no effect on Napoleon’s army.”³⁰¹

Scholars in Hungary from a variety of disciplines, including archaeology and landscape ecology, raised questions regarding the environmental hypothesis, stemming from paleoclimatic, archaeological, and historical evidence of the invasion, and we collaborated on a response.³⁰² Büntgen and Di Cosmo’s investigation of the relationship between reconstructed weather patterns and documentary evidence was justified; climate exerted important effects on steppe-based societies and polities. Yet, we felt that the evidence could have led to an opposite conclusion than that reached by the authors – namely, that there is little evidence that climate was a major factor in the Mongol decision to withdraw. Our paper focused on specific aspects of their arguments that the authors had made. We argued that above-average rainfalls should have been beneficial for pasturage. Besides textual evidence, coin hoards suggest the greatest Mongol impact was in the

³⁰⁰ Büntgen and Di Cosmo, “Climatic and Environmental Aspects of the Mongol Withdrawal,” 1-9.

³⁰¹ Conor Gearin, “Mongol hordes gave up on conquering Europe due to wet weather,” *New Scientist*, May 26, 2016.

³⁰² Zsolt Pinke, László Ferenczi, Beatrix F. Romhányi, József Laszlovszky, and Stephen Pow, “Climate of doubt: a re-evaluation of Büntgen and Di Cosmo’s environmental hypothesis for the Mongol withdrawal from Hungary, 1242 CE,” *Scientific Reports* 7 (2017): 1-6.

low-lying Great Hungarian Plain – where such evidence should be limited if flooding had seriously impeded Mongol mobility during their occupation.³⁰³ The historical documents from the time seem virtually silent on climate issues specifically working against the Mongols. When faced with the range of data, our article concluded that the Mongol withdrawal in 1242 likely was not primarily the result of environmental and climatic drivers. Simultaneously to the publication of our work, Büntgen and Di Cosmo published a further brief reply, offering responses to five main arguments we made, while reiterating the importance of focusing on the very specific set of data and circumstances pertaining to 1242 when assessing the withdrawal.³⁰⁴

It must be stressed that both geographical-environmental-climatic theories need not be viewed as shades of the same explanation. Their arguments follow a different methodology and suggest different causes, relying on very distinct sets of evidence. However, before discussing each of the two theories in turn, it is useful to note that while they differ in their underlying argument, there are four overarching issues which apply to both and make it difficult to accept either of them offhand. Firstly, both theories seem to underestimate the carrying capacity and resilience of the Carpathian Basin, particularly as a grass-producing region, which is problematic for arguments that rest on the notion that the Mongols' herds had insufficient pasturage during the invasion. Secondly, they both suffer from having very little primary source evidence which supports the view that environmental or climate issues were a crucial factor in the events of 1241-42. There is

³⁰³ For example, see: Balázs Nagy, "Tatárjárás kori pénzleletek a Dél-Dunántúlról," in *Fiatal Középkorok Régészeti VI. Konferenciájának Tanulmánykötete*, Csilla Szöllősy and Krisztián Pokrovenszki (eds.) (Székesfehérvár: Szent István Király Múzeum, 2015), 277–285; György V. Székely, "Tatárjárás és numizmatika – Egy történelmi katasztrófa pénzforgalmi aspektusai," in "*Carmen miserabile*" *A tatárjárás magyarországi emlékei. Tanulmányok Pálóczi Horváth András 70. születésnapja tiszteletére*, Szabolcs Rosta and György V. Székely (eds.) (Kecskemét: Kecskeméti Katona József Múzeum, 2014), 331–344; Laszlovsky, Pow, Pusztai, "Reconstructing the Battle of Muhi," 35–37.

³⁰⁴ Ulf Büntgen and Nicola Di Cosmo, "Reply to 'Climate of doubt: a re-evaluation of Büntgen and Di Cosmo's environmental hypothesis for the Mongol withdrawal from Hungary, 1242 CE,'" *Scientific Reports* (2017): doi:10.1038/s41598-017-12126-8.

almost a total silence on any such issues in relevant sources is not something which can be attributed to a tendency of medieval authors to simply overlook or ignore any such phenomena. Thirdly, the notion that the environment of Hungary could provide a unique and insurmountable challenge to the Mongols requires us to overlook the great challenges presented by the environment and climate of Mongolia and Inner Asia, the homelands from which they emerged and initiated their conquests, especially if it is being argued that climatic extremes or seasonal mud compelled Batu to call off the campaign. Fourthly, by arguing that the Mongol commanders *realized* that Hungary was unsuitable for conquest, both arguments overlook the subsequent decades of attacks, calls for Europe's submission, proposals for military alliances, and successful Mongol rule in parts of southeastern Europe which suggest that they still showed an interest in dominating Europe after 1242. It is an indefensible though persistent canard that the withdrawal signalled the end of Mongol aggression against Europe. In the following sections, I will look at the specific issues with each of the two theories in turn.

3.2.1. Criticisms of Sinor's Geographical Theory

As was mentioned, Sinor's theory immediately attracted both supporters and detractors and has done so since its inception. However, I see two major problems specifically related to it. One is that Sinor only provided a single statement in a primary source that directly supported his hypothesis. Namely, there is a brief mention in the account of Thomas of Split that the Mongol leader Qadan took only a portion of his full army in Croatia to approach Split because, it being the beginning of March and still bitterly cold, there was not sufficient grass for all their horses.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ Damir Karbić, Olga Perić, and James Ross Sweeney (trans.). *Thomas of Split, History of the Bishops of Salona and Split* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006), 298-299. The relevant statement reads: "*quia non erant herbe pro toto equitatu sufficientes.*"

Sinor seemed to pass over the fact that the author of this statement clarified that the shortage pertained to a specific seasonal pattern rather than being a simple inadequacy of pasturage *per se*. Moreover, a problem that the Mongols encountered on an occasion in the rugged coastal strip near Split on the Adriatic Coast is not particularly useful for understanding what was happening in the stretches of grassland in Hungary itself.

Sinor's argument focused on the number of animals that could be supported in the normal conditions of the country, but his representation of normal conditions was inconsistent. That is, his argument underwent a stark transformation over three decades. To best highlight its inconsistency, one can compare his theory in 1972 to another statement on it which he made in 1999 toward the end of a long and storied career. In "Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History," where his theory first appeared, Sinor wrote the following which has been slightly abridged from the original for clarity:

The Hungarian Plain (Alföld) is rightly considered the westernmost part of the great Eurasian steppe belt [...] the so-called Nagy Alföld covers approximately 100,000 km², i.e. 24,710,400 acres. [...] Both in Mongolia and in the U.S.A. five sheep or goats are considered the equivalent of one "animal unit", i.e. one head of cattle, horse or camel. The Mongol livestock of 1918 counted thus approximately 3,895,200 animal units. If for the sake of simplicity, we estimate the size of the Hungarian range as being 1/12 that of Mongolia we must reckon that it had a carrying capacity of about 322,933 animal units. [...] A fairly productive grass range has a grazing capacity of 10 acres per animal month or, in other words, a range area of 120 acres is needed to support one horse for one year. On this basis, the Hungarian Alföld could support no more than 205,920 animal units as compared to over 2,500,000 of the Mongol grazing lands. Counting only three horses per Mongol horseman, the Hungarian range could provide for the mounts of only 68,640 warriors on the impossible condition that no other animals were using the pastures [...] the Hungarian range was unable to provision a nomad "superpower".³⁰⁶

If we compare that to the following statement which Denis Sinor made in his 1999-dated article, "The Mongols in the West," we see some rather dramatic shifting of the data:

³⁰⁶ Denis Sinor, "Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History," *Oriens Extremus* 19 (1972): 181-182.

The military strength of the great nomad empires, and that of the Mongols in particular, rested on their cavalry and on a virtually inexhaustible supply of horses [...] There is evidence that each warrior had at least three or four horses, but Marco Polo spoke of about eighteen mounts for each man! Taking into consideration the losses suffered by the Mongols we may count with, say, 100,000 men occupying Hungary who would then need, on a conservative estimate, at least some 400,000 horses. It has been suggested that about 42,000 square kilometers (10,378,425 acres) can or could be used as grazing land. Estimates of grazing or carrying capacity of ranges vary widely but on the assumption that at that time about 25 acres were needed to support one horse for one year, the carrying capacity of the Hungarian range must be set at 415,136 animal units. On the completely unrealistic condition that no other animals were using these pastures, and counting five horses per Mongol horseman, the Hungarian range could provide for the mounts of 83,027 warriors, clearly far below the strength of the Mongol army. [...] This is the reason why in the spring of 1242 the Mongols withdrew from devastated, overgrazed Hungary to the abundant pastures of the steppe.³⁰⁷

In 1999, he reiterated the same driver behind the Mongol withdrawal, but the numbers and statistics that undergirded his conclusion appear troublingly protean to any reader. The Carpathian Basin – which Sinor presumed to be the only grassland which the Mongols would occupy in Hungary and Europe – had a maximum carrying capacity of 68,640 troops in his initial estimate and 83,027 roughly three decades later when he revisited his theory. Between the former and latter appearances of the theory, the Great Hungarian Plain's available pasturage appears to have decreased by more than half of its area (100,000 to 42,000 km²), while the pasturage needs of horses likewise decreased by about 80%. It almost comes out in the wash, however, because each Mongol warrior would need five horses in 1999 compared to the three that he would require in 1972.

What accounts for the wild fluctuations of the inputs between his two papers? It can appear that Sinor was determined to reach a conclusion and the numbers were essentially filler. That is, he was determined to confirm a hypothesis and the conclusion took precedent over the data provided to support it. Indeed, the fluctuations are so great that the data inserted into the equation

³⁰⁷ Denis Sinor, "The Mongols in the West," *Journal of Asian History* 33.1 (1999): 19-20.

can seem irrelevant, making the results at least questionable. But what, then, could have been Sinor's motivation to keep the maximum number of Mongols at this range (c. 68,000-84,000) rather than let it increase substantially with the revised calculation of 1999 which noted a much lower pasturage requirement per horse than we see in the 1972 version? I suppose that it might have been related to existing estimates in scholarly literature for the size of the Mongol army which invaded Europe. In the literature we often read that 135,000 Mongol troops were poised to invade Europe based on the testimony of Friar Julian who heard these figures when he was in northeastern Russia very shortly before the massive Mongol attack commenced there in 1237-38.³⁰⁸ Göckenjan and Sweeney noted that 135,000 referred to the core of Mongol cavalry whereas Julian's additional figure of 260,000 slaves referred to troops levied from subjugated and defeated populations. In the view of these two scholars, Julian's figures were reliable based on comparison with data in the Secret History and Chinese sources, but the total figure of c. 400,000 referred to the full strength of the Mongol Empire's armies rather than just those taking part in the Western Campaign against Russia and later Europe.³⁰⁹ Göckenjan supposed that roughly 130,000 troops, a third of empire's total forces, participated in Batu's Western Campaign; George Vernadsky earlier estimated 120,000 and V.V. Kargalov estimated between 120,000 and 140,000.³¹⁰ Perhaps Sinor was striving to demonstrate that Hungary's grasslands would not allow a force of nomadic cavalry troops even approaching these prior estimates. If he could show that fewer Mongols could pasture their mounts

³⁰⁸ Roman Nautala, От Давида, царя Индий до ненавистного плебса Сатаны. Антология ранних латинских сведений о татаро-монголах [From David, King of the Indies to Detestable Plebs of Satan: An Anthology of Early Latin Information about the Tatar-Mongols] (Kazan: Sh.Marjani Institute of History of Tatarstan Academy of Sciences, 2015), 382. Friar Julian noted that there were said to be 135,000 troops who followed the law of the Mongols, ostensibly meaning the Mongols themselves and similar Turkic peoples: *centum triginta quinque milia de lege sua*.

³⁰⁹ Göckenjan and Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm*, 109, 124-125 n. 58.

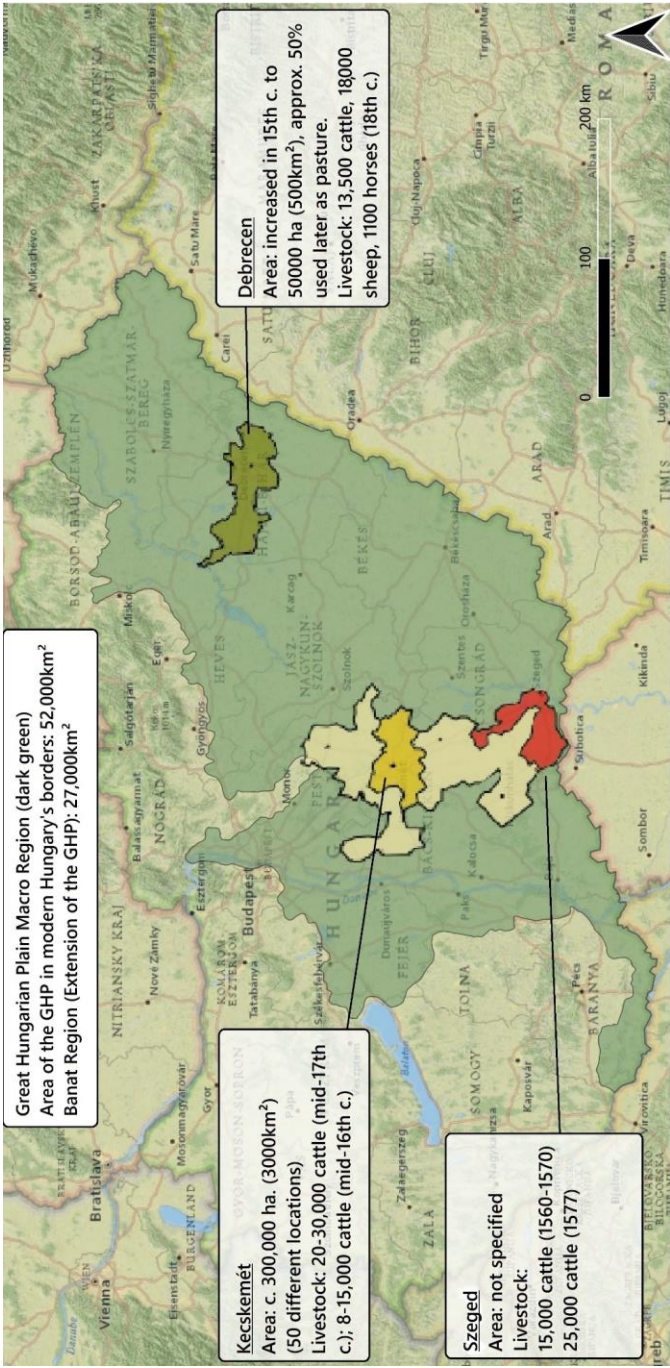
³¹⁰ Hansgerd Göckenjan, "Der Westfeldzug (1236-1242) aus mongolischer Sicht," in *Wahlstatt 1241: Beiträge zur Mongolenschlacht bei Liegnitz und zu ihre Nachwirkungen*, ed. Ulrich Schmielewski (Würzburg: Bergstadtverlag Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn, 1991), 39, 64 n. 38.

in Hungary than the common quotes given for the Mongol army's size in 1241-42, this would implicitly support his account of why the withdrawal happened when it did.

A more serious problem for Sinor's explanation is that our earliest real records of herd sizes from the Early Modern Period do not support his argument regarding the limitations of Hungary's carrying capacity. The sixteenth century was a golden age of Hungarian cattle breeding, seeing a huge increase in the international export of cattle from the mid-sixteenth century. As a result of the desire of the Ottoman government to regulate and impose customs duties, many *defters* have survived – receipts recorded for taxes in treasury books. A profitable international trade fomented the creation of reliable records, for example bridge toll registers, which allow historians to ascertain livestock numbers even on the local level starting in those centuries.³¹¹ The administrative records of towns, as well, provide similar details. We can see that towns in the sixteenth century were regularly exporting 2000 or 3000 cattle annually from their stocks. They kept herds of horses and sheep as well; they did not solely produce cattle though it was the cattle export specifically that resulted in detailed recordkeeping.³¹² Based on the records, the map seen here (Map 5) provides some precise numbers regarding the size of herds within specific boundaries at certain times.

³¹¹ For the most recent study and a comprehensive survey on this topic, see: Péter Csippán and László Ferenczi, "Fifty shades of grey? The impact of the Hungarian cattle trade on cattle breeding in the late medieval and early modern period," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 29 (2020): 1-17. See also: Ann Horváth, "The Cattle Trade of a Hungarian Town (Szolnok) in the Period of Turkish Domination," in *Studia Turcica*, ed. Lajos Ligeti (Budapest 1971), 235-240.

³¹² László Mészáros (Fenyvesi), "Kecskemét gazdasági élete és népe a XVI. század közepén," in *Bács-Kiskun megye múltjából* 2. - *A késői feudalizmus kora*, ed. Iványosi Szabó Tibor (Kecskemét: 1979), 58-286.; 92-93.



Map 5. Pasture and livestock data for the Great Hungarian Plain (14th-17th centuries). Area of the GHP in modern Hungary: green. 18th c. administrative boundaries: Debreceen: forest green; Szeged: red; Kecskemét: yellow; pale yellow: the boundaries of Cegléd, Nagykőrös, Kiskunhalas (i.e. the approx. area where Kecskemét rented “puszta” lands) (Sources: admin. boundaries: Beluszky, 2001; data on Debreceen: Balogh, 1976, pp. 18–21; Kecskemét and Szeged: Makkai, 1971, pp. 492–493; Kecskemét: Mészáros, 1979, pp. 92–93). Source: P. Csippán and L. Ferenczi, Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports 29 (2020) 1020313. Map designed by László Ferenczi.

Turning to the administrative region of Debrecen, we notice a very illustrative case regarding the numbers of livestock that could in fact be raised in a small area. Boundaries fluctuated through the centuries, and when we get these specific number of animals in the 1700s, Debrecen had expanded to approximately 1437 km² (based on 250,000 *cadastral hold* – 1 cad. hold = 0.575 ha.),³¹³ but in fact it was something more like 920km² if one excludes the additional rental lands (82,000 cad. hold). Important for my argument, István Balogh notes that in the eighteenth century, these 13,500 cattle, 18,000 sheep, and 1100 horses grazed in the exact borders of Debrecen’s administrative area as it was in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Moreover, his research found that out of those 48,000 hectares, only 17-20,000 was used regularly or occasionally as grazing land.³¹⁴ This means that out of 480km² of land, roughly 170-200km² were being used as pasture for 13,500 cattle, 18,000 sheep, and 1100 horses in the mid-eighteenth century. By Denis Sinor’s own definition (5 sheep = 1 horse or head of cattle), we count 18,200 animal units in a space that was at most 200km². In a space (20,000 hectares) that was 1/260 of the Great Hungarian Plain only within modern Hungary’s reduced modern borders, we can see livestock levels reach close to a tenth of Sinor’s original estimate for the carrying capacity of the entire kingdom. Certainly, the Debrecen community must have been maximizing land use, keeping as many animals as they could within 20,000 hectares because the ratio of land being used as pasture is quite high in this case. With the example of Szeged, we note that within visibly quite small boundaries, 25,000 cattle were being sustained in 1577.³¹⁵ In the case of Kecskemét, there is more complexity to the situation, but it can be said that within a 3000km² administrative boundary there

³¹³ For the hold as a measurement, see: <https://www.sizes.com/units/hold.htm>

³¹⁴ István Balogh, “Adatok az alföldi mezővárosok határháználátához a XIV-XV században (Debrecen határának kialakulása),” *A Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Levéltár évkönyve* 3 (1976): 18-21.

³¹⁵ László Makkai, “Der ungarische Viehhandel, 1550–1650,” In *Der Außenhandel Ostmitteleuropas, 1450–1650: Die ostmitteleuropäischen Volkswirtschaften in ihren Beziehungen zu Mitteleuropa*, ed. Ingomar Bog, 483-506 (Cologne–Vienna: Böhlau, 1971), 492-493.

were fifty separate locations of rented puszta land (implying formerly inhabited and now abandoned land) being used as pastures, and the total number of cattle climbed as high as 30,000 in the mid-seventeenth century.³¹⁶

There are too many factors at play to simply take Debrecen's administrative boundaries as an example and conclude, based on this one specific situation, that we should expect to see exactly 2,875,600 animal units being pastured in the Great Hungarian Plain including its extension in the Banat region of today's Romania and Serbia. Admittedly, there were landscape, land-use, and even climatic changes between the period of the Mongol invasion and the Early Modern Period.³¹⁷ It is doubtful that the later records give us an exact idea of the carrying capacity of the Great Plain in the Árpád period.

I will not attempt to revise Denis Sinor's calculation, but I only want to highlight its problems and suggest that it does not accurately reflect the relations in the Carpathian Basin. What we can conclude with certainty is that based on real numbers for pasturage area and real numbers of livestock at specific points in time, we end up with real numbers so much higher than Denis Sinor estimated for the carrying capacity of the plain that his theory is untenable. It is likely that the maximum amount of livestock which the Great Hungarian Plain could sustain was in the millions whether we are referring to the thirteenth century or the sixteenth century. The much better records in the nineteenth century allow us to see that in 1861, six communities comprising only 1% of the Great Hungarian Plain sustained 30,593 heads of cattle, 15,190 horses, 245,340 sheep, and 26,100 pigs. While it might be imagined that this reflects some sort of drastic

³¹⁶ László Mészáros (Fenyvesi), "Kecskemét gazdasági élete és népe a XVI. század közepén," in *Bács-Kiskun megye múltjából 2. A késői feudalizmus kora*, ed. Tibor Iványosi Szabó (Kecskemét: 1979), 92-93.

³¹⁷ József Laszlovszky, Stephen Pow, Beatrix F. Romhányi, László Ferenczi, and Zsolt Pinke, "Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary in 1241-42: Short and Long-term Perspectives," *Hungarian Historical Review* 7:3 (2018): 432-436.

modernization in animal husbandry, the local herders were still following the same practices as their medieval forebearers.³¹⁸

A final point is that the premise of Sinor's theory reduces the complexities of the real situation to an almost videogame-like simplicity by implying that the Great Hungarian Plain was the only pasturage available in the entire region occupied by the Mongols. Wallachia just south of the Carpathians was a landscape comprising sections of steppe vegetation and one that suited Cumans and herders in the relevant period. Moreover, when the Mongols of the Golden Horde under Töle Buqa invaded Poland in 1287, they first left their ailing horses to graze in the vicinity of nearby Volodymyr.³¹⁹ Obviously there were pastures and land that could be turned into pasture to the east of Poland and Hungary where reserve forces could be sustained in the event that the Mongols had taxed the landscape in the frontline area of a campaign – they could simply pull back for a year and return. The fact is that the Pontic steppe was bordering Hungary's eastern frontier. Hamdallah Mustawfi, in his geographical work, repeatedly emphasized the excellent pasturage of the Dasht-i-Kipchak along with the regions of the As (Alans) and Rus' (meaning the Kiev region) which allowed the populace to almost entirely live off the products of the numerous cattle and horses.³²⁰ If the Mongols pastured their horses in those relatively nearby steppes and conducted temporary or seasonal campaigns in Europe, this would not be terribly different from the way Chinggis Khan and other steppe leaders long before him waged wars from their steppe base that ultimately ended in lasting conquests in China or the way that the Ilkhanate conducted lasting conquests in the Middle East from its base on the Plain of Mughan.

³¹⁸ Pinke et al., "Climate of Doubt," 3. The sheep, horses, and cattle approach 100,000 animal units, roughly half of Sinor's original estimate for the carrying capacity of the entire Great Hungarian Plain.

³¹⁹ Perfecty, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 97.

³²⁰ Le Strange, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulub*, 251-252, 258.

3.2.2. Criticisms of Büntgen and Di Cosmo's Environmental Hypothesis

Büntgen and Di Cosmo's argument for the Mongol withdrawal does not attribute it to the general geographical or environmental situation of Hungary. Rather, it posits that the unusually wet conditions in the winter and spring of 1242 made the formerly favorable military situation of the Mongols, evidenced by their spectacular victories and occupation of Hungary's Great Plain, suddenly problematic because soil wetness delayed the onset of vegetation, while the muddy terrain interfered with their military capability.³²¹ This situation accounts for the descriptions in the sources of more setbacks and difficulties taking fortified places, particularly after the Mongols crossed to the west side of the Danube in early 1242. Thus, the authors argue, the withdrawal took place in conditions of "(i) reduced mobility and military effectiveness; (ii) reduced fodder for the horses; and (iii) reduced victuals for the army."³²²

As mentioned, I was involved in collaborating on an article with several Hungarian colleagues which offered a concise rebuttal to the environmental hypothesis and which appeared roughly a year later. Simultaneously, Büntgen and Di Cosmo offered a point-by-point reply to our criticisms and both articles were published in *Scientific Reports*. In their reply, Büntgen and Di Cosmo emphasize the importance of using "absolutely dated and spatially explicit natural archives and historical sources, when linking climate variability with human history."³²³ They then offer replies on five issues we raised: (1) We cited a letter in which Béla IV reported to the pope that his

³²¹ It should be noted that climate is properly defined as the variation of weather in a period of at least 30 years, while weather is the change in the atmospheric conditions of some days, weeks, or years. However, these terms are not always used with precision in the debate surrounding the Mongol withdrawal. In part this is justified since the cold weather in 1241–42 could be tied to the general cooling of the following several centuries. Many thanks to As András Vadas for helpfully pointing out this issue of terminology.

³²² Büntgen and Di Cosmo, "Climatic and Environmental Aspects," 5.

³²³ Ulf Büntgen and Nicola Di Cosmo, "Reply to 'Climate of doubt: a re-evaluation of Büntgen and Di Cosmo's environmental hypothesis for the Mongol withdrawal from Hungary, 1242 CE'," *Scientific Reports* (2017).

kingdom was ideally suited to the Mongols raising their herds, but the authors responded that this would be only under normal conditions, quite unlike those in 1242; (2) We pointed out that precipitation appears to be beneficial for agricultural production in Hungary, based on twentieth-century records, but the authors suggested that applies to ordinary steppe conditions but not thirteenth-century Hungary in which rising water levels would have reduced land suitable for occupation and agriculture; (3) We suggested the famine was largely manmade, but the authors held that (admittedly long-term) cold and wet conditions were found to contribute to famine in the fourteenth century; (4) We pointed out that destruction was concentrated mostly on the Great Hungarian Plain, but the authors held that weather accounted for western Hungary escaping largely intact since it was invaded only in 1242; (5) We showed an Early Modern depiction of Székesfehérvár to demonstrate that it was ordinarily surrounded by marshes, but the authors stated this centuries-later depiction was anachronistic and in any case supported the view that the local marshes would have hindered the Mongols.³²⁴

In my view, Büntgen and Di Cosmo's argument can be considered more persuasive than that of Sinor as the more recent theory is based on a reliable paleoclimatic model, rather than a mysteriously evolving calculation. The observation that there was a short-term weather situation in the Carpathian Basin in early 1242 that saw unusual cold and precipitation is unassailable and furthermore this finding corroborates contemporary accounts of a bitterly cold winter that saw the Danube freezing.³²⁵ Nonetheless, as a historian, my main interest or concern regards how the

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 288-289. Thomas of Split noted, "January had passed, and the winter was unusually harsh and bitter. It was so cold that all the waterways froze, offering an easy passage to the invaders." It is important to note that the Danube freezing in the winter was not an extraordinarily rare event. It is documented as having happened quite often in the Little Ice Age (1500s-1600s). See: András Vadas, "'A Dunára én bizon nem megyek, mert még nem akarok meghalnom'. A Duna jégjelenségei a kora újkorban (1530–1650)," in *Micae mediaevales III*, eds. Judit Gál et al. (Budapest: Történettudományok Doktori Iskola, 2013), 219-235.

historical sources corroborate the argument that the short-term conditions in Hungary had really created the crisis scenario for the Mongols which is described by the authors. This is especially important since they are attempting to make their argument in the face of the Hungarian king's own claim that his territory had proved suitable for Mongol occupation. The statement, made by Béla IV to Pope Innocent IV probably in 1247 or 1248, is particularly damning because it stands in complete contradiction to the scenario proposed with the environmental hypothesis. Moreover, the king made this remark *after* the Mongols had invaded, occupied, and withdrawn from Hungary which means that it was based on experience and observation rather than an inference or assumption. Warning of the extreme danger that faced all of Europe, the Hungarian king noted that Hungary would be an effective base from which to wage war on Europe because of its suitability to the Mongols' lifestyle: "They can settle their families and animals – in which they abound – marvelously well here [in Hungary], better than elsewhere."³²⁶ The king then went on to note that Attila, confusedly remembered as "Totila," had come from the East and used Hungary as his base from which to subdue the West. Besides his own experience, Béla invoked precedents of Eastern invaders successfully occupying Hungary.

Even if we neglect or dismiss statements in the sources that are at odds with Büntgen and Di Cosmo's argument, there is very little support in contemporary texts for it. Perhaps owing to that reality, the authors sometimes followed Sinor's tendency of making reaching inferences to connect statements in the textual primary sources to their inference for what happened based on reconstructed year-by-year weather conditions in the Carpathian Basin. An especially noticeable example of this tendency is when the authors refer to Mongol activities and decisions during the

³²⁶ Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica*, 230-232. The English translation here by Piroska Nagy is found in: Barbara Rosenwein, ed., *Reading the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 421.

summer and fall of 1241 while they were occupying Hungary. The Mongols ordered servants to provide shelter and fodder for their horses, did not burn crops, and kept peasants alive with the command to take in the harvest. Even when the authors accede that the documentary sources are silent on any weather-related issues during this phase of the invasion, they still claim, “These preparations are somehow indicative of an early onset of the fall/winter in 1241.”³²⁷ A statement like this one leaves readers with the feeling that the documentary evidence is being forced to construct a narrative that emerged initially from paleoclimatic data.

A major component of Büntgen and Di Cosmo’s theory is their attempt to relate a documented famine to a food crisis that they presume the Mongol occupiers were experiencing in 1242. They argue that the Mongol decision to feed their prisoners with less desirable parts of sheep, as recorded by their captive Rogerius, indicates that the Mongols themselves could foresee the great famine that was overtaking Hungary. Deciding to feed prisoners only parts of sheep, rather than the whole sheep they were receiving beforehand, hypothetically could have been motivated by a sense that herd sizes were decreasing. Nonetheless, a variety of factors, including a lost sense of the value or importance of the prisoners could also account for it. For instance, if the Mongol leaders had abandoned a previous plan to occupy Hungary over the long term, then these prisoners were no longer essential and could at once become perceived as more of a burden during the withdrawal eastward. Rogerius reported that he heard from interpreters that the prisoners were about to be subjected to a wholesale massacre.³²⁸ Having escaped from captivity around that time in the Carpathian Mountains south of Alba Julia, he mentioned that this change in the rations for prisoners occurred after the Mongols began withdrawing from Transylvania into Cumania

³²⁷ Büntgen and Di Cosmo, “Climatic and Environmental Aspects,” 3.

³²⁸ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger’s Epistle*, 221.

(Wallachia). Thus, it is hard to attach the decision regarding rations to climate conditions in Hungary which the Mongols were already in the process of departing.

Other statements from the sources which the authors provide to support their theory are entirely related to the famine experienced in Hungary in the aftermath of the occupation. Using these statements as evidence of the proposed crisis scenario seems even less justifiable than the aforementioned examples. Famine did severely afflict the local Hungarian population, but textual sources explicitly describe why this happened. Climate was not the primary driver. Thomas of Split stated that it happened because the peasants were forced during the invasion to abandon their crop fields for two growing seasons.³²⁹ Naturally, if the farmers were unable to cultivate their fields or harvest crops because they had to flee into remote or defensible places of refuge owing to the disruption and danger of the invasion, a serious famine was going to set in. Other peasants had harvested some crops during the occupation but only to supply them to the Mongols in 1241.³³⁰

Regarding this devastating famine, what happened in Hungary in 1242 was hardly an isolated incident. Shortly after the withdrawal, a Dominican emissary, Simon of Saint-Quentin, was sent into the Mongol Empire to meet them with letters from the pope. He passed through many regions that had been affected recently by invasions and eventually met with the Mongols in Armenia. In his report, detailing Mongol methods of waging war, he stated, “In every country which the Tartars destroy, famine always follows.”³³¹ Providing specific details, Simon of Saint-Quentin describes an “unheard-of famine” following the Mongols’ invasion of Georgia and sack of Tbilisi in the 1230s.³³² What his report would suggest is that Mongol invasions consistently

³²⁹ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 303.

³³⁰ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger, Epistle*, 211.

³³¹ Richard, *Histoire de Tartares*, 44.

³³² *Ibid.*, 56-57. The line in question reads: *Et postquam ibi facta est occisio tanta subsecuta est fames inaudita.*

triggered famine in all the affected areas, far beyond Hungary, and we can easily infer that this happened because it was a larger strategy of the Mongols. The famines they triggered were intentional – a sort of weapon to crush resistance. When we consider that testimony, it is very hard to entertain the notion that the starvation which affected Hungary’s people in 1242 was the result of a short-term fluctuation in weather. Kirakos of Gandzak, an Armenian churchman taken prisoner, noted that the Mongols invaded Greater Armenia in the summer when the harvest had not been reaped or gathered in the granaries. They came with their livestock and ate and trampled everything, so that when they left the region in the winter, the inhabitants had nothing to eat and died of starvation. However, Kirakos noted, that winter was as “not severely cold, as at other times but as mild as one could wish.”³³³ Here we see a close parallel to what happened in Hungary in terms of famine, albeit without the cold weather.

If we need further proof, Juvaini describes instigating famine as a regular feature of steppe warfare against sedentary societies. Referring to the actions of Küchlüg, a Naiman chieftain who fled Chinggis Khan to the Kara Khitai and was attempting to subjugate the city of Kashgar, Juvaini noted, “Küchlüg, at every harvest time, would send his troops to devour their crops and consume them with fire. When for three or four years they had been prevented from gathering in their corn, and a great dearth had made its appearance, and the populace were distressed with famine; they then submitted to his command.”³³⁴ This type of warfare was being practiced from the very beginning of the empire, even by refugees fleeing from Chinggis Khan. Changchun, a Chinese Daoist monk, passed through the former Khwarazm Empire shortly after its conquest and described a society so broken down by famine and brigandage that the Mongol governor of

³³³ Bedrosian, *Kirakos*, 224.

³³⁴ Boyle, *The World Conqueror*, 65.

Samarkand refused to reside in the palace of the former shah.³³⁵ In their campaigns against Korea, the Mongols inflicted famine on the population to pressure the king to submit. The king in turn complained to the Mongol leadership in terms that sound rather familiar: "...several times you sent army leaders to censure [the people]. The people have no land to cultivate and in farming there was no time to harvest. Considering this land [had only] flowering grass, what could be produced? Thinking that we had no way of offering up tribute and to present it would be difficult, my fear was extreme."³³⁶ The Mongols inflicted such severe starvation on the population that finally they started killing their own government-appointed leaders or inciting Mongols to attack certain fortresses. Ultimately the military governor of Korea was overthrown and assassinated, not long after he refused to open a granary. In the end, the king finally sent his son to the Mongol court to submit in 1259 by which time the Mongols had seized the entire harvest, epidemics were breaking out, and starvation was rampant across Korea.³³⁷

Even though conditions in Korea were of course very different from those in Hungary, we cannot forget Simon of Saint-Quentin's blanket statement that a massive famine followed a Mongol invasion *wherever* an invasion took place like a natural law. A comparative look at texts from different times and regions should lead us to the conclusion that the famine that unfolded in Hungary was intentionally brought about by the invaders and was a regularly employed tactic or at least a very common consequence of a Mongol occupation of a territory. Andrea Kiss has looked at the topic and while she argued that the Mongol invasion was "very much responsible for the hunger," she also speculated that the unusual cold of the winter of 1241-1242, coupled with

³³⁵ Arthur Waley, trans., *The Travels of an Alchemist: The Journey of the Taoist Ch'ang Ch'un from China to the Hindukush at the Summons of Chingiz Khan* (London: Routledge, 1931), 93.

³³⁶ Edward J. Schutz and Hugh H. W. Kang, *Koryosa Choryo II: Essentials of Korean History* (Seoul: Jinmoondang Publishing Company, 2014), 307.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 369-377.

abundant snow and ice, may have played a contributing role in the situation. As such, this could support Büntgen and Di Cosmo's hypothesis.³³⁸ On the other hand, the most recent conclusions by Andrea Kiss and her fellow researchers are that during major and long-lasting climatic changes and many years of extreme weather, famine occurred very rarely at the countrywide scale. Famines and food shortage crises in Hungary usually affected only particular regions. There were very few exceptional cases when such situations affected the whole kingdom (e.g. the mid-1310s, 1362, or 1364). But even in these periods different social groups were affected in different ways and there were areas which were lightly or negligibly affected. It is also important to underline that the crisis periods, related to long-term climate change, were the same as those faced in contemporary Western or Central European contexts – that is, people in other regions of Europe were experiencing the same famine.³³⁹ In a recent and definitive work on the economic history of medieval Hungary, József Laszlovszky, Balázs Nagy, and other leading scholars have likewise reached the conclusion that the environmental situation of medieval Hungary was such that famine occurred very rarely – something which would suggest the famine in the 1240s was brought on by a truly exceptional set of circumstances, i.e. a severe dislocation of the farming populace caused by the invasion.³⁴⁰

Though a famine clearly affected the agrarian, sedentary population in 1242 and for some time afterwards, it is highly doubtful that this is indicative of a crisis that was similarly affecting the Mongols. Ibn al-Athir mentioned that during the Mongol conquest of the Khwarazmian Empire

³³⁸ Andrea Kiss, "Weather events during the first Tatar invasion in Hungary (1241-42)," *Acta Geographica Universitatis Szegediensis* 37 (2000): 149–156.

³³⁹ Andrea Kiss, Ferenc Piti, and Ferenc Sebők, "14. századi rossz termések, élelmiszerhiány, drágaság, (éh)inség - és feltételezhető okaik Magyarországon," in *Magyar gazdaságtörténeti évkönyv*, ed. György Kövér, Ágnes Pogány, and Boglárka Weisz (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2016) 23-79.

³⁴⁰ József Laszlovszky, Balázs Nagy, Péter Szabó and András Vadas (eds.), *The Economy of Medieval Hungary* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

in the early 1220s, “provisions were difficult to come by in all those regions because of their ruinous state... only little food could be found by anyone,” and yet the Mongols themselves “were not troubled by the lack of foodstuffs because they ate only flesh... and their mounts ate only plants.”³⁴¹ It is doubtful that they could have faced a food crisis based on their herds dying out without this becoming well known to observers. Furthermore, the Mongols were highly adaptive to the challenges posed by the environments in which their conquests were taking place. The early *Mengda Beilu* noted already in the early 1220s that they adapted their diet gradually to the changing environment they were facing in their ongoing war with the Jin Dynasty in China, and they were now willing to eat wheat and rice, making rice porridge in their camps, though they were previously unfamiliar with such a diet.³⁴² Carpini and Rubruck noted how they and their Mongol escorts regularly drank boiled millet broth on the journey as emissaries across Eurasia, and even the transfer of local populations along the route to engage in the growing of grain.³⁴³ As might be expected of troops engaged in an apparent project of world conquest, the Mongols were highly flexible in finding ways to survive in foreign environments – it is hard to believe that a short-term weather anomaly could have so quickly convinced them that survival in Hungary would be impossible.

Outside of references to famine, Büntgen and Di Cosmo’s argument is really without any support from available sources. In my view, the glaring absence of such statements represents a

³⁴¹ D. S. Richards, *Ibn al-Athir, The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-ta'rikh. Part 3: The Years 589-629/1193-1231: The Ayyubids after Saladin and the Mongol Menace* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 218.

³⁴² Olbricht and Pinks, *Meng-ta pei-lu*, 58.

³⁴³ Jackson and Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William*, 141. In the company of the Mongols, Carpini like Rubruck experienced regularly consuming only millet broth in the morning and meat in the evening. Rubruck also mentioned how the Mongols made a “very excellent” drink in the winter from rice, millet, wheat, and honey. Evidently by the 1250s, they were embracing a wide range of cereals and wine was being transported to Mongolia from other regions. *Ibid.*, 76.

serious problem for the theory. Normally an *argumentum ex silentio* is an ill-advised practice for historians – what David Hackett Fischer called “the fallacy of negative proof.”³⁴⁴ One should not immediately assume that climate issues did not have a serious impact on the Mongol occupiers of Hungary in 1242 simply because the sources do not mention such a scenario. However, in this case, it is justifiable to see the silence of medieval authors on this issue as a problem since sources from the period, including those composed by outsiders and Latin authors in particular, often express an awareness of the way that environmental and weather factors affected the Mongols. More generally, medieval authors across the whole of Eurasia did not ignore the influence of these factors in the shaping of historical events. Ibn Khaldun and other Islamic authors, following a tradition dating as far back as antique literature, were quick to suggest climatic and environmental determinism behind historical events and the development of societies.³⁴⁵ One of the earliest mentions by a Latin author of events connected to major developments in Inner Asia and loosely related to the future rise of Chinggis is found in the work of Otto of Freising who reported on rumors in the Levant about the conquests of “Prester John.” He had heard from a Syrian bishop in 1145 that a Nestorian Christian emperor in the Orient, Prester John, had desired to make war on the Islamic world, but his army had been prevented from invading the heart of Persia by temperate weather which had prevented rivers from freezing and enabling a crossing. So, the failure of this conquest to materialize was attributed to the climate. The consensus is that Otto of Freising in fact was hearing the story of Yelü Dashi, who founded the Kara Khitai state after the collapse of the Khitan Liao Dynasty, and his victory over the Seljuks at the Battle of Qatwan near Samarkand in 1141.³⁴⁶ Even a medieval rumor transferred across thousands of kilometers and through societies

³⁴⁴ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies* (New York: Harper, 1970), 47.

³⁴⁵ Pow and Frenkel, “The Use of Environmental-Climatic Theories,” 29-31.

³⁴⁶ *Medieval Sourcebook*, “Otto of Freising, The Legend of Prester John,” Accessed at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/otto-prester.asp>

with very different agendas which shaped the narrative still reported, accurate or not, a blasé detail about the decisive role of environmental and climatic factors in a campaign that recently happened in Transoxiana.

More pertinent to the issue of the Mongol withdrawal, writers of the time in Europe tended to see adverse weather events that inflicted ruin on campaigns as expressions of divine wrath and favor. Presumably, if the weather-related events had exerted a negative impact on the Mongols in 1242, we would have heard no end of it from contemporary writers. About a decade before the Mongol invasion, the future king of Hungary, Béla IV, invaded Galicia. The *Galician Volhynian Chronicle* mentions how “the Archangel Michael” released a torrent of rain on the Hungarians as they advanced through the Carpathians, drowning their horses. When many Hungarians drowned in a river, the chronicle records that “the Dniester played a bad trick on the Hungarians,” and when an epidemic struck the invading force, we read that “the Lord sent a plague... His angel struck them down.”³⁴⁷ This tendency is something hardly unique to medieval Latin authors. It seems to represent a general anthropological phenomenon that humans perceive the weather or natural calamities as signals of divine wrath and favoritism. We can also see that the Russian chroniclers were following a Biblical outlook and style – whether we think of the sea overwhelming the troops of Pharaoh or the smiting of the Assyrian emperor Sennacherib’s army by a plague during the siege of Jerusalem, something also attributed to an angel. Yet, clearly the outlook described above goes beyond a European tendency based on Biblical *topoi*. As a reaction to drought brought on by

³⁴⁷ Perfeky, “Galician-Volynian Chronicle,” 37-38.

climate change, the Mayans appear to have increased human sacrifices to appease the rain god, Chaak.³⁴⁸ Undoubtedly, they assumed they had somehow offended him.

There seems to have been a very widespread sense that when the weather works against one's own community, this is the result of divine displeasure owing to its sins. On the other hand, when natural phenomena end up devastating an invading enemy, this was interpreted to be divine justice inflicted on the invaders. We could justifiably describe these two tendencies in the sources as the "*For our sins*" – "*God punished them*" dichotomy. While English-language literature has not yet offered major studies on the so-called Second Mongol Invasion in 1285, two major Hungarian studies have explored these important, if largely overlooked, events.³⁴⁹ Moreover, as these studies show, the source material does indicate the Mongols suffered in 1285 from epidemics, extreme cold weather events, and ultimately famine in their disorganized retreat from Hungary. These problems were well documented by several authors, including Baybars al-Mansuri (c. 1245-1325) in distant Mamluk Syria who reported that the debacle was mainly a result of cold and hunger.³⁵⁰ Besides historians in the Islamic world, a Russian chronicle also referred to the impact of a devastating famine for Mongol forces lost or entrapped in the Carpathians.³⁵¹ Despite there being much less surviving source material on the 1285 events compared to the earlier invasion, the material we do have is replete with these sorts of references. It was a great coup for Christian writers in 1285 to be able to assert that God had shown his favor on a Christian populace by

³⁴⁸ "Mayans Offered Sacrifices to End Drought at Edge of Sacred Pool," *Archaeology News Network*. Accessed at: <https://archaeologynewsnetwork.blogspot.com/2015/01/mayans-offered-sacrifices-to-end.html#Cw12wuiO4QM2Sx1C.97>

³⁴⁹ György Székely, "Egy elfeledett rettegés: a második tatárjárás a magyar történeti hagyományokban és az egyetemes összefüggésekben," *Századok* 122 (1988): 52–88; Tibor Szöcs, "Egy második 'tatárjárás'? A tatár-magyar kapcsolatok a XIII. század második felében," *Belvedere Meridionale* 22:3-4 (2010): 16–49.

³⁵⁰ V. G. Tizengauzen (ed.), *Sbornik materialov otnosiaschchikhsia k istorii Zolotoi Ordý*, I (St Petersburg, 1884), 106.

³⁵¹ Perfecky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 96.

inflicting these environmental hardships on their enemies. A contemporary chronicler described the famine and sickness which the “protector of the Christians” inflicted on the Mongols as “the victory of God” – rather than a result of human agency.³⁵²

The paltry sources for the 1285 episode persistently, regardless of the geographical or social origins of their authors, mention environmental issues affecting the course of the campaign, but the larger body of sources on 1242 are utterly silent on any such difficulties. This suggests that the Mongol forces did not experience any major problems of this nature in the earlier campaign. The silence in the sources *is a problem* regarding the lack of “*God punished them*” type statements, such as “God inflicted hunger and cold on the Tartars” or “God delivered Hungary.” Rather, what we commonly encounter in the Latin sources regarding the 1241-42 invasion are statements of the “*For our sins*” type in my proposed dichotomy. At the opening of his epistle to a senior prelate in Italy, Rogerius, a survivor of Mongol captivity warned his reader that some of the atrocities he was about to describe might be hard to believe, but he should not be astonished that God forgot his mercy and allowed the destruction of his “oppressed people.” Borrowing phrases heavily from the Old Testament, Rogerius mentions how God “visited their iniquities not with rods but with stripes, their sins not with mild solace (by which He used to console His people) but with beatings and anger so that Hungary, full of people, sits solitary...”³⁵³ Referring to the casualties at Muhi, Thomas of Split openly and abruptly asked God in his work “Why, alas, did you bring such a bitter end to men bearing the offices of the church and appointed to Your ministry? [...] Truly, *thy judgements are a great deep*.”³⁵⁴ He later mentioned that an unnamed religious man was “deeply moved by this terrible fate of the Christian people” and desperate to know why God had permitted

³⁵² Szőcs, “Egy második ‘tatárjárás’?”, 24. It is important to note that this chronicle’s interpretation of the event was very common. The sources are so replete with such references that 1285 might be interpreted as a religious event.

³⁵³ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger’s Epistle*, 132-135.

³⁵⁴ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 268-269.

pagans to destroy Hungary “when the Christian faith flourished there and the Church was held in great honor.” He received a reply in a nightly visitation that he must not see God’s judgement as unjust; God had allowed the tragedy to happen because of the wickedness and greed of three bishops.³⁵⁵ In this invasion, authors sought a just divine reason why the disaster happened – something which might be taken as a signal that natural forces were either neutral or actually appeared to aid the invaders (such as the freezing of the Danube).³⁵⁶

Regarding Büntgen and Di Cosmo’s claim that the Mongols under Batu ultimately based themselves in the Volga Basin because it was “ecologically suitable to their economy, lifestyle, and military needs,”³⁵⁷ this assertion is problematic as the authors simultaneously argue that the Carpathian Basin was unsuitable. They note that the Hungarian river system was prone to flooding and the formation of marshlands until the drainage works of the nineteenth century altered the landscape. However, the region of the Lower Volga where Batu and Sartaq, as the preeminent leaders in the Jochid ulus, based themselves was certainly swampy as well. Describing the area where Batu’s Sarai was located, Hamdallah Mustawfi noted that “most of the lands here are

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 278-281. This passage is rather fascinating. Firstly, Thomas of Split leaves the bishops unnamed which could have been motivated by his own social connections to them and their larger network. In my view, they were three of the kingdom’s highest-ranked bishops who died at the Battle of Muhi – and thus figures who paid the ultimate price for their apparent sins. These were Archbishop Ugrin of Kalocsa, Matthias of Esztergom, and Gregory of Győr. Another fascinating aspect of this description is that the sin is not simply attributed to the Hungarian people. Rather they became collateral damage stemming from God’s desire to punish the bishops. As such, Thomas implies that there existed a sense of rejection of the notion that the Hungarian people somehow deserved their destruction. The Mongol invasion of Hungary may have given rise to discussions of theodicy.

³⁵⁶ In the *Novgorod First Chronicle*, we see an interesting case of chroniclers making sense of the disaster that befell Russia in 1237-38 in a way that loosely made use of both types of cliché in my proposed dichotomy. The ruin of Ryazan and other Russian cities in that winter campaign happened because of the sins of the Russian people. “God let the pagans on us for our sins... And any land which has sinned, God punishes with death or famine, or infliction of pagans, or with drought, or with heavy rain, or with other punishment, to see whether we will repent and live as God bids.” Yet, when the Mongols abruptly turned back only about a hundred kilometers from Novgorod and did not take the city, this was because God, the sacred cathedrals, and the prayers of devout princes, holy elders, and monks protected it. God’s deliverance was explanatory for Novgorod, but the other cities evidently perished for the people’s sins. See: Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes (trans.), *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016-1471* (London: Camden Society, 1914), 84.

³⁵⁷ Büntgen and Di Cosmo, “Climatic and Environmental Aspects,” 7.

swamps.”³⁵⁸ The location where Berke had established the New Sarai was on the banks of the Volga in “a salty marshland” with no walls, according to al-Umari.³⁵⁹ The Mongol leaders in the region seem to have actively sought out and selected marshy regions perhaps for the abundant aquatic grasses and, more surprisingly, for the protective features of the terrain. William of Rubruck mentioned that Batu and Sartaq annually journeyed south into the Volga Delta itself during the winters. They stayed in the vicinity of Summerkent, meaning “reedbed city” in Persian, amid the branches of the Volga and regularly surrounded by water. When the various branches of the Volga froze, they would cross over the different streams where there was abundant grass for their herds and would “lurk among the reeds” until the ice started to thaw.³⁶⁰ If one accepts Büntgen and Di Cosmo’s general argument, then it is not adequately explained why Batu relocated to a marshland after the withdrawal.

Both the Lower Volga region and the drainage areas of Hungary’s major rivers were affected by climate change from the second half of the thirteenth century. Settlements in the area east of the Tisza rose in altitude over the course of the Middle Ages so that settlements of the fourteenth to mid-sixteenth century were on average situated considerably higher than in preceding centuries.³⁶¹ This suggests that hydro-climatic changes associated with the Little Ice Age, flood proneness and crop damage, could explain why low-lying areas with patterns of dense settlement

³⁵⁸ Le Strange, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulub*, 251. Batu’s Sarai is often identified as modern Selitrennoye, Astrakan Oblast.

³⁵⁹ Lech, *Das mongolische Weltreich*, 146. The site of Berke’s Sarai is a topic of debate. One theory puts it at Kolobovka, Volgograd Oblast. Other theories hold that in fact the site at Selitrennoye is Berke’s Sarai.

³⁶⁰ Jackson and Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William*, 257-258. In recent scholarship, the site of Summerkent is identified with Moshaik near today’s Astrakhan. Moshaik seems to have been founded after Saqsin fell to an eight-year-long Mongol siege. Its populace appears to have been relocated to Moshaik after the conquest. Saqsin has been identified with Samosdelka, Astrakhan Oblast in recent scholarship. See: D. V. Vasil’ev, “New Data on the City and Environs of Saksin,” *The Volga River Region Archaeology* 2,12 (2015): 189-267.

³⁶¹ Zsolt Pinke, László Ferenczi, Beatrix F. Romhányi, Ferenc Gyulai, József Laszlovszky, Zoltán Mravcsik, Patrícia Pósa, and Gyula Gábris, “Zonal Assessment of Environmental Driven Settlement Abandonment in the Trans-Tisza Region (Central Europe) During the Early Phase of the Little Ice Age,” *Quaternary Science Reviews* 157 (2017): 98–113.

were abandoned toward the end of the thirteenth century. Hydroclimatic changes worked this effect in other parts of Hungary in the same period, and the flat areas of the Great Hungarian Plain were most heavily affected.³⁶² However, these same settlement abandonment trends during the Little Ice Age have been noted in the Volga Basin, suggesting climate change was producing the same sorts of challenge there. Flooding and the deterioration of environmental conditions in its Volga heartland has long been connected to the decline and disintegration of the Golden Horde.³⁶³ Furthermore, archaeological surveys show that the abandonment of several major cities of the Volga region by the mid-fourteenth-century occurred probably due to effects of climate change and flooding. The abandonment of the Golden Horde's capital, Batu's Sarai in the reign of Uzbek Khan and its transfer to Berke's Sarai, farther away from the Volga Delta and the Caspian Sea was likely driven by this ongoing climate situation in the fourteenth century.³⁶⁴ Thus, the Little Ice Age's effects were severely felt in the Volga Basin – just as they were in the Carpathian Basin – and there is an archaeological evidence of both regions experiencing similar long-term trends that forced settlement abandonment in low-lying areas.

Subscribing to any geographic or climatic (weather) theory requires the researcher to overlook what happened in the long-term aftermath of 1242. The Mongols regularly threatened Hungary's monarch with ultimatums to submit to their rule, and even offered him military alliances, in the years following their departure.³⁶⁵ Büntgen and Di Cosmo seem to have ignored this ongoing pattern of Mongol-Hungarian interactions in formulating their hypothesis for the withdrawal. They

³⁶² Laszlovszky et al., "Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary," 435-436.

³⁶³ Alexander Pachkalov, "Трансгрессия Каспийского моря и история золотоордынских городов в Северном Прикаспии" [Transgression of the Caspian Sea and the history of the Golden Horde cities in the Northern Caspian], in *Vostok-Zapad: dialog kul'tur i tsivilizatsii Evrazii* [West and East: Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations of Eurasia] 8, ed. A.A. Burkhanov (Kazan: Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2007), 171-180.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Göckenjan and Sweeney, *Mongolensturm*, 61. The issues of continued invasions and interactions including the 1285 campaign in Hungary will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

stated that the Mongols never attempted to invade Eastern Europe again except for the short-lived invasion of Poland in 1259. In the authors' view, the demonstration of the Great Hungarian Plain to short-term weather events (i.e. the cold, wet episode in early 1242) would "have made it obvious that the region was unsuited to military occupation" by a large army which relied heavily on horses.³⁶⁶ They conveniently ignored that the Mongols did eventually launch a large-scale invasion of Hungary in 1285. The motivations of the Mongols and the scale of that invasion are uncertain and subject to debate, but we may safely share Peter Jackson's conclusion that it was a much larger undertaking than the scant secondary literature on it would suggest – indeed, "a major enterprise."³⁶⁷ If the Mongols really held some notion that its environmental situation made Hungary off limits, it is hard to explain such a massive campaign being directed against it after 1242 if one subscribes to Büntgen and Di Cosmo's hypothesis.

To summarize regarding the geographical theory of Sinor and the environmental hypothesis of Büntgen and Di Cosmo, both explanations for the 1242 withdrawal are faced with much evidence which goes against their fundamental assertions. Yet, as I have suggested in past papers on the topic, they are valuable contributions to the discussion and their underlying assumption that the environment could have exerted powerful influences on the events is one that has to be thoroughly considered. I still share the conclusion of several scholars in Hungary that these environmental factors could not have been the primary driver for the withdrawal based on specific evidence in the sources – and their telling silences.

Jack Weatherford, in his influential *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*, seemed to subscribe in part to Sinor's idea of the unsuitability of Europe's agricultural landscape

³⁶⁶ Büntgen and Di Cosmo, "Climatic and environmental aspects," 7.

³⁶⁷ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 205.

to the Mongols but he added another suggestion that in the Mongol advance from the dry steppes to the “humid coastal zones... the dampness caused the Mongol bows to lose strength and accuracy.”³⁶⁸ My feeling had long been that this was a baseless assertion. In fact, there turns out to be an indirect basis in the sources to accept the general relevance of the idea. The fourteenth-century source, the *Illuminated Chronicle*, describing the Battle of Lake Hód fought in 1282 between the Cumans and their Hungarian hosts, mentions that “by divine clemency” a heavy downpour occurred which made the bows of the Cumans ineffective. Hence, the steppic cavalry forces suffered a crushing defeat.³⁶⁹ This is a reminder that claims about the meaningful effects of the environment and weather events on campaigns, even on the short-term or on a single day, cannot be dismissed as utterly irrelevant. These factors *could* matter in warfare. Moreover, regarding the long-term situation, it is unquestionable that climate in the few centuries following the first Mongol invasion exerted powerful changes on Hungary’s society and landscape and could have played a serious role in Mongol-Hungarian interactions. Thus, both theories for the withdrawal have deserved serious consideration and they offer many useful ideas to the larger discussion; if not specifically the deciding factors in the events of 1242, environment and climate did play decisive roles in later events like the 1285 invasion.

As I argued in my MA thesis, European observers and those elsewhere were often aware and eager to report of the ways that the environment exerted often negative effects on the Mongols.³⁷⁰ In part, this simply reflects a tendency to report noteworthy events. On the other hand, it seems like those in Europe, particularly those in the clergy, were keen to report these episodes

³⁶⁸ Jack Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2004), 158.

³⁶⁹ János Bak and László Veszprémy (trans.), *The Illuminated Chronicle: Chronicle of the Deeds of the Hungarians from the Fourteenth Century Illuminated Codex* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2018), 332-333.

³⁷⁰ Pow, “Deep ditches,” 27.

because they affirmed that the Mongols were being weakened by divine punishments. Armenian refugee priests who arrived in England in the early 1250s were questioned at St. Albans, and they reported “that the Tartars had, through the vengeance of God rather than man, been so diminished by a deadly disease amongst themselves, as well as by the swords of their enemies, that they were completely overcome,” and forced to scale back their conquests.³⁷¹ This likely relates in part to drought which had devastated their herds in the reign of Güyük, documented in the *Yuan Shi*,³⁷² and to the internal purges and conflicts which characterized the rise of Möngke. The *Grandes Chroniques de France* similarly contain an interesting statement referring to the period around 1260, when Hulegu’s conquests were unfolding in the Islamic world, that the Mongols returned to their territory after being devastated by an epidemic.³⁷³ As I cannot find any references to an epidemic affecting Hulegu’s armies at the time, we are faced with the possibility that rumors of the epidemic that devastated Möngke’s forces in Sichuan in 1259 had already reached the French court within a few years. In that period, any such rumors would have been widely disseminated and greeted with enthusiasm since they carried the implication that God would defend the Christians and punish the Mongols with the forces of nature itself. In a social and literary framework shaped by such outlooks, the silence in primary sources on the role of natural forces in 1241-42, except when they aided the Mongols (*for our sins*), is impossible to ignore. It is doubtful that climate or environment were decisive in the withdrawal.

³⁷¹ Giles, *English History*, vol. 2, 532.

³⁷² Pow, “Deep ditches,” 27.

³⁷³ Jules Viard (ed.), *Les Grandes Chroniques de France* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1932), 225. The relevant passage reads: “Si avint que les Tartarins qui menoient si grant mestrise, furent surpris de diversses maladies et s’en retournerent en leur terre, et plusieurs en morurent.” Though much of the earlier material on the Mongols in this work seems to stem from Vincent of Beauvais, this material is independent and could reflect a rumor that had reached the French court.

3.3. Was Permanent Conquest the Purpose of the Mongol Invasion of Europe in 1241-42?

For scholars, a major reservation to accepting the notion that permanent conquest was actually intended in 1241 is that historical accounts of the invasion of Europe and occupation of Hungary can read like a list of Mongol successes at the expense of the local populations and their leaders, which makes the Mongol decision to abruptly withdraw thousands of kilometers eastward in 1242 mysterious. It seems unlikely to have been the result of some setback since we read mostly of Mongol victories. Furthermore, the Mongol Empire successfully expanded over much of the Eurasian continent, subduing China, Korea, the Abbasid Caliphate, and the peoples of Inner Asia. We might wonder why Hungary would be uniquely exempt from this larger program of empire-building. Yet, the fact that the Mongols voluntarily withdrew from Hungary could be interpreted as evidence that they did not intend to occupy it or incorporate it into their empire – at least not at the time of the first invasion. This viewpoint appears to have emerged in Hungarian and Soviet historiography in the twentieth century with László Makkai, Ödön Schütz, and V.P. Shusharin all arguing that the first attack was something like an exploratory raid or devastating initial attack intended to soften up the Kingdom of Hungary for later subjugation.³⁷⁴ As Rogers noted, there is not much primary source evidence that would directly support the larger argument, but the inference is not outlandish when considered in the context of what the Mongols actually did and how the historical events unfolded. Moreover, when Rogers wrote his article, there was little criticism of this type of theory since it was only being discussed by those who were advocating it.³⁷⁵

³⁷⁴ Rogers, “Historians’ Explanations,” 14-15.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

In the last two decades since Rogers wrote his article, some leading experts in the fields of the Mongol Empire, the invasion of Hungary, and Mongol-European relations have similarly advanced arguments that basically fall within the scope of what he called the “gradual conquest theory” – they all share the idea that permanent conquest and occupation was not likely Batu’s goal in 1241-42. Peter Jackson suggested in *The Mongols and the West* that the invasion of Hungary may have simply been intended as a punitive expedition because the Hungarian king had harbored Cuman refugees and refused to send them back to Batu. After destroying the kingdom, defeating its forces, and pursuing the king as far as the Dalmatian coast, the Mongols returned to the Pontic Steppe, having sufficiently achieved their mission.³⁷⁶ Jackson also noted that coins thought to have been minted in Hungary by the Mongols date from the twelfth century, and so numismatic evidence could no longer be used to further the argument that a permanent occupation was intended.³⁷⁷ Jackson also put forward the speculative idea that perhaps in the aftermath of the first invasion, Hungary’s ruler opted to pay tribute to the Golden Horde and that this secretive tradition lasted into the reign of Ladislaus IV (r. 1272-1290).³⁷⁸ However, I am skeptical of that possibility since it seems that the burden of paying tribute to the Mongols would have had some noticeable impact on Hungarian society that would show up overtly in the sources, were it more than a token amount.

János B. Szabó has continued in the Hungarian scholarly tradition by expressing skepticism that the Mongols intended to permanently occupy Hungary. He points out that terminology in Chinese sources in reference to the larger 1236-42 Western Campaign hints that the conquest of the “Kipchak” and their steppe territories was always the defining objective of the invasion.

³⁷⁶ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 74.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

Hungary was too far from Batu's evidently preferred base on the Volga and so the attack on Hungary was meant to secure the Mongol Empire's westernmost frontiers; at most, the Mongols seem to have desired to receive taxation from Hungary as a distant tributary.³⁷⁹ Mongol military historian, Timothy May, has pointed out how patterns of invasion and withdrawal were a regular feature of Mongol conquests across Eurasia. Drawing attention to these "tsunami" cycles of repeated invasions, he suggested that the conquest of Hungary was probably intended in the long run, but the attacks in 1241-42 may have been to devastate and weaken the region for the planned conquest.³⁸⁰

These are reasonable inferences and arguments, grounded in the context of the specific invasion and the larger history of the Mongol conquests, but I contend that the contextual picture identified by all the aforementioned authors can likewise support another interpretation which is that the first invasion was already intended as a long-term occupation. The fact is that the Mongol campaign in Europe in 1241-42, centered on Hungary, was part of a major operation aimed at the permanent occupation and conquest of many territories – it saw a huge expansion of the Jochid ulus in particular and the Mongol Empire in general in a very short period. Other regions invaded during the Mongols' larger overall campaign (1236–1244) were incorporated into their Empire. These include the Bulgar state on the Volga, the Russian principalities, and the Cuman-Kipchak tribes based on the steppe belt north of the Caspian and Black Sea. As those conquests were taking place, another smaller Mongol force was pushing westward, albeit on the southern side of the Caucasus, bringing into submission states such as Cilician Armenia, and even invading Syria by 1244.³⁸¹ Thus, it is evident that the larger campaign which terminated in western Hungary and

³⁷⁹ János B. Szabó, *A tatárjárás - A mongol hódítás és Magyarország* (Budapest: Corvina, 2007), 162-163.

³⁸⁰ Timothy May, "The Mongol Art of War and the Tsunami Strategy," *Golden Horde Civilization* 8 (2015): 35.

³⁸¹ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 74-75.

Croatia—also ruled by the king of Hungary in the thirteenth century—was one that resulted in permanent conquests and the expansion of the Mongol Empire.

Turning to the events in Hungary specifically, we cannot dismiss easily the *conquest* aspect of this massive westward drive and temporary occupation of Hungary when we consider a wide range of primary sources which emphasize that such an intention existed, before and after the invasion, including texts written in thirteenth-century Mongol imperial courts. The *Secret History* includes the Majar/Majarat people (Magyar/Magyars) and, somewhat confusedly, “Kerel” (Király) among the tribes that Sübe’etei and the Mongol princes strove to conquer. They are featured in such lists along with the Qanglin (Qangli), Kibcha’ut (Kipchak), Orusut (Rus’), Asut (Alans), Bulgar – sizeable groups which all were subjugated in the course of the Western Campaign and whose peoples were incorporated into the Mongol Empire to varying degrees.³⁸² The “Majar” seem to have been included in the general program of the conquest, as is evidenced by this tribe’s inclusion twice in the *Secret History* in a list of eleven peoples/countries that were the targets of the campaign(s) of Sübe’etei and Batu.³⁸³ This becomes further evident from Rashid al-Din’s description of the preparations for the Western Campaign in 1235: “the august mind of [Ögedei] Qa’an resolved that of the princes, Batu, Möngke Qa’an, and Güyük Khan, together with the other

³⁸² De Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 194, 201, see also De Rachewiltz’s commentary on these names, largely based on the identifications proposed by Paul Pelliot: *Ibid.*, 959, 991.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 989-990. As De Rachewiltz notes, the Secret Historian muddled the campaign of Jebe and Sübe’etei north of the Caucasus in 1222-24 with the later Western Campaign of 1236-1244. In fairness, the earlier campaign did see the Mongols pass through the same areas and struggle against many of the same peoples they would face again roughly fifteen years later. However, the Hungarians, for instance, were clearly not attacked during Jebe and Sübe’etei’s attack, nor is there any record of them campaigning as far as Kiev (“Keyibe/Kiwa Menkermen” in the *Secret History*, which was its Turkic name meaning “Kiev Great City,” see: *Ibid.*, 960). Thus, it is clear that the Secret Historian sometimes mistakenly merged the two distinct campaigns. That the author was susceptible to amalgamating these campaigns might be taken as mild support for my viewpoint that the campaign of Jebe and Sübe’etei had conquest, rather than an exploratory raid or whatever else is imagined, as its primary objective. See: Pow, “The Last Campaign and Death of Jebe Noyan,” 7-8.

princes and a great army, should set out for the countries of the Qipchaq, Orus, Bular, Majar, Bashgird, Sudaq, and [all] that region and *subjugate them all*.”³⁸⁴

There is some confusion related to the terms “Bashgird” and “Majar” in Rashid al-Din’s work and this confusion seems to have widely affected Persian and Arabic authors over a lengthy period. Both these ethnonyms were applied to the Hungarians of the Carpathian Basin in different Islamic geographic traditions recorded from the ninth to thirteenth century. This stems from the fact that both the Bashkirds (Bashkirs) and Magyars were recorded to have lived east of the Volga in the ninth century.³⁸⁵ Without getting into the entangled and ongoing debates about who the Bashkirds and Hungarians were in the earlier Middle Ages (c. 800-1100), and what languages they spoke, it is enough for my purposes to state that the contemporary Islamic geographical literature reflected some sort of awareness in its authors and their informants that Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin were descendants of a branch that had migrated away from a larger group that inhabited the Volga region. Thus, the works of Persian authors in the period of the Mongol Empire and successor states seem to reflect a measure of persisting confusion – specifically a tendency to mix up the two groups.

The results of such confusion are evident, for instance, in Rashid al-Din’s account of the Western Campaign where he inserted Juvaini’s account of the Battle of Muhi (1241) at the very outset of the campaign chronologically, when the Mongols were east of the Volga in 1236.³⁸⁶ I

³⁸⁴ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 55. The emphasis is mine to draw attention that the attack of the Magyars appears not have been an addendum to the campaign of conquest; it had the same objectives. As Boyle noted, the Orus designated the Rus’. Bular refers to the Volga Bulgars. Majar designates Hungarians, while Bashgird, owing to some confusion in Asian sources, evidently stemming from the migration of the Magyars, could designate either Magna Hungaria (the Bashkirs) in the Volga region or the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. Sudaq is the important city in Crimea.

³⁸⁵ Péter Juhász, “Baskírok és magyarok a muszlim forrásokban. — Bashkirs and Hungarians in Muslim Sources,” *Belvedere Meridionale* 29,2 (2017): 133-139.

³⁸⁶ Boyle, *Successors of Genghis Khan*, 56. See n. 222. This issue seems to have bedeviled historians who were confused why the account of the war against the Hungarians in Europe, on the borders of the Franks, was described

imagine this happened because Rashid al-Din or his staff of compilers encountered Juvaini's description of the war against "Keler and Bashgird" and imagined this to be "Bular and Bashgird" – that is, the Volga Bulgars and the Bashkirds. Friar Julian mentioned the latter group dwelling in "Magna Hungaria." The Hungarian Dominican, who was in their homeland very shortly before the Mongol conquest and personally spoke with the local Bashkirds, was ambiguous on the usage of ethnonyms at the time. He stated, "We arrived at the farthest borders of Russia and heard the truth that all of the Bashkirds who are called pagan Hungarians,³⁸⁷ and the Bulgars, and many other kingdoms have been totally devastated by the Tartars." He designated the terms "pagan Hungarians" and "Bashkirds" (*Bascardi*) as synonyms for a single people.

I see no strong reason to doubt Friar Julian's testimony that, on the eve of the Mongol invasion in 1235-36, he stayed among a people who were called Bascardi who spoke Hungarian, enabling him to communicate directly with them. His testimony corroborates aspects of a wide range of sources, including the Franciscan friars, Carpini and Rubruck, who subsequently passed through the same region personally and respectively noted the presence of the Hungarian-speaking "Bascart" or "Pascatur." Since the evident pronunciation of the name in Latin sources so consistently matches what we find in thirteenth-century Mongolian and Persian sources, i.e. Bashghird, I have opted to utilize the ethnonym "Bashkird" rather than "Bashkir" throughout this work. Of course, the Mongol conquest brought great changes to this group and the migrations and developments of subsequent centuries have seen the assimilation of the Bascard/Bashkird

here. Blochet even thought "Bular and Bashgird" reflected a faint memory of the war against Poland, as well as Hungary. However, I suspect the Bular was related to Bulgaria and since there was also a European Bulgaria near Hungary, this could add to the confusion of authors in the Islamic milieu.

³⁸⁷ Following Hautala's text, originating from Dörrie, we have "Bascardi." See: Hautala 2015, 374. The pagan Hungarians were frequently described as Baskirs/Baskirds, particularly in Islamic geographical works. Carpini also noted that Baskirds were the same as Magna Hungaria: "Bascart, id est magna Hungaria" (Van den Wygaert, 89). The Baskird name was still attached to the Kingdom of Hungary by a Persian thirteenth-century Persian author, Juvaini, describing the Mongol invasion of Europe. See: Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 270-271.

remnants into the Bashkir people which speaks a Turkic language; the Ugric elements were absorbed by the Early Modern period.³⁸⁸

Returning to the evidence related to the thirteenth century, it appears that authors in the Islamic milieu, far outside of Europe and often having limited knowledge and interest in the region, could mistake the Hungarians in Europe with the Bashkirds. The same seems to be true regarding their association of Lesser Bulgaria with the Bulgars of the Volga region. For instance, Rashid al-Din's material on Europe's geography makes it clear that he knew Hungary ("Majaristan") bordered on Bulgaria ("Bulgar").³⁸⁹ This additional ambiguity between Volga Bular and Danube Bulgar could well have contributed to his decision to erroneously place Juivaini's material on the invasion of Hungary at the outset of Western Campaign, and to alter Juvaini's "Keler and Bashghird" to "Bular and Bashghird." In any case, based on the demonstrable tendency of authors outside of Europe to confuse two vaguely tied ethnic groups, the Magyars and Bashkirds, who were both attacked by the Batu's forces in the course of the Western Campaign, one might justifiably ask: How can we certain that the references in Asian sources to an intended Mongol conquest of the "Magyars" or "Bashkirds" are ever actually referring to the Kingdom of Hungary and not exclusively to the Bashkird tribe in the Volga-Kama region?

³⁸⁸ For an important work on this, see: A.V. Aksanov, "From the "Bascardi" to the "Bashkirs": The Fate of an Ethnonym during the 13th–16th centuries," *Golden Horde Review* 5.2 (2017): 786–800.

³⁸⁹ Karl Jahn, *Die Frankengeschichte des Rašīd ad-Dīn* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1977), 52–53. Jahn transliterated the term as *Bulgār*. The confusion that two Bulgaria's might have caused is also evident in the heading for Rashid al-Din's description of the Western Campaign where we see "Bulghar" and "Bolar" listed separately among the countries that Batu's forces attacked. The alternative spellings and structure of the passage makes it clear that Rashid al-Din, in this instance, thought Bular and Bulghar were two different nations. See: Boyle, *Successors*, 56; Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 321. I strongly reject the notion suggested by Minorsky and currently prevalent in Chinese scholarship, that Bolar or Polo, whether in Persian or Chinese sources on the Mongol Empire referring to western regions, have anything to do with Poland. See: Boyle, *Successors*, 56, n. 222. As we can see in the Persian translation of a Mongol report, the Poles were clearly designated as *Ila'ut*. *Ibid.*, 70. It was common to refer the Poles as Lechs, Lechites, etc. in the relevant period. In fact, Hungarian still applies this name for Poles – Lengyel.

To this, I would observe that while we see examples of historical errors based on misinterpretation of ethnonyms, as we see this in the case of Rashid al-Din's mistaken insertion of the Muhi episode in his description of the first stages of the campaign, we also see many examples where Asian authors writing Mongol imperial historiography correctly distinguished the Hungarians of the Carpathian Basin from the Bashkirds east of the Volga. Moreover, there are two points that clearly demonstrate that the Kingdom of Hungary was a target for conquest during the Western Campaign according to the Asian sources, recording by insiders of the Mongol imperial administration. First, Rashid al-Din and the *Secret History* list the Bashkirds ("Bashghird" and "Bajigit" respectively) and the Magyars ("Majar" and "Majarat") as separate nations in their respective records of the nations that were designated as targets for conquest at the outset of the campaign.³⁹⁰ Moreover, Sübe'etei's biographies in the *Yuan Shi*, based on a Mongolian-language original and recorded within a couple decades after the events, name the nation occupying the Carpathian Basin as the "Mazhaer" (馬札兒) which was a very close approximation of Majar (pl. Majarat) – the Mongolian term for the Hungarians.³⁹¹ That relates to the second, and more persuasive, point for why we can be absolutely certain that the thirteenth-century Asian sources unequivocally named the Kingdom of Hungary as an intended conquest. While the terms "Magyar" and "Bashkird" could be used ambiguously in the wider body of source literature composed under Mongol rulers, the term "Keler" or "Kerel" is unambiguous in Mongol-period sources where it consistently referred to the Hungarian king and, by extension, his people and state. It was intended to approximate the epithet "Király" which the Hungarians used as the term for their king.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Boyle, *Successors of Genghis Khan*, 55; De Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 194.

³⁹¹ Pow and Liao, "Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction," 63, 65.

³⁹² Ibid., 63. In the biographies of Sübe'etei, Király was approximated as "Qielian" (怯憐) which represents Keler or Kerel. Béla IV is recorded as Kerel in the *Secret History*, and the term appears in different iterations (Keler, Kilar) in the Persian works of Juvaini and Rashid al-Din. See: De Rachewiltz 2006, 194; Boyle 1958, 199, n. 3; Boyle 1971, 58.

When the thirteenth-century Asian sources made use of this royal term, we can be certain it represented the Mongolian name for the king of Hungary, even if they used it to describe the monarch's person or in an imprecise way to describe his state and people. Moreover, *Király*, it turns out, was named as a target for Mongol conquest. Juvaini, writing sooner after the events than Rashid al-Din, also provided a very revealing description as regards Mongol objectives Hungary. He wrote that at the *quriltai* of 1235, when the Mongols made plans for conquest of regions that were still in "rebellion," they assigned armies to campaigns in all four directions, but "chief attention was paid to the extirpation and conquest" of the "Qifchaq and Keler." This indicates that the Western Campaign, and within its framework the conquest of the Kipchaks *and* Hungary in particular, were the primary military objectives of the Mongols in 1235.³⁹³ As further proof, Rashid al-Din added that Ögedei Khan intended to take part personally in the Western Campaign until he was dissuaded from doing so by Möngke.³⁹⁴

We can distill all these textual records to a basic statement – in 1235, the Mongol supreme leadership made the conquest of the Kipchak (Cumans) and the Kingdom of Hungary their primary military objective, as difficult as that might be to believe. It is admittedly strange from our modern vantage point to wonder why Hungary would sit so highly in Mongol priorities, but it perhaps relates to Hungary's close connections with the Cumans. Béla IV was styling himself *rex Cumanorum* in the period and engaged in a policy of eastward expansion. Perhaps he was equated as a major ruler of the steppe people east of the Carpathians or at least as someone who exerted powerful influences over them. An article by Roman Hautala and Gulmira Sabenova has highlighted how when he was still a prince, and titled Duke of Transylvania by his father, Andrew

³⁹³ Boyle, *The World Conqueror*, 198-199. The "Qipchaq and Keler" of course denote the Kipchak and *Király* (i.e. the Hungarians; the ruler's name was occasionally used to denote the nation in Asian sources).

³⁹⁴ Rashid al-Din, *The Successor of Genghis Khan*, 54.

II, Béla had been eagerly expanding Hungarian influence into Cumania, partly by proselytizing efforts. In 1227 a Cuman leader, Bortz, accepted baptism from a Hungarian prelate. This conversion success was concomitant with the establishment of a bishopric of Cumania and the strengthening of Hungarian secular power and influence over the nomads. As the authors suggest, the abrupt successes in conversion to Christianity seem tied to the Mongol threat in the 1220s and 1230s, and Hungary's monarchs seem to have exploited the issue by exerting their influence in Cuman territories.³⁹⁵ Likely, this played a role in the Mongol perception of Hungary as a threat to their attempts to exert their own authority in the region.

Thus, based on the sources originating under Mongol auspices, we can dismiss the view that the Western Campaign which affected Russia was a third rate priority for the Mongols.³⁹⁶ According to the Mongol Empire's own surviving sources, it was their leadership's highest military priority at the time, and long after the campaign and Batu's withdrawal, the conquest of Hungary still evidently remained a goal of the Mongols. In a section of his larger compendium pertaining to the history and geography of "the Franks, Rashid al-Din mentioned that despite its innumerable army, Nogai of the Golden Horde attacked "Magaristan" relentlessly and conquered it.³⁹⁷ This confused reference would likely relate to Nogai's role in the 1285 invasion and other attacks, though Rashid al-Din had apparently received a suspiciously sanguine report of the war's outcome. If inaccurate on the details, this passage perhaps reflects a notion that the conquest of Hungary really was a strategic aim – both in the unified Mongol Empire and in the Jochid ulus

³⁹⁵ Roman Hautala and Gulmira Sabdenova, "Hungarian Expansion in Cumania on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion of 1241," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 22 (2016), 84-96.

³⁹⁶ In secondary literature, it is not uncommon to see the idea that the Western Campaign, or at least the conquest of Europe, was not a significant priority.

³⁹⁷ Karl Jahn (trans.), *Die Frankengeschichte des Rašīd ad-Dīn* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1977), 52-53. A preceding description of the geographical location of Magaristan (Majoristan) leaves no doubt that this passage refers to Hungary in the late thirteenth century.

after the dissolution. As mentioned in the last chapter, Ötemish Hajji preserved a story that Hungary had been given as a princely appanage to Shibān and formed his *ordo*.³⁹⁸ It is hard to determine if this merely reflects Shibānid dynastic self-fashioning, but it is interesting to note that Shibān did have a son named Majar, undoubtedly following the widespread tradition of Chinggisids naming sons after peoples that their fathers had conquered.³⁹⁹

At the same time, Hungary's regional neighbors that were within its growing sphere of influence in the thirteenth century were considered part of the Mongol mandate of conquest. In 1287, when Nogai journeyed to the Volga to resolve a dispute amongst Jochid princes, Rashid al-Din mentioned that "he set out from the territory of the Rus, the Vlachs, and the Poles which he had conquered and made his yurt."⁴⁰⁰ Such lasting inroads into Europe existed long before the 1280s. Rubruck already reported in the early 1250s that south of the Danube and as far as Sclavonia (Croatia or Bosnia), Lesser Bulgaria and Blakia (Wallachia) had certainly become subject to the Mongols and were paying them tribute.⁴⁰¹ Already in the few years after the withdrawal, Batu's forces had managed to gain control of much of the Balkans.

Returning to the invasion of Hungary in 1241-42, perhaps the most convincing evidence that it was already intended as a conquest is the terminology of a passage found in Rashid al-Din's work. The author largely borrowed a passage from Juivaini describing the Battle of Muhi. Evidently confused by the term "Bashgird," Rashid al-Din inserted this description at the outset of a longer description of the Western Campaign. Describing the victory over the Hungarians, Rashid al-Din added material not found in Juvaini's account as a sort of conclusion. He noted, "This

³⁹⁸ Mirgaleev, *Ötemish Hajji, Qara Tavarikh*, 32.

³⁹⁹ Boyle, *Successors*, 112.

⁴⁰⁰ Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 357. I am doubtful "Poles" were intended; Bulgar(ian)s match Nogai's record better.

⁴⁰¹ Jackson and Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William*, 66. Mongols conquests in the Balkans continued with Nogai.

victory was one of their great deeds. Bular and Bashghird is a great region with [many] places difficult of access, and yet they conquered it. They have rebelled again and have not yet been completely subjugated. Their kings are called *keler*.⁴⁰² This passage is important in many respects. Firstly, it indicates an apparently Mongol viewpoint that Hungary had been under their domination in the aftermath of Muhi but that this control had since been lost as the inhabitants persisted in their rebellion. Secondly, the Persian-Arabic terminology might be very telling about how this conquest was viewed. It states that the “province” or “mandate” (*vilayat*) of Hungary was “liberated” (*mustakhlās shud*). The words *wilayat* and *mustakhlās* are among the most semantically charged words in the Arabic-Islamic history of thought and can be interpreted as an implication that the Mongols held a divine mandate to take over the region. Of all the Mongols’ “great deeds” (*karha-yi buzurk* – a term possibly tied to the Persian epic tradition), this conquest (*fath* – an Arabic term meaning “opening” and tied to the early Islamic conquests and ideas of a divinely sanctioned conquest) was one, according to the author. We also receive a clue from Rashid al-Din for why the conquest did not prove lasting – Bular and Bashghird were a large province full of “difficult places” (*mawadi'-i sa'b*), which we can understand as defensible terrain and perhaps, by extension, strongholds or at least terrain features that lent themselves to defense.⁴⁰³

Rashid al-Din was an author influenced by a long Islamic literary tradition so that his testimony regarding the divine sanction of the conquest of Hungary must be approached cautiously. It is, of course, possible that his work was simply reflecting common *topoi* used to describe conquests. However, there can be no doubt that the outlook regarding a divine mandate to conquer the entire world was common among the Mongols themselves in the relevant period and so this

⁴⁰² Boyle, *Successors*, 57. For Thackston’s similar translation, see: Thackston, *Compendium of Chronicles*, 321. The term *keler* is again used here to designate “Király” – the title of the king of Hungary.

⁴⁰³ Bahman Karimi (ed.), *Rashid al-Din, Jami' al-tawarikh*, vol.1 (Tehran: Iqbal, 1960), 475. My thanks to my Georg Leube (University of Bayreuth) for his philological expertise which he directly shared with me on these terms.

passage might reflect a Mongol ideology, albeit through the framework of Islamic literary conventions. Güyük Khan's letter in 1246 to Pope Innocent IV, written in Persian and still extant in the Vatican's archives, lays out the Mongol ideology quite clearly. More or less as an opening to the missive, the khan stated that the pope and all the princes of Europe were to come immediately to serve him at which point he would make known "the commands of the *Yasa*" – the law handed down by Chinggis Khan. In answer to the pope's question about what fault "Christians" and Hungarians in particular had committed to deserve the slaughter that was inflicted on them, Güyük answered, "The eternal God has slain and annihilated these peoples because they have neither adhered to Chinggis Khan, nor to the Khagan, both of whom have been sent to make known God's command, nor to the command of God." In more prosaic terms, Güyük mentioned that these people had killed the Mongols' emissaries. After expressing doubts about the pope's authority to know the divine will – since, after all, the Mongol Empire could not have achieved such success without it – Güyük concisely laid out the imperial ideology: "From the rising of the sun to its setting, all lands have been made subject to me. Who could do this contrary to the will of God?" Then he offered a final warning that the magnates of Europe were to come at once to him – just in case they missed the message the first time – and if they ignored that divine command, he would know them as enemies.⁴⁰⁴

This clear statement of the Mongol ruler's sole legitimate authority and divine mandate to rule the entire Earth was not unique or a burst of hyperbole that resulted from Güyük's outrage at the pope's arrogance – it was a consistent message regardless of the recipient. A separate

⁴⁰⁴ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 85-86.

Dominican mission travelled to Baiju's encampment in Greater Armenia and returned to the papal curia in 1248 with a very similar response from the Mongol general:

In your letter you had written about many people being killed, annihilated, and destroyed. The unwavering command of God and the statute of him who encompasses the entire Earth is thus to us: whoever shall hear this command should possess his own land, water, and inheritance, and should offer his support to him who encompasses the surface of the entire Earth. But whoever will not hear this command and statute and do otherwise – he will be wiped out and destroyed.⁴⁰⁵

Thus, Baiju's message also called on the pope and magnates of Europe to immediately come in person if they wanted to continue ruling their lands, albeit as subjects of the khan. In addition to the ultimatum of the Mongol military leader in the region, the Dominican emissaries received an edict from Güyük to Baiju which opened with an expression that tidily formulated the Mongol worldview and mission: "By the command of the living God, Chinggis Khan,⁴⁰⁶ son of God sweet and venerable, declares that God, raised above everything, is the immortal God, and over the Earth Chinggis Khan is the only ruler."⁴⁰⁷ Güyük then urged Baiju notify everyone of "the mandate of the living and immortal God," both in places that had submitted and in those still in rebellion against the Mongols' divinely sanctioned rule, so that the message was broadcast to all people "wherever a messenger is able to reach." Güyük added what the consequences were to be

⁴⁰⁵ Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 114. Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXI, 51. The original letter has not survived but a copy has survived in the fragmentary report of Simon of Saint-Quentin which was recorded in the *Speculum historiale*. The passage reads: *Et in litteris taliter scripseras: homines multos occiditis, interimitis et perditis. Preceptum Dei stabile et statutum ejus qui totius faciem orbis continet ad nos sic est: quicumque statutum audierint super propriam terram, aquam et patrimonium sedeant, et ei qui faciem totius orbis continet virtutem tradant. Quicumque autem preceptum et statutum non audierint sed aliter fecerint, illi deleantur et perdantur.*

⁴⁰⁶ Cingischam in the Latin text is a remarkably close reproduction of the khan's name which might speak to the reliability of this transcript of an original, official document here. Unlike several other documents from the Mongols to the papal curia, the original letters have not survived so these transcripts are all we have for Mongol responses to Ascelin's Dominican mission.

⁴⁰⁷ Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 115-116. The passage reads: *Per preceptum Dei vivi, Cingischam filius Dei dulcis et venerabilis dicit quia Deus excelsus super omnia, ipse est Deus immortalis et super terram Cingischam solus dominus.*

for those who chose to ignore the message: “Whoever will hear it and neglect to observe it will be destroyed, obliterated, and killed.”

It is doubtful if the Mongols in the 1240s could have made their viewpoint much clearer or easier to interpret for posterity than they did. What more could they have said, and how many more times, and to how many different rulers, could they have said? The message was that there was one Heaven, one Earth, and one Khan, and anyone who resisted the world ruler’s divine mission to subjugate the entire Earth would be eradicated. Historians are free to ask any questions, and even have an obligation to do so, but at a certain point, one must wonder why this cornerstone of Mongol foreign policy is so regularly questioned. Taking the Mongols at their word, one can almost feel the exasperation of Güyük at those “who do not hear” and “do not see,”⁴⁰⁸ even when the message is repeatedly and explicitly laid out in copies and original primary source documents with the khan’s official seal on them!⁴⁰⁹

Within the same decade as the Mongol invasion of Hungary, the Mongols undoubtedly held a prevailing ideology that Europe had an obligation to submit to Mongol authority. A better and more pertinent question for our purposes here is whether that ideology already existed during the 1241-42 invasion, a few years before it appeared in the messages from Güyük and Baiju to the pope. Perhaps the world conquest goal was formulated in the period immediately after the Mongol withdrawal. However, this seems very unlikely. In such a case, we must imagine that the ideology was either conceived during the confusion and instability of an interregnum period when Töregene

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Güyük’s letter in Vatican is an original written into Persian as a useful intermediary language of the period. In fact, running the text directly through Google Translate yields a pretty good, readable translation. See: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LetterGuyugToInnocence.jpg>. The idea that Güyük’s concept of a divine mandate of world conquest was only dreamt up in the aftermath of the Mongol Empire expanding to the borders of Germany is difficult for me to accept. Moreover, we cannot attribute the message to Christian ventriloquism.

was systematically trying to destroy her enemies at court while foisting her chronically ill son, Güyük, onto the throne over Ögedei's expressed decision that Shiremün succeed him,⁴¹⁰ or we must believe that Güyük and his court immediately came up with the idea around the time of his enthronement in 1246. The instability of that entire timeframe makes it seem like an unlikely period for the court in Mongolia to aggressively push an inflexible and demanding program over the princes and subjects of the entire empire – though hypothetically that is possible and maybe such an outward distraction from internecine conflicts would be desirable in the mid-1240s.

The better evidence suggests the world conquest ideology already existed during the Western Campaign. Otherwise, we must wonder at the clairvoyance of Peter, a refugee Russian bishop, who was questioned by the gathered prelates in 1244 before the Council of Lyon. Matthew Paris noted of the interview: "The archbishop, when asked as to their [the Mongols'] mode of belief, replied that they believed there was one ruler of the world; and when they sent a messenger to the Muscovites, they commenced it in these words, 'God and his Son in heaven, and Chiar Khan on earth.'"⁴¹¹ The Russian bishop also explained that "they have already enticed numbers of all nations and sects to them, and intend to subjugate the whole world..."⁴¹² How did the Russian bishop so accurately foretell the messages the papacy would receive a few years later from the ruler of the Mongols? The answer is in my view that he did not foretell anything, but rather these exact formulaic messages, conveying the Mongol mandate of world conquest, had already been received by Russians during the Western Campaign and so were well known to the bishop. As confirmation of this contention, the Hungarian Dominican, Friar Julian, visited the Magyar

⁴¹⁰ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 19.

⁴¹¹ Giles, *English History*, vol. 2, 29-30; Luard, *Chronica Majora*, vol. 4, 387-388. "Chiarchan" evidently was how the name Chinggis Khan sounded to the Russians, probably heard through Turkic-speaking intermediaries.

⁴¹² Ibid.

ancestral homeland, east of the Volga, “Magna Hungaria,” in 1235-36, very shortly before the Western Campaign commenced. A letter on the mission noted,

In that land of the Hungarians, the said brother came across Tartars and the emissary of the ruler of the Tartars who understood Hungarian, Rus’, Cuman, German, Saracenic, and Tartar. He said that the army of the Tartars, which at that time was only five days away, intended to march against Germany – but they were waiting for another army which they [previously] had sent to destroy the Persians [...] And this same people proposed to leave their land to fight against all who will resist them and to devastate every kingdom which they prove able to subjugate.⁴¹³

Having been stopped on the eastern frontiers of Rus’ in 1237 during a second journey because the Mongol advance was fully underway and Magna Hungaria had already been overrun, Julian reported in a letter to the papal curia about the danger facing Europe. First, he noted that the ideology had emerged after Chinggis Khan’s victory over the Khwarazmians: “Considering himself stronger than everyone on the earth, he began to advance against kingdoms, seeking to subjugate the whole world to himself.”⁴¹⁴ Julian then described the Mongol plan of attack on Russia in precisely the way that it later unfolded in 1237-1240 after he left the region.⁴¹⁵ Most importantly, regarding the 1241-42 campaign in Europe, Julian noted, “A trustworthy report came from many, and the duke of Suzdal in person entrusted me to convey to the king of Hungary that the Tartars, day and night, hold councils on how to defeat and conquer the Christian kingdom of Hungary.”⁴¹⁶ Again, faced with this sort of material, we either have to consider that Julian somehow heard and accurately reported on the ideology and plans of the Mongols which shortly afterwards were carried out, or we must allow that the Dominican friar had a remarkable ability to foretell the future and predict the development of the Mongol Empire’s future ideology.

⁴¹³ Hautala, От Давида, 362; Dörrie, *Drei Texte*, 158-159. English translation by author.

⁴¹⁴ Hautala, От Давида, 377.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 377-378.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 380. Importantly, Julian noted that though the Mongols were discussing how to conquer Hungary, they had plans to go to Rome and even farther beyond it.

Any argument that these descriptions of Mongol intentions, all stemming from Latin sources, represent distortions of the facts, owing to authors' tendency to view developments through the prism of European or Christian preconceptions, falls apart when we encounter the wider range of sources. A letter from Ögedei Khan to the king of Korea, dated to December 1231, surviving apparently as a direct transcript in the *Koryosa*, very much suggests a program of world conquest being carried out in all directions, along with the viewpoint that all outside powers had an obligation to submit to the Mongol Empire. The khan's recorded edict in the ultimatum stated, "If you are awaiting battle, we are in one action to kill you [...] If on the other hand you want to submit, you are to go and submit all at once [...] In the great nation of the Qa'an, we Tatars have gathered all the nations surrounding us in the four directions."⁴¹⁷ Moreover, formulaic wording in Ögedei's letter in the *Koryosa* about blinding and crippling the recalcitrant sedentary people it addressed closely matches the wording of Güyük Khan's edict in 1247 to Baiju, supporting the authenticity of both khans' letters and suggesting the wording of these surrender ultimatums was established already by the early reign of Ögedei.⁴¹⁸ In 1234, as war erupted between the Mongols and the Song Dynasty, Chinggis Khan's close advisor, Yelü Chucai, taunted the Song ambassador that, though they were using the Yangzi River for defence, the hooves of the Mongols' horses

⁴¹⁷ Gari Ledyard, "Two Mongol Documents from the Koryō sa," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963): 228. Though recorded in Classical Chinese, there is little doubt that this letter is a verbatim transcript of a translation of the original message in Mongolian. It was likely the exact message the Korean court received, judging from its opening lines which Gari Ledyard has translated: "Strength of Heaven! Words spoken from heaven." See: Ibid. This standard opening formula appears for instance in Batu's message to Ögedei recorded in the *Secret History*. Apparently referring to the same formula of "words spoken from [Tengri]" that we see in the Korean letter, Simon of Saint-Quentin noted that the Mongols called messages from the khan, "letters of God."

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. The relevant passage in the *Koryosa* transcript of Ögedei's letter reads, "Those people we get who do not braid their hair will have their eyes blinded, their hands removed, their legs crippled." This undoubtedly referred to those who surrendered and joined Mongol forces taking the hairstyle of the Mongols as a token of submission, as Dominicans Julian and Simon of Saint-Quentin both noted. For comparison, see this passage from Güyük's letter to Baiju: "And I assure you that whoever will not listen to this my mandate will be deaf, and whoever will see this my mandate and will not carry it out will be blind, and whoever will make as though they are performing this, my judgement, knowing peace but not actually carrying it out, will be crippled." Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 117; Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXII, 52. Accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org

would nonetheless reach the heavens and the ocean – meaning their strategic goal already was total conquest.⁴¹⁹

The chronicle of al-Dhahabi records that in 1240-41, just as the Mongol invasion of Europe was commencing, an emissary of the Mongols approached the Ayyubid emir of Mayyafariqin with a message, the text of which has been recorded. “The representative of the Lord of heaven, who strides the surface of the Earth, king of the Orient and Occident, who commands the princes of all countries to enter into obedience to the khan of khans, Ögedei” warned the emir henceforth to be his obedient subject and dismantle the walls of all his strongholds.⁴²⁰ Down to its very wording and formulae, this echoes the messages that the Franciscans received from Mongol courts though with an important distinction – Ögedei rather than Güyük was the khan transmitting the message to the emir of Mayyafariqin. In light of evidence of this kind, imagining that the messages which Europeans received in the mid-1240s reflect a novel ideology that emerged in the reign of Güyük is indefensible. We ought to accept the evidence that rulers across the whole of Eurasia were receiving similar ultimatums many years prior to the invasion of Hungary.⁴²¹

Thus, I share Peter Jackson’s view that “the balance of probability is that the idea of a mandate from Heaven conferring world-rulership had already emerged in the lifetime of Chinggis Khan.”⁴²² A clue is the stock phrases of the khans’ submission ultimatums, particularly in their way of continuing to describing the constituent peoples of the Mongol Empire as Mongols, Merkits,

⁴¹⁹ Olbricht and Pinks, *Meng-ta pei-lu*, 210.

⁴²⁰ Arlette Nègre (trans.), *Kitāb duwal al-Islām (Les dynasties de l’Islam)* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1979), 242.

⁴²¹ I would go so far as to suggest that one of the most incontrovertible facts in the whole of medieval history, based on the distribution and type of textual evidence, is that the Mongols in the 1230s and 1240s were carrying out a project with the stated aim of the subjugation of the world. Continued arguments against this view only prove that scholars can argue any point, no matter how implausible, and make it somewhat convincing.

⁴²² Peter Jackson, “World-conquest and Local Accommodation: Threat and Blandishment in Mongol Diplomacy,” in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honour of John E. Woods*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 10.

Naimans, and Muslims long after the Mongol Empire had expanded.⁴²³ When this ideology emerged is difficult to say but perhaps Friar Julian was correct in suggesting world conquest became a consuming goal from the time of Chinggis Khan's extraordinary success over the Khwarazm Shah. In any case, it predated the Mongol arrival in Hungary in 1241. Peter Jackson has looked closely at the issue and noted in al-Nasawi work that Chinggis Khan used this concept of *el* – submission – in a recorded message to the Shah in late 1210s, shortly before war broke out. Juvaini records Chinggis Khan using similar formulae in his ultimatum to Nishapur 1220. A letter from Ögedei threatened the Seljuks of Rum and expressed the notion of world dominion in the 1230s, though only recorded much later by Ibn-Bibi, sounds much like what we find in the Mongol ultimatums to the rulers of Europe.⁴²⁴ The concept of world rulership could have come about very early in the Mongol Empire's development. The *Mengda Beilu*, written in 1221, stated that Mongol officials already carried tablets with Chinese script proclaiming Chinggis Khan's mandate of heaven, implying sovereignty over the earth, and referring to him as "Emperor Chinggis" (成吉思皇帝) – terminology which has implications regarding his dynastic and territorial aspirations.⁴²⁵

Though it is clear from their own words that the Mongols intended to conquer "the world," a legitimate question regards what exactly they meant by *the world*. Since Late Antiquity, Roman emperors carried an orb symbolizing the Earth and medieval kings carried on this tradition when, of course, it must have been self-evident that they did not rule the whole of Europe, let alone the world. The Chinese imperial tradition similarly carried a longstanding notion of the emperor's

⁴²³ Ibid., 9.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 4-7.

⁴²⁵ Olbricht and Pinks, *Meng-ta pei-lu*, 65. The important passage in the Song envoy's report notes that high officials wore tablets which in Chinese script conveyed the message, "By heaven's mandate, Emperor Chinggis Khan's sacred imperial decree." Original: 用漢字曰：天賜成吉思皇帝聖旨。For the Chinese text, see: "蒙韃備錄" Wikisource. Accessed at: <https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hant/%E8%92%99%E9%9F%83%E5%82%99%E9%8C%84>

world rulership. Bayan, a Mongol general, memorialized Khubilai Khan upon his successful conquest of the Song Dynasty, opening his message by stating that the highest achievement of any dynasty was to gain the submission of the whole world and put its efforts toward “complete unification.”⁴²⁶ The Orkhon Inscriptions (c. 730), commemorating the deeds of two Turkic rulers and their forefathers stretching back for two centuries, show that such ideals of world mastery already existed in Inner Asian steppe empires long before Chinggis Khan. In the opening of Kul Tigin’s inscription, we read, “Eastward to the sunrise, southwards to the midday, westwards as far as the sunset, and northwards to the midnight – all the peoples within these boundaries (are subject to me). These many peoples I have organized thoroughly. These peoples are not rebellious now.”⁴²⁷

Successful nomadic confederations that arose rapidly and expressed ambitions of world-conquest had a long-established history, and the Mongols’ claims of world mastery were not unprecedented. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether the Mongols’ expressed aspirations and claims reflect mere rhetoric or a serious project. I favor the latter viewpoint. Even though others made claims of world rulership, the Mongols’ level of success in carrying out such a project was without parallel in history. The fact that in the 1230s – in Mongolia – plans and preparations were being made to invade Central Europe and southern China simultaneously might be taken as a pragmatic demonstration of the global scale of Mongol military objectives. I do not know precisely how thirteenth-century Mongols imagined the Earth or even if they conceptualized it as a sphere. However, it can be ascertained that for their purposes, they had a very practical view of the world

⁴²⁶ Francis Woodman Cleaves, “The Biography of Bayan of the Bārin in The Yüan Shih,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 19 (1956): 249.

⁴²⁷ Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 52. The inscriptions were created by rulers of the Second Turkic Khaganate which had emerged on the northern borders of the Tang Dynasty in the late seventh century. It remained a regional power, largely confined to the region of Mongolia, and much smaller than the Mongol Empire, which suggests that the language of world rulership reflected ideals.

as it related to their divine mandate of world conquest; it was essentially wherever there were people who could pay tribute or valuable resources to be collected – wherever the Mongols’ horses and their messengers announcing the Mongol call for submission could reach.

What, then, did a practical, down-to-earth world conquest mean for the Mongols in its application? Thomas T. Allsen noted that with Yelü Chucai’s administrative and census-taking measures in the conquered territories of the Jin Dynasty in the early reign of Ögedei (r. 1229-1241), the Mongols came to appreciate the potential benefits that emerged from registering the population in regards to goods and services that could be extracted from the local populations. Afterwards, they were careful to include the obligation for census-taking in territories which they ordered to submit.⁴²⁸ This can be seen as an important shift in imperial policy from what had been more destructive conquests in previous years that yielded fewer and more ephemeral material and manpower benefits for the conquerors. Allsen further observed that in the reigns of Ögedei and Möngke, the Mongols’ set of demands that all “surrendering states” (*il irgen*) had to accept to avoid their own ruin evolved. Until they accepted these demands, foreign powers and peoples were designated as “rebellious states” (*bulgha irgen*). As such these ultimatums reveal the blueprint of Mongol administration and resource extraction. According to Allsen, there were seven very common stipulations that show up in the sources:

1. The local ruler had to come in person to submit.
2. Close relatives were to be offered as hostages.
3. A registration of the population was to be taken.
4. Taxes were to be sent.

⁴²⁸ Thomas T. Allsen, “Mongol Census Taking in Rus’, 1245-1275,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 5 (1981): 35-36.

5. Local military forces were to be raised for service.
6. Postal relay stations were to be established.
7. Overseers (*darughachi*) for the Mongols would be allowed.⁴²⁹

Christopher Atwood highlights the importance that a just cause for going to war held for the Mongols, and particularly in the time of Chinggis Khan these justifications were usually avenging past attacks on Chinggis Khan's ancestors, the harboring of enemies who had fled from the Mongols, and the killing of envoys.⁴³⁰ One might cynically note that by engaging in a war of conquest on a global scale and offering haughty demands to surrender or die to rulers who had often never heard of them, the Mongols practically guaranteed one or another of the latter two scenarios would happen, thus supplying the necessary justification for an invasion. Still, it is a fascinating truth that Chinggis Khan and the Mongols themselves cared about a just cause for war. As Atwood additionally observes, once the Mongols had committed to war, they aimed at the total subjugation of the enemy ruler – he would either be annihilated along with his family or become “a subordinate executor of Mongol administration.” Moreover, though the Mongols concluded treaties with states they had found too large or powerful to be conquered in a single campaign, they felt these treaties to be temporary and resumed their conquests without warning when a good opportunity presented itself to secure more complete control.⁴³¹

The patterns and practices enumerated above summarize how the Mongols were carrying out their war of world conquest and what their ideology and mandate meant on a mundane level. They had an overall plan to conquer everyone, I believe as early as the later reign of Chinggis Khan or at least during the reign of Ögedei. At a regional level, they attempted to persuade the

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁴³⁰ Christopher Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 349.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

closest neighbors of the state under attack from coming to its aid. Once they subjugated that state, they incorporated its manpower and resources for the purpose of invading the neighbors, using the harboring of refugees as a justification. The objective was to break alliances and isolate single enemies to make them easier to defeat. The Mongols essentially snowballed across Eurasia, their manpower and material resources swelling with each victory and being afterwards applied against those whose borders they had just reached.⁴³² Such a method of divide-and-conquer successfully brought them to the frontiers of Hungary by early 1241.

Though in its application, the world conquest mandate can come across as a cynical project aimed only at the maximum exploitation of outside peoples and their resources, the ideal of world rulership in and of itself seems to have motivated the Mongols. In a paper on the presumed northern borders of the Mongol Empire, I highlighted that in the 1240s they had already carried their conquests up to the Arctic Ocean and subjugated the Permian and Yugra peoples; these tribes were found to be living at a subsistence level so the Mongols demanded labor rather than goods, according to William of Rubruck. Mongols collected the hunting birds, so valuable to their aristocracy, from islands in the Arctic Ocean and even made observations on the position of the Pole Star at that latitude. Carpini observed how at the enthronement of Güyük, the grandees of the empire dressed for four days in different colors which symbolized the four cardinal directions in the traditional Turkic-Mongol system.⁴³³ The fact that they were going to such lengths to demonstrate their rule over all lands and peoples might suggest that they took this both the mandate

⁴³² The Mongols indeed described the process with a similar metaphor. Simon of Saint-Quentin noted that they were inclined to say of their conquests: “We are,” they say, “as a great river with much water which because of its exceeding depth cannot be crossed, its forceful rush sweeping away whatever it encounters, granted it originates from a small source and is derived from many small streams.” See: Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 37; Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXX, 76. Accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org

⁴³³ Stephen Pow, “The Mongol Empire’s Northern Border: Re-evaluating the Surface Area of the Mongol Empire,” in *Genius loci – Laszlovszky 60*, eds. Dóra Mérai et al. (Budapest: Archaeolingua, 2018), 8-13.

and ideal to heart. If we accept the words found in many ultimatums, Mongol leaders believed their world rulership would lead to peace throughout the world,⁴³⁴ and to a real extent it did lead to an epoch scholars have recently dubbed the *Pax Mongolica* when figures like the Polos could traverse the breadth of Eurasia in relative safety.

In a separate paper, I tried to argue for Hungary's suitability for inclusion in the Mongol Empire. First, Hungary is well known as the westernmost extension of the Eurasian steppe belt with a long history of being occupied by nomadic peoples who ostensibly found its environment accommodating to their nomadic lifestyle. Secondly, Hungary in the period was crisscrossed by important trade routes which until shortly before to the period of the Mongol invasion had an eastward emphasis. Both of these characteristics would have made the Carpathian Basin very appealing to the Mongols who placed high value on both pastureland and the economic benefits derived from commerce. The trade routes of medieval Hungary also had regularly spaced commercial towns, likely to facilitate the movement of merchants, and this feature could have lent itself well to the Mongol postal relay system. Hungary's landscape and geographical situation so lent itself to nomadic incursions and occupation that the kingdom's survival and continued independence in the thirteenth century seems more remarkable than that of Poland or Bohemia.⁴³⁵

Situated as it is in a context that saw Mongol messengers evidently demanding the submission of subsistence-level tribes dwelling on the Arctic Ocean and in a period when a concept of the mandate of world conquest was present among the Mongols, I cannot accept that the first major invasion of Hungary was intended as a punitive raid though it may have *de facto* devolved

⁴³⁴ For an illustrative example in Möngke Khan's letter to Louis IX of France, as reported by William of Rubruck, see: Jackson and Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William*, 248.

⁴³⁵ Pow, "Climatic and Environmental Limiting Factors," 307-312.

into by the time Batu withdrew in 1242.⁴³⁶ There are several pieces of evidence in the primary sources that point against the punitive raid explanation. The first relates to the ultimatum from the Mongols to the Hungarian king, the text of which was preserved in Friar Julian's letter to the papal curia in early 1238:

I, Khan,⁴³⁷ the emissary of the heavenly king, to whom he gave power over the earth to lift up those who subject themselves to me and lay low those who resist, am amazed at you, king of Hungary – that when I will have sent you envoys thirty times, you do not send any of them back to me, and send me neither your messengers nor letters. I know that you are a wealthy and powerful king, that you have many soldiers under you, and alone you rule a great kingdom. And, therefore, it is difficult for you to submit yourself to me voluntarily. However, it would be better and more beneficial if you were to voluntarily submit to me! I have understood, in addition, that you are keeping the Cumans, my slaves, under your protection, for which reason I command you not to keep them with you any longer, and do not have me as your enemy because of them! It is easier for them to escape than you because they, lacking houses and migrating about with tents, might perhaps get away. But you, living in houses, having castles and cities – how will you escape my hands?⁴³⁸

As a first point, based on the close resemblance of statements about the wealth and power of the king of Hungary to those which Chinggis Khan made to the Khwarazmian Shah in a missive recorded by al-Nasawi,⁴³⁹ I tend to believe that this letter is authentic. Taken at face value, the letter is a demand for the Hungarian king's submission on a specific issue of contention. It is possible to interpret what might be an ultimatum for submission as only a demand that Béla IV acquiesce to releasing the Cuman refugees from his protection. After all, harboring enemy refugees was a justification for the Mongols to go to war, so it is not illogical to assume that "submission" here implies "submission to our request" – and that, in fact, is how it has been regularly understood in

⁴³⁶ A tricky issue is of course that Chinese sources often describe *tao*, "punitive expeditions," (討) as though unruly, rebellious subjects were being punished, even when these campaigns were in fact aggressive invasions or conquests of independent powers. In East Asian texts, the term can function as a euphemism or justification, and the Mongols similarly held or adapted this type of terminology. See: Pow and Liao, "Subutai," 56.

⁴³⁷ It was often imagined (including by me) that this letter came from Batu and that he is directly addressing the king of Hungary. However, judging by the language which closely repeats the formulae of other messages that came directly from the great khan, we would like to point out that at least in principle this letter was an expression of Ögödei Khan's own voice and command.

⁴³⁸ Hantala, От Давида, 380-381; Dörrie, *Drei Texte*, 179. English translation by author.

⁴³⁹ Levi and Sela, *Islamic Central Asia*, 125-126.

scholarship. Moreover, we know that during the invasion of Hungary some Cumans fled to Bulgaria,⁴⁴⁰ and we likewise know that the Mongols moved in the same direction in 1242 during their withdrawal. It is possible to imagine they were only pursuing Cuman escapees in that direction and the entire war was really fought over refugees. Yet there is a passage discussing the Mongol invasion of Hungary in Emperor Frederick II's widely disseminated letter of June 1241, which appears to have been neglected in such considerations. Frederick related that his information on the campaign in Hungary and the defeat at Muhi came from the bishop of Vác, who was the ambassador at his court. It was apparently that bishop who informed the emperor that Béla IV "was ordered by messengers and letters from these Tartars, if he wished to save his life and that of his subjects, by a surrender of himself and his kingdom, at once to anticipate their favour; but he was not frightened or warned by this..."⁴⁴¹

In short, the Mongol calls for submission were demands for the Hungarian king's submission to their rule rather than a submission to their request to release the Cumans. Moreover, both the Franciscan and Dominican missions to Güyük and Baiju respectively carried the pope's letter and demand to know why the Mongols had massacred the Hungarians in particular. As already mentioned, the khan answered that it was "because they have neither adhered to Chinggis Khan, nor to the Khagan" who had been sent to make God's command for submission to the Mongols known. Baiju likewise answered that destruction befalls those who ignore the divine command of the Mongol emissaries. Neither of them mentioned a dispute over refugees. The invasion of Hungary was inspired by a bigger issue.

⁴⁴⁰ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 176-177. My view is that the Mongol move into Bulgaria could have been at least partly motivated by the Cuman refugees, but they were not the genuine cause for the invasion of Hungary.

⁴⁴¹ Giles, *English History*, vol. 1, 342-343.

Regarding János B. Szabó's arguments,⁴⁴² I do not disagree with his viewpoint that securing the Kipchak people and territory was a primary objective of the Western Campaign according to the Asian sources written in Mongol courts and that the Mongols felt it necessary to ward off the incursions and influences of the Kipchaks' western neighbors like Hungary. However, I would add that the conquest of Hungary was also a stated objective in those sources. I agree as well that Hungary, being far from the Jochid base of operations, before and after the campaign, would have been difficult to hold. The important question, however, regards when the Mongols would have reached that conclusion. Did they have it already before the invasion or was it a conclusion they reached during the invasion? I lean toward the latter viewpoint. Szabó suggests that the Mongols likely desired the Hungarians to pay tribute but did not desire to directly rule over the Carpathian Basin for such reasons. If so, Hungary still would have become a subject of the empire and fulfilled some major requirements of submission to the Mongols. It would have entered into the same sort of agreement that several Western Asian powers, such as Lesser Armenia, Georgia, and the Seljuks of Rum, did in the same decade. Faced with stiff resistance and numerous enemies, the Mongols seem to have been more willing to resort to these arrangements. As Peter Jackson recently observed, "By the mid-thirteenth century the Mongol government had acquired the appearance of an extremely complex pattern of imperial or princely rights, direct rule or indirect control through client rulers. In several of the conquered tracts, the regimes in power had been swept away ... And in many regions, local dynasts survived or new ones were installed."⁴⁴³

There were problems with trying to subjugate Hungary from a powerbase in the Pontic Steppe which history has borne out, but I hesitate to imagine that these issues were so well

⁴⁴² Szabó, *A tatárjárás*, 162-163

⁴⁴³ Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale, 2017), 116.

understood by the Mongols that they tempered Mongol plans and expectations already in early 1241 on the eve of the invasion. There are many sources from the time of the invasion that stated the Mongols planned on continuing farther west than Hungary, something difficult to reconcile with the viewpoint that a short-term occupation of the kingdom was the preordained endpoint of the Western Campaign. Rogerius admitted to disappointment when, as a prisoner, he heard that the Mongols had abandoned their plan to attack Germany. A letter from the bishop of Augsburg in June 1241 stated that the Mongols were to invade “all of Germany imminently.”⁴⁴⁴ A letter from Jordanus, the Franciscan vicar of the province of Poland, written in March 1242, very shortly before the withdrawal, noted that the Mongols were about to invade Germany and Bohemia.⁴⁴⁵ Salimbene de Adam (c. 1221-1290) met frequently with John of Plano Carpini after his return and asked him about the Mongols. Carpini told him that the Mongols had indeed considered invading Italy and this information, a detail absent from Carpini’s own surviving report. It apparently originated from Güyük with whom Carpini spoke often “on friendly terms.”⁴⁴⁶

Of course, these sorts of ideas regarding Mongol goals could have been merely fueled by rumors and fears among Europeans during the invasion, but Friar Julian, with his remarkable foresight, was correct in his assertion in both 1235-36 and 1237-38 that the Mongols would invade Russia and Hungary; he also asserted they were coming for Germany and Rome.⁴⁴⁷ So, there is much evidence that there was a change in plans during the invasion, but it is difficult to explain why this happened. Though the Mongol leadership obviously did manage to preserve many

⁴⁴⁴ Goldene Chronik, 360

⁴⁴⁵ Giles, *English History*, vol. 3, 452.

⁴⁴⁶ Joseph L. Baird, Giuseppe Baglivi, John Robert Kane (trans.), *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam* (Binghampton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986), 200, 203.

⁴⁴⁷ Hautala, *От Давида*, 362, 380.

secrets,⁴⁴⁸ if the larger Mongol strategy was well known by their enemies who were actively preparing, this might have been one reason for the Mongols to alter it in 1242.

Regarding Timothy May's view of gradual conquest in tidal wave cycles of devastation, I agree that the Mongols seem have decided at some point that Hungary's conquest would require additional campaigns. However, this seems to have been a decision that was reached based on total victory and subjugation not being achieved in the first invasion. After all, it would be more beneficial and economical in terms of manpower and time for the Mongols if they drub their adversaries into complete submission on the first attempt. In practice, Mongol conquests often unfolded in this manner, but this seems to stem more from the recalcitrance, resiliency, and rebelliousness of their new subjects than from any preference. It is doubtful the Mongol leaders would prefer to take five campaigns to achieve a conquest if it could be done in one. Nonetheless, the Mongols were highly flexible according to the military situation, and could resort to terrorizing the local population and pillaging with the strategic aim of convincing the enemy leadership to surrender, as they did in 1213-14 in northern China during the early years of their war of conquest against the Jin Dynasty.⁴⁴⁹

Historians should be cautious of seeing a gradual conquest as a chosen method rather than one that became necessary in practice. Some campaigns that have long been interpreted in scholarship as intended exploratory raids or softening-up operations were actually attempted conquests that simply did not unfold as planned, owing to the strength or resistant of the Mongols' adversaries. For instance, I argue that the campaign of Jebe and Sübe'etei in 1220-24, long

⁴⁴⁸ Peter the Russian bishop told attendees at the Council of Lyon in 1244 that foreigners were never allowed to the secret councils of Mongol leaders.

⁴⁴⁹ Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia*, 277.

interpreted as a reconnaissance in force, was in fact a war of conquest.⁴⁵⁰ The Mongols simply did not have the numbers necessary to pacify a huge region filled with large populations of warlike peoples, though they did manage to gain the submission of thousands of Kipchak, Qangli and other tribes whom Sübe’etei made into a new army.⁴⁵¹

The case of the Mongol conquest of Korea is very illustrative of how multiple campaigns could be required to conquer a state, but only because that state continually broke the terms of its submission agreement with the Mongols or returned to open warfare with them. The Kingdom of Korea actually submitted to the Mongols at the first call for surrender. However, a renewed invasion took place in 1225 when the burden of Mongol taxation proved too much, and the Koreans murdered the emissaries who had come to receive gifts.⁴⁵² The Koreans had broken two cardinal rules by refusing to pay tribute and murdering Mongol emissaries. Korea quickly submitted again but then once more murdered its resident *darughachi* and the Korean royal government relocated to Kanghwa Island in 1232.⁴⁵³ This led to another devastating invasion but the Koreans soon secured a truce by sending a (fake) relative of the king to Mongolia as a hostage – a ruse which was only discovered fourteen years later.⁴⁵⁴ Thus in 1253, Möngke Khan ordered a renewed and sustained invasion which after several years of incredible devastation finally convinced the Korean leadership to submit and move off of their island fortress.⁴⁵⁵ It is highly doubtful that this time-consuming and exasperating method of conquest was one that the Mongols preferred but was rather a reaction to the continued resistance of their opponents.

⁴⁵⁰ Pow, “The Last Campaign and Death of Jebe Noyan,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (2017): 7-8.

⁴⁵¹ Pow and Liao, “Subutai,” 58.

⁴⁵² W. E. Henthorn, *Korea: The Mongol Invasions* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 28-29.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 68-71.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

Thus, “gradual conquest” as a practice emerged from military necessity in many cases and must not have been a first choice for Mongol leaders who would have liked to see the world sooner fall under their domination and who would have preferred consistent, reliable shipments of taxes from their subjects. This leads me to the viewpoint that when the Mongols invaded Hungary in 1241, they would have hoped it would end in a permanent conquest. The best evidence that this was their intention emerges indirectly from who took part in the invasion and the way the Mongols entered Hungary. It is crucial to note that there were representatives of all four branches of the Chinggisid dynasty who took part in the larger campaign *and* the advance on Hungary.⁴⁵⁶ Even though Möngke (the senior Toluid) and Güyük (an Ögedeid) returned to Mongolia shortly beforehand, it seems to have been intentional that their interests were still represented and this likely is related to holding a stake in the conquest. Descendants of all four of Chinggis Khan’s sons by his chief wife Börte would be responsible for carving out new domains in the Carpathian Basin.

In early 1241, as Orda (a Jochid) and Baidar (a Chaghadaid) attacked Poland and eventually turned south into Hungary, the main force under Batu and Shiban (both Jochids), along with Sübe’etei, moved through the Verecke Pass in Hungary’s northeast. One army under Qadan (an Ögöeid) and Büri (a Chaghadaid) passed through the Borgo Pass and launched an invasion of eastern Transylvania’s Saxon centers. Böcek (a Toluid) led the assault southward through Vlach territory (later Moldavia and Wallachia) and entered Hungary probably through the Turnu Roşu Pass.⁴⁵⁷ Since this outline is accompanied in Mongol sources by a mention of “five routes,” it is possible that Büri and Qadan’s units entered the Carpathians via different routes. The division of

⁴⁵⁶ The *Xin Yuan Shi* implies that the representation of sons from all four branches of Chinggis Khan’s dynasty, along with the inclusion of Kölgen, had symbolic intent: Ke Shaomin, *Xin Yuan Shi* (Shanghai: Kaiming Publishing House, 1935), 243 (6841).

⁴⁵⁷ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 70.

Mongol armies might reflect a planned appanage distribution since the way they entered the kingdom. The representatives of all four filial branches of Chinggisid family were taking part in a way that seems to provide tidy divisions of Hungary's territory. If not coincidental, there seems to be a component of planned wealth distribution as well; Qadan and Büri's attack fell on the silver mining center, Böçek had taken the salt production and trade routes, while the Jochid princes, Batu and Shiban, seemed to have moved on the pastures of the Great Hungarian Plain. Moreover, they brought their families and herds, a practice which Atwood has suggested indicates the intention of permanent occupation.⁴⁵⁸

As a captive of the Mongols, Rogerius noted of the immediate aftermath of Muhi, "First they set aside Hungary beyond [east] of the Danube and assigned their share to all of the chief kings of the Tatars who had not yet arrived in Hungary. They sent word to them on the news and to hurry as there was no longer any obstacle before them."⁴⁵⁹ This all makes sense in light of the way the representatives of the four sons of Chinggis Khan moved into distinct regions. They had clearly already determined how they were going to parcel up the kingdom into appanages at that early stage. This is very similar to what Grigor of Akanc described the Mongol leaders engaging in during the conquest in Greater Armenia,⁴⁶⁰ and that region did become a permanent part of the Mongol Empire. Thus, Rogerius' description of the establishment of a Mongol administration in Hungary in 1241, run by "kneses, or bailiffs" who enforced the law and arranged the transfer of supplies to the new rulers should not be dismissed as something planned as a temporary measure.⁴⁶¹ In 1241, the conquest of Hungary must have been intended as something permanent. I share

⁴⁵⁸ Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia*, 350

⁴⁵⁹ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 190-191.

⁴⁶⁰ Grigor of Akanc, 13. These were places under permanent occupation. See: Timothy May, *Chormagan*, 55. This same practice in Armenia was also documented by Vardan Arevelc'i. See: R. Thomson (trans.), "The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arevelc'i," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989): 214.

⁴⁶¹ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 206-209.

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Büntgen and Di Cosmo's view that between 1241 and the following year's withdrawal, there was a change in the occupiers' plans. Within that short time, they made a decision to fully abandon the country without leaving any administration in place. Why this happened is uncertain, but it seems doubtful that they arrived with the plan to create an administration and then evacuate.

Chapter 4: The Military Weakness Theory and the Multicausal Theory Related to Strategic Problems

4.1 Preliminary Discussion

This chapter will address, in its initial section, the final theory explored by Greg S. Rogers – namely the notion that the Mongols were essentially forced to stop their conquest or deterred from continuing. The following section will explore my own argument which suggests that there appear to have been multiple causes which ultimately impelled Batu to withdraw, arguing that they were often closely related to military-strategic issues.

1. Is there veracity to any accounts of the Mongols being defeated, wishing to flee from Europe, or suffering high casualties? The **military weakness theory**,⁴⁶² which argues that the Mongols were essentially deterred, either by losses or the perceived might of their enemies, will be explored here. More broadly, we could simply ask: is there any basis to the claims of the Mongols desiring to flee, expressing doubts and fears, or those related to victories over the Mongols?
2. Though the argument that the Mongols retreated in defeat flies in the face of the overwhelming evidence of their victories and high level of success in crushing resistance particularly in Hungary, the most suitable region for their long-term occupation, can it be argued nonetheless that certain situational realities impelled the Mongol commanders' decision to withdraw in 1242? Were the number and sophistication of fortresses in the larger region key factors in this decision? Did

⁴⁶² Rogers, "An Examination," 12-14, 19-20; Pow, "Deep Ditches," 41-45.

other military technologies play a role? Did legitimate fears of a counterattack as well as customs and strategies among the Mongols also influence the decision?

4.2 Is there a basis to the accounts of the Mongols desiring to flee at points, and claims of high casualties? Are there reliable accounts of Mongol defeats in Europe?

The last of the four broad explanations for the 1242 Mongol withdrawal discussed by Rogers is explored here by simply considering some questions which all raise a similar larger question: Are there actually any statements in the earliest available primary sources which could be used to support the idea that the Mongols withdrew because of the resistance they were encountering or feared to encounter? The answer to this is emphatically positive; in fact, I would argue that this is the only explanation for which we can observe both Asian and European sources corroborating each other. It is the only theory which seems to be explicitly supported in several sets of unrelated sources. Using the broad comparative approach which I have been regularly advocating, this situation alone would make the “military weakness” explanation the strongest theory. It is the only explanation that does not necessarily have to contend against explicit statements in our most reliable or authoritative primary sources that contradict it. Carpini gave impetus to the political theory based on the death of Ögedei, but as Rogers notes, several of his own statements can simultaneously be used to support the argument that Mongol losses were high in Hungary. Carpini noted for instance, “A great number of the Tartars were killed in Poland and Hungary, and if the Hungarians had not taken flight and had resisted manfully, the Tartars would have left their country, for they were filled with such fear that they all tried to run away. Bati, however, drawing his sword, withstood them to the face saying: ‘Do not flee, for if you do, not one will escape, and if we are to die, let us all die, for that is about to happen which Chingis Chan

foretold when he said we should be put to death: if the time has now come let us endure it.' And so fresh heart was put into them and they stayed and destroyed Hungary." Elsewhere, he observed a special cemetery in the Mongol homeland for those who died in Hungary, "for many lost their lives there."⁴⁶³ Related to the account of this graveyard for those who specifically died in Hungary, Carpini recounted that he accidentally entered it and was confronted angrily by Mongol guards. They let him go, however, because he was an envoy who did not know the customs of their land. In my view, the personal story involving this locality makes the claim more convincing than if he had stated he merely heard of such a graveyard.

The issue of whether the invasion of Europe was discouraging or costly for the Mongols is not so simple because, while many sources document setbacks, losses, and fears amongst them, these same sources discuss many more defeats with lasting consequences and a great deal more fear and losses amongst the local populations who suffered the invasion. Moreover, despite Rogers' use of it as supporting evidence, the statement of Thomas of Split that in the past the Russians were able to repel the Mongols at first who only returned to the west twenty years later (*sic*), after they had first conscripted many defeated peoples such as the Cumans,⁴⁶⁴ cannot be used to bolster the "military weakness" theory. However, it does support a point of view that I have attempted to argue in the past,⁴⁶⁵ and in the present work, that the stiff resistance they encountered in 1222-1224 at the hands of the Kipchaks, Russians, Bulgars, and Bashghirds deterred the Mongol leadership from attempting a major invasion of the West until the Jin Dynasty was defeated in 1234. This points to the fact that the Battle of the Kalka really was a desperate struggle and, for Sübe'etei at least, the later campaign had an element of revenge.

⁴⁶³ Rogers, "Historians' Explanations," 13; Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 13-14, 30.

⁴⁶⁴ Rogers, "Historians' Explanations," 13-14; Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 252-255.

⁴⁶⁵ Pow, "The Last Campaign and Death of Jebe Noyan," 15-16.

Thus, “military weakness” is a persuasive explanation for the termination of the conquests and basic abandonment of the northwest in the 1220s, and the delay in resuming major campaigns until the mid-1230s, but it is less adequate for explaining the withdrawal in 1242. Especially, we cannot impute Batu’s withdrawal to the Rus’, as desperately as they fought, when we consider that the entire urban culture of the greater Russian territory was basically annihilated in three years and that the surviving Rus’ princes sooner or later submitted to the Golden Horde – many of them very soon after the invasion.⁴⁶⁶ It is also difficult to argue that resistance in Rus’ territories stopped the Mongols because the invasion continued to push thousands of kilometers westward and Rus’ towns were overrun with such rapidity that the two-month duration of the siege of Kozelsk stands out as a remarkable anomaly.

This relates to another important point on this issue – the political contexts and *Standortgebundenheit* of the historians who considered the question of the withdrawal. In the twentieth century, as Rogers demonstrates, there were many historians such as S.L. Tikvinskii who argued that it was the heroic resistance of Russians and other eastern peoples which broke the drive of Batu’s armies to conquer Europe. He wrote, in remarkably familiar terms for anyone studying this topic, of the countries of Western Europe being “saved from inevitable death at the hands of an opponent superior to them in both military strength and strategy... thanks to the heroic opposition of the neighboring peoples – Slavs and Hungarians – to the Tatar-Mongol domination.” V.T. Pashuto echoed this assessment that the Russians and peoples of Eastern and Central Europe saved “Vienna and Paris, London and Rome, the cities and cultures of many countries” from destruction.⁴⁶⁷ Polish and Bulgarian works of the twentieth century described the Battle of Liegnitz

⁴⁶⁶ Perfeky, “Galician-Volynian Chronicle,” 57; Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 15. Yaroslav II was already at Güyük’s court in Mongolia when Carpini’s embassy arrived there in 1246, and Michael of Chernigov and Daniel of Galicia were going to Batu’s court around the same time.

⁴⁶⁷ Rogers, “Historians’ Explanations,” 12.

as a Polish victory after which Batu, who apparently took part in it, withdrew to the steps.⁴⁶⁸ One almost gets the feeling from such assessments that the future Warsaw Pact had its inception in the Mongol invasion period, whether an unappreciative West acknowledged it or failed to realize it. Friedrich Engels, who was obviously very influential on Soviet scholars, had argued in the earlier century that the Mongols' victories had been won at too high a price that it broke the strength of the nomads whose dissensions then ended their attack.⁴⁶⁹

Not surprisingly, Western historians in the tensions of the second half of the twentieth century balked at the idea, popular amongst the Soviet historians, that Eastern Europe's resistance had essentially *saved them*. Leading American historian Charles Halperin argued "Russian blood did not save Western civilization," and Joseph Fletcher stated there was "nothing to suggest" the Mongols viewed the Europeans as too strong to conquer. Meanwhile, the Soviet historians, along with Denis Sinor, could point out that the claims of one Berthold Spuler that German knights at Liegnitz turned back the Mongols or that Friedrich II, Duke of Austria, played some role in Europe's deliverance were at least as preposterous explanations. One can easily detect the tensions between East and West in these scholarly disputes regarding the charter myth of the West's salvation, and similarly get the sense that the Cold War was being played out at the sieges of Kiev and Vladimir, and on the fields of Muhi and Liegnitz. In the argument that the Russians had taken the brunt of the onslaught of a murderous mutual enemy so that the West could escape relatively unscathed, one cannot but help detect the influence of more immediate events in the living memories of the Soviet historians who advanced it.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 12.

But it gets worse. If there were many spurious claims, driven by nationalistic and political motivations, being advanced in the twentieth century, this is in great part due to the foundations of the hyperbole and even forgeries that characterized scholarship in the nineteenth century. In the burgeoning nationalist movements that were especially pronounced in East-Central Europe, the Mongol invasion was often employed to advance feelings of national pride. In a recent article, Tomáš Somer pointed out how an imagined victory at Olomouc, Moravia over the Mongols in 1241 was, ironically enough, a confused memory of a failed attack by Cumans in the service of Béla IV during an invasion of the Bohemian Kingdom in 1253. This confusion appeared quite early in the Bohemian and Polish sources but gradually the “memory” of a great victory over the Mongols at Olomouc became more elaborate. In the 1600s, local legends attaching pilgrimage sites to miracles that supposedly occurred during the Mongol invasion sprang up, likely to attract additional pilgrims.⁴⁷⁰ In 1817, the Czech philologist, Václav Hanka (1791-1861), “found” a fragment original Czech-language manuscript of a poem which recounted Jaroslav of Sternberg’s great victory – something which greatly bolstered the Czech National Revival movement. It was later proved to be an elaborate forgery.

Before the forgery was proven, some already had their doubts about the fragment including Antonín Boček, the official archivist-historian of Moravia. He was convinced the real hero was actually a certain Zdislav of Sternberg, rather than Jaroslav, but when he tried to use primary sources to reconstruct the events, he could find disappointingly few sources. To get around this problem, he forged ten charters detailing great destruction and effects of the Mongol invasion in Moravia and inserted them into his *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris Moraviae*. With Hanka’s

⁴⁷⁰ Tomáš Somer. (2018) “Forging the Past: Facts and Myths behind the Mongol Invasion of Moravia in 1241.” *Golden Horde Review* 6.2: 245-246.

forgeries being exposed in the 1880s and Boček's also being revealed some years later, the myth which had once inspired Czech national feeling became a risible and embarrassing episode in the country's history.⁴⁷¹

We can find a similar, if less dramatic, myth-making process taking place in other countries through Central Europe in the same period. During the emergence of a Croatian nationalist movement, Dimitrija Demeter, composed "The Battle of Grobnik Field" (Bitka na Grobničkom polju) in 1842. The battle seems have been a fiction, but its lack of a factual basis did not stop it from becoming an important part of the Croatian national identity in the early twentieth century. Amidst several paintings depicting formative episodes in the history of Croatia, Celestin Medović devoted one to the fierce struggle at Grobnik (1905), which is present today in the Croatian Institute of History. Once again, the myth of Grobnik seems have grown out of earlier forgeries related to the Mongol invasion which cast an aura of controversy over the entire episode. Josip Ante Soldo has pointed that during the sixteenth century a historiographical tradition emerged that the Frankopani of Krk had provided great assistance against the Mongols to Béla IV when he fled to Dalmatia, pursued by Qadan, in 1242. The supposedly defeated the Mongols at the Battle of Grobnik, killing some 56,000 of the invaders.⁴⁷² There are several sources – including grants from the grateful monarch to the Frankopani – describing the bravery and support that they offered to the king. However, it turns out, these documents were forged during the fifteenth century. Historian Nada Klaić has concluded that these sources are forgeries (pp. 381-3), based on the analysis of their terminology and references to diplomacy. Their content also seems tied to Sigismund, king of Hungary (1387-1437) and Holy Roman Emperor (1431-1437), and his

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 247-248. The forgeries were definitively exposed by B. Bretholz in *Die Tartaren in Mähren* (1897).

⁴⁷² The Croatian Franciscan, Ivan Tomašić, recorded this number of casualties in his *Chronicon breve regni Croatiae* (1561).

activities such as his participation in the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396.⁴⁷³ So, we encounter in this case impressively early forgeries from the Middle Ages, their creation driven by the agendas of nobles in the region, but nonetheless they cast dispersions on all further claims of victories over the Mongols in Croatia.

In the German-language context of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we encounter secondary literature that portrayed Duke Friedrich II of Austria as a great hero in the war against the Mongols and even as the savior of Europe. This continued from the Early Modern period into the first half of the nineteenth century when German historical scholarship began calling for a “*kritische Untersuchung*” (critical investigation) of the topic of the Mongol invasion of Europe. While his Czech contemporaries, Palacký and Boček, had been careless and uncritical in their use of primary sources in the view of E. J. Schwammel, German-language historians had certainly reached the carefully researched conclusions that “half the glory” for the salvation of the Hohenstaufen and Babenberg houses belonged to the Austrian duke, Friedrich II, who had halted and thrown back the Mongols before they could invade Germany. Indeed, Friedrich II had been nothing less than “*der siegreiche Bekämpfer der Tartaren*” (the triumphant opponent of the Tatars).⁴⁷⁴

As Johannes Giessauf has pointed out, this viewpoint on the Friedrich’s contribution to repelling the Mongols was remarkably consistent regardless of how far *Geschichtswissenschaft* developed. Among many German scholars who praised the duke’s heroics against the Mongols,

⁴⁷³ Josip Ante Soldo, “Provala Tatara u Hrvatsku,” *Historijskom zborniku* 21-22 (1969): 381-383. There are documented cases of forgeries, complete with golden seals, being created in Croatia in the 1400s to annul property sales, for instance. See: Damir Karbić, “The Šubići of Bribir (A Case Study of a Croatian Medieval Kindred),” doctoral dissertation (Budapest: CEU, 2000), 394-395. My special thanks to Mišo Petrović (CEU) for his careful assistance with the Croatian secondary literature on this topic.

⁴⁷⁴ E. J. Schwammel, *Der Antheil des österreichischen Herzogs Friedrich des Streitbaren an der Abwehr der Mongolen und seine Stellung zu König Bela von Ungarn in der Zeit des Mongolensturmes*, 665-66.

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Joseph Hormayr (1781-1842) likened the duke to Aetius who stopped Attila, Charles Martel who stopped the Moors, and Otto the Great who stopped the Magyars at Lechfeld. But while those figures had saved particular nations, Friedrich had saved “the whole civilized world.” This trend persisted well into the twentieth century, driven by German national feeling and the political-historical developments of the time, with Hugo Hantsch (1895-1972) noting in 1947 that Austria had proved itself during the Mongol invasion as the “bulwark of the Occident.”⁴⁷⁵ Yet Giessauf has also thoroughly researched and highlighted the demonstrably negligible role he played during the invasion. He is recorded to have personally killed two Mongols in Hungary, and according to his own surviving letters, his army dispatched either 300 or 700 more on the borders of Austria.⁴⁷⁶ Meanwhile, he actively harmed the war effort of the Hungarian king who subsequently referred to the duke as *nostrum specialem inimicum* – “our special enemy.”⁴⁷⁷

It is important to note that unsubstantiated claims of victories by Europeans against the Mongols continue to appear even in very recent scholarship. An important Romanian monograph on Romania’s relations with the Golden Horde, published in the 1980s, made a very detailed and elaborate claim of a victory won by local Hungarians and Romanians over Berke’s forces in the Banat region in 1256. It even records that the Mongols suffered 56,000 casualties!⁴⁷⁸ Alexandru Gonța described this event on the basis of a single reference to a letter of the Archbishop of Canterbury to Peter II of Savoy, but when one follows the citation it leads to a letter dated to 1247 that only mentions that there was news that the Mongols had returned to the Kingdom of

⁴⁷⁵ Johannes Giessauf, “Herzog Friedrich II. von Österreich und die Mongolengefahr 1241/42,” In: *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Alpen-Adria-Raumes* (= *Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Geschichte* 9) (Graz 1997), 1-2.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11, 18.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁷⁸ Alexandru Gonța, *Românii și Hoarda de Aur 1241-1502* (Iasi: Demiurg, 2011), 90.

Hungary.⁴⁷⁹ It records absolutely nothing about the Banat, a battle “at the confluence of the Tisza and Danube,” and precise casualty figures. Besides, there is the problem of its being written a decade too early to report on a clash that supposedly took place in 1257. Yet, excellent modern scholars can end up repeating these sorts of claims, especially as they pursue various specialties which do not necessitate reconstructing the historical textual basis for an outline of events. So, for instance, an archaeologist might simply cite previous authoritative historical monographs without revisiting their claims. Thus, we see Gonța’s baseless claim repeated very recently in an otherwise reliable and thorough archaeological study on the Banat region.⁴⁸⁰

It seems like many of the false claims of victories that appear now are curious mixtures of original statements in sources upon which embellishments and outright fiction fossilized in the secondary literature over time. When even texts that are presumed to be authoritative repeat such claims, subsequent authors simply cite this secondary literature without any reservations. This historiographical phenomenon, evident in material related to the Mongol invasions of Europe, is also apparent in process by which literature on the Sübe’etei developed,⁴⁸¹ and this is not simply a coincidence in my view. It relates in both cases to language barriers and perceptions of scholarly authority. False claims about Sübe’etei were perpetuated because it was not the case that most authors and researchers could actually access the primary sources. Especially in the nineteenth century, authors writing general histories simply had to take the assertions of a few authorities at face value. Similarly, if one encounters a rare claim that stemmed from literature about the Mongol

⁴⁷⁹ MGHS XXVIII, 288. There is indeed a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury, but it was not even written during the reign of Berke. To make matters even more confused, Gonța claimed that this letter was written in 1261, which was after the death of Matthew Paris, whose *Chronica Majora* contains the letter, actually dated to 1247.

⁴⁸⁰ Silviu Ota, *The Mortuary Archaeology of the Medieval Banat (10th – 14th centuries)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 40. This is where I first encountered the claim. My thanks to Silviu Ota for his great assistance in tracking down its origin.

⁴⁸¹ Pow and Liao, “Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction,” 38–48.

invasions written in an Eastern European or East-Central European linguistic context, it is not likely to be the case that a global readership can trace the citations and double-check their textual basis. Much of the source material remains untranslated in Latin which is increasingly neglected. Now with increasing public interest, a great amount of information on the Mongol invasions is appearing on Wikipedia, this situation is becoming quite dire. The material is often evolving as a tightly intertwined sequence of reliable source-based claims and baseless nonsense that has merely been perpetuated in a literary game of telephone for generations. Faced with citations that lead to monographs written in regional languages, we can be sure that few authors will be equipped to carefully assess the value of the claims they encounter.

The troubled historiography of the Mongol invasion of Europe in 1241-42 has seen many forgeries and hyperboles already thoroughly exposed in scholarship. Moreover, with a situation in which modern scholars continue to accidentally record misinformation often simply because it appeared in the works of earlier authorities, it really is no surprise that claims that the resistance of local populations played any role whatsoever in bringing about the Mongol withdrawal in 1242 are greeted with cynicism at present. Considering our own *Standortgebundenheit*, we might acknowledge that historians presently are in a period of hyper-skepticism regarding any such explanations. But has scholarship become perhaps too wary and too critical of such claims? In Poland, we can note a shift from the wishful thinking behind the Lajkonik Festival in Krakow – where the locals traditionally celebrated a questionable repulse of the Mongols – to a skepticism not simply of any claims of victories but also of any claims made in the chief primary source on the 1241 invasion of Poland – the fifteenth-century history of Jan Długosz. Polish historian, Gerard Labuda, reached the conclusion that the long and detailed account found in Długosz's work was based on some lost chronicle or historical materials written shortly after the events. Perhaps they

originated from the writings of a Dominican, Jan Iwanovic, mentioned as a survivor of the battle, and a common source also used by the *Annales Silesiaci compilati*.⁴⁸² However, Józef Matuszewski subsequently cast doubts on Labuda's claims and concluded that Długosz's account of many important events is unreliable since his thirteenth-century source materials, if indeed he had any, cannot be substantiated. In Matuszewski's view, the account of Długosz was based on Thomas of Split and the very brief summary of C. de Bridia – the rest being the literary flourishes of an imaginative fifteenth-century author.⁴⁸³ Following up on that view, Jerzy Mularczyk left out Długosz in his reconstruction of the invasion of Poland, re-imagining the Battle of Liegnitz as a small skirmish of little military importance.⁴⁸⁴ According to this argument, the most detailed primary source materials we have on the invasion of Poland – including any reports of successful resistance or rare victories for the Poles – are essentially mythology.

But returning to the questions posed at the start of this discussion, when unreliable sources and interpretations are cast aside, do we still see evidence of a negative side of the invasion of Europe for the Mongols. I would contend that we do. The rumors of setbacks are simply too widespread through a diverse range of sources from different milieus to be merely reflecting a European bias. Asian sources regularly uphold the claims found in European sources and even introduce unique negative accounts related to fears, high casualties, tough resistance, etc. Moreover, the strange silences or *lancunae* in Asian texts about the campaign itself, though the preparations for it are well-documented, seem to belie the importance of it. Its high priority is nonetheless revealed by the status of the Chinggisid princes and noyans who all simultaneously took part in it. It is strange, for instance, that Juvaini referred to the extirpation of the Kipchak and

⁴⁸² Gerard Labuda, *Wojna z Tatarami w roku 1241*, 1959. Many thanks to Michał Machalski (CEU) for his assistance regarding the Polish secondary literature.

⁴⁸³ Józef Matuszewski, *Relacja Długosza o najeździe tatarskim w 1241 roku*, 1980.

⁴⁸⁴ Jerzy Mularczyk, "Mongolowie pod Legnicą w 1241 r.", *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. 96, 1/2 (1989) pp. 3-26.

Magyars as the primary aim of the Mongol leadership at the quriltai in 1235, but then he devoted so little attention to the events of the war. Minorsky thought that perhaps there was a lacuna in the text from the point where the campaign in Russia (1237) began to be discussed until the description of the capture of Magas (1239-40).⁴⁸⁵ Juvaini also happened to be very remiss about the earlier campaign of Jebe and Sübe'etei against the Kipchak, Russians, and Volga peoples in 1222-1224, simply neglecting to mention anything about it though he had covered the preceding parts of the campaign in detail.⁴⁸⁶ These repeated gaps might hint at a willful silence beyond simple ignorance about what happened.

Regarding accounts of tough resistance, several sources refer to the Mongols facing such resistance and experiencing fear of defeat in both Poland and Hungary. The Polish Franciscan, C. de Bridia, stated that Mongol informants had personally told Benedict the Pole that the battle of Liegnitz was a near disaster for their side. The Mongols were apparently about to flee when the columns of Henry II of Silesia suddenly collapsed into a disorganized retreat.⁴⁸⁷ This is meaningful since Benedict the Pole, as a companion of Carpini on the journey to and from Mongolia, had much time to converse with his Mongol companions and with the groups they passed through. It is also easy to imagine how C. de Bridia, as a fellow Polish Franciscan, would have received this information from Benedict the Pole. He also detailed an initial defeat when the Mongols first entered Poland. Regarding the invasion of Hungary, C. de Bridia stated that the Batu's forces turned in flight at the contested bridge at the Battle of Muhi until he compelled them to return to

⁴⁸⁵ V. Minorsky, *Caucasica III: The Alān Capital *Magas and the Mongol Campaigns*, 14 (1957): 222, n. 2.

⁴⁸⁶ Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 269, n. 4; Pow, "The Last Campaign and Death of Jebe Noyan, 18-19.

⁴⁸⁷ Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 80-81.

battle, adding extra details not found in the account of Carpini. Furthermore, he identified the source for this claim as “the Tatars themselves.”⁴⁸⁸

We do of course have to be cautious with this sort of testimony. Otto of Freising, a century earlier, thought very little of the Hungarians. Thus, when they managed to win a battle against the German Crusaders passing through their territory, the chronicler indicated that the Hungarians were in fact on the verge of flight before they managed to win.⁴⁸⁹ With defeats suffered at the hands of the Mongols, we could likewise be witnessing a literary convention for excusing such defeats. However, I contend that we can trust the friars on these points since they also mentioned much that discredits the European forces that opposed the Mongols, and they readily acknowledged the skill of the Mongols in war. With the Battle of Muhi, we can compare the account of C. de Bridia to Chinese sources, originally stemming from a Mongolian biography of Sübe’etei, and see that they match quite well on the details. C. de Bridia for instance mentioned that a Mongol “chief general” was hurled over the bridge spanning the Sajó by King Coloman, the brother of Béla IV, and that they threw back several attacks by the Mongols, but the general carelessness and inactivity of the Hungarian forces allowed them to be surrounded and defeated.⁴⁹⁰

The basic outline of events matches the account in the most lengthy and detailed citation of Sübe’etei’s original lost biography – one of two matching biographies of the general found in the *Yuan Shi*. It states that while Mongol forces tried to cross the bridge, they were attacked by the Hungarians in that disadvantageous position. A leading general with the honorary epithet “Bahadur,” evidently close comrade of Batu, died along with dozens of armored elite troops. At this point, the princes themselves wanted to retreat and devise a plan to defeat the Hungarian

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 82-83.

⁴⁸⁹ Mierow, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, 68-69.

⁴⁹⁰ Painter, “The Tartar Relation,” 82-83.

monarch later, but Sübe’etei shamed them into continuing the fight by stating that he would not return until he reached the Danube River and a certain Hungarian city.⁴⁹¹ A third and most abbreviated version of Sübe’etei’s biography recorded in Su Tianjue’s work sums up the main Mongol army’s battle around the bridge well: when the great army engaged in battle, it did not go well – i.e., it was a military setback (大軍會戰，不利). This all appears to corroborate Thomas of Split’s detailed account of the battle which records that certain units under Coloman, Bishop Ugrin of Kalocsa, and the Master of the Knights Templar fought very effectively in the early stages of the battle and kept making “a great slaughter among the enemy” (*magnas strages ex hostibus faciebant*) before they were surrounded and routed.⁴⁹²

Chinese and Persian accounts simultaneously reflected perceptions of Hungary as a dangerous and powerful adversary in the lead-up to the Battle of Muhi in April 1241. Again the biography of Sübe’etei records that trepidation about the strength of the Hungarian royal army was widespread amongst Batu’s troops in the period before the engagement.⁴⁹³ Juvaini stated that the Hungarians had been rendered arrogant by “the magnitude of their numbers, the greatness of their power and the strength of their arms” and that each soldier was famous in war and considered flight a disgrace. In the same passage, the author mentioned that Batu was racked with anxiety on the day before the engagement, after hearing a report on the numerical superiority and strength from Shibān who had performed a vanguard scouting operation. Thus, Batu went atop a hill to

⁴⁹¹ Pow and Liao, “Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction,” 66-67. The city is “Macha” on the Danube. Though it seems to describe the intended attack on Esztergom, it might actually refer to Bache (modern Bač) which was known to al-Idrisi, writing in the twelfth century, as one of the great cities of Hungary. It was close to the Danube and a wealthy seat of an archbishopric in earlier centuries. The Kipchaks had a demonstrable tendency to alter a /b/ sound to an /m/ sound.

⁴⁹² Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 266-267.

⁴⁹³ Pow and Liao, “Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction,” 63, 65.

commune with Tengri in conscious imitation of Chinggis Khan's custom before his greatest wars, having reportedly ordered the Muslims in his army to pray for victory.⁴⁹⁴

None of the source material really echoes the secondary literature about easy victories against hopelessly outclassed and bumbling enemies – “tyros” in the words of Edward Gibbon. Even in the few Asian records we have of this conflict, it sounds like a fearful and stressful predicament for Batu and his forces. As such, the statements of the friars about the Mongols being on the verge of flight at Muhi corroborate the accounts first recorded under Mongol government auspices. Especially meaningful for the attempt to find an explanation for the withdrawal is the fact that we have an originally Mongolian document stating that the princes wanted to flee from Hungary a year before they actually withdrew.

Regarding Carpini's claim of high casualties among the Mongols during the campaign in Hungary, other sources can offer some indirect support for this claim. Besides the statements above about losses at Muhi, a statement in the *Heida Shilue* – a work of two Song emissaries to the Mongols in the 1230s – offers some insight. It notes that those who took the body (or perhaps only the head) of a Mongol who fell on a campaign in a distant land and shipped it on a pack animal to the family of the deceased in Mongolia would receive a handsome reward.⁴⁹⁵ Thus, we might assume that those whose remains were taken back to Mongolia must have been among the higher ranked individuals to justify the enormous effort. The bodies of the fallen elite seemed to have high importance. When the sons of three Mongol leaders were killed in the bloodbath that characterized the fall of Kozelsk in 1238, the Mongol searched extensively for their bodies, though

⁴⁹⁴ Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 270-271. For a detailed discussion of this episode, see: Pow and Laszlovszky, “Finding Batu's Hill at Muhi.”

⁴⁹⁵ Olbricht and Pinks, *Meng-ta pei-lu*, 223.

in vain.⁴⁹⁶ So, if the remains of elite members of society returning from Mongolia were numerous enough to justify an individual cemetery, this might imply that a considerable number of the leaders and aristocracy of Mongol society had died in Europe. Perhaps the type of warfare they were forced to engage in – the constant need to storm real and *ad hoc* fortresses even in the Great Hungarian Plain⁴⁹⁷ – brought about these sorts of losses among the elite. Several centuries later, Ötemish Hajji (f. 1550), whose history was informed by materials and lore from the Golden Horde, noted that Hungary was a great province and there were “many battles” with the Király during the invasion.⁴⁹⁸

Turning to the question of whether the Mongols experienced any defeats in Europe, it is an important one to explore in this study because defeats could hypothetically motivate a withdrawal. Peter Jackson is doubtful that they ever experienced a serious check at the hands of European armies. He attributes Matthew Paris’s strange and repeated claims of an Imperial victory over the Mongols to a desire to magnify Emperor Frederick II role as a defender of Christendom. Moreover, the less improbable victories found in the sources were probably minor triumphs over raiding parties. Even so, as Jackson notes, “The idea that the Mongols had suffered a major check was remarkably widespread.”⁴⁹⁹

There are many accounts of minor victories over the Mongols in Europe found in the sources, but as Jackson contended, it is difficult to see major effects from these engagements. For instance, C. de Bridia recorded such an event, noting that Orda’s forces were initially defeated on

⁴⁹⁶ Perfecky, *Galician-Volynian Chronicle*, 46-47.

⁴⁹⁷ Laszlovszky et al., “Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary,” 427-428; Rosta, “Egy új lehetőség kapujában,” 186–192.

⁴⁹⁸ Mirgalev, *Qara Tavrikh*, 32-33. He likewise noted a fortress in Crimea and how Shibān took it by a ruse. This would fit with Rashid al-Din’s record of Shibān invading Crimea. I believe that the local lore recorded by this sixteenth-century author often had a historical basis, particularly since he visited the site in Crimea, it seems.

⁴⁹⁹ Peter Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 67.

Poland's borders.⁵⁰⁰ His written work was finished July 1247 so we cannot attribute this to some legend that had developed in the intervening centuries. Jan Długosz, writing much later, also described a victory at Tursko, possibly the same event, that resulted in the Mongols' prisoners escaping, though the Mongols regrouped and eventually defeated the Poles.⁵⁰¹ It might be tempting to dismiss this account, but the *Yuan Shi* biography of Sübe'etei records a setback for the Mongols during the larger campaign at a place called Turiske (秃里思哥) which might reflect a memory of the event, albeit as an amalgamation of that event with the fall of Kozelsk in May 1238 and with the Rus' leader's name, bizarrely recorded as "Ye-lie-ban," likely a corruption for "Irezan" (Ryazan),⁵⁰² another principality/city which fell in December 1237.

Roger Bacon recorded that the Moksha tribe had been defeated by the Poles, Germans, and Bohemians while in Poland and so they clung to the hope that they would be freed someday by these same people: "East of the Don are [...] a tribe called the Moxel [...] Their chief, and a great part of the people, were killed in Poland by Poles, Alemanni, and Bohemians, when the Tartars conscripted them in a war with the Poles. Yet they [still] side vigorously with the Poles and Alemanni, clinging to the hope that by them they may be freed from slavery to the Tartars."⁵⁰³

In Hungary, there were some small successes though they are often downplayed in our main narrative sources with were lamenting the disaster of the invasion rather than trying to cheer their readers with small triumphs. Rogerius mentioned, for instance, that Bishop Benedict of

⁵⁰⁰ Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 80-81.

⁵⁰¹ Długosz, *Historiae Polonicae*, XII, 267.

⁵⁰² The name of the Rus' "ruler" in Sübe'etei's biography is Yelieban (也烈班). However, Möngke's annals of the *Yuan Shi* record that he demonstrated valor in taking the "city" of Ryazan (也烈贊) – Irezan in Mongolian: *Yuan Shi*, 44. Possibly, the compilers encountered this term and were not always sure if it referred to a person or place.

⁵⁰³ John Henry Bridges (ed.), *The "Opus Majus" of Roger Bacon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1900), 361. Translation by Herbert M. Howe, 1996.

Oradea had defeated a small group of them in the early stages of the invasion of Hungary.⁵⁰⁴ To the west of Hungary, a victory of Otto of Brunswick is recorded in more than one source.⁵⁰⁵ Duke Friedrich of Austria, as mentioned, reported a small victory on his borders as the Mongols made their way between Bohemia and Hungary – noting that 300 of the enemy were slain in a letter dated 13 July 1241. Two weeks later he noted in another letter that 700 had been slain. The Chronicle of Garsten (*Continuatio Garstensis*), however, noted that untold numbers of the enemy had been killed.⁵⁰⁶ I share Giessauf's view that the *Continuatio Garstensis* seems to be describing the same general event in its reference to an attack on Austria's border at Korneuburg ("apud Nuinburch").⁵⁰⁷

There is also an account of Ivo of Narbonne that describes a Mongol attack on "Neustat" (Neustadt) where he was staying and the successful relief of the town by the Duke of Austria and other neighboring allies, who put the Mongols to flight.⁵⁰⁸ As Giessauf points out, Ivo's use of "Tattari" rather than "Tartar" in his letter points to a degree of authenticity in the document. It could well be a legitimate account of an event.⁵⁰⁹ I would add that the detailed description of an English interpreter in Mongol service who was captured, complete with a whole backstory of how he ended up in the service of the Mongols, along with the claim that he was recognized as a former envoy to the king of Hungary, lends credence to the letter. Thus, my view is that Ivo of Narbonne was in fact describing the same attack on Austria that Friedrich also described in his letters.

⁵⁰⁴ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 178-179.

⁵⁰⁵ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 67.

⁵⁰⁶ Joseph Hormayr, *Die goldene Chronik von Hohenschwangau, Urkunde* (Munich: G. Franz, 1842), 65-66, 70; Giessauf, 18.

⁵⁰⁷ Giessauf, "Herzog Friedrich II. von Österreich," 18.

⁵⁰⁸ Giles, J. A. (trans.), 1889, *Matthew Paris, English History: From the Year 1235 to 1273*, Vol. 1, George Bell & Sons, London, 469-470.

⁵⁰⁹ Giessauf, "Herzog Friedrich II. von Österreich," 19-21.

A historical problem emerges, however, because Ivo of Narbonne is thought to have been describing an attack on Wiener Neustadt rather than Neuburg. I cannot share Giessauf's view that the attackers might have been Cumans who had fled Hungary after the assassination of their leader, Kuthen.⁵¹⁰ They were documented by Rogerius to have fled southeastward through Marchia,⁵¹¹ a clearly defined area, to Bulgaria. Moreover, such an explanation cannot be reconciled with the account of an English prisoner acting as an envoy of the khan being among the prisoners taken by the Duke of Austria. Such a figure in Orda's army would make sense.

Thus, there are two feasible explanations. One possibility is that Ivo of Narbonne was in fact describing the events that occurred the settlement of Neuburg (Korneuburg), north of the Danube River, and simply called it Neustat (new town) rather than Neuburg (new walled town). Loose circumstantial support for this explanation is found in two important works composed in the same region of Austria and thought to date from the early thirteenth century. The *Nibelungenlied*, composed by an anonymous Austrian author, uses the terms "*burc*" and "*stat*" interchangeably to refer to Attila's capital, Ecelburg/Etzelburg (Buda).⁵¹² Likewise, the *Deeds of the Hungarians* written in Latin by a Hungarian anonymous author in the same period employed the German term *burc* to refer to a town, namely Attila's capital.⁵¹³ It does suggest a precedent in thirteenth-century Austria and Hungary alike that these German terms could be used interchangeably, and so we might expect a Neuburg (Korneuburg) to have been interchangeably known as Neustat in the same period. Also, Ivo of Narbonne identified himself as staying with a Beguine community which one could imagine situated at Korneuburg, just north of the Danube

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 22-23.

⁵¹¹ Bak and Rady, 176-177.

⁵¹² A.T. Hatto, *The Nibelungenlied* (London: Penguin, 1969), 396, n. 396.

⁵¹³ Rady and Veszprémy, *Anonymous. Deeds of the Hungarians*, 8-9.

but quite close to Vienna, rather than the much more distant Wiener Neustadt. Though speculative, this explanation could reconcile the sources regarding an attack on Austria in 1241.

The other possibility is that Ivo of Narbonne really was in Wiener Neustadt and bent the truth, pretending he had been in a town that came under attack. In my view, it seems entirely probable that the Mongols under Orda and Baidar would attack an Austrian settlement north of the Danube. If they attacked Wiener Neustadt, however, that would mean that not only did they cross the Danube River half a year before any such crossing is documented, but they also would have had to ride past Vienna – the ducal capital. I cannot imagine that Friedrich II would then describe this episode as an attack on his “borders.” Moreover, it seems impossible that the attack documented by Ivo of Narbonne’s letter could have taken place in the summer of 1242; the letter of Duke Friedrich II in July 1241 indicates the Mongols were threatening his own frontiers and that he was fighting against them there, whereas a second letter in the summer of 1242 indicates that he had advanced against the Mongols into formerly Hungarian territory and was present at the castle of “Clobuk” on the Váh River in present-day Slovakia.⁵¹⁴ Therefore, the most sensible explanation is that the French visitor, Ivo, was actually at Neuburg and that this is where a relief army drove off the Mongols in the early summer of 1241. In any case, this victory was hardly of great strategic value to the overall course of the war and there is no way the Mongol withdrawal in 1242 can be imputed to it. This ties to another account of a minor victory, recorded by Dalimil to have been won by the Václav I of Bohemia in the first part of 1241 at Glatz (Kłodzko). While accounts of victories in Czech lands were sometimes falsified, this episode is supported by the Bohemian king’s letter and that of Frederick II which mention fighting on Bohemia’s border.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁴ Hormayr, *Die goldene Chronik, Urkunde*, 65-66, 69. I take the mentioned castle to be Hlohovec (Galgóc) which was “in Hungary” as Friedrich specifically indicated, rather than a location in Moravia as Hormayr suggested.

⁵¹⁵ Hanka, *Dalimils Chronik von Böhmen*, 182; Hormayr, *goldene Chronik*, 66; Giles, *English History*, vol. 1, 343.

There are three accounts of Mongol defeats in Europe that seem to have been more significant and consequential than those described above, and which should be investigated here.

1. There is a description of a botched river crossing that likely reflects the well-attested initial stage of the Battle of Muhi and caused doubts in the Mongol commanders about the continuation of the campaign. 2. There is an account of a defeat experienced at the hands of a coalition of armies in Croatia originating from an Islamic author. 3. There is another description of a defeat experienced in Bulgaria or close to Constantinople suffered at the hands of the Latin Empire. These latter two episodes occur within a historiographical and textual blind-spot which has made it difficult to make sense of the meagre accounts and whether they refer to the same event.

Regarding the river-crossing defeat, the story was recorded in the Armenian prince Het'um's *Flower of the Histories of the Orient* (1307) which he dictated in French. It states that after conquering Hungary, Batu led his forces to the Duke of Austria's territory and encountered a great river. The bridge was blocked by the Austrians so Batu tried to ford the river, but he and a great number of his troops perished, swept away by the water. "Struck with dread and shame, [the remaining Mongols] returned in great sorrow to the kingdom of Russia and Komania... Thereafter the Tartars did not go to the country of Germany."⁵¹⁶ The *Chronica van der hilliger stat va coelle* records an account of a failed attack on a bridge in Austria, but a comparison reveals that it was merely translated into German from Het'um's work and cannot be seen as any separate corroboration of this obviously inaccurate record of events.⁵¹⁷

When used in comparison with other sources, it is evident that Het'um tended to be imprecise on historical details. It also must be remembered that he dictated his history which would

⁵¹⁶ Robert Bedrosian (trans.), *Het'um the Historian's History of the Tartars* (New York: Sources of the Armenian Tradition, 2004), g42.

⁵¹⁷ Gombos, *Catalogus*, 487.

contribute to his tendency to amalgamate events, apparent throughout his work.⁵¹⁸ On the other hand, he explicitly stated that the section of his history in which this account is found came from “Tartar histories.” He had served with them on campaigns and attended the enthronement of several khans of the Ilkhanate. In my view, this confused account has as its basis real memories and stories of the Battle of Muhi and the fighting for the bridge which resulted in the death of a Mongol general. As hinted at already, the tenor of the biography of Sübe’etei in the *Yuan Shi* regarding the Battle of Muhi is rather negative. Not only does it describe the death of a general and many elite armored troops, along with the princes’ desire to flee from Hungary, but it also revisits these traumas in the context of a personal conflict between Batu and Sübe’etei that arose because of the casualties which resulted from the botched river crossing specifically.⁵¹⁹ While that is undoubtedly the main kernel of truth informing Het’um’s version of the invasion of Europe, it is possible that his story also reflected more recent memories of a Mongol chieftain who had been captured and beheaded during the crossing of the Drim in Serbia in 1282,⁵²⁰ or by the results of the disastrous 1285 invasion of Hungary by Nogai and Töle Buqa.

While Het’um’s description of a defeat is largely useless for historians trying to reconstruct actual events in 1241-42, it is useful as a reflection of later perceptions and a distant memory of the event among Mongols. By the early fourteenth century, Batu’s victory in Hungary had been transformed into his defeat and death in Austria. Part of that unflattering picture could have emerged with the ongoing hostility between the Ilkhanate and Golden Horde, starting in the 1260s. Some individuals in the Ilkhanate may have gloated over a perceived defeat of the Golden Horde

⁵¹⁸ For example, Het’um noted that Möngke Khan drowned when his ship sank during the invasion of Song China which suggests he confused the later invasions of Japan (1274, 1281) which were devastated by typhoons with the land invasion of the Song Dynasty in 1259. See: Bedrosian, *Het’um the Historian’s History*, g40.

⁵¹⁹ Pow and Liao, “Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction,” 67.

⁵²⁰ Aleksandar Uzelac, “Tatars and Serbs at the end of the thirteenth century,” *Revista de Istorie Militară* 5/6 (2011): 10.

in Europe, and Het'um's version of events reflected such attitudes. If the account actually represents a story that had currency amongst Mongols in the Ilkhanate, it is especially meaningful that it reflects regret amongst the troops of Batu for attempting to invade Europe and it has a sort of explanatory element – the first invasion went badly and so the Mongols never returned to resume the conquest of that region.

Regarding the second substantial account of a defeat, we find an account in Abu'l Fida's geographical work regarding events near Šibenik on the Dalmatian coast that must have occurred in 1242 when Qadan's forces were there. This account originated in the earlier work of Ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi (1214-1286) who spent time at the Ilkhanate court and so might have been informed about Mongol setbacks in Europe in a similar context to that of Het'um. In any case, the relevant text states that the Mongols advanced to its walls, and a combined force of Hungarians, Bashkirs, and Germans joined and inflicted such a defeat on them that it “deprived them of the desire to return to those countries.”⁵²¹

This is compelling for several reasons. For one thing, we cannot argue that Abu'l Fida or the earlier author of his original source were motivated by partisan feeling to assert a victory in Croatia by Christian locals over the Mongols. Another intriguingly related fact is that from the 1220s to the 1250s, the Templars had occupied an important role at Šibenik, holding a castle there.⁵²² Templars had an important presence in the battles against the Mongols at both Liegnitz and Muhi. Their presence at Šibenik might have been a factor in why it became the site of a recorded battle. Moreover, there is a local legend that the Hungarian monarch was at the Church

⁵²¹ For the translation of the passage in French: “Les Tartares s'étant avancés jusque sous ses murailles, les Hongrois, les Bashkirs et les Allemands réunirent leurs forces auprès de cette ville, et firent essuyer aux Tartares une défaite qui leur ôta l'envie de retourner dans ces contrées.” See: M. Reinaud (trans.), *Géographie d'Aboulféda*, Tome 2 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1848), 312-313.

⁵²² Danko Zelić, “Templarski castrum u Šibeniku,” *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 23 (1999): 33-42.

of Saint Elisabeth near Šibenik during the invasion period and lost his crown there, though it was found later. Toponyms indicate connections to the invasion. There is a hill called Trtar near Šibenik was so called because the “Tartars” (Mongols) were there. Near Trtar, some arrows were discovered in graves, but no serious archaeological studies have been done.⁵²³

As additional contextual support, the charters of Béla IV, which recounted the service of his loyal nobles, often referred to fighting in Dalmatia. In April 1245, the king thanked a certain Hudina for the blood which he and his followers shed in battles against the invaders there.⁵²⁴ In another document, he thanked a Count Alexander for initiating battle with them when the Mongols approached the coastal region.⁵²⁵ This episode of the described defeat in the area of Šibenik, which is only a fairly short distance northwest of Split and Trogir, makes sense within the context described by Thomas of Split of Qadan’s forces withdrawing to the hinterland and making repeated forays to the coastal cities over the course of March 1242.⁵²⁶ There is much evidence of fighting around Dalmatia. Moreover, similar to Het’um’s account but even more forcefully, Abu’l Fida’s source suggested a sort of cause and effect relationship; owing to the defeat in Croatia, the Mongols no longer had a desire to return to the larger region.

Finally, regarding a third defeat account, there is a mention by the Syriac author and historian Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286) in his *History of Dynasties* that the king of the Franks encountered Batu’s forces when they approached the “area of Constantinople” and inflicted a defeat on them “at the border of Bulgaria” so that “till this day” they have not returned to the

⁵²³ Soldo, “Provala Tatara,” 387.

⁵²⁴ *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol 4, 274-5.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 306-307.

⁵²⁶ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 298-301.

“region of the Greek Franks.”⁵²⁷ A similar but less precise passage is recorded in the *Chronography* of the same author that Batu “prepared to attack Constantinople from the quarter of the Bulgarians. And the king of the Franks heard, and they gathered together and met Batu in battle, and they broke him and made him flee. And no man of the Tatars afterwards went into the country of the Franks.”⁵²⁸ Thus, we encounter an account from an author outside of Latin Christendom who reported a defeat and, once more, a sort of cause-effect relationship was drawn between the defeat and the lack of renewed invasions. Moreover, it provides a precise region – the borders of Bulgaria and the territory of Constantinople. Even if this were the only testimony we had on this matter, it would be easy to determine that the king of the “Greek Franks” must be the Latin Emperor of Constantinople, Baldwin II (r. 1240-1261).

We have confirmation of that from a statement found in Austrian chronicles, including those composed near K~~l~~osterneuburg. In light of the Mongol attack on that area in the summer of 1241, the local clerics may have had special interest in the subsequent events of the Mongol invasion, and so this battle in the distant Latin Empire was recorded. The writers of that chronicle would have tracked Mongol movements with greater effort because it had involved them personally. The *Continuatio Sacrcensis Secunda* states specifically that Baldwin (“Paldwinus”) the Latin Emperor won a battle against the invading Mongols in the area of Greece and lost the second engagements. It also says the castles and strongly fortified cities were able to resist the invaders, but other vulnerable areas were depopulated by them.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁷ Edward Pocock (trans.), *Gregorii Abul Pharagii Historia, Historia Dynastiarum* (Impensis Ric. Davis, 1663), 310.

⁵²⁸ E.A. Wallis Budge (trans.), Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj* (Reprint: Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2003), 398.

⁵²⁹ MGHS IX, 641; István Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars*, 70. As Vásáry notes, this record is found in several Austrian chronicles. It is interesting that Vásáry took this account seriously and incorporated it into the larger narrative. This represents a break from a long period in the English literature, since Edward Gibbon perhaps, which saw this episode entirely overlooked in discussions of the invasion, or at least not taken seriously.

Regarding this battle, it is interesting to note that there was a false rumor that spread that Baldwin II had been killed. the *Chronique Rimée* of Philippe Mouskes recorded that a report of Baldwin II's death reached the French court in 1242: "From Greece returned news / which was very perilous and not good / that the emperor was dead."⁵³⁰ As Giebfried notes, there is a paucity of historical source material for the region of the Latin Empire and Asinid Bulgaria, but sources demonstrate that Baldwin, still alive, actually returned in Constantinople before 5 August 1243.⁵³¹ It is indeed difficult to sort out what happened in this proverbial blind spot on the map of thirteenth-century Europe, but evidently there was a serious campaign and probably Baldwin was on the borders or in a fortress for a long time until the Mongols had clearly withdrawn a long distance away. Since no sack of Constantinople materialized, we might consider that his strategic goals were partly successful.

Phillippe Mouskes recorded another report of a victory over the Mongols, perhaps closely related to the events involving Baldwin II: "News of the Tatars arrived, with great joy in the entire world, that the king of Vlach country defeated them in a pass. On the other hand, the Duke of Bavaria, with the armies under his banner, also defeated them. Both have lost prominent men."⁵³² I am slightly tempted to think that the king of the Vlach country in this case was actually the Latin emperor, and the author used that terminology merely to create a rhyme since Ivan II Asen had died 24 June 1241 and his kingdom was in disorder with a child successor in his minority. Also,

⁵³⁰ John Giebfried, "The Mongol invasions and the Aegean world (1241–61)" *Mediterranean Historical Review* 28 (2013): 133.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² *Chronique rimée de Philippe Mouskes, évêque de Tournay au treizième siècle, publiée pour la première fois avec des préliminaires, un commentaire et des appendices*. T. 1 und 2, ed. by Baron de Reiffenberg, Brüssel 1836-1838, vv. 30959-30962, p. 681. Translation and analysis of the passage in: Alexandru Madgearu, *The Asanids: The Political and Military History of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185-1280)* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 231-233. The original wording is: Que li rois de la tière as Blas/ Les ot descomfis à I pas/, D'autre part li dus de Baiwière,/ Il et sa route et sa bannière / Les ot descomfis ausement./ D'ambes pars perdirent grant gent."

the fact that the French poet was aware of the loss of “prominent men” would suggest a monarch who had close communication with the French court, but it could just as soon have been an Asinid victory occurring in the last stages of the campaign in Europe.

Regarding the context of these reports of some military success in the Balkans, Baldwin II was in a good position to resist the Mongols at the time. In 1239 or 1240, he had returned to Constantinople from France with reinforcements comprising 700 knights and 30,000 or more likely 60,000 troops.⁵³³ Moreover, his forces had been augmented by Cuman refugees who had arrived in two waves in 1237 and 1240. In the summer of 1241, two Cumans chiefs married the daughters of leading Latin nobles in Constantinople, tightening their military alliance.⁵³⁴ This shoring up of relations between the nomads and their hosts was surely related to the arrival of the Mongols in Europe. Moreover, the unlikely alliance between the Latin Empire of Constantinople and its Cuman allies was still going strong in the early 1250s, when Joinville heard about Cuman customs such as burying people alive with chieftains from a French royal who had visited their camp.⁵³⁵

In light of a context in the Balkans at the time of Batu’s invasion which saw an army of Franks, Cumans, and other miscellaneous peoples joining together against the common danger of the Mongols, it is interesting to consider a strange passage recorded by Matthew Paris:

“About this time the Tartars, a barbarous race of people, who had invaded the Christian countries and committed great slaughter, wandering here and there in Greater Hungary, were defeated and forced to retreat. The greatest portion of these... fell... having been attacked by five Christian and Saracen kings who were united for the purpose... After the slaughter... the kings of

⁵³³ Madgearu, *The Asanids*, 223.

⁵³⁴ Vászary, *Cumans and Tatars*, 64-66.

⁵³⁵ M.R.B. Shaw, *Chronicles of the Crusades* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 290. Aleksandar Uzelac believes that the alliance ultimately failed, but based on Joinville’s account, I would argue that it must have held intact under the Mongol threat for at least a decade. See: Aleksandar Uzelac, “Cumans in the Latin Empire of Constantinople.” *Golden Horde Review* 7.1 (2019): 8-21.

Hungary and Dacia sent some Christians to the provinces which had been reduced... to a desert by the Tartars; and more than 40 ships went from Dacia alone filled with them.”⁵³⁶

Within Europe, this passage referring to strange bedfellows uniting to defeat the Mongols would make sense only in the southeast corner where the Cumans, Byzantines, Latin Empire, and nearby Seljuks were all in close interaction. Also, Matthew Paris was correct about the attempted resettlement of Transylvania in the aftermath of the invasion. The passage seems to reflect a confused rumor, but its origins could relate to the events in the Latin Empire in 1242. In another confused passage, attributing the victory to the sons of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, of whom Matthew Paris was certainly a partisan, the chronicler wrote, “A most bloody battle took place by the banks of the Delpheos, not far from the Danube, and after many had fallen on both sides, the hostile [Mongol] army was repulsed.”⁵³⁷

Could this reflect a confused rumor of a battle fought against the Mongols by the Latin Emperor near Develtos (Δεβελτός),⁵³⁸ an ancient town and medieval fortress located in Thrace near the Sredetska River? It would make sense as a strategic point where the Latin Empire’s troops would try to block Mongols approaching from the north. It marked the historic border region between Bulgaria and Byzantium, being situated at a point that marked the wasteland buffer zone of Zagore. Historically, Emperor Baldwin would have followed a long precedent in establishing a defensive line there against a nomadic invasion coming from the north; Develtos marked the Bulgar-Byzantine frontier in the 800s. When Cumans invaded the Byzantine Empire in the 1090s, Alexios I organized his main defenses at the fortress of Ankhialos in the immediate vicinity of

⁵³⁶ Giles, *English History*, vol. 1, 253.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 357.

⁵³⁸ For al-Idrisi’s description, see: Jaubert, *Géographie d’Édresi*, vol. 2, 293. He referred to it as Zaghoria and noted that it was situated at the foot of a chain of mountains.

Develtos. Furthermore, his defensive line was concentrated in a few other fortified centers along the same parallel as Develtos, showing this was the boundary they had established for repelling a northern nomadic invasion.⁵³⁹ In more immediate terms, Develtos also marked the border of the Latin Empire and the Asinid kingdom.⁵⁴⁰ If Baldwin had tried to prevent a Mongol advance on his territory, a battle in the area of Develtos makes sense entirely and if he was engaged in blocking his frontier against a Mongol advance for a length, the false rumor of his death recorded by Phillippe Mouskes and his mysterious absence from Constantinople until 1243 make sense as well.

In all three cases of military defeats experienced by the Mongols, we have sources that originated apparently from non-European contexts. Furthermore, in all three we notice the same trope – after a setback, the Mongols left European territory without any desire to return. Since Bulgaria was subjugated, perhaps in 1242 but more likely some years later, we have no reason to believe these battles signify decisive, crushing defeats which broke the operational ability of the Mongols. However, the negative impact of such battles on their morale is so consistently repeated that we should hold the combined assertions to have a partly historical basis. The tendency to overlook contemporary accounts of Mongol defeats in the sources has limited our ability to reconstruct the scenario in which the withdrawal from Europe occurred.

In light of the larger context, claims found in certain Latin reports of a Mongol desire to flee, high casualties, and even some strategically insignificant military setbacks should probably not be interpreted as mere propaganda efforts to inspire resistance. In fact, the friars seemed to have been trying to inspire improved preparations, solidarity amongst European leaders, and

⁵³⁹ E. R. A. Sewter (trans.), *Anna Komnene, The Alexiad* (London: Penguin, 2009), 264-267.

⁵⁴⁰ Peter Soustal, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini 6: Thrakien* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991), 235. Since antiquity, this strategic point was fortified. The Roman Empire regularly blocked invasions by Goths and Huns at Develtos before it was similarly used to block the Bulgars in later centuries.

resistance by emphasizing the miserable failure of Latin Christendom in the 1241-42 invasion. They employed negative assessments to stir readers out of complacency and made light of successes of entirely ignored them. The aforementioned charters of the Hungarian king, however, give a glimpse of a much more determined, widespread resistance through Hungary and beyond than clerical sources allow us to imagine. For instance, our Latin narrative sources, Rogerius and Thomas of Split, downplayed or ignored the successful resistance on the Danube for nine months, so we read next to nothing about it, the focus instead by places on villages getting destroyed and prisoners being slaughtered.⁵⁴¹

I share Jackson's view that the friars were trying to galvanize resistance with their claims that the Mongols feared the Franks,⁵⁴² but I do not think they consistently employed positive reinforcement. If many clerical authors had a bias or agenda, it was to downplay local successes that were not of any great significance to the overall situation of the danger posed by the Mongols and the humanitarian disaster which had unfolded. They wanted to motivate their readers through fear and shame. Their works and the letters of rulers during the invasion often emphasized the tragic slaughter of civilians, destruction, and inadequate responses of leaders. In the Latin literature, defeats and failures were emphasized during and after the invasion.⁵⁴³

To conclude on this point, it is difficult to overlook the many statements referring to the invasion being costly and difficult for the Mongols, as well as the numerous accounts of defeats, many of which originated outside of Europe. There is not enough evidence to conclude that any defeat was every costly enough to have forced a withdrawal, but it is interesting how authors who

⁵⁴¹ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 210-213. Describing the summer of 1241, Rogerius wrote nothing about defensive efforts along the Danube, but rather focused on the destruction of defensive villages in the Great Plain.

⁵⁴² Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 135.

⁵⁴³ Carpini, for instance, censored the Hungarians for taking flight at Muhi when the Mongols themselves were ostensibly on the verge of fleeing from their country. See: Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 30.

touched on the subject were rather uniformly and consistently of a view that the troubles the Mongols encountered in Europe were deterring them from returning to the region in force. Rubruck heard while he was in Mongolia that soothsayers would not allow a return.⁵⁴⁴ As Jackson stated, there was likely no decisive check that forced the withdrawal but the cumulative effect of small military reverses, even in pitched battles, and even in what ended up being Mongol victories, might have bolstering a lasting impression that the “Franks” and the Hungarians were difficult adversaries and other strategies in addition to force would be required to gain their submission.

4.3. Theory of a Multicausal Explanation for the Withdrawal

On the basis of the facts that other singular explanations related to the death of Ögedei, environmental and climatic factors do not seem convincing, and the notion that the Mongols never intended to conquer Hungary or Europe at large seems unjustified, I want to introduce a theory that many factors were at play behind the withdrawal. I do not subscribe to any notion that the handful of recorded victories over the Mongols in the course of the Western Campaign were decisive, or that the Mongol military was unable to continue the war owing to losses. Yet, I still contend that real and potential resistance across the breadth of Eastern and Central Europe must have played a central role in convincing the Mongols to pull far back from the territory they were occupying in 1242.

I stand by the view I first advanced in my MA thesis that fortresses were the *sine qua non* of Europe’s resistance to the Mongols – just as fortresses were the backbone of resistance in wars between various European powers in the thirteenth century. The reason that fortifications were so significant in Europe’s survival during the first Mongol invasion is that they tended to exacerbate

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 197.

other problems experienced by the Mongols on the Western Campaign such as interpersonal tensions between leaders. Fortresses also caused delays that allowed political issues to arise in the highly unstable Mongol Empire which flared up regularly and interfered with the ongoing project of world conquest. Moreover, perhaps the best evidence of the efficacy of castles as a defensive measure against Mongols is not our documentation of short failed sieges, but rather the fact that the period following the withdraw saw such a remarkable, and costly, build up of fortresses across the entire affected region of East-Central Europe.

There was of course a long history of tensions arising between Mongol princes during frustrating, prolonged sieges as we see with the famous case of Jochi and Chaghadaï having a falling out during the siege of Urgench in 1221 which resulted in their having to be permanently separated. Rashid al-Din noted that the fight happened because of “differences in temperament,” but also noted that it followed a series of successes by the defenders of the city. So many Mongols were killed besieging the city, Rashid al-Din alleged, that piles of bones were still visible on the landscape roughly eighty years later.⁵⁴⁵

Setbacks in the course of sieges had a way of making Mongol princes realize that they had differences in temperament. We see this phenomenon again in the lesser known episode of an argument that arose between Hulegu and his son owing to the prolonged resistance of Mayyafariqin. When Hulegu complained that the siege was taking so long and proceeding so disastrously that Tengri must have been protecting the fortress, his son responded to the criticism by noting that this was because he was required to take the fortress by military force, whereas

⁵⁴⁵ Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 248. The *Secret History* does not focus on the siege so much as the major political fallout that resulted from Jochi and Chaghadaï coming to blows. Ögedei was chosen by Chinggis Khan as his successor since he could act as a bridge to facilitate cooperation between his brothers. See: De Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, 187.

Hulegu had only won his greatest conquest through deceit: “You took Baghdad by perfidy, while here many are killed.” Hulegu then warned his son to keep a wide distance from him for a prolonged period in order to avoid being executed, according to Juzjani.⁵⁴⁶ If the story seems doubtful owing to the author’s hostility, we read a similar account in the Korean sources about the fortress of Kuju that defended itself well, resulting in an old commander saying that Tengri was protecting it shortly before the siege was lifted.⁵⁴⁷ The account of Mayyafariqin has a ring of truth and fits with the larger picture we have of blame and recrimination between Mongol leaders when sieges failed to result in speedy capture or resulted in huge losses and embarrassing defeats.

The Mongols must have perceived fortresses as serious obstacles – and not simply the ones they managed to take or besiege, but also those they knew they would eventually have to take to exert their authority over a rebellious territory. Thus, a deterrent in Europe was not just the fortresses they had encountered in 1241-42, but also those they expected to encounter. When Ögedei received word from Batu of Güyük’s open hostility during the Western Campaign, the *Secret History* records the Great Khan raging that his son’s punishment for this disruptive behavior should be that he be placed in the forefront of siege operations:

We shall place him in the vanguard
Which are as high as mountains
Until the nails of his ten fingers are worn away;
We shall place him in the garrison army:
We shall make him climb the town walls
Which are made of hard-pounded earth
Until the nails of his five fingers are ground down.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ Raverty, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, 1270-1275.

⁵⁴⁷ Henthorn, *Korea: The Mongol Invasions*, 67.

⁵⁴⁸ De Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, 207.

Whether an accurate description of a real conversation or fictionalized, this recorded statement does reveal that the Western Campaign had come to be associated difficult and dangerous sieges which were perceived as being onerous by the Mongols. It was evidently a sort of punishment to take part in that type of warfare. But it was not simply the siege warfare that would have been disheartening to the invaders of Europe. The Mongols had fought many tough pitched battles and they also had to reckon with the battles they could expect to face as the war continued into Central Europe. There were many yet unconquered foes surrounding them after their drive into Hungary who had demonstrated an ability for concerted actions and cooperation. These were real issues even if they seem to be trifles from the safe distance of eight centuries for historians who are aware of how many victories the Mongols did win in Europe and elsewhere. In short, Batu and his subordinate princes faced a military problem predominantly in 1241-42 based on the humans who were opposing them or were expected to be opposing them in the immediate future – and discounting that factor requires one to ignore much source material.

4.3.1 Past and Present Signs of a Problem with Nomadic Warfare in Europe

The Mongols had an unprecedented grasp of siege warfare since the reign of Chinggis Khan who recognized such skills were necessary; they already had a documented artillery corps by 1214 and made use of elaborate tactics and siege engines.⁵⁴⁹ While not making light of the striking innovations, novelties, and unprecedented expansion of the Mongol Empire, it is also evident that a certain continuity runs through the history of nomadic polities and peoples which is striking. Since so many sedentary accounts describe nomadic peoples mainly within the context of invasions and warfare, we can see this continuity in the way they waged war. Therefore, I would

⁵⁴⁹ Thomas T. Allsen, "The Circulation of Military Technology in the Mongolian Empire," in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, ed. Nicola di Cosmo (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 275.

argue that taking into consideration the descriptions of nomadic invasions of Europe for roughly a millennium before Batu arrived would be at least somewhat beneficial for exploring common threads and making observations of certain areas in which the Mongols might have differed from preceding nomadic groups of invaders.

The sources in the centuries before the Mongols document certain customs of other nomadic groups which show remarkable continuity with what outside observers like Carpini and Simon of Saint-Quentin noted about the Mongols. Afterall, they both noted that the Mongols picked lice and ate them,⁵⁵⁰ but Ibn Fadlan also noted this custom in the Bashghird tribe he encountered in his journey from Baghdad to the Volga in the early tenth century. He noted that the Oghuz Turks raised the hide of a horse over the burial place of a their dead, exactly as Simon of Saint-Quentin noted several centuries later of the Mongols' burial customs. Ibn Fadlan noted the Pechenegs' horses managed to dig up grass roots with their hooves underneath the snow, but Ibn al-Athir likewise noted this behavior in the Mongols' horses.⁵⁵¹

The customs of the Mongols evidently came from a long tradition and were based within a wider spectrum far beyond the Mongolian Plateau. We read in the *Secret History* of Alan Qoa telling her sons to break individual arrows and then to attempt the much harder task of breaking a bundle of them as a demonstration of the importance of unity, but in Plutarch's *Moralia* we encounter a very similar story about a certain Scythian king, Skilurus, who bundled many spear-shafts together when he was dying and asked his eighty sons to break them. When they were unable

⁵⁵⁰ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXX, 78.

⁵⁵¹ Stone and Lunde, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 18, 22-23; Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXX, 86; Richards, *Ibn al-Athir*, 203.

to do it, he pulled them one by one breaking them as a metaphor of the importance of their solidarity.⁵⁵²

It is tempting to attribute all such recurring motifs regarding the nomads in the sources as mere *topoi*, but then how do we explain that varied accounts, such as Herodotus's passage on the Scythians, Jordanes' work on the Huns, and the *Chou-shu* account of the Türks, all mirror one another in the description of Inner Asian nomads cutting their faces as a sign of mourning?⁵⁵³ The dismissal of observations of striking commonalities between the Mongols and their nomadic forebearers into the wastebasket of *topoi* is unfortunate. It becomes hardly credible to think that descriptions of the Mongols in the thirteenth century are based on literary templates of nomadic behavior because their empire extended so far and so many diverse records from unrelated authors who obviously did not borrow from one another so consistently describe the same practices and beliefs of the Mongols.

Though it exceeds the scope of this work to carefully analyze the successive waves of nomadic peoples who entered Europe, taking the wider perspective offers some insights right away. One major observation is that there does not seem to be a recorded problem of nomads having trouble feeding themselves when they entered Europe or occupying parts of it, such as the Carpathian Basin, Wallachia or the Balkans, for sustained periods. Another general pattern running through nomadic occupations is that there seems to be a remarkable pattern of nomadic powers in Europe eventually losing a decisive battle and sometimes getting massacred or utterly eradicated as a consequence – whether it be Attila's forces at Catalaunian Plains in 451, the fall of the Avars to Charlemagne in the 790s, the defeat of the Magyars at Lechfeld in 955, or the Battle of

⁵⁵² W.C. Helmbold, *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Harvard Loeb, 1962), 446-447.

⁵⁵³ Denis Sinor, "The Historical Attila," in: *Attila: The Man and his Image*, Franz H Bäuml and Marianna D. Birnbaum (eds.) (Budapest: Corvina, 1993), 6-7.

Levounion in 1091 when the Byzantines (with Cuman allies) basically eradicated the Pechenegs as a power in Europe. Regarding that last battle, Anna Komnene tells us that a song was chanted amongst the Byzantines in the aftermath of the events which saw a wholesale massacre of the Pechenegs, including women and children: “All because of one day, the Scythians never saw the month of May.”⁵⁵⁴

The Mongols avoided any such comeuppance in the 1240s, but there are indications that they held a fatalistic notion that such an event was coming. In 1246, Carpini noted a prophecy prevailing amongst the Mongols that they were destined to be conquered by another nation, and he observed that Batu referred to this prophecy during the Battle of Muhi – stating that if that moment of their downfall which Chinggis Khan prophesied had come, they should bear it with courage.⁵⁵⁵ One could even speculate regarding whether the Mongols were made aware of the fates of past nomadic conquerors in Europe through local informants, but this sort of fatalistic outlook seems to have been a deeper and prevailing trend amongst nomadic leaders who perhaps entirely understood the unstable bases on which their power rested.

During a visit to Attila the Hun, Priscus, an ambassador from the Eastern Roman Empire, heard from someone at his table “it had been prophesied to Attila that his race would fail.”⁵⁵⁶ Whoever prophesied this may have simply been realistic about their long-term outlook. In Denis Sinor’s view, the “Hun economy, often unable to provide the bare essentials, could not produce the goods readily available within the Roman world... [They adopted] the use of brute force to obtain goods... but finally the resilience of the Romans, with their vast demographic and economic resources – capable of absorbing huge losses in goods and men – got the better of the Huns. The

⁵⁵⁴ Sewter, *The Alexiad*, 225-226.

⁵⁵⁵ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 26, 30.

⁵⁵⁶ Sinor, “The Historical Attila,” 11.

outcome of Attila's venture was not due to his own failure: it was inevitable."⁵⁵⁷ Certainly what Sinor described could apply equally well to what happened over six centuries later to the Pechenegs in 1091. The *Alexiad* recounts Alexios I being regularly trounced by the nomadic light cavalry but when such events happened, the sedentary people could retreat to fortresses, or even Constantinople, which their pursuers could not succeed in taking.⁵⁵⁸ When, finally, the Pechenegs were defeated in the open field by a coalition of their rival Cumans and the Byzantines, the victors massacred the prisoners to make sure the danger was entirely stamped out. The Byzantines could afford to lose battles but for the Pechenegs a defeat was more consequential.

Returning to the earlier case of Attila in the fifth century, he made an earth-shaking impression across Europe, but there were indeed great limitations to his ability to exert power in the larger region beyond the Carpathian Basin. In the view of Herwig Wolfram, Attila was a nuisance to the Romans rather than an actual danger. It may be granted that Attila claimed world rulership, his demands for subsidies were increasing, and his "extortionate claims were supported, at least in part, by some devastating military campaigns. But there is a danger of overestimating Attila's stature. Even at the height of his power he received a rather modest amount of money as annual tribute from Constantinople. The sum was considerably less than the Visigothic king Alaric was paid in 408 and did not even amount to one-third of the annual income of an Italian senator."⁵⁵⁹

Along similar lines, Agathias, a historian of Justinian I, described the inroads of Attila and his followers, noting that by "sudden and unexpected raids they did incalculable damage to the

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁵⁸ Sewter, *The Alexiad*, 196-210. It is interesting to note that according to al-Kashgari, who compiled a lexicon of Turkic words in the 1070s, Turkic nomadic peoples had a single word, *köchrüm*, to refer to the scenario in which sedentary villagers panicked and retreated into cities. It must have been a frequent and predictable event – a pattern of warfare with sedentary peoples. See: Robert Dankoff, *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects* (Cambridge: Harvard University, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1982), 360.

⁵⁵⁹ Herwig Wolfram, "The Huns and the Germanic Peoples," in *Attila: The Man and his Image*, 24.

local populations, even to the extent of displacing the original inhabitants and occupying their lands. But their stay was a brief one and at the end of it they vanished without a trace.”⁵⁶⁰ This shows an interesting parallel with the later arrival of the Mongols. Indeed, if the origin of the quotation were unknown, one could easily imagine that this description was in reference to Batu’s campaign in Europe in 1241-42.

Though I do not entirely share Wolfram’s viewpoint that Attila was taken lightly by anyone, if the Eastern Romans were willing to attempt to lowball him with their peace payments, I contend that this reflected their faith in the strength of their fortifications, particular those of Constantinople. After all, the Kutrigar (“Cutrigar” or “Huns”) Bulgars actually tried to take the city in the aftermath of the Justinian Plague of 541, when they migrated southward to the Danube and crossed it when it froze in the winter to invade the Byzantine Empire with a huge cavalry force.⁵⁶¹ Their campaign against Constantinople failed disastrously, even though if we believe Agathias, the Byzantine forces were few in number (150,000 men spread over the entire empire) and the city’s fortifications in such a state of disrepair that the Kutrigars managed to reach the inner walls without resistance. Furthermore, many of the troops defending it were civilians dressed in uniforms to fool the attackers. Despite this, the famed general Belisarius managed to ambush an army near the city and surround it, thus negating their bows since the nomads were too close to employ them. The Kutrigar siege of the Chersonese proved similarly fruitless and their attempt at an amphibious landing with makeshift rafts ended disastrously. Likewise, any attempts to enter Greece were blocked by fortified garrisons. Thus, the Kutrigars at last evacuated the region, returning north of

⁵⁶⁰ Joseph D. Frendo (trans.), *Agathias, The Histories*, vol. 2 A (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), 146.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

the Danube, where they were promptly attacked by a rival steppe tribe at the instigation of Justinian, leading to an ongoing war which weakened both parties.⁵⁶²

Despite their success at taking captives and plunder in “unprotected places,” to borrow Agathias’ terminology, the general picture here hints at the vulnerabilities or weaknesses of steppe armies waging certain types of warfare in the region. These general principals seem to have remained remarkably consistent over centuries. When the Bulgar leader Krum attacked Constantinople in 813, it was a disastrous failure like that which the Avars experienced in 626. It should be terribly obvious that the only reason the Byzantine Empire survived so long was because of its capital’s fortifications and those of its support network – more than any other factor. Even if its armies could not stop steppe forces from overrunning their territory, the city would inevitably repel any attempt to finish it off completely until the invention of effective gunpowder weapons. As such, it provides rather powerful support for my thesis that strong, technologically advanced fortifications were probably, above all other factors, the one that decided whether a state resisted or submitted to a powerful steppic empire, whether regarding Constantinople or elsewhere, and whether referring to the Mongols or another group.

Even the accounts of the Cumans in the decades just before the arrival of Batu’s forces ring with many of the patterns we detect regularly in primary sources on the Mongols. Robert de Clari, a knight from Picardy who participated in the Fourth Crusade and fought in the Balkans, described how each Cuman warrior, armed only with simple weapons such as bows, was followed by eight or so strikingly obedient horses.⁵⁶³ He described how in the leadup to the Battle of Adrianople in 1205, the Latins made light of the Cumans, dressed in sheepskins. They had “no more fear or care

⁵⁶² Ibid., 149-161.

⁵⁶³ Edgar Thomas McNeal (trans.), *The Conquest of Constantinople by Robert of Clari* (New York: Columbia, 1936), 87-88.

for them than a troop of children.”⁵⁶⁴ The mood changed rather drastically when the Cumans rushed on them and inflicted a major defeat on the Latins, capturing their emperor. The described underestimation of the nomadic forces on the basis of their humble equipment and horses closely resembles the attitude of the Rus’ forces when they first saw the Mongols on the other side of the Dnieper in 1223, before the disaster of the Kalka,⁵⁶⁵ or how the defenders of Baghdad reacted to the approaching Mongols in 1257-58. Generally, in the open field, it was a fatal mistake to underestimate the Cumans and Mongols alike.

We notice another similarity between the earlier situation with the Cumans and the later invasion of Batu. The Cumans had trouble with capitalizing on their victories by taking major strongholds. For instance, when he defeated a second Latin army, killing the marquis of Salonika, Ivan Asen took his Vlach and Cuman forces to besiege the city. They failed in their attempt to take it, something Clari attributed to the miracle of a saint.⁵⁶⁶ This episode highlights another pattern in the sources – when sieges by Mongols or any other steppic army failed in Europe or elsewhere, the result was often attributed to a miracle or divine protection. We see this at Wrocław in Poland, for instance, when the Mongols abandoned the siege and fled owing to a saintly miracle.⁵⁶⁷ As we can see from a wide range of examples, Mongol attackers were just as prepared to see Tengri’s protection behind the resistance of some fortified sites they attacked as the defenders were prepared to see divine deliverance. But a good question for scholars to ask is why so many documented miracles occurred to the benefit of sedentary peoples during sieges of strongly fortified locations, and so few occurred in the course of pitched battles.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁶⁵ Pow, *The Last Campaign and Death of Jebe Noyan*, 10.

⁵⁶⁶ McNeal, *The Conquest of Constantinople*, 127.

⁵⁶⁷ Bolesław Szczesniak, “Hagiographical Documentation of the Mongol Invasion of Poland in the Thirteenth Century,” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 17 (1958): 180.

Regarding the Mongols themselves and their first invasion of Europe, we can see that many of the problems that dogged past invaders were still relevant for the Mongols, despite the unprecedented organization, size, and complexity of their empire and armies by 1241. Without question, in the view of contemporaries, the Mongol Empire possessed the greatest and most effective army of the period – this was considered the case even by Latin authors like Carpini and Thomas of Split who had little praise besides to offer the Mongols. Yet it still had vulnerabilities and one of these was clearly in the area of siege warfare. There is an obvious reason for this: the strengths of Mongol army such as horsemanship, rapid movement, concentrated arrow fire, and the use of surprise attacks could be essentially negated in a siege which generally force them to fight on foot. Het'um (Hayton) who had direct experience alongside them in campaigns and lauded the skill of the Mongols in war, including the taking of towns and fortresses, also stated that they were not terribly effective when fighting on foot. He observed, “They are skilled in horsemanship and are brave mounted archers, but they are not very good as infantry, as they are slow on foot.” Regarding another deficiency, he noted that “they know how take another’s land but not how to hold it.”⁵⁶⁸

Nomadic warfare was an impressive display in the open field where their advantages were maximized, and indeed Thomas of Split reflected this nuance when he stated that no other people had so much experience in war or knew so well, most of all “on open ground, how to get the better of their enemy, whether by courage or skillful tactics.”⁵⁶⁹ Compared to their impressive record of actions of Mongols in the open field, however, some of the records of their sieges can have an almost darkly comical quality. Besides recording Hulegu threatening his son to avoid his presence

⁵⁶⁸ Bedrosian, *Het'um the Historian's History*, g73.

⁵⁶⁹ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 282-283.

during the siege of Mayyafariqin, Juzjani also made note of a Mongol commander who had become bogged down in the siege of Uch (now in modern Pakistan) on the Delhi Sultanate's frontiers. A certain *baghatur*, fed up with the delays and high casualties, told the commander that he would take it in single assault. He went rushing into the breach in the wall during a surprise night attack and immediately sank into a pit of water and clay which the defenders had secretly prepared – at which point the assault was called off.⁵⁷⁰ We also have the case of Möngke Khan's second-in-command, Wang Dechen (汪德臣) marching up to the walls of the stubborn Song fortress of Diaoyucheng in 1259 and demanding in a loud voice for its surrender, only to be greeted in return with a projectile fired by the defenders which mortally wounded him.⁵⁷¹ In a very strong set of military skills, the sources suggest that siege warfare was clearly one of the relatively weaker aspects in the Mongols' repertoire. Perhaps, then, it was direct experience which motivated Bayan, who led the conquest of the Song Dynasty in the 1270s, to remark that besieging cities was "last resort tactics," even if he justified his argument through the citation of Chinese military classics.⁵⁷²

One of the aspects of Mongol practices that seems to have contributed to this general phenomenon was a certain social pressure or obligation for high-ranking military leaders and even royalty to set an example of personal valor in the storming of towns and fortresses – a "first on the city walls" mentality. While in pitched battles, the commanders tended to stand far back and cautiously monitor the developing situation, as Carpini noted,⁵⁷³ the situation was entirely different in siege warfare, and Mongol leaders seem to have commonly led from the front. Sübe'etei's first military success which started his rapid promotion to a senior commander and earned the personal

⁵⁷⁰ Raverty, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, 1154-1155.

⁵⁷¹ *Yuan Shi*, 3653; Stephen Pow, "Fortresses that Shatter Empires," 103-104.

⁵⁷² David Curtis Wright, "Artillery is Not Needed to Cross a River: Bayan's Swift Riparian Campaigns Against the Southern Song Chinese, 1274-1276," in *Military Studies and History*, ed. John Ferris, vol. 2 of *Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies* (Calgary: Center for Military and Strategic Studies, 2008), 94.

⁵⁷³ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 36.

commendation (and gifts) of Chinggis Khan was in 1212 when he was first to the top of the walls of the Jin Dynasty's city of Huanzhou.⁵⁷⁴ It is probably this sort of cultural expectation that explains the high rate of commanders' deaths in assaults on forts or cities recorded in the sources. Even the highest Chinggisids were genuinely leading from the front and sometimes leading small numbers of troops. We have clear evidence that this was the case in the Western Campaign, where multiple sources originating from Mongol records note Möngke displaying personal valor in the taking of Ryazan and Vladimir, while Güyük played a leading role in the storming of Magas, the Alan capital.⁵⁷⁵

The unintentional result of such a custom was that if Mongol leaders died in combat, it often was the case that they died in besieging and capturing fortified sites. The *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle* relates that when the citizens of Kozelsk suddenly rushed from their city in 1238 and attacked the Mongols, "three sons of Tatar generals" figured in the alleged 4000 dead among Batu's forces in the bloody final struggle.⁵⁷⁶ Toquchar, the husband of Chinggis Khan's daughter, was felled during the siege of Nishapur.⁵⁷⁷ The Mongol noyan, Dayir, along with the majority of the high-ranking leaders, died in the storming of Lahore; Dayir had shortly before replaced the former commander of the war on the Delhi Sultanate who had been felled before the walls of another fortress.⁵⁷⁸ If Juzjani can be believed, basically all of the troops in the Mongol force were wounded by the time Lahore was taken. His account, furthermore, helps confirm the picture that

⁵⁷⁴ Pow and Liao, "Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction," 52.

⁵⁷⁵ Yuan Shi, 36, 44; Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 59.

⁵⁷⁶ Perfecky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 47.

⁵⁷⁷ Octave Houdas (trans.), *Histoire du Sultan Djelal ed-din Mankobirti Prince du Kharezm par Mohammed en-Nesawi* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1895), 91; Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 174-175, see n. 11.

⁵⁷⁸ Raverty, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, 1126, 1135.

Mongol high-ranking leaders took part in the fighting; apparently died of a lance wound while simultaneously inflicting one.

Such incidents highlight the larger ongoing problem of siege warfare for the Mongols in the thirteenth century. It essentially negated their greatest strengths and during the storming of a fortified site, they were reduced to an equal footing with the defenders. This could be why Rumi in his 15th discourse and Frederick II in a letter of July 1241 both documented that the Mongols were increasingly using the armor and weapons of the local people in the areas they invaded. They found ways to combat the resultant high losses from sieges. One tactic was to simply bypass strong fortifications, leaving some troops to continue to invest it, something mentioned by Carpini whose account of Mongol tactics was likely partly informed by witnesses of the larger Western Campaign. He mentioned that they would leave 3000, 4000, or even more troops to continue the siege, even as other forces continued to advance through the invaded country.⁵⁷⁹ In thinly settled areas of Eurasia with fewer strongholds, one could imagine that such a tactic could work, but in Central Europe, dotted with fortresses and towns, it would have proven unfeasible and even extremely dangerous for the invaders. Another tactic, well attested across the whole of Eurasia, was to use the local rural population to both perform slave labor, such as digging trenches, but also to be the first troops launched into assaults on the fortifications. A further tactic, noted by Simon of Saint-Quentin,⁵⁸⁰ was to feign they had left an area and then suddenly rush upon a fortress when the populace was unprepared, something which worked at Nagyvárad (Oradea) in April 1241, but failed dismally with the cities on the Dalmatian coast less than year later.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 46.

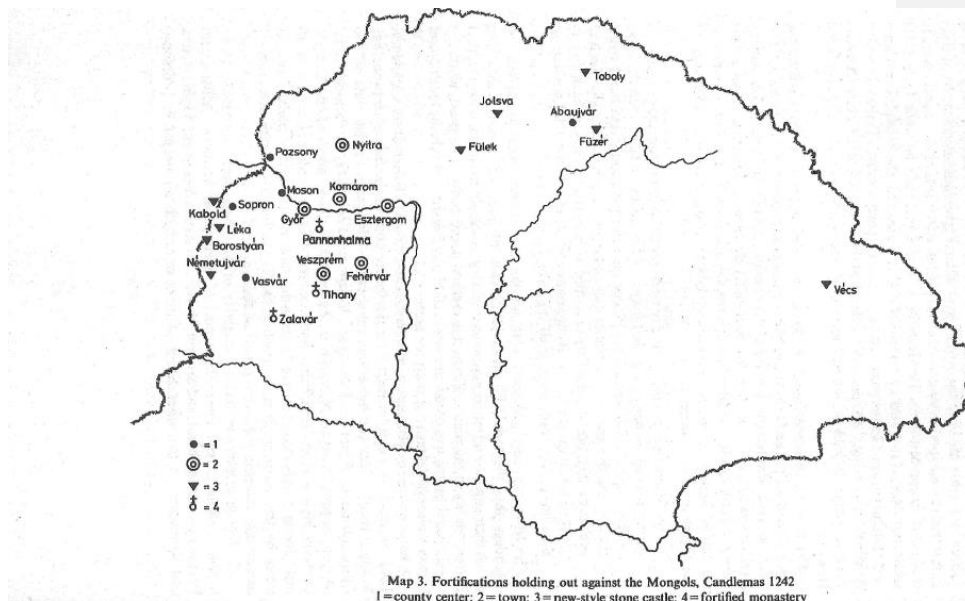
⁵⁸⁰ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXX, 82.

⁵⁸¹ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 198-199; Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 300-301.

The failure of the tactic in 1242 was likely owing to refugees and survivors of encounters with the invaders having widely spread information about Mongol tactics. By the start of that year, the Hungarians on the western side of the Danube were prepared to hold out in castles or adequately fortified sites and resist after the Mongols managed to cross the ice in early 1242. Dated to 2 February 1242, a surviving message from various noble, clerical, and municipal leadership in Hungary, asking for help from the papacy, sheds much light on the situation (Map 6). It noted that they had repelled the Mongols from crossing the river for some time, but when it froze, it gave them the opportunity to swarm over to the western side. At the stage of events, the letter notes:

We pulled back, well-armed and in great numbers, into the castles [fortified sites] of Székesfehérvár, Esztergom, Veszprém, Tihany, Győr, Németújvár, Pannonhalma, Moson, Sopron, Kőszeg, Zalavár, Léka, and to other castles and places not far from the Danube, and likewise Pozsony, Nitra, Komárom, Fülek, Abaújvár, and other castles and fortified places.⁵⁸²

⁵⁸² Göckenjan and Sweeney, *Mongolensturm*, 294-295.



Map 6. Fortifications documented holding out against Mongols, February 2, 1242: 1 – county center; 2 – town; 3 – new-style stone castle; 4 – fortified monastery. Source: Erik Fügedi, *Castle and Society in Medieval Hungary (1000-1437)*, 46.

The representatives of these sites then indicated that they would continue to resist, waiting for military assistance to arrive from their neighbors, but they felt they had more to fear from Mongol ruses than from their actual attacks.⁵⁸³ That relates to another point – the types of nomadic tactics employed by the Mongols were not totally unknown to people in Eastern Europe. Crossings rivers with bags of straw or inflated bags were well known as a practice among the nomads, so much so that *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, written decades before the Mongol invasion the described Magyars in the late ninth century crossing the Volga “sitting on leather bags, as is the pagan custom.”⁵⁸⁴ A Polish text dating from the early twelfth century, *The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, stated that the Cumans used this same method to cross a river in their “wonted” way

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 295.

⁵⁸⁴ Rady and Veszprémy, *Anonymous. Deeds of the Hungarians*, 20-21.

when they invaded Poland in the 1000s.⁵⁸⁵ Across the region, the local people seemed to know that nomads crossed rivers with ease by such methods, even before the Mongols arrived, and thus we do not have to imagine that Batu had been prevented in 1241 from crossing the Danube River because it posed an insurmountable obstacle. It could not be crossed because of armed resistance, likely including crossbows and artillery. A letter from the Hungarian king to the papal curia dated to 19 January 1242 requested volunteers with military experience to join in the forming a “wall” with the huge number of Hungarians who had thus far held the Mongols from crossing the Danube; tellingly, he requested Venetian troops specifically as their “ballistarii” were needed to prevent a crossing.⁵⁸⁶ The described scenario probably explains the delay of ten months at the “water of resistance,” in the words of Béla IV, and it demonstrates that the Hungarians were able to effectively employ what knowledge they did already have of nomadic warfare to effectively combat the Mongols.

On the topic of bodies of water, C. de Bridia mentioned independently that certain types of fortresses located on specific types of landscape held out very easily against them, but also that “safety could be had from them on the sea.”⁵⁸⁷ This highlights another problem the Mongols were starting to face already in 1241-42. They really had no answer at that point in the development of their empire to overcome coastal fortresses, ports, navies, and the problem posed by the ocean in general. Some European powers had formidable military vessels at the time owing in part to developments of the Crusades; Joinville noted that during the landing of the French in Egypt, the Comte de Jaffa’s galley had 300 rowers.⁵⁸⁸ This technology presented serious problems. During

⁵⁸⁵ Paul W. Knoll and Frank Schaer, *The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2003), 155.

⁵⁸⁶ Sinor, “The Mongols in the West,” 17; Balázs Nagy (ed.), *Tatárjárás (Nemzet és Emlékezet)* (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), 176.

⁵⁸⁷ Painter, “The Tartar Relation,” 98-101.

⁵⁸⁸ Shaw, *Chronicles of the Crusades*, 203.

the period of attacks on Song and Korea in the 1250s to the 1270s, the Mongols at last made use of local craftsmen and experts to construct warships. Mongol naval warfare initially did not have a great track record in Korea or Japan, though it was highly successful against the Song.⁵⁸⁹

In the 1240s, however, naval warfare appears to have been an utterly foreign concept to the Mongols. According to Thomas of Split, during the very last stage of the campaign before Qadan withdrew from the Kingdom of Hungary, Béla IV boarded a galley at Trogir and ordered the sailors to row right past Qadan and inspect the Mongol ranks. Qadan, after realizing that a crossing of the narrow channel to Trogir or Čiovo was impossible, could only stand on the coast and watch; later he sent an emissary speaking in Slavonic to demand the town's surrender, unsuccessfully.⁵⁹⁰ Interestingly, the Mongol report of the events, translated into Persian in Rashid al-Din's *Compendium of Chronicles*, noted that the Hungarian king ("Keler") embarked on a ship in a town and sailed away.⁵⁹¹ So perhaps Béla really did sail somewhere else, perhaps another local island, or at least he made it appear that way to the Mongols on the coast. It is probably no accident that the Mongols departed soon after this event, equipped with the realization that they had absolutely no way of pursuing the king any farther. Along with that must have come the realization that they were far out of their element for conducting a successful war in the maritime region as their chief target could simply sail past them at will.

In 1242, the Mongols simply would not have had the technical know-how or equipment necessary to carry out a key aim of capturing Béla or taking many of the coastal fortified sites after he reached the area. Indeed, they did not even attempt a siege of Split or Trogir, and their attacks on the fortress of Klis and the city of Dubrovnik failed, though they did succeed in burning Kotor,

⁵⁸⁹ Wright, "Artillery is not needed," 91-104.

⁵⁹⁰ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 300-301.

⁵⁹¹ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 71.

Svac, and Drishti.⁵⁹² In the rugged area of today's Slovakia, later charters document that the fortresses held out quite well, even though they had been exposed to the Mongols for the entire period of the occupation. We read messages from the king praising the Count Bogomir and the other defenders of Trenčín Castle, including those who perished while repelling a Mongol siege.⁵⁹³ We also read the king's praise for a certain figure who organized the successful defense of Komárom.⁵⁹⁴ Moreover, some of the fortresses in Slovakia that were organized seem to have had an *ad hoc* quality to their creation, such as a hilltop near Šurice, the road from Muhi to Nitra, which was evidently created to stall Mongol pursuers during Béla's flight from his defeat.⁵⁹⁵ Moreover, the very last stage of the campaign in Hungary was marred by disappointment. According to Rogerius, when the people in the town of Esztergom, the wealthiest urban center in the kingdom, realized the city was about to fall to the Mongols, they systematically destroyed all the dyed fabrics, killed the horses, buried the gold and silver, and hid whatever of value they had. When the town fell, Batu ordered the slaughter of 300 women in a rage at being robbed of the town's plunder. He was then unable to storm the citadel.⁵⁹⁶ One has to wonder if this disappointment played any role in the withdrawal which rapidly followed.

If Hungary had demonstrated itself to be full of "difficult places," in the words of Rashid al-Din, the Mongol Empire's expansion was not dictated by whether regions were entirely suitable for their brand of pastoralism and absent of challenges. Repeatedly, their conquests came about as a result of adaptation to such challenges as we see in Song China, or Korea (where they tried out naval warfare) or in later amphibious invasions like those of Japan. The Chinggisid princes at this

⁵⁹² Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 301.

⁵⁹³ Ferdinand Uličný, "Vpády mongolov na Slovensko v roku 1241," *Vojenská história* (2004/3): 13.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁹⁶ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 216-219.

time had an obligation to follow a divine mandate of world conquest *volens nolens*. That is why I believe that when they withdrew in 1242, it was only to “make a new plan to defeat the enemy in the future” to borrow the wording from a biography of Sübe’etei in the *Yuan Shi*. By one means or another, the task of bringing Hungary into submission had to be achieved and it was not abandoned.

4.3.2. Contributing factors to the withdrawal

There were several contributing factors to the withdrawal that can be cited. Among them are several “external” problems related to the enemy. One is that the local people had certain military technologies, beyond fortifications, that were beneficial to their resistance. Carpini mentioned that the Mongols greatly feared crossbows.⁵⁹⁷ Prompted by Mongol conquests in the Middle East around 1260, Louis IX took the danger seriously and had a conference where he banned diversions and ordering his people to stock weapons and train with ballista and bow for the coming showdown that he anticipated.⁵⁹⁸ It appears that the crossbows developed in the Latin West were unusually deadly and effective, judging by a statement by Anna Komnene. She noted that the *tzangra* of the Crusaders was a sort of secret weapon “utterly unknown to the Greeks” that fired “with tremendous violence” right through shields and armor. She noted that this foreign weapon, capable of firing through walls and killing instantly, was a “truly diabolical machine.”⁵⁹⁹ Western Europe’s artillery seems to have been relevant during the Mongol invasion of Hungary;

⁵⁹⁷ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 46.

⁵⁹⁸ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, 224-225.

⁵⁹⁹ Sewter, *The Alexiad*, 282-283.

both our main narrative sources state that “Latin” artillery and trained crossbowmen were decisive in defending Esztergom and Székesfehérvár.⁶⁰⁰

Heavy armor seems to have been judged beneficial during the invasion, judging by the Hungarian kingdom’s shift to higher emphasis on the development of heavy cavalry in the aftermath.⁶⁰¹ The Mongols were by contract very lightly armored – Simon of Saint-Quentin who actually stayed at a Mongol military camp, stated that one in ten Mongol troops had any armor, being exclusively worn the officers, standard bearers, and chiefs. Rubruck similarly noted that when he finally got to see a Mongol armed escort and enthusiastically tried to inspect their equipment, only two in twenty of them had habergeons which they had got from the Alans.⁶⁰²

Despite little armor, the Mongols had effective weapons and technologies of their own, but gunpowder weapons cannot be included among them in the 1241-42 invasion. I can find no record anywhere of the use of such weapons in Europe except in the *Xin Yuan Shi* which was completed in 1920. A passage in its biography of Qadan in *juan* 111 mentioned “cannons” (架炮) being used to attack Esztergom (Gran - 格蘭城), but the entire narrative clearly originates from the nineteenth-century work of D’Ohsson, who in turn relied on Rogerius’ description of the siege of Esztergom. Even the French pronunciations are retained in the transliteration of toponyms. Yet, the original text, namely that of Rogerius, states that the Mongols constructed “thirty siege engines” (*XXX machinas paraverunt*).⁶⁰³ Though I do not doubt that gunpowder explosives were being used in China in the time of the Mongol conquests, its supposed usage in the Western Campaign by some

⁶⁰⁰ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger’s Epistle*, 218-219; Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 290-291.

⁶⁰¹ Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary: 895-1526* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 104-105.

⁶⁰² Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXX, 79; Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 210-211.

⁶⁰³ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger’s Epistle*, 216. Ke Shaomin, *Xin Yuan Shi*, 253 (6851).

modern authors stems from a case of a cross-language telephone game that introduced the false idea that the Mongols employed guns in Europe into scholarship.

Refugees were a characteristic feature of Mongol campaigns and they were problematic for the Mongol war effort because they brought information Mongol secrets, strategic goals, tactics, and weakness to the peoples who had not yet encountered them. With the Mongols' way of treating "allies" and massacring aristocrats being reported well in advance, it is not a terrible surprise that the Mongols could not find willing supporters among the local nobles in Latin Christendom during their invasion. As well, the displacement of Cuman refugees resulted in many European states having new armies composed of troops who had previous experience fighting the Mongols. This must have been a factor. While the experiment of incorporating Cuman forces into Hungary failed disastrously during the Mongol invasion, there were other success stories. George Akropolites referred to a "battleworthy army of Scyths" composed of such refugees being added to Nicaean Byzantine forces in early 1241.⁶⁰⁴ The Cuman refugees who similarly joined the Latin Empire could have contributed to their documented initial success against the Mongols.⁶⁰⁵ As mentioned, Joinville vividly described the alliance between the Cumans and Latin Empire and how the Cumans basically formed a huge military camp. While Hungary's initial incorporation of Cuman refugees failed spectacularly in 1241, ending in the lynching of their leader Kuthen and the retreat of his followers to Bulgaria, that memorable episode often overshadows the success stories that occurred in several nearby states.

Relatedly, population numbers were a problem. Europe's population at the time has been estimated at perhaps somewhere between 70 and 90 million with the greatest numbers and urban

⁶⁰⁴ Ruth Macrities (trans.), *George Akropolites: The History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)), 215.

⁶⁰⁵ Uzelac, "Cumans in the Latin Empire," 11.

centers in France, Italy, Flanders, and other areas that Batu's forces had not invaded.⁶⁰⁶ As the Mongols advanced, they were obligated to leave behind stations and garrisons in previously conquered territory;⁶⁰⁷ their own available strength to continue the conquest would dwindle by necessity unless they could continue to levy combatants into their service. When Baiju was censured angrily by Hulegu in the 1250s for failing to subjugate the Abbasid Caliphate, he cited in his defense their huge population: "I have done what I could have taken from the gates of Rayy to the border of Anatolia and Syria. The only thing I haven't done is to take Baghdad because there are too many people and soldiers with too many arms."⁶⁰⁸ Even for the Mongols, the numbers of their enemies mattered. A few years after the withdrawal, Simon of Saint-Quentin recorded that Batu had the most troops of all the Mongol princes, but only 160,000 of them were "Tartars." The remaining 440,000 comprised a mixture of Christians and infidel auxiliaries.⁶⁰⁹ If the exact numbers are not trustworthy, at least the relative proportions of the constituent peoples should be seen as factual. The heavy dependence on conscripted conquered peoples was a key feature of the Mongol conquests and all the papal envoys were emphatic that these subject peoples told them they would rebel against the Mongols if they saw an opportunity. Simon of Saint-Quentin mentioned that only two of Batu's brothers (whom I take to be Orda and Shiban on the basis of Mongol sources) accompanied him on the campaign into Christendom. This probably signals that the others were left behind to secure control of conquered peoples and territories, since we know that other Jochids such as Berke, Tangut, and Shingur took part in elements of the campaign outside of Europe. The Kipchaks were the most numerous of Turkic peoples according to a

⁶⁰⁶ Pow, "Deep Ditches," 47-48.

⁶⁰⁷ Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 98.

⁶⁰⁸ Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 482.

⁶⁰⁹ Jean Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 93; Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXII, 34.

contemporary, Ibn al-Athir.⁶¹⁰ In the Golden Horde, the most numerous people were Russians, followed by the Kipchak, according to one of al-Umari's informants.⁶¹¹ Batu's position ruling over newly conquered and probably resentful subjects was far from secure.

On top of an untrustworthy subject population, there were problems of ongoing rebellions behind Batu's forces and outside people moving into the power vacuum caused by the Mongols' destructive conquests. Baltic peoples such as the Lithuanians evidently attempted to capitalize on the Rus' principalities' weakness and disorder after Batu's invasion, raiding deep into territory made subject by the Mongols. This is probably tied to Güyük's words to Carpini in 1246 that he "wanted to send an army to Livonia and Prussia."⁶¹² Rashid al-Din noted that in 1242, the Kipchak rose up in rebellion and fought with the Jochid prince, Shingqur. These rebels were then pursued all the way into the northern Caucasus in 1243. One reading of the passage is that these were the Kipchaks of Kuthen – the chieftain who had been lynched in Hungary in 1241, after which his followers fled to Bulgaria.⁶¹³ In 1243, a Mongol army was also dispatched northward to fight with Rostislav, the son of Michael of Chernigov. Having been defeated, Rostislav then fled to Béla IV and joined him in a marriage alliance which the Hungarian king suddenly welcomed, reversing his past decision to refuse such a marriage.⁶¹⁴ The Mongol threat undoubtedly inspired him to create a buffer among semi-independent principalities.

The war against Russia principalities was by no means over in 1242 as events would show, and would drag on in the form of negotiations, political maneuvering, alliance-making, and sometimes open war. The intensity, persistence, and aggressiveness of the local populations'

⁶¹⁰ D.S. Richards, *Ibn al-Athir*, 203.

⁶¹¹ Lech, *Das mongolische Weltreich*, 145.

⁶¹² Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 45.

⁶¹³ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 71, n. 350.

⁶¹⁴ Perfecky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 52, 47.

resistance over the entire course of the Western Campaign was evidently an issue. Besides the frequent sieges and storms of cities and fortresses that characterized the campaign over seven years, we also must acknowledge that there were a great number of pitched battles documented in the sources. The sheer number of these engagements must have slightly worn down the invaders and created a sense of foreboding or battle fatigue. In the campaign against the Rus' from 1237-1241, besides the innumerable towns that were sacked, I found reliable records of at least four open field battles which resulted from Russian armies actively advancing toward the Mongol invaders. There was a first battle fought on the borders of Ryazan's territory on the Voronezh River in late 1237;⁶¹⁵ the battle waged by Prince Roman Ingvarovich against the Mongols on the Oka River near Kolomna in which Kölgén, the son of Chinggis Khan, died of his wounds in January 1238;⁶¹⁶ the battle of the River Sit where Grand Prince Yuri II's forces were at last destroyed, evidently by Boroldai, on 4 March 1238;⁶¹⁷ when Prince Mstislav Glebovich learned of the Mongols' approach, he led his army outside of Chernigov to fight in the open with them shortly before the fall of the city in October 1239.⁶¹⁸ All of these battles were defeats for the Russian forces but nonetheless serious and aggressive efforts to take the fight to the invaders.

Additionally, if we believe elements of a much later *vita* of a fictional Saint Mercurius, Smolensk was never taken during the invasion because its defenders won a pitched battle against the Mongols. While the *vita* is totally unreliable, including a report that Batu was killed by "King Stephen" in Hungary shortly after his defeat near Smolensk, it is not implausible that a pitched battle accounted for the fact that the city was not besieged during the invasion when almost every

⁶¹⁵ Zenkovsky, *The Nikonian Chronicle*, vol. 2, 309.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.; Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 59.

⁶¹⁷ Zenkovsky, *The Nikonian Chronicle*, vol. 2, 311-315.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 319; Perfecky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 47.

other major urban centers of Russia was.⁶¹⁹ In my view, such local legends, while inevitably embellished with literary elements over time, often contain at least a kernel of veracity, and Smolensk's apparent survival through the onslaught of 1237-1240 is a historical anomaly that is much more puzzling than the survival of distant Novgorod or Pskov. In short, destroying the urban culture of Kievan Rus' did not necessarily ensure its immediate incorporation into the empire. That took ongoing efforts by the new Mongol overlords in the region.

Besides the external problems posed by the huge population of their enemies and their new subjects of questionable loyalty, there were internal problems which likely contributed to the withdrawal. A major contributing factor was the dissension between the princes which led to an open confrontation between Batu and his cousins, Güyük and Buri.⁶²⁰ This likely happened in late 1240 just before Güyük and Möngke were recalled from the Western Campaign. I lean toward that date on the basis of Qadan and Büri being present in western Rus' territory in the winter of 1240-41 for the invasion of Europe. Like Möngke and Güyük, they had taken part in the siege of Magas in the winter of 1239-40. Presumably all of the representative princes journeyed westward for a meeting with the Jochids after the fall of the Alan capital. Rashid al-Din documents that Möngke and Güyük departed from the campaign in the autumn of 1240 and he does not include them among the participants in the siege of Kiev.⁶²¹ So the assembly of the princes occurred in the autumn of 1240, very shortly before the siege of the old Rus' capital, and therefore probably somewhere closer to it than Magas. Regardless of where and when it happened, the conflict between the princes had likely been building, and was probably related to something much more concrete and serious than drinking etiquette.

⁶¹⁹ Charles Halperin, "The Defeat and Death of Batu," *Russian History* 10,1 (1983): 50-65.

⁶²⁰ De Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, 206-207.

⁶²¹ Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 69.

I suppose the conflict that was emerging between princes was related to rights regarding the distribution of plunder, conquered territory, appanages, etc. The problem with an altruistic task like combining forces in a single campaign for the nebulous purpose of world conquest was that some stood to benefit more from the results than others – and since the Jochid patrimony was being expanded, other princes might have wondered what benefits they were receiving. This is where cracks could have formed in the united front initially presented by the Chinggisid princes. We notice that in 1238-1240, most princes of the Jochid line seem to continue conquests to the west whereas Güyük, Qadan, Büri, and Möngke went eastward to conquer the Caucasus. This could be a subtle indication of the need, already, to keep the princes separated in order not to infringe on one another's perceived share in the conquests or at least plunder and captives. Yet, there would have been a lingering and inevitable sense amongst the princes of the other three lines that the Jochids, and Batu particularly, were benefiting most from their combined efforts and sacrifices. Thus, royal customs and hierarchies could have had a detrimental effect on the combined war effort as the campaign unfolded, eventually leading to the princes having to be separated, and leading to much greater problems once Güyük became khan in 1246.

Health concerns among the Mongol leadership could have been another factor in the decision to pull back from Europe. Güyük was chronically ill, something which might have influenced his decision with the fall of Magas in early 1240 to send a false report back to Mongolia that total victory had been attained. Rashid al-Din indicated that Batu was suffering from gout at the time of Ögedei's death, i.e. during the Western Campaign.⁶²² It seems to have run in his family, his brother Berke having to sit during the coronation of Möngke due to his own gout. I accept Rashid al-Din's statement that the Mongol princes commenced pulling out of Hungary in 1242,

⁶²² Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 120.

they had no idea that Ögedei was dead. But the fact is that he was suffering severe illnesses and chronic infections in the years before his death and this could have adversely affected the campaign. Bar Hebraeus noted that at the time when Ögedei was sick, he recalled his son Güyük back to Mongolia.⁶²³ Thus, we might take it that the recalls of both his eldest son and his nephew, Möngke, before Batu continued into Europe were motivated by Ögedei's ongoing illness and approaching death. This undoubtedly weakened the army's available strength and manpower shortly before it made the drive into Hungary and Poland. As such, it could have had a demoralizing effect on the army and cast doubts on when to terminate the campaign – indeed Batu's letter to the khan in the *Secret History* reflects such uncertainties. In it, he expressed that there was an uncertainty among the princes about if the campaign could be deemed successful.⁶²⁴

The importance of the prognostications of shamans and diviners could have also played an important though overlooked role in the withdrawal. Many observers from across Eurasia noticed the importance of these figures in Mongol military decisions. Kirakos of Gandzak, for instance, noted that the Mongols only proceeded somewhere only if their “witches and sorcerers” permitted it.⁶²⁵ Marco Polo noted that on campaigns, the Mongol leaders and shamans gathered before the army and carried out divination,⁶²⁶ almost as a sort of theatrical display. Regarding the nuanced relationship between diviners and royal military leaders, I am reminded of a statement which Arrian attributed to Alexander the Great – one which firmly fixed itself in my memory since I first encountered it. When the Macedonian ruler had returned from India and was about to enter Babylon, several “Wise Men of the Chaldeans” drew him aside and warned him to go no further

⁶²³ E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Chronography*, 410.

⁶²⁴ De Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, 206-207.

⁶²⁵ Bedrosian, *Kirakos*, 236.

⁶²⁶ Cliff, *The Travels*, 90.

because of inauspicious prognostications. Apparently, Alexander replied with a quip from a now lost tragedy, “Prophets are best who make the truest guess.”⁶²⁷

As the issue of divination relates to the campaign in 1241-42, Simon of Saint-Quentin recorded that Batu was very apprehensive about invading Hungary so he consulted demons, one of which told them to proceed confidently and they would be victorious.⁶²⁸ As mentioned, when William of Rubruck visited Mongolia in the early 1250s, he found out a reason why the Mongols had not yet returned to Hungary – their shamans did not permit it, i.e. the prognostications were bad. He noted, “the Mongols never perform military exercises or go to war unless they have given the word; and they would long since have returned to Hungary, but the soothsayers do not allow it.”⁶²⁹ Since shamans were instrumental in the decision to invade Hungary in the first place, and the decision not to return there in force afterwards, should it be terribly surprising if they also had a major influence on the withdrawal, even though it is not documented? Shamans may well have brought an end to it.

In summary, I agree with the view of Di Cosmo and Büntgen that amongst the Mongol commanders of the campaign, we can detect that a change in plans occurred from 1241 to 1242. Though I do not share their view that it was related to environment, I agree with their sense of a shift in objectives and a revision of the original task. The *Heida shilue* noted of Mongols on campaign, “They are best suited to fighting in the open field. If they do not see an advantage (i.e. victory, a favorable outcome), they do not advance.”⁶³⁰ If they did not advance in 1242, even after

⁶²⁷ Aubrey de Sélincourt (trans.), *Arrian. The Campaigns of Alexander* (London: Penguin, 1971), 376. Elsewhere, when he wished to attack the Scythians, and his seer Aristander reported inauspicious omens, Alexander ordered another sacrifice. According to one source, Aristander then read the omens as very favorable. *Ibid.*, 206, n. 7.

⁶²⁸ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXX, 149.

⁶²⁹ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 197.

⁶³⁰ Olbricht and Pinks, *Meng-ta pei-lu*, 187. The original wording is: 其陣利野戰，不見利不進.

successfully breaking across the Danube, a combination of various factors must have convinced them that continuing to advance was *not advantageous*.

We may assume the following factors were at play in the withdrawal:

- Perceptions of the enemy as numerous and warlike, with some technical strengths, capable of resisting in fortifications and unifying for sudden coordinated attacks.
- Discord between princes which news of Ögedei's fragile state of health likely exacerbated.
- Prognostications of shamans were bad for continuing the campaign in Europe.
- Ongoing and emergent rebellions in Kipchak and Russian territories which Mongol forces had already overrun.

Chapter 5: Responses and Post-1242 Mongol-European Relations

5.1 Responses to the Invasion in the Kingdom of Hungary

The reactions of the Hungarian king and his nobles to news of the Mongol withdrawal were immediate and among the most dramatic in the kingdom's history. Thomas of Split wrote that Béla IV rushed back "without delay" from the Dalmatian coast to Hungary with his retinue after his scouts had reported with certainty that the Mongols had completely left his realm. This definitely happened before September 1242 because Thomas tells us that his wife and children remained behind until that time.⁶³¹ The kingdom was in state of disorder and lawlessness in 1243 judging by a papal letter which noted that opportunistic invaders were attacking Hungary – again taking advantage of the power vacuum.⁶³² This could have referred to the Austrians who certainly capitalized on Hungary's crisis, but I cannot imagine the pope, no matter how troubled relations were with the Holy Roman Empire's magnates, would state Friedrich II was "doing injury to Christ." I rather imagine these invaders were simple groups of brigands and refugees who had essentially arrived in Hungary to escape the Mongols, or even local people reduced to predatory activities out of hunger, desperation, and opportunism. In any case, order was being restored very quickly and if necessarily through violence. A letter dated to 27 January 1243 stated that immediately after the "conflict" with the Tartars, the king sent Vaivod Laurence into Transylvania to gather the surviving population and provide protection and relief for it,⁶³³ while brigands were suppressed and destroyed.⁶³⁴

⁶³¹ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 302-303.

⁶³² *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae saeculi XIII e regestis pontificum Romanorum selectae*, Carolus Rodenburg (ed.), (Berlin, 1887), 4: *sed quidam, sicut mirantes accepimus, regnum ipsum presentibus Tartaris et post illorum recessum hostiliter invaserunt, multos de ipsius confinio.... non absque manifesta iniuria Crucifixi.*

⁶³³ Franz Zimmermann and Carl Werner (eds.), *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen* (Hermannstadt, 1892), 71.

⁶³⁴ Nagy, *Tatárjárás*, 192-193.

With basic control reasserted over the kingdom, the Hungarian monarch and his magnates could turn their attention to defensive reforms since, after all, the Mongol Empire was still on their borders and occupied with a project of world conquest. A glaring lesson from the first invasion was that Hungarian fortifications had proven inadequate – at least those located in the Carpathian Basin and particularly in the Great Hungarian Plain. This was largely owing to royal policy which did not allow nobles to build strong fortifications as a way of centralizing authority and control in the hands of the king. Hungary fortifications had been very weak. Yaqut in his geographical work noted that he met some Muslims from Hungary in the 1228 who observed that the king forbade them from walling their towns for fear that they might rebel.⁶³⁵ The Teutonic Knights were eventually expelled from Burzenland in 1225, where they had been since in 1211 by King Andrew II. A major reason for their ousting seems to have been that they had started to construct stone castles which the king evidently saw as a threat to his control over them, even while he had initially invited them to provide military protection of the frontier.⁶³⁶

The Hungarian medievalist, Erik Fügedi, noted that castles, up to this point in the kingdom's development, played a minimal role in defense of Hungary's frontiers. Invasions were traditionally repulsed in pitched battle, the frontiers defended with obstacles and barriers of felled trees.⁶³⁷ Granted, there were "castles" in Hungary before the invasion, county seats – many like Csongrád and Szabolcs were constructed by earthworks and wood. A few county seats like Alba Iulia were protected by stone which remained from their old Roman fortress and Székesfehérvár, a royal capital, had stone walls from the pre-Mongol period as its name clearly indicated. The majority of earthwork county seats had already lost importance at time of the invasion – there

⁶³⁵ Stone and Lunde, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 187.

⁶³⁶ Hautala and Sabdenova, "Hungarian Expansion," 79.

⁶³⁷ Erik Fügedi, *Castle and Society in Medieval Hungary (1000-1437)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 37.

demonstrated ineffectiveness in the face of the Mongol invasion marked the end of the use of such fortifications.⁶³⁸

Such defenses proved entirely inadequate in the face of Batu's forces. According to our two best narrative sources, Rogerius and Thomas of Split, very few fortresses of towns survived the year-long Mongol occupation. If the fortified sites in Croatia either deterred or resisted the Mongols much more effectively, Thomas of Split only mentioned only Esztergom's citadel and the city of Székesfehérvár holding out in Hungary itself.⁶³⁹ Rogerius echoed these examples of fortified sites under attack, but also mentioned the successful resistance of the monastery of Pannonhalma, adding that only these three places remained unconquered in the whole region.⁶⁴⁰ Other evidence, including letters from its abbot after the attack, suggests that even if Pannonhalma survived, it suffered enormous damage.⁶⁴¹

In his analysis, Fügedi demonstrated that places still effectively resisting in early February 1242, as was revealed by the letter from the Hungarian defenders of these strongholds dated to the same time, were very often located on citadels or reflected the rare advancement of being constructed from stone.⁶⁴² In fact, Pannonhalma and Esztergom which were able to survive sieges are situated on hilltops that appear at least somewhat similar in photographs. It is no accident that Székesfehérvár resisted Mongol attacks – it was surrounded by marshes that aided in its defense as both Thomas of Split and Rogerius noted – but so too did Komárom at the confluence of two rivers and the monastery of Tihany on a fortified island.⁶⁴³ As suggested, Székesfehérvár's long-

⁶³⁸ Professor J. Laszlovszky informed me on the details about the evolution of the Kingdom of Hungary's county seats from his archaeological experience.

⁶³⁹ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 288–301.

⁶⁴⁰ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 218–219.

⁶⁴¹ Annamária Bartha, "A tatárjárás és Pannonhalma," in: *A múltnak kútja. Fiatal középkoros régészek V. konferenciájának tanulmánykötete*, Tibor Rácz (ed.) (Szentendre, 2014).

⁶⁴² Fügedi, *Castle and Society*, 45–47.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 47–48.

standing name suggests that the town had stone walls which likely helped as well. It is also evident that there is a spatial pattern to survival as the vast majority of sites that survived into 1242 were located in the west of the country or in the rugged north, and almost nothing surviving in the Great Hungarian Plain where destruction and population loss was heaviest judging by a variety of data.⁶⁴⁴

There was a dramatic and rapid shift in the Kingdom of Hungary toward building stone castles located on highly defensible sites in the immediate aftermath of the first Mongol invasion of Hungary (1241–1242). Erik Fügedi’s important study revealed how the weakness of Hungary’s fortresses and walled towns in the face of repetitive but effective Mongol siege tactics was related to these reforms. Fortified sites constructed on level ground and defended by wooden and earthen parapets proved extremely vulnerable to Mongol tactics – intense arrow fire, use of incendiary materials, and heavy bombardment by catapults operating in conjunction with waves of prisoners who filled the moats to enable attackers to overrun the fortifications – as we see with the rapid fall of Pest in 1241.⁶⁴⁵

Though Fügedi’s analysis did not extend to the castles and cities located in Croatia or on the Dalmatian coast, we encounter the same basic patterns for which sites could deter or resist the Mongols which were noticeable in Hungary. Qadan, the Ögedeid prince in pursuit of Béla IV, was at a loss to take fortresses such as Klis, where his attack caused limited damage and resulted in casualties for his own troops. Coastal cities located partly on islands or outcroppings, such as Split, Trogir, and Dubrovnik, saw Mongol efforts meet with similar frustration.⁶⁴⁶ Combining that textual account with Fügedi’s analysis is quite useful for establishing that the two most important topographical features for effectively resisting the Mongols seemed to have been rugged citadels

⁶⁴⁴ Laszlovszky et al., “Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary,” 425–429.

⁶⁴⁵ Fügedi, *Castle and Society*, 45.

⁶⁴⁶ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 299–301.

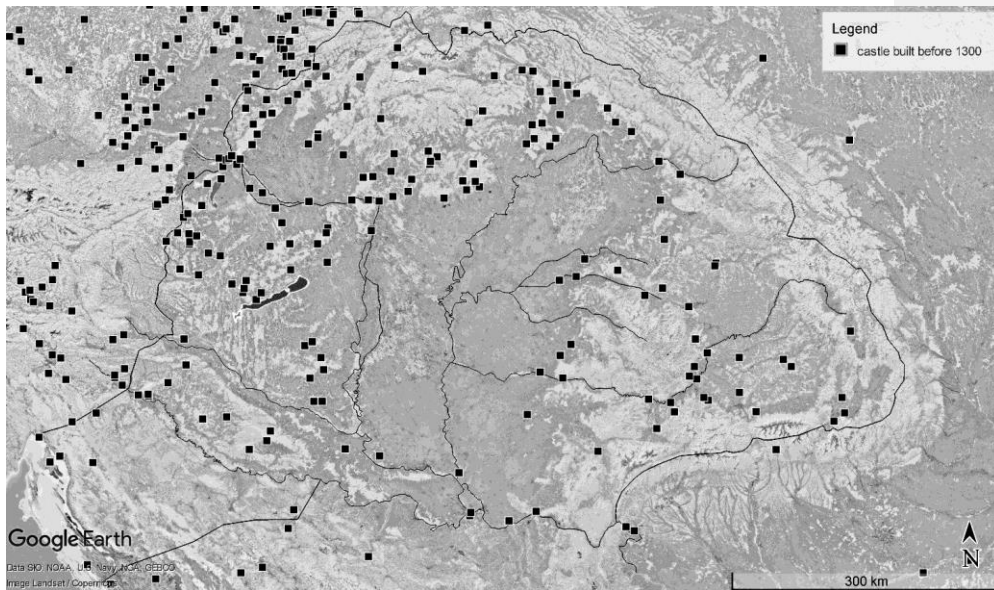
and protective bodies of water. Indeed, Fügedi was able to point out that in the decades after the first invasion, castles or *Fluchtburgen* had been constructed on sites such as hilltops that already had been proven through experience to be effective refuges for the population during the occupation. The brevity of the Mongol onslaughts was not necessarily the only reason for the survival of some strongholds though it could have been a factor. The reliable and contemporary *Speculum historiale* mentioned a Cistercian monastery which repelled Mongol attacks for over six months – a report that seems to have originated from Simon of Saint-Quentin.⁶⁴⁷

Contemporary sources did not provide comprehensive lists of sites that survived, and while Fügedi and others have improved our understanding, we still do not have the full picture. For instance, Rogerius tended to describe wholesale destruction, but he also described his own experience in 1242 of passing with the withdrawing Mongol column through Transylvania “where many people had survived and where several castles” had been earlier prepared.⁶⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the broad patterns both in terms of geographical location and defensibility have been established by modern researchers and these patterns must have been noticed in the wake of the Mongol withdrawal in spring 1242 by survivors who did not understand why the Mongols left and certainly expected their return.

⁶⁴⁷ Pow et al. *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars* XXXI, 149. I argue that it must have been Belafons (Pétersvárad) since it was near Mendicant houses and Latin settlements like Mandelos, and was wealthy, it could have been the monastery in question since it would have justified a more serious Mongol investment. Still, the six-month timeframe is a problem unless Mongol efforts to cross the Danube were considered part of the siege. It is remotely possible the Cumans who defected from Hungary’s forces in early 1241 were confused with Mongols. The Cistercian community was sponsored by Béla to relocate to a more defensible site in 1246, as the Mongols had directed their attacks heavily on the wealthy monasteries of Syrmia during the invasion. See: Đura Hardi, “Cumans and Mongols in the Region of Srem in 1241–1242: a Discussion on the Extent of Devastation,” (Philosophy Faculty University of Novi Sad, 2016), 92–94, 100. This topic invites further exploration. Many thanks to Beatrix Romhányi, who told me recent archaeological findings are supporting this identification, as well as László Ferenczi, and József Laszlovsky for their suggestions.

⁶⁴⁸ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger’s Epistle*, 221.

The post-invasion flurry of castle-building which has been well known in Hungarian scholarship for at least a century. Fügedi systematically identified between 147 and 172 new castles built between 1242 and 1300; his work and that of scholars such as Jenő Szűcs confirm that twenty-two towns with privileges were established in the first thirty years of this flurry of activity.⁶⁴⁹ The distribution of the new thirteenth-century castles reveals a rather unexpected and paradoxical trend (Map 7).



Map 7. Castles in the Kingdom of Hungary before 1300. Image courtesy of Beatrix Romhányi

It is conspicuous that the vast majority of castles built in the second half of the thirteenth century were not situated in the center and east of the country, which had borne the brunt of the Mongol occupation in 1241–1242, but rather close to the western and northern borders of European

⁶⁴⁹ Nora Berend, *At the Gates of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37.

rivals such as Austria and Bohemia.⁶⁵⁰ This is puzzling since renewed Mongol invasions would come from the east; the Mongols had based themselves on the Pontic Steppe from which they continued to issue ultimatums and threats of attack. Fügedi simply noted the curious phenomenon at first, but subsequently he drew firmer conclusions that indeed these castles show that Béla's defensive strategy surprisingly appears to have had a westward emphasis, an opinion that has since been shared by some scholars.⁶⁵¹

Despite the confusing trends in how castle-building developed in the second half of the thirteenth century, my view is that Béla IV and his magnates really did devise an overarching strategy to deal with the ongoing threat of an imminent Mongol return. That was the primary driver behind these reforms, more than any threat from Austrian or Bohemian rivals and any desire to secure portions of the Babenberg inheritance after 1244. The elements of the strategy which often raise questions for modern researchers were shaped by Hungary's social, political, and physical landscape. For instance, the geographical distribution of castles constructed in the aftermath of 1242 is curious, but when we see this within the larger context of the kingdom's situational realities, it becomes clear why the strategy ultimately manifested itself in such a way.

The main evidence for a strategy centers on a crucial letter from Béla IV to Pope Innocent IV, the date of which has been heavily debated. Many scholars favor 1250,⁶⁵² but Toru Senga's thorough analysis concluded 1247 is more probable.⁶⁵³ In the letter, the king outlined the reasoning behind the defensive steps he was taking in the aftermath of the Mongol withdrawal. Nora Berend has argued that Béla IV's ulterior motive in the aftermath of the Mongol invasion could

⁶⁵⁰ Fügedi, *Castle and Society*, 57-59.

⁶⁵¹ Jenő Szűcs, *Az utolsó Árpádok* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1993), 44-50.

⁶⁵² Göckenjan and Sweeney, *Mongolensturm*, 300.

⁶⁵³ Berend, *At the Gates of Christendom*, 166.

have been to gain concessions and special privileges from the papacy; the threat of renewed invasion was used for political leverage. Béla IV carefully cultivated a Christian frontier ideology while hinting to various popes that their neglect of his needs was forcing him to reach a deal with their Mongol enemies.⁶⁵⁴ While this letter is “traditionally understood as the desperate cry of a Christian king for help, even the physical form of the letter, surviving in the Vatican archives, contradicts that analysis. Sealed with a golden bull, the letter was carefully crafted in both form and content.”⁶⁵⁵

Despite such valid observations, it appears that much of what the king was asserting represented his genuine fears and intentions more than an exercise in rhetoric to gain papal concessions. Julian’s earlier warning to the papacy in 1238 that the Mongols were going to invade Hungary proved prophetically accurate.⁶⁵⁶ The numerous warnings Béla received from “leading men” of a pending invasion in 1241 turned out to be correct as well.⁶⁵⁷ Crucially, the first Mongol onslaught had a very personal element, aimed at the nobles and Béla, making the Mongols an existential threat to the elite. This makes me doubt that Béla’s major strategic concern was regional politics in the aftermath of war that killed his brother and many leading magnates of the kingdom. As Friar Julian noted, the Mongols regularly eradicated the high nobility of a state to make its people unable to offer resistance.⁶⁵⁸ The king’s own experience in 1241–1242 would have confirmed this. Therefore, it is unlikely he was unworried about a Mongol return, seeing his neighbors in Europe as a more substantial threat after 1242. His new foreign policy of making marriage alliances with Rus’ and Polish rulers was expressly so he could gain intelligence on the

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 167-170.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 166.

⁶⁵⁶ Dörrie, *Drei Texte*, 177-178.

⁶⁵⁷ Karbić et al., *Thomas of Split*, 257.

⁶⁵⁸ Dörrie, *Drei Texte*, 176.

Mongols and their secret plans as his surviving charters sometimes hint at.⁶⁵⁹ To the pope, he echoed that strategic intention with his new marriage alliances and confessed his dread the Mongols whom, as he expressed early in his letter, “the experience of war has taught us to fear in the same way as all the other nations they have passed through.”⁶⁶⁰

That the monarch had already turned to the task of major fortification reforms in the 1240s at the time of writing his letter to Innocent IV is very clear. He wrote in explanation of his strategy that he had decided to concentrate his defense line along the Danube River and to attempt to secure Transylvania by inviting the Knights Hospitaller:

Only the Brothers of the Order of Saint John [Knights Hospitaller] have recently accepted our request, warring against heathens and schismatics in the defense of our kingdom and the Christian faith. We have already placed the knights in an especially dangerous position; in the region of the Cumans and Bulgarians on the far side of the Danube, where the Tartar army advanced previously, during their last invasion of Hungary [...] We have also placed a detachment of the same Brothers in the middle of our kingdom and assigned them to the task of defending the Danube by constructing fortresses, since our people is inexperienced in the building of fortresses. We reached this decision after repeated discussions with our people, because it seemed better for us and for Europe to secure the Danube with strongholds as it is the very river of fate. It was here that Heraclius clashed with Khosrau in the defense of the Roman Empire. It was here that we also battled, even though unprepared and at the time sorely beleaguered, for ten months with the Tartars, during which time our kingdom had to do almost completely without the protection of castles and defenders.⁶⁶¹

If we allow, then, that the entire letter is not primarily a bluff aimed at the pope, and reflected a project he was already carrying out, it becomes an outline of Béla IV's strategic rationale based on numerous discussions with his counsellors. Lessons had been learned and the earlier invasion had convinced him that the most effective line of defence was the Danube. He did

⁶⁵⁹ Gustáv Wenzel (ed.), *Árpádkori új okmánytár. Codex diplomaticus Arpadianus continuatus*, vol. 7 (Pest: Eggenberger, 1869), 167.

⁶⁶⁰ Rosenwein, *Reading the Middle Ages*, vol 1., 420.

⁶⁶¹ Göckenjan and Sweeney, *Mongolensturm*, 308-309 (my translation). The dangerous position of the Knights Hospitallers refers to the passes of the Olt River and Burzenland which was the area through which Böček broke into the kingdom, and, as I suggested already, the likely main withdrawal route in 1242.

not want a repeat of Muhi by gambling the royal army to fight the Mongols in the open on a marshy plain of their choosing. He opted to center his defenses along a natural barrier that had proven strategically important through recorded history in order to protect the ancient capitals and population base of the *Medium Regni*. In short, the line in the sand was the Danube and the sine qua non was preserving control over it in a renewed invasion. It was in Béla's own words, the "water of resistance" where the advancing Mongols were held back by unprepared and outmatched defenders for ten months after Muhi.⁶⁶²

The Knights Hospitaller played a key role in Béla IV's described defense reforms, being placed in key strategic positions and engaging in castle-building because his own people were not skilled or experienced in it. One position was to block the Turnu Roșu Pass along the Olt River which had been used as a point of access by the Mongols in the first invasion; another letter shows the king granted this arrangement in June 1247 which obligated the Knights to fortify and repopulate Transylvania, while providing sixty knights against the Mongols and fifty knights to garrison castles in the kingdom's west against Christian foes.⁶⁶³ Furthermore, the Order formed an important part of Béla IV's Danube defensive line. As Zsolt Hunyadi notes, scholarship has identified a castle belonging to the Hospitallers in the Kingdom of Hungary and granted by Béla IV as being one on the southern end of Margaret Island (Margitsziget), a strategically important site in the Danube, separating modern Buda and Pest. It may have been built immediately after the invasion. Apparently, there were more such castles constructed along the Danube line, but this one is known to have belonged to the Order.⁶⁶⁴ Judging by the king's subsequent devotion to the island, the placement of elite knights there, and the fact that his daughter Margaret resided in a convent

⁶⁶² Rosenwein, *Reading the Middle Ages*, vol 1., 421.

⁶⁶³ Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica*, 209-211; Göckenjan and Sweeney, *Mongolensturm*, 313, n. 17.

⁶⁶⁴ Zsolt Hunyadi, "Hospitallers in the Kingdom of Hungary c.1150-1387," Doctoral dissertation (Budapest: CEU, 2004), 111.

on the island, we might consider that it held both strategic and symbolic significance after 1242. The Hospitaller presence at a square, four-corner-tower castle on Margaret Island seems to have been temporary; their presence can only be confirmed there from 1278 with a last mention in 1290. An abandonment could reflect a declining sense of the Mongol threat which many scholars believe first impelled the castle's construction.⁶⁶⁵ There was also another castle on the island which belonged to the archbishop of Esztergom, and though its dating is in question, it was certainly part of the same defensive system.

Much more lasting was the direct consequence the Danube defensive strategy had for the development of Hungary's capital. Óbuda already existed within the walls of Roman military camp turned into an ecclesiastical center in the 1000s with a market outside the walls. By the late twelfth century it was one of three chief royal centers of the itinerant monarchy. The first record of Pest was a ferry crossing in the twelfth century probably situated where the town first arose on the Roman ruins at 15 Március square.⁶⁶⁶ Óbuda saw the construction of an important royal castle (c. 1220) shortly before invasion, showing that the site was practically replacing Esztergom's functions, and Pest too was developing rapidly as an urban center populated by German migrants. It might have been the first city in Hungary to receive city walls, perhaps begun very shortly before the city was destroyed in 1241. Sources document the destruction of both, but while excavations have shown signs of Pest's famous destruction, Óbuda lacks these overt signs and it is thought that

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 156-157.

⁶⁶⁶ Enikő Spekner, *Hogyan lett Buda a középkori Magyarország fővárosa?* (Budapest: Budapesti Történeti Múzeum, 2015), 185-188.

the castle, among the most modern in the kingdom, survived, since it retained its important function before and after the invasion.⁶⁶⁷

In any case, the Mongol invasion gave impetus to a complete transformation of the urban landscape and hierarchy with Béla IV establishing a “new Buda” on the castle hill west of the Danube at some point in the mid-1240s even as the re-established town of Pest received a new royal charter of rights in 1244.⁶⁶⁸ Béla IV was in Buda in 1243 and wanted to create the new hilltop settlement as a new stronghold. Based on two charters in 1255 and 1259, fortifications certainly existed there by that point, first in the form of walls with towers subsequently added. In 1276, another charter demonstrates that levies were being exacted on townspeople’s goods to maintain the fortifications.⁶⁶⁹ There has been a long debate about when a royal residence appeared and where it was first located. Spekner argues that there was already one in the north of hilltop (the Kammerhof) from the time of the town’s founding in the 1240s, something supported by the presence of royal minters in the town already in 1255. However, this does not exclude the possibility that another defensive property simultaneously emerged at the southern site near Stephen’s Tower, where the present castle emerged.⁶⁷⁰ Solid evidence for the southern castle only exists from the 1300s, but it is clear that Buda became the primary residence of the kings sooner. Esztergom, the former capital, was donated to the archbishop in 1256, and Buda was called the kingdom’s *civitas principalis* in a foreign source by 1308.⁶⁷¹ The decision to resettle the area’s

⁶⁶⁷ István Feld, “Ecilburg und Ofen – zur Problematik der Stadtburgen in Ungarn,” in: *Castrum Bene 6. Burg und Stadt*. Tomas Durdik (ed.) (Prague: Archaeologický ústav AV ČR Praha, 1999), 75-80.

⁶⁶⁸ Spekner, *Hogyan lett Buda*, 189-190.

⁶⁶⁹ András Vég, *Buda város középkori helyrajza I* (Budapest: Budapesti Történeti Múzeum, 2006), 27.

⁶⁷⁰ Spekner, *Hogyan lett Buda*, 190-191.

⁶⁷¹ Károly Magyar, “Royal Residences in Buda in Hungarian and European Context,” in: *Medieval Buda in Context*, Balázs Nagy, Martyn Rady, Katalin Szende and András Vadas (eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 144-146.

surviving burghers on a defensive site west of the Danube as a defensive measure in the 1240s birthed what would become the country's capital city.

The other linchpin of this defensive system was Visegrád situated on an imposing hilltop at the Danube Bend. There had already been a small stone castle erected there by the 1100s on the base of a Roman ruin, and Árpád-era kings would stay there, but both the settlement and fortress were destroyed during the Mongol invasion.⁶⁷² Buzás convincingly argues that Visegrád was already becoming important before the invasion – Béla used the site in the lifetime of his father – but it was with Béla's reforms that it became a major stronghold, motivated by Queen Mary's desire in 1248 to erect a new castle in expectation of an imminent Mongol invasion. The exact stages of the rebuilding process are unclear, but a charter of 1251 indicates a functioning royal residence was there and in 1259 the king gave the castle and the whole of Pilis to his wife. The new fortress had an upper castle surrounded by stone walls with towers, a draw bridge, etc., while the lower castle had the Solomon Tower, the top of which appears designed for placing large artillery pieces. The site had German *hospes* residents and was defended successfully during a civil war in 1284.⁶⁷³ The transformation of Visegrád into one of Hungary's strongest castles was rapid, carried out at the queen's own expense with the upper castle serving as a refuge for the Dominican nuns normally based on Margaret Island in case of emergency. Judging by a charter, it was a fully functional castle by 1265 at the latest.⁶⁷⁴ It is interesting to note the parallels with Zagreb, formed from two walled settlements of Kaptol and Gradec whose growth was fostered by Béla's 1242 edict establishing it as a free royal city immediately after the Mongols left. We likewise note the emergence of tower sites there around which larger fortifications could develop, and the rapid

⁶⁷² L. Bozóki, *Lapidarium Hungaricum* 8. *Pest megye II. Visegrád, alsó- és felsővár*, Pál Lővei (ed.) (Budapest, Nemzeti Kulturális Alap, 2012), 17.

⁶⁷³ Gergely Buzás, "A pilisi ispán visegrádi vára," *Várak, kastélyok, templomok* (April 2018), 14-18.

⁶⁷⁴ Bozóki, *Lapidarium Hungaricum*, 17.

construction (1249–1254) of a massive, highly defensible fortress, Medvedgrad, on a rugged mountain not far from Zagreb in response to the Mongol threat.

While the stretch of river near the Danube Bend and valuable royal-ecclesiastical centers were secured by large fortifications, farther south down the river we do not encounter the same situation. Szabolcs Rosta has published on several sites in the Kiskunság that were previously thought to be cemeteries, but recent archaeological excavations show them to have been improvised circles of ditch-work fortifications centered around stone churches during the 1241–1242 Mongol invasion. In the cases of Tázlár, Csengele and Szank, they all have evidence such as corpses of victims, weapons, and coins dated to the invasion, as well as being close to other sites of already discovered invasion-related massacres and destruction. In the case, of Csengele, Ferenc Horváth interpreted the site in this way and József Laszlovszky long suspected the “cemetery” showed defensive features, a view vindicated by this latest research. Rosta postulates that these earthworks seem to have been rapidly constructed during the invasion in the Great Hungarian Plain where the landscape, materials, urgency, and lack of knowledge did not allow for better defenses; they show signs of being overrun in these three investigated cases.⁶⁷⁵

Concerning the interpretation of these sites, it was quite normal that churches were surrounded by cemeteries, and a ditch with no defensive function enclosed the cemetery. These sites, however, show much bigger, multiple ditches and earthworks between them, which were clearly for defense. The other features (bodies, arrow heads, etc.) prove that they were besieged (Fig. 1). This seems to confirm Rogerius’ account of villagers gathering at such earthwork fortresses in the Plain and making a last stand against the invaders.⁶⁷⁶ Rosta believes that these

⁶⁷⁵ Rosta, “Egy új lehetőség kapujában,” 186-192.

⁶⁷⁶ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger’s Epistle*, 210-213.

fortresses were connected to the Danube defense line – another triple-ditched circular system was investigated at Perkáta located not far from the west bank of the Danube. Unlike those in the Kiskunság, this site did not have the features of a siege and destruction. This research is just beginning and Rosta predicts further investigations in Békés and Transdanubia will reveal much more about the extensiveness of this defensive system and its role in the Danube defense. We can see a case of such earthwork systems being only a few kilometers apart.⁶⁷⁷

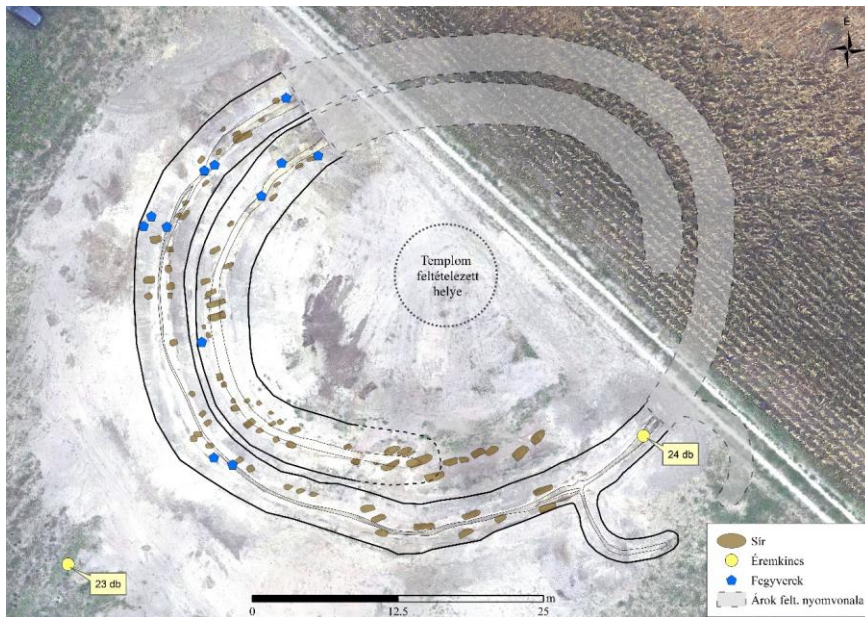


Fig. 1. Earthwork at Szank. Brown = corpses, blue = weapons, yellow = coins. Image courtesy of Szabolcs Rosta.

It is no coincidence that the sites of last stands (Tázlár, Csengele and Szank) all have names of Cuman origin today and this relates to another aspect of the defense strategy. The stretch of plains east of the Danube, the Kiskunság, was resettled by Cumans in 1246–1247 with Béla IV

⁶⁷⁷ Rosta, “Egy új lehetőség kapujában,” 190.

abruptly marrying off his son to a Cuman princess and receiving from several chieftains a pagan oath of loyalty made by cutting a dog in half; this marriage was so hasty that Béla did not even wait for their conversion. The chronicle specifically states that this decision was motivated by the king's expectation of a Mongol return.⁶⁷⁸ What accounts for this drastic urgency of defensive reforms from 1246 to 1248? Though Carpini's warnings of Mongol intentions to conquer Europe, spread about after his return from his mission to the khan, were part of it, there is evidence the threat was more tangible.

In an overlooked passage, Matthew Paris recorded that in 1246 the Mongols again invaded Hungarian territory to subdue it, and the king withdrew the inhabitants to fortified sites to await the battle while sending word to the pope to help him:

In this same year, the Tatars of most hateful memory made a formidable incursion [in the Middle East and Caucasus]. Afterwards, hoping for further good fortune, they again daringly invaded the provinces of Hungary as it seemed to them that they were not previously subdued although they were disgracefully abandoned by the inhabitants. The king of that country, greatly alarmed at their approach, withdrew with the inhabitants from the weaker portions of his territories, and fleeing to the most fortified places (and even they seemed to him to be scarcely safe), there awaited a bloody battle. He also sent word to the pope to use his anxious endeavours to protect him and all Christendom from such a fearful pest.⁶⁷⁹

This seems strongly related to the extant letter of Béla IV in which he asked for papal assistance and laid out his strategy. It also seems related to the inhabitants of Pest being evacuated to Buda at the time, and the pope's 1247 letter to the bishops of Esztergom and Kalocsa,

⁶⁷⁸ István Gyárfás, *A jász-kunok története*, vol. 2. (Kecskemét, 1873), 31. The relevant text in the thirteenth-century *Codex Luxenburg: Quos Bela rex Hungarorum, velut dominus Papa nuntios ad Thartharos direxit. Anno dominice incarnationis MCCXLVI. Bela rex Hungarie audiens nuncios domini Pape sibi per omnia manifestantes vitam et mores, ut superius dictum est, Thartharorum. Nec mora et ecce nuntii sui aulam intrantes, quos ad eosdem Thartharos direxerat, eorum gesta et secreta scrutando. Qui per omnis, utifrater Johannes regi nuntiaverat, emulgaverunt in hunc modum. Rex autem Bela, his rumoribus auditis, motus et perterritus, filium suum in regem electum dedit filie regis Comanorum. Nuptieque noviter in Hungaria sunt celebrate. In his autem nuptiis X. Comanorum convenerunt, iurantes super canem gladio bipartitum, iuxta eorum consuetudinem, quod terram Hungarorum, tanquam regis fideles, contra Thartharos et barbaras nationes obtinebunt.*

⁶⁷⁹ Giles, *English History*, vol. 2, 165.

commanding them to erect fortifications at defensible sites to receive the populace.⁶⁸⁰ The *Yuan Shi* reports that Uriyangqadai, the son of Subutai, took part in Batu's punitive campaign to subdue the Bulgarians and Germans in 1246 and that he was still in the western regions when Güyük Khan died in 1248.⁶⁸¹ The Russian Nikonian Chronicle provides a garbled account of a second Mongol invasion of Hungary and northern lands in 1247–1248.⁶⁸² More convincingly, in a letter of 1247, the archbishop of Canterbury stated that he heard the Mongols returned to Hungary,⁶⁸³ and the king of France received a Mongol embassy in early 1247 demanding his submission and using stock phrases we would recognize in many Mongol ultimatums.⁶⁸⁴

Whether the crisis of 1246–1248 represent feints, real attacks, or pervasive rumors, the psychological effect of what happened was enormous, hastening the decades-long development of a defensive system to cope with a Mongol return to Hungary. Any such system had to cope with long-term realities and some new limitations imposed in the aftermath of the 1241 invasion. The distribution of buried coin-hoards, corpses, and settlement damage connected to those events

⁶⁸⁰ Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica*, 204.

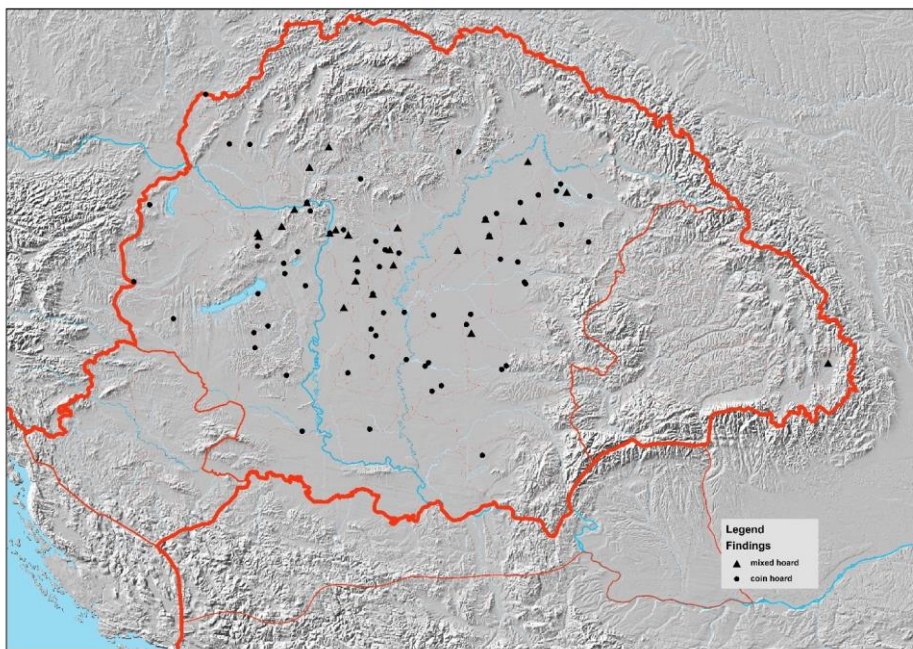
⁶⁸¹ *Yuan Shi*, 2976. The specific reference is to a westward campaign against the *beilie'r* (孛烈兒) and *niemisi* (捏迷思) in 1246. Regarding the first group, as I have suggested in this work, it refers not to Poland as Chinese historiography suggests but to Bulgars – and Europe's Bulgarians in this case rather than the Volga Bulgars who were already thoroughly subjugated. I base this on the view that Carpini, writing around 1246–47, did not include Bulgaria in his comprehensive list of nations the Mongols had subjugated, but Rubruck writing a few years later in the early 1250s stated that the Kingdom of Bulgaria, Wallachia, and much of the Balkans was subject to the Mongols, even including details of tribute which Bulgaria paid (Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 41, 91, 124). This suggests to me that Bulgaria was not actually subjugated as the Mongols passed through it in 1242, but rather during the campaigning, ostensibly in the Balkans, which was occurring c. 1246–47 according to several sources documented in this paragraph. As regards the second group attacked by Uriyangqadai, this appears to be *nemtsy*, the Slavic exonym for Germans, including settlers in their own lands. It is interesting to note that in their invasion of Hungary, the Mongols appears to have adopted Sasut to refer to German settlers from the Hungarian term for Saxons, but in this later case, they borrowed the Slavic exonym.

⁶⁸² Zenkovsky, *The Nikonian Chronicle*, vol. 3, 24–25.

⁶⁸³ Luard, *Chronica Majora*, vol. 4, 133.

⁶⁸⁴ Giles, *English History*, vol. 2, 214.

supports the conclusion that devastation and population loss was most heavy in the Great Hungarian Plain east of the Danube (Map 8).⁶⁸⁵

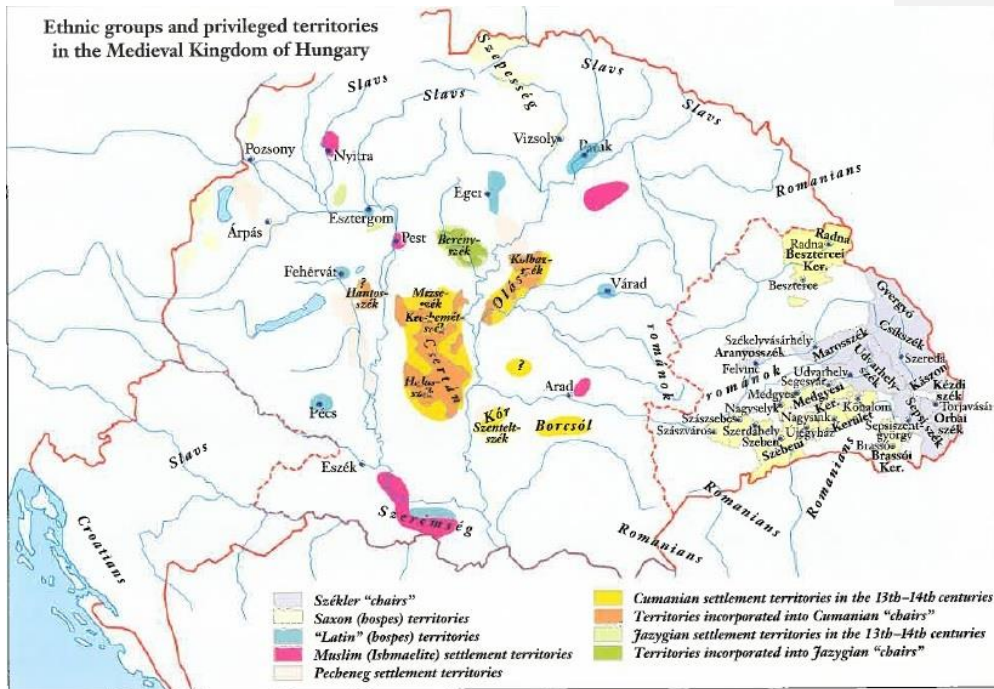


Map 8. Distribution of hoards found in Hungary connected to the invasion (image courtesy of the Hungarian National Museum and designed by Csaba Tóth)

Interestingly, the same areas that show heavy concentrations of hoard-finds, the plain between the Danube and Tisza and the plain in the northeast between the Tisza and Körös, also happen to be the main regions that Béla designated for the Cumans to settle. These are the Kiskunság (Cumania Minor) and Nagykunság (Cumania Major). That is no accident since Béla IV

⁶⁸⁵ Laszlovszky et al., "Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion of Hungary, 425-427.

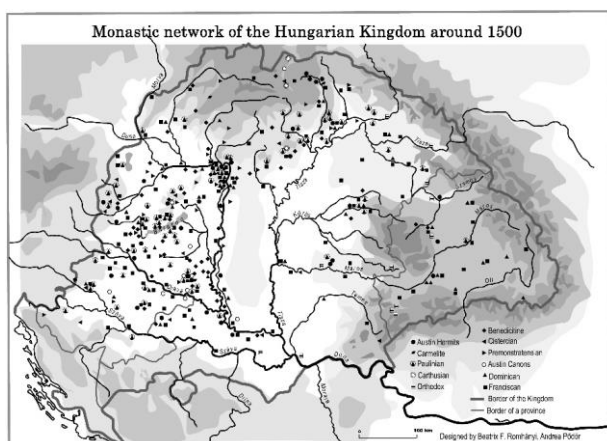
would have wanted to avoid conflict between the sedentary population and the herding newcomers. He settled the Cumans in areas that had been heavily depopulated, nicely separated from the still densely populated Medium Regni by the Danube. The Cumans, it seems, were placed as the protective force for the plains regions which did not allow for the construction of castles, while their forces also formed a formidable mobile barrier, as it were, on the eastern side of the river (Map 9).



Map 9. Ethnic groups and privileged territories in the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary. Source: Laszlovszky, "Medieval Archaeology in Hungary," in: Hungarian Archaeology at the Turn of the Millenium, Zs. Vissy (ed.), (Budapest: Ministry of National Cultural Heritage - Teleki Foundation), 346.

Beatrix Romhányi's excellent research and particularly her visualizations of monastic network throughout the centuries in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary confirm this picture of

population loss, shifts in land use, and lessons learned following 1241–1242. We see that in the lead-up to the Mongol invasion, monastic settlements with their concomitant expensive buildings were somewhat evenly distributed throughout the kingdom including in the Plain region. However, even by 1500 we can see that monastic communities along the Tisza, Körös, and Maros and throughout the central plains not only disappeared after the invasion but those areas remained basically abandoned. Meanwhile the western part of the country, as well as the mountains of today's Slovakia, showed huge increases in such monastic sites. Since monastic communities were not choosing sites based on military priorities, what we see here probably reflects population presence, a response to perceived threats and the selection of secure or protected sites, along with regional wealth, donations, and financial opportunities for monks. The monastic network developed heavily in secure, populated areas (Map 10).



Map 10. Monastic network of the Hungarian Kingdom around 1500. Image courtesy of B. Romhányi.

This relates to Béla's strategy. Regardless of how it ideally would be carried out, it was difficult to build castles in the east-central parts of the country simply because there were not many people to provide the pre-requisite taxes and labour required for such projects; the distribution of castles in thirteenth and fourteenth century Hungary could, to some extent, represent which areas

had a healthy population and economy after the war and subsequent famine. Fügedi noted the distinction between the “enthusiasm” of nobles who were granted incentives to build castles, increasing their own power vis-à-vis the monarch, and the ordinary populace whose frustration at bearing the labor and tax burden sometimes comes through in the extant records.⁶⁸⁶

That relates to another issue: how much central control did the king have over the results of a policy that relied so heavily on the cooperation of his nobles? Surviving charters indicate he controlled it to some extent by rewarding lands to nobles who had demonstrated loyalty to him in the invasion period.⁶⁸⁷ The king’s escape from the Battle of Muhi had been very narrow, judging by the gratitude he expressed to a Ban Jacob who helped him, surrounded on all sides with blood pouring out, escape to the forest and get to a hiding place in the mountains, keeping at his side when there “seemed nothing left but death.”⁶⁸⁸ The king also expressed gratitude and conferred territories upon a certain Ernye for giving him his horse and stopping the pursuers when the king’s own horses were killed underneath him in the retreat.⁶⁸⁹ Yet another letter by the king expressed thanks to someone who gave him a horse at the battle and whose brother was killed in the fighting.⁶⁹⁰ Two figures who had also demonstrated their loyalty to the king at the battle, Achilles and Kozma, were conferred with territory and castles. It seems that the individuals who had saved the king’s life already once were later being entrusted to build and hold strategic castles.⁶⁹¹ Ultimately, however, castles could only be built depending on suitable sites, available population, and the noble’s ability to build at his own expense as was indicated in yet another charter.⁶⁹² In

⁶⁸⁶ Fügedi, *Castle and Society*, 52-53.

⁶⁸⁷ Nagy, *Tatárjárás*, 200; Wenzel, *Árpádkori új okmánytár*, vol. 7, 223-225.

⁶⁸⁸ *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. 5, 2-3.

⁶⁸⁹ Nagy, *Tatárjárás*, 195-196. Béla to Ernye of the Ákos kindred, 7 July 1250.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 198-199. Béla to Ivánka’s son, András, 13 March 1253.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 199-200. Béla to ispán Kozma and Achilles, 21 June 1266.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 194.

such circumstances, Béla's program ended up with a distribution that matches the monastic network.

The construction of fortifications in Hungary in the period after the first invasion went beyond the scope of the castles built by the king and various magnates. In Hungary's urban centers, private stone towers started to be constructed with great frequency which can be viewed as a response to the Mongol invasion and ongoing threat. Many of these appeared in Sopron and Buda, showing clear defensive features; they seem to have functioned as a sort of *refugium* for their owners. Though such towers appeared in Bohemia and Austria before Batu's invasion, they only appeared in Hungary after that period. Moreover, most of these urban towers were abandoned by the fourteenth century when the Mongol threat also subsided.⁶⁹³

Returning to the royal program of castle construction, it is evident there were nuances to the Hungarian monarch's strategy. In the first few decades after the Batu's invasion, the Hungarian's new Cuman troops, mistaken as "mercenaries from many countries" by a medieval commentator, were crucial to driving off predatory neighbors in this phase.⁶⁹⁴ In the struggle to regain control over their former territory, Béla decided to concentrate his defensive efforts at the Danube. In the event of a worst-case scenario in a renewed Mongol invasion, communities in the Great Plain and Transylvania might have had to fend for themselves. Transylvania, in any case, had been severely depopulated, so it did not have the requisite body of labourers to build castles in the post-invasion years, as is indicated by a letter of 6 May 1246 from Béla to a Transylvanian bishop.⁶⁹⁵ Nonetheless, motivated by necessity, it seems that many *ad hoc* castles were already

⁶⁹³ Gergely Szoboszlay, "Urban Private Towers in the Shadow of the Mongolian Invasion," (2020: unpublished).

⁶⁹⁴ M. Fischer (trans.), *The Chronicle of Prussia by Nicolaus von Jeroschin: A History of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia, 1190–1331* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 180.

⁶⁹⁵ Nagy, *Tatárjárás*, 188–189.

constructed there by survivors of the invasion, as Rogerius witnessed already in 1242.⁶⁹⁶ It appears these were not reflected in earlier studies such as that of Fügedi. Some of them simply were not noticed owing to their state of disrepair and many centuries of abandonment.

At the time, the threat was universal across Europe, though not as immediate as the danger facing Hungary, Galicia-Volhynia, and Poland as the frontline of Mongol conquest. Pope Innocent IV advised the overhaul of the defenses in all Christian countries in the post-invasion years and even promised financial support for the undertaking at the Council of Lyon in 1244.⁶⁹⁷ The fact is that the threat of renewed Mongol invasions applied to the whole of Christendom in the aftermath of the withdrawal as Europe's leaders were being regularly reminded. Both the Dominican mission of Ascelin and the Franciscan mission of John of Plano Carpini returned from Mongol courts with official ultimatums bearing the same tenor that Europe's rulers could submit or die. Around Lent in 1247, Louis IX received an embassy stating that the entire world had been given to the Mongols by God.⁶⁹⁸ In any case, evidence of fortress reforms spill over the Carpathians in the same period are evinced in Galicia-Volhynia and Poland which were in the most immediate danger.

5.2. Attempts at Fortification Reforms in Galicia-Volhynia

We have evidence of drastic efforts to try to improve fortifications almost immediately after the Mongols devastated the Vladimir-Suzdalian region in early 1238. Russian chronicles record that in 1239, Alexander Nevsky had his subjects build a fortress on the Shalon' River.⁶⁹⁹ It is difficult not to see this project as being connected to almost total annihilation of the royalty and urban centers of northeast Russia the year prior. The most serious effort at actually initiating a

⁶⁹⁶ Bak and Rady, *Master Roger's Epistle*, 220-221.

⁶⁹⁷ Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom*, 165.

⁶⁹⁸ Giles, *English History*, vol. 2, 214.

⁶⁹⁹ Zenkovsky, *Nikonian Chronicle*, vol. 2, 318.

major improvement in fortifications was attempted by the brothers who ruled over Galicia and Volhynia, Daniel and Vasylo. They were closely tied to the Hungarian monarch by marriage. They also had direct communications with Pope Innocent. In 1248, the Pope asked Daniel of Galicia to pass on information to the Teutonic knights if the Mongols were about to attack.⁷⁰⁰ Likewise, Daniel was now acting in the role of an early warning system regarding Mongol movements for Béla IV, his new in-law. A charter of the Hungarian monarch mentions how he would send his nobles to Galicia-Volhynia to acquire direct information from the Rus' who had been staying with Batu or had recently come back from a summons by the Mongols.⁷⁰¹

As Daniel of Galicia was closely tied to the court and person of Béla IV who was himself engaging such dramatic fortification reforms, it should come as no surprise that the Rus' prince attempted a similar reform almost immediately after Batu passed through his territory in 1240. I contend that it would be strange if Hungary, and only Hungary, had a strong reaction to the arrival of the Mongols as a major, new power in the region and attempted a major fortification overhaul. Moreover, it would be strange if the evident fortification reforms across the region of Eastern Europe happening simultaneously from the mid-thirteenth century were, only in Hungary's case, related to the Mongol presence. In my view, these types of reforms were all primarily motivated by the Mongols.

In the case of Galicia-Volhynia, we can be certain of the connection between the Mongols and the major fortress building project. The *Galician-Volynian Chronicle* tells us that when he was summoned to Batu's orda in 1245 to formally submit to the khan, "Danilo was greatly distressed for he had not fortified his land with citadels. After consulting with his brother [Vasilko], he set

⁷⁰⁰ Wenzel, *Árpád kori új okmánytár*, vol. 7, 267.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

out to see Batu.”⁷⁰² This passage implies that Danilo wanted to resist the Mongols, but he realized he did not have adequate fortifications to attempt such a thing. Thus, he went to Batu and submitted, but subsequent events bear out that he was only buying time. In the 1250s when Daniel started war against the Mongols, he centered his defense on the hilltop center of Chelm. He built on the defenses of another nearby city which had resisted the first Mongol invasion. In the center of his capital Chelm, on elevated terrain, was a huge stone tower from which artillery could fire. After an allegedly accidental fire of the wooden structure in 1256, during the open war he had at last commenced against the Mongols, he built “higher and stronger walls” but did not repair the tower, “for he was building other fortifications against the godless Tatars.”⁷⁰³ There were signs that the fortification reforms were having desired effects, but the princes simply lacked the time and distance from the Mongols to sufficiently carry them out. In 1254, Qurumshi (Kuremsa) had attempted to besiege Kremenets but “met with no success there and returned to their land.”⁷⁰⁴

The *Galicia-Volhynia Chronicle* describes how the fortress construction efforts of Daniel ultimately failed, and this was through tense negotiations rather than military force. It was ultimately in late 1259 during a wedding feast in Volodymyr that the princes heard of Boroldai’s sudden approach with a large Mongol army. Boroldai’s emissaries arrived demanding to know if the princes were truly his allies, or rather enemies. In the awkward and tense situation which found the Rus’ princes posing as Mongol allies while in fact attempting a fortress overhaul in the hopes of breaking free of their rule, Daniel wisely thought it best to not go in person to meet the Mongol military leader. Instead he sent his brother, Vasilko, and son, Lev, and Bishop Ivan of Chelm in his own place. Boroldai flew into a rage at the meeting and demanded that they prove they were

⁷⁰² Perfeky, “Galician-Volynian Chronicle,” 57.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 74-76.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 69.

allies by leveling of the kingdom's fortresses. Being in a bad position to refuse, Lev had his troops level the fortifications of Danilov (the ruins of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Церква Св Трійці, in Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine), nearby Stozesk (Стіжок) and sent them to destroy those at Lviv. Vasilko likewise sent his troops to dismantle the fortifications at Kremenets and Lutsk. Because of the enormous size of the fortifications at Volodymyr, the prince had them torched and Boroldai inspected their work to see it was done to his satisfaction. The Mongol leader then ordered the earthworks to be dug up. From there, Boroldai took Vasilko to Chelm to see to its surrender but it resisted. Mongol attacks on it could achieve nothing as "it was tightly defended with catapults and crossbows" and filled with capable troops. Thus, Boroldai sent Vasilko up to the walls to demand its surrender. Vasilko secretly indicated he wished the town to refuse by throwing a stone each time he demanded the commander surrender. The town's defenders refused to surrender based on this non-verbal cue. The Mongols evidently did not suspect anything and simply bypassed the town, continuing with Vasiko in toe to attack Poland.⁷⁰⁵

The Galician-Volhynian royalty's effort to modernize their fortifications in order to stand a chance of breaking free of the Mongols had abruptly faltered in this anti-climactic fashion after many years of progress. Likely having realized what their "allies" were attempting in the long term, the Mongols advanced and brought the project to a halt evidently before the Galician princes felt their preparations were sufficient to resist Boroldai's amassed forces in 1259. Once he had two leading princes in his company as hostages, the Mongol leader had the upper hand in any negotiations and could see to the peaceful dismantling of the kingdom's best fortresses. The resistance of the western Rus' in Galicia-Volhynia collapsed. In 1274, we read of Lev and another Galician prince marching on the respective left and right flanks of a Mongol army, with the

⁷⁰⁵ Perfeky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 78-79; PSRL, T. 2, 848-852.

chronicler's observation that at that time all Rus' princes "were subjects of the Tatars."⁷⁰⁶ As such a statement was meaningful to the chronicler, we might take it that the subjugation of the Rus' was a gradual process even after the incredible shock which accompanied the destruction of almost all its significant urban centers in 1237-40.

What is clear from the events of 1246-1259 is that the inconsistently offered resistance which flared up in Galicia-Volhynia was founded on a strategy that emphasized placating the distant Mongol overlords while seeing to the gradual improvement of fortresses both in terms of geographical placement and building materials. The locations of the major fortresses which Boroldai ordered dismantled in 1259 formed a loose ring in the Volhynian-Podolian Upland. Generally, these fortresses were situated on elevated sites, and some like Kremenets and Danilov were especially singled out in the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle* for having already proven their defensive worth when Batu first passed through the region in the winter of 1240-41.⁷⁰⁷ The two mentioned fortresses and Stożek were located in a strong line along a range of mountains in an otherwise flat area, which hints that Daniel was striving to create a network of fortresses.

Importantly for my argument, this strategy reveals that the Galician ruler had learned the same lessons which his relation by marriage to Béla IV and the Hungarian court had probably helped internalize regarding defensive works. After all, Daniel shifted his capital from Galicia (Halych) to the defensible hilltop center of Chelm and greatly invested in its defenses after the Mongol invasion. This is hardly a coincidence and it seems highly improbable that Daniel was unaware of the Hungarian monarch's strategic decisions when they interacted closely and regularly in person and in joint military undertakings through the relevant period. They must have discussed

⁷⁰⁶ Perfeky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 88; PSRL, T.2, 872.

⁷⁰⁷ Perfeky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 49.

measures for coping with the problem of the Mongols and Daniel may well have been inspired in his own course of action by Béla IV's own castle-building project.

Fortifications too came to increasingly shift from wood to stone or brick. We see the emergence of the dungeon tower in Chelm with a base of stone, and when Vasilko's son, Volodymir (d. 1289), took the rule of Volhynia in 1269, he launched a series of tower constructions that represent a major innovation in the regions. Starting in the 1270s, the Tower of Kamyanyets was constructed in brick; it still stands today. He constructed another equally high tower in Brest, and another on Volhynia's eastern frontier at the time of his death.⁷⁰⁸ To see unprecedented brick towers of impressive height appearing in that region at the same time as Hungary's reforms in stones castles which are certainly a reaction to the Mongol presence implies closely related sets of activities. Just as the rulers of Galicia-Volhynia seem to have perceived improved fortifications as their best chance to assert their independence from the Mongols, it is telling that, based on the severity of Boroldai's reaction, the Mongols in the 1250s likewise perceived the new fortresses as the greatest threat to their rule in the region.

5.3 Reforms in Poland

As traces of it appear in textual sources, the Polish response to the first Mongol invasion is curious. Unlike in the cases of Hungary and Galicia-Volhynia, the sources almost never state that any defensive measures were undertaken as a direct reaction to the Mongols. Yet, we see many of the same dramatic social and technical reforms in Poland that we notice took place in Hungary at the same time. Sometimes we see stated connections between the Mongol threat and fortification

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 111-112, 117.

developments, such as when we read in the Annals of Krakow that the church of Wladyslaw was covered with lead, except for its new towers which were built specifically to resist the Tartars in 1247.⁷⁰⁹ In the *Annales Capituli Posnaniensis* we encounter a flurry of castle building amongst Poland's dukes in the 1240s, immediately after the Mongols left. Duke Przemysł I of Greater Poland built a castle at Zbąszyń in 1243. Bolesław II Rogatka, duke of Silesia, constructed a castle on the Obra river in 1246. In 1249, Przemysł "edificavit" Poznan, meaning he built a castle as the town already existed. The same year, Przemysł I and Bolesław the Pious, Duke of Gniezno, constructed and walled the castle of Bytom.⁷¹⁰ The annals almost start to read like the record of a massive construction project. But what accounts for it? There could be and were many possible motivations for castle-building: ducal civil war, Pomeranians, Teutonic Knights, etc. However, the Mongol issue might have become very pressing during the 1247 crisis related to new Mongol inroads reported in Hungary. In a letter of February 1247, Pope Innocent IV called on the bishop of Krakow to unite with the duke of Krakow & Sandomir, Boleslaw V, to defend Christianity from the pagans "repeatedly" attacking the area.⁷¹¹

Yet, the Polish sources do not emphasize the Mongol threat particularly. When the rulers of Greater Poland are recorded having built a castle in 1255 at a strategic passage, they are stated to have done so out of an awareness, or epiphany, that since ancient times, the Pomeranians had trouble with taking castles.⁷¹² Still, the parallels between the reforms taking place at the time in Poland and Hungary are compelling. As with Hungary, castle-building in Poland was a strict royal prerogative until the mid-1200s when suddenly nobles could construct private castles at will. This change occurred soon after Mongol arrival. In a letter of 1252 to a Count Clement, palatine of

⁷⁰⁹ MHGS, XIX, 598.

⁷¹⁰ MGHS XXIX, p. 441-445.

⁷¹¹ Monumenta Medii Aevi Historica, Tom. 1, 36.

⁷¹² MGHS XXIX, 451.

Krakow, Duke Boleslaw V called on the him and his descendants to henceforth build castles and walled cities at will and to keep possession of them.⁷¹³ Essentially, Poland's royalty had sacrificed a high degree of their control over the territory and this was curiously a general trend in the period as Marcin Rafał Pauk has noted.⁷¹⁴ In the mid-thirteenth century, nobles were suddenly permitted to construct castles at the same as Hungarian nobles were actively building them for the first time.

On the whole, Poland was lightly fortified compared to Western Europe. City walls and massive fortifications were rare in medieval Poland compared to average estimates in Europe; by the end of the 1500s even after founding of many private cities only approx. 5.5% were walled, and in general fortified cities were disproportionately located in Teutonic Order and Silesia, i.e. areas of foreign settlement. Stone and brick fortresses were rare in medieval Poland. Wood was plentiful, the costs of stone and brick was prohibitive, and the motte-and-baily type was basically sufficient for protection in ordinary conditions. The stone or brick type was heavily concentrated in Silesia and Teutonic Order territories. Town walls were steadily renovated from the second half of the thirteenth century. For example, Poznan received brick walls from its former earth and wood starting in 1275 to the early 1300s.⁷¹⁵

During the continued threat of Mongol invasions in the same timeframe, there were evolutions in the way towns and fortresses were organized. In 1292 the newly crowned king suddenly built the city walls closely connecting the town to the castle at Nowy Sacz on the southern frontier of Piast kingdom. Wieliczka, which was from mid-1200s the leading center of salt production, had a fortress with a rectangle plan and towers, and later town rights in 1290 followed

⁷¹³ F. Piekosiński (ed.), *Monumenta Medii Aevi Historica, Res Gestas Polniae Illustrantia*, Tomus IX (Cracow 1886), 85-86.

⁷¹⁴ Marcin Rafał Pauk, "Funkcjonowanie regale fortyfikacyjnego w Europie Środkowej w średniowieczu," *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 51.1 (2003): 3-16.

⁷¹⁵ Leszek Kajzer and Jan Salm, "Burg und Stadt in Polen," *Castrum Bene* 6, 113-119.

by walls in mid-1300s. In medieval Poland, the general trend was that the construction of a fortress preceded the gradual emergence of a nearby town, and the fortresses were first selected on a hill, promontory or swamp for protection.⁷¹⁶

Perhaps the best sign of a clear relationship between Polish defensive reforms to those taking place in Hungary, and their mutual connection as a response to the Mongol threat, relates to private urban towers. The very same pattern of a sudden and dramatic appearance of small fortified towers within urban communities occurred in Poland at the same time as Hungary. In the case of Krakow, researchers Waldemar Komorowski and Jerzy Piekalsi assumed that the construction of these towers must have been connected to Mongol attacks. Archaeological findings confirmed they were built from about 1260, after the second Mongol invasion of Poland, and that the construction of such towers ceased after 1280 when Krakow's city walls were completed.⁷¹⁷ If not explicitly stated, there can be little doubt of a causal connections.

5.4 Later Invasions of the Thirteenth Century

A large second invasion of Poland in 1259 followed the stamping out of Prince Daniel and Vasiko's resistance in Galicia-Volhynia.⁷¹⁸ In a related operation, the Mongols devastated Lithuania in 1258 sufficiently enough to make the Lithuanian duke covert to Christianity for a time. When the Mongols then continued into Poland, it seems their campaign was not solely directed at the Polish principalities; in the aftermath there are records that the Mongols even came to blows with the Teutonic Knights and inflicted heavy losses on them.⁷¹⁹ Yet, the invasion of

⁷¹⁶ Stanislaw Kloldziejski, "Chateau et ville en Pologne de midi" *Castrum Bene* 6, 146-147, 151.

⁷¹⁷ Szoboszlay, "Urban Private Towers," 2-3.

⁷¹⁸ Perfecky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 76-77.

⁷¹⁹ Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 123.

1259 from the Jochid *ulus* was primarily a devastating invasion of Poland's territory which left lasting damage.

In the course of this campaign, something rather notable happened at the time with regard to fortification reforms. The *Annales Sanctae Crucis Polinici* record that after taking Sandomierz, the Mongols continued to advance along the road to Krakow. However, they proved unable to take both the city and its castle. Thus, they returned back to their own country, only destroying churches, killing those they could find in the open, and taking captives along the way.⁷²⁰ In 1265, a major overhaul of Krakow's fortifications saw them expanded to cover the entire citadel, though the new walls were still made with logs rather than stone.⁷²¹ It is difficult not to connect this project of strengthening the fortifications of Krakow to a decision-making process in the aftermath of the renewed Mongol invasion, especially when we consider that the city had actually come under attack in 1250-60.

In 1261, Berke, the eventual successor of Batu (after a few convenient, sudden deaths), sent an embassy to Paris demanding the French monarch's surrender and threatening invasion of France.⁷²² Simultaneously Berke pressured Béla IV to enter into a marriage alliance with the Mongols and join in a campaign against his Latin neighbours, essentially by offering his kingdom as a base for the Mongols and sharing plunder with them.⁷²³ Evidently, the campaign that climaxed in 1259 had a much wider scope than Poland and could have developed into a more serious and sustained assault on Christendom than even the first invasion. However, drastic developments diverted Berke's attention away from Europe. In 1259, Möngke Khan died in distant Sichuan and

⁷²⁰ MGHS XIX, 682.

⁷²¹ Ibid.

⁷²² Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica*, 239-241; 264-265.

⁷²³ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 123-124.

his brothers, Khubilai and Ariq Böke, went to war for his throne almost immediately. In the western part of the Mongol Empire, the Jochid *ulus* under Berke, based on the Pontic Steppe, went to war with Hülegü, ruler of the recently founded Ilkhanate established in the Middle East. As the formerly unified Mongol Empire devolved into several enormous and often mutually hostile territories, Europe was granted a reprieve, especially as Berke and Hülegü inflicted huge casualties on each other in a sequence of pitched battles during the first half of the 1260s.

The last period of the Golden Horde posing an existential danger to the kingdoms of East-Central Europe was in the 1280s. Letters and reports composed in Latin Christendom, along with some Persian sources, agree that the Mongols were still putting considerable military pressure on Hungary in the four-decade interval between the two major invasion events; inroads became frequent in Hungary starting in the early 1270s, owing to internal dissensions in the kingdom upon which the Mongols appear to have been eager to capitalize.⁷²⁴ The situation took a drastic turn in the last months of 1285 as two preeminent Horde princes, the *de facto* ruler Töle Buqa and the khanate's preeminent military leader, Nogai, launched a major invasion of Hungary that pushed as far as Pest before coming to ruin. Besides the effects of concerted Hungarian attacks, it is explicitly emphasized in a wide range of sources that weather played havoc with the Mongol forces.

As an indication of how far news of the 1285-86 episode and the role of weather in it had reached, even Baybars al-Mansuri (c. 1260-1325), a Mamluk chronicler whose work was mainly focused on events in the Islamic sphere, had heard of the calamity which characterized the campaign's end. In al-Mansuri's version of events, Nogai managed to retreat east across the Carpathians in good order but Töle Buqa's forces became trapped and brought to ruin in the winter

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 204.

conditions of the border wastelands. Under the heading of the year 686 A.H. (1287-88),⁷²⁵ the historian mentioned that Töle Buqa, already acting in a role of supreme leadership in the Golden Horde, had ordered Nogai to assemble his own troops as the two of them would launch an invasion of Hungary (الكرل – al-KRL, i.e. Kerel, viz. Király).⁷²⁶ The historian recorded, “Nogai took his troops and left Töle Buqa. He reached his winter quarters safe and sound. Töle Buqa, on the other hand, went through shelter-less deserts and wild steppes as he lost the main road. He and his troops experienced extreme difficulties and calamities; the larger part of his army died of cold and weakness. Just a few of them survived.”⁷²⁷

Another contemporary historian writing under Mamluk patronage, al-Nuwayri (1279-1333) recorded similar details, also under the heading of the year 686 A.H., his narrative basically following the other Mamluk chronicler’s record of events:

He [Nogay] came to him [Töle Buqa] and they met at the aforementioned place. They plundered Hungary [KRL – i.e. Kerel, viz. Király], forayed through it, slaughtered its inhabitants and then returned. At the same time the frost got fiercer and a lot of snow fell. Nogay, together with his troops, left Töle Buqa and went to his winter camp, he reached his home safely. But Töle

⁷²⁵ The evident confusion in the Mamluk sources regarding the chronology, with the date of the Mongols’ subsequent invasion of Poland, 1287-88, being applied to the events of the earlier invasion of Hungary in 1285-86, might be a hint that already Hungary and Poland had come to be viewed as a single entity by authors in the Islamic milieu in the late thirteenth century. The usage of the name KRL to refer to Hungary could explain why Poland and the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania were often called “Kerel” in the works of authors in Early Modern works stemming from the Golden Horde and an Islamic context which were discussed in the second chapter.

⁷²⁶ V. G. Tizengauzen (ed.), *Sbornik materialov otnosiashchikhsia k istorii Zolotoi Ordy*, I (St Petersburg, 1884), 83-84, 106. Though in Tizengauzen’s edition we can see the name of the nation invaded by the Golden Horde rendered in the Arabic text of al-Mansuri as KRK, the editor noted that it could actually be KRL, even while failed to identify the country in question as Hungary – something which has had reverberations in subsequent scholarship. There is a clear explanation for the ambiguous transliteration; Arabic historians sometimes *appeared* to have rendered the term as KRK owing to the addition of the character *hamza* (ﺀ), a glottal stop, to the *lām* (ﻝ) at the end of KRL, making the final letter appear as *kāf* (ﻙ) – thus ending up with a spelling ambiguity that could be interpreted as KRK. Nonetheless, for the certain identification of KRL as Hungary (i.e. al-Karil, Bilad al-Karil meaning the Land of Hungarians), and the observation that Arabic historians sometimes appeared to have rendered the term as KRK owing to stylistic issues, see: Ibn Khaldūn, al-Khabr ‘An Dawlat al-Tatar: Tarīkh al-Moghul min al-Kitāb al-‘Abr [Reports of the Tatar: History of the Moghuls from the Book of Lessons], ed. Aḥmad Umrānī (Beirut: Dār al-Farābī, 2013), 217, n. 150. My special thanks to Nikola Pantić for researching this important detail and his helpful advice.

⁷²⁷ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik*, I, 106. Many thanks to Olga Kalashnikova for her assistance with the Russian text.

Buqa lost his way. Many of his soldiers died. The critical state of affairs compelled his army to eat packhorses, hounds, and people who had died owing to famine.⁷²⁸

There are two important details that emerge from the Mamluk authors' account, besides their notice of the crucial role of weather and natural factors in the disastrous end of the campaign for the invaders. Both accounts recorded that in the aftermath of the invasion, strong antipathy developed between the two Mongol leaders directly connected to the military disaster, with al-Nuwayri even noting that Töle Buqa suspected that Nogai had intentionally contributed to his ruin in Hungary.⁷²⁹ As a result, both chronicles agree, Töle Buqa began conspiring to kill Nogai and this eventually led to the apparently more wily Nogai striking first and assassinating him in 1291; al-Mansuri provides a vivid description of how Nogai tricked Töle Buqa into meeting him under the guise of peaceful talks between them.⁷³⁰

The point of all this is that the invasion of Hungary was such a debacle that it had serious and enduring political ramifications that affected the Golden Horde for a long period. It really cannot be considered an event of only local importance to Hungary. The campaign's lasting political fallout in the Golden Horde speaks to its having really been a disaster.⁷³¹ The other key point is that from these Mamluk sources, it appears that Töle Buqa's intention could have been merely overrunning and raiding the kingdom, since such terminology is used, the purpose of

⁷²⁸ Ibid., 135, 156. Whether al-Nuwayri simply abridged the passage taken from al-Mansuri or both authors relied on common source material is unclear to me, but their respective passages bear strong similarities in detail, phrasing, and structure.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 106-107.

⁷³¹ In part, the true importance of the 1285-86 invasion for the political history of the Golden Horde is downplayed because the name of Kerel to designate Hungary in the Mamluk and Golden Horde sources keeps getting persistently overlooked or misinterpreted since Orientalist scholarship emerged. Nikolay Karamzin in the nineteenth century stated that Töle Buqa and Nogai fell out owing to an environmental disaster in "Circassia" (sic!), and we must lament that this is still the official record of Nogai's career on Wikipedia at present. In my view, this misidentification by the famed Russian historian likely occurred because of a stylistic rendering of KRL (Hungary) as KRK (الكرك) which we see, for instance, in the Arabic passages of Tizengauzen. The term KRK could have been mistaken for Kerkes – Circassians – who were of course conquered by the Mongols in the 1230s.

plundering is underscored, and the described military disaster is centered within the context of the Golden Horde armies' efforts to return home from Hungary with their spoils. However, we can similarly allow that such a devastating and largescale foray represents a more lasting act of suppression, aimed at crushing the resistance of the targeted people, particularly from the perspective of Mongol imperialism as it developed in the thirteenth century.

On the invasion of Hungary in 1285, the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle* describes a disaster for the Mongol forces in a strikingly similar way to the Mamluk chronicles. After plundering Hungary, Nogai made his escape from the country at Brasov, in southeastern Transylvania (Burzenland), the same area general area where Böček entered and the main withdrawal took place in 1241-42. Töle Buqa, however, tried to go northeastward through the Carpathian Mountains (basically corresponding to Batu's point of entry in 1241). An ordinary crossing of the pass should have taken three days, but Töle Buqa and his men were trapped for thirty days "driven by God's wrath." Famine set up, the Mongols were reduced to cannibalism, countless numbers of them perished, and eventually the Mongol leader made it out with his wife on a single mare.⁷³² In light of that vivid description, it is interesting that the Italian contemporary chronicler, Salimbene de Adam, recorded that in 1285 the Mongols invaded Hungary and then sent this letter to the Hungarian king, apparently recorded verbatim:

"David John, King Tharsus and the Eastern Isle: the grace of God to the King of Hungary and his people. Our heart is elevated over all humankind, by the will of God, and our throne is exalted over the necks of the rebels, so that the kings of the earth worship the girdle of our loins – all except the King of France, for the Lord has assured me that he is a faithful and good Catholic. And he said to me, "Put not forth thy hand upon this person." [Job 1.12] Our sword shall devour the enemies of the Crucified, and our horses and asses shall eat their remains. Yet because we are travelling in the winter, our camels and dromedaries are sluggish because of the difficulties encountered. Peace be to all men. Let them send us wine instead of balsam, wheat in place of

⁷³² Perfeky, "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 96.

gold, because we are pilgrims in foreign lands, led by a star. And we plan to bring back to their own homeland our lord Balthasar and our brothers-in-law Gaspar and Melchior.”⁷³³

Garbled and bizarre as it is, the tenor of the message seems to relate to the famine. Töle Buqa apparently decided in the desperate situation to portray himself as a lost Christian pilgrim. I take it to be authentic, though perhaps a good deal was lost in translation. Other European chronicles mirror the descriptions of how, while returning with plunder and captives, the invaders were pursued by the inhabitants of Transylvania, fleeing into the forests and mountains where a huge number of them died in the cold weather.⁷³⁴ When the Mongols experienced a crisis with the environment in Hungary, it appears everybody noticed. Moreover, there are no real records of the Mongols succeeding in taking fortresses or castles. They essentially opted for easy targets in the countryside. A churchman of Esztergom recorded that 200,000 Mongol well armed Mongols had invaded Hungary to occupy it and advanced to Pest. Yet they were not able to do much damage to the nobles and troops, rather killing 7000 peasants, the sick, and infirm. However, the invaders had been attacked from all sides by Hungarians, Vlachs, and Saxons during their flight into Transylvania and 26,000 of them had been killed.⁷³⁵

Shortly after the debacle in Hungary, the Golden Horde princes made another drive into Poland and besieged Krakow unsuccessfully, its castle now fortified in stone; a simultaneous attack on Sandomierz also failed.⁷³⁶ Nevertheless, in the same rough period of the 1280s and 1290s, the Golden Horde did subjugate several states and played a powerful political role in the Balkans into the 1300s.⁷³⁷ The emergence of Romanian principalities even seems tied to the Golden

⁷³³ Baird, Baglivi, and Kane, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, 586-587.

⁷³⁴ Gombos, *Catalogus*, 1959.

⁷³⁵ Ferdinand Knauz (ed.), *Monumenta Ecclesiae Strigonienses*, Tom. 2 (Esztergom, 1882), 419-420.

⁷³⁶ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 204-205.

⁷³⁷ István Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70-71; 86-90.

Horde's activity in the region. At the same time, the Golden Horde behaved very much as a regional power, Nogai making an alliance with the Byzantines.⁷³⁸ All of this suggests that the Mongols had a continuing interest in Europe but less grandiose goals than in 1241.

What accounts for the spectacular failures of the Mongol-Cuman invading forces in Poland and Hungary in the 1280s, when they had previously achieved major successes in past decades during invasions of these same areas? Beyond the sense that defensive improvements had actually worked, and that the Golden Horde obviously was not as overwhelming powerful as the unified Mongol Empire, one has a sense of lessons learned. That is, one key factor is that element of surprise with their attacks no longer existed. It might have been that local forces even tended to imitate certain features of the Mongol military – much in the way that Carpini had urged his readers to copy the Mongols' way of using salt water to harden arrow heads during their manufacture, and to immediately copy their army's decimal organizational structure.⁷³⁹

Beyond mere suggestions, we have evidence of actual process of adoption which began surprisingly early. When Daniel of Galicia came to meet Béla IV in Hungary in the mid-1240s, shortly after the prince's submission to Batu, the Galician forces present had already adopted Mongol armor and equipment. The chronicler mentions that the assembled German envoys inspected the equipment in wonder.⁷⁴⁰ Not simply equipment, but Mongol tactics likewise seem to have been steadily recognized and adopted. Thus, we read in the *Annales minoris Poloniae* of the Transylvanians taking defensive positions in their towns and castles at first but coming out to

⁷³⁸ Albert Failler and Vitalien Laurent (trans.), *Georges Pachymèrès: Relations Historiques* (Paris: Société d'édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1984) vol. II, 446-449.

⁷³⁹ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 46. The Pole, C. de Bridia, called for massed use of crossbowmen but also for setting ambushes and attacking with multiple armies from every side. Though he was essentially calling for an imitation of the Mongols, he said Europeans should fight them by employing the strategies of the "Maccabees." See: Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 100.

⁷⁴⁰ Pefeky, "The Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 61.

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surround the withdrawing Mongol forces “like a ring dance” after discovering they were suffering famine and disease. Rather than attack the trapped Mongol forces who decided to fight, the Transylvanian forces left a gap through which they retreated. Only then, when the Mongols were escaping, did their own attack commence.⁷⁴¹ All of this has a more than passing resemblance to the stratagem employed by Batu’s forces to great success at the Battle of Muhi in April 1241. If not a conscious imitation, we might at least conclude that the Transylvanians were employing classically “Mongol” tactics against the invaders in 1285.

⁷⁴¹ Gombos, *Catalogus*, 159; August Bielowski (ed.), *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, (Lviv 1878), Tom. 3, 183.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

From this lengthy “revisiting” of the existing explanations for the Mongol withdrawal in 1242, contextualizing the events of the Western Campaign, along with the following half-century of Mongol-European interactions, and attempting to detect the traces of evolving ideas the Mongols had regarding the northwestern regions, some conclusions emerge:

A first key point is the Mongol ideology of world conquest seems to have been the driving factor behind the invasion of Europe in 1241. Thus, the purpose behind invading Hungary was the same as that which had motivated other Mongol invasions across Eurasia: subjugation of the territory, its ruler, and its people to the divinely chosen Chinggisid dynasty whose mandate was to rule the entire world. I reached this conclusion without much effort; the Mongols stated it as clearly as they could for the better part of the thirteenth century. There is overwhelming evidence that this was the Mongols’ intention regarding the whole of Europe since their Chinggisid great khan personally conveyed that message with his (extant) seal on it. The recorded formulae we see in the demands for submission sent by Chinggisid khans in the 1200s were not *topoi* employed and dreamt up by sedentary authors in widely different settings, writing in widely different genres. Rather, this message, or *topos*, of a Mongol ideology of world conquest was something originating from them themselves and particularly their highest decision makers. To imagine otherwise amounts to accepting that a wildly convoluted and improbable conspiracy was carried out by sedentary authors across Eurasia to bequeath posterity with a false impression of the Mongols’ intentions. Moreover, unless we are prepared to ascribe clairvoyance to Friar Julian (c.1236) and Peter the Russian bishop at Lyon (1243), then we can be absolutely sure that the intention to conquer Europe, as part of a larger program of world conquest, existed during the rule of Ögedei

Khan (r. 1229-1241); i.e. before the Western Campaign and during it. The plan also existed after the invasion and during the rule of Ögedei's next two successors.

A second point is that though the initial invasion of Hungary was a startling success in terms of military history, the occupation of Hungary was only a partial success. It cannot be seen as a total victory. The destruction of the country was in part, rather than total, despite the hyperbole employed by authors such as Rogerius. However, it must be remembered that from his standpoint in Transylvania, the destruction really was so thorough that it could have created the impression that the whole of Hungary had been annihilated. Still, what we see in 1242 was that active resistance was ongoing, many regions of the kingdom still had troops and a healthy population, and there were still many unconquered countries in the vicinity so that Hungary was basically a salient in a sea of hostile powers for Batu's forces. The partial rather than total wasting of the kingdom is something being corroborated by archaeology. As such, a nuanced, multi-causal explanation for the withdrawal, rather than a simple monocausal explanation, is necessary. The most consistent message emerging from sources outside of Europe and within it is that the stiff resistance encountered there was a problem for the Mongols, despite the enormous slaughter and destruction they inflicted on the local populations, the decisive battlefield victories they won, and the enormous amount of plunder they acquired. Their experience of this resistance, the difficulties posed by terrain and fortifications, and the looming sense that unknown, possibly enormous coalitions of enemies could emerge from the yet unconquered areas probably form some key impulses behind Batu's decision to withdraw in early 1242. Even if such were the case, I am tempted to speculate that the order to withdraw could have emerged through the face-saving conduit of a diviner's *Gutachten*.

A third point is that fortifications played an important role in the defense of parts of Europe and the survival of segments of the population in regions affected by the first invasion. That is why we can see that such a broad and massive fortification reform took place across the entire region of East-Central Europe in the aftermath. While we have textual records of sieges which detail cases of fortifications that resisted the Mongols, perhaps a much better indication of how useful they were considered can be seen in the costly and labor-intensive construction projects that were undertaken as a response to Mongol invasions through the thirteenth century. Since enormous efforts were required for such projects, one might take it that there was a prevailing feeling across the region that such reforms were indeed worth the effort.

A fourth consideration is that when the Mongols did pull back from the heartland of the Kingdom of Hungary, their subsequent movements, documented in their own surviving report in Rashid al-Din's work and elucidated by other sources, do not create a picture of an army rushing back to Inner Asia owing to some political contingency which had emerged. We must consider that other problems brought about the decision to leave Hungary. Furthermore, it seems to be the case that they did move in the direction of a famously wealthy metropolis, Constantinople, which had been the target of nomadic armies for centuries. They did not withdraw in a beeline for Mongolia. All of this leads me to the idea that they were at least considering moving on Constantinople in 1242 as a sort of opportunistic raid. That was Edward Gibbon's perception of their southeasterly withdrawal before scholarship had, itself, moved in another direction on the Mongol withdrawal.

There is a fifth point that is raised by revisiting these issues of the Mongol invasions of Europe – a sort of methodological conclusion that might represent that most worthwhile historiographical contribution this study can make. It relates to the problem of unrelated written

sources. So often, medievalists are keen to see narrative structures, *topoi*, and the rules of genre at play in the surviving texts, shaping narratives. But what do we do when independent sources in multiple genres that could not possibly have influenced each other end up corroborating and complimenting one another? Moreover, what should be done when we encounter other bodies of evidence such archaeological findings and environmental data which help to corroborate the picture in the textual sources? I would argue that in such situations, as we often encounter in the topic of the Mongol Empire and the Mongol invasions, we would do well in many cases to consider our textual sources very seriously before dismissing their claims as mere narrative structures rather than descriptions of events which actually occurred.

Revisiting the invasions of Europe has not resulted in an attempt to totally revise arguments that earlier scholarship advanced. The present study helps to underscore some of the old wisdom. For instance, political forces were at play in undermining the Mongol attempt at conquering Europe, and likely Ögedei Khan's health problems actually exerted some influence on events. Sources from Europe and Asia alike attest to a very real conflict between the princes that escalated into a crisis during the reign of Güyük (r. 1246-48), bringing the Mongol Empire to the brink of civil war and made its early dissolution a real. These political and interpersonal issues, which were grave enough to reach the ears of the Great Khan in Mongolia in 1240, evidently had a damaging effect on the course of the campaign and, more importantly, prevented a return to Europe with a similarly massive coalition of princes in the immediate aftermath. This is a point that has long been argued and a close investigation bolsters it.

Weather-related issues also perhaps played some role in the 1242 invasion, if not a decisive one. If such factors had been decisive in 1242, the sources which document the earlier invasion would have read more like those which document the events of 1285. Still, the Mongols may have

been demoralized by the conditions they encountered in the Carpathian Basin. We do know that over time issues of Hungary's wet climate had ostensible effects on Cuman tents and equipment, causing them to gradually shift to permanent structures as dwellings in their former winter camps after an extensive period of settlement in Hungary.⁷⁴² Moreover, we have documentary evidence that rainy weather worked decisively against the nomadic Cumans at the Battle of Lake Hód in 1282 when they were defeated by the Hungarian royal army in a storm which rendered their arrow-fire less effective. Only a few years later, Töle Buqa and Nogai came to spectacular ruin there and again the sources attest that the outcome was heavily influenced by extreme weather. It cannot be ruled out that some environmental issues were factors in the first invasion.

Regarding the entire arc of Mongol-European interactions in the thirteenth century, we note some overarching principles. One thing we detect is that the atomic resistance that the Mongols encountered in Europe could have been beneficial for those who were attempting to resist lasting subjugation by the Mongols. Compared to the Jin, Song, or the Khwarazmian Empires, where power was either directed by a central bureaucracy or heavily concentrated around the person of a single ruler and his charisma, Europe was a nebulous mess of a region. Hungary's post-1242 decentralization is telling, though admittedly, Poland became more unified toward the end of the thirteenth century under the same stresses and threats of invasion.

As a point for broad comparison, we might consider Niccolò Machiavelli's exploration of the question of how it was possible for Alexander the Great to so rapidly subjugate the entire Persian Empire and for his successors to continue to rule it after his death. He observed that in a state controlled by a single potentate to whom everyone is entitled to give their allegiance, no

⁷⁴² Kyra Lyublyanovics, "The Socio-Economic Integration of Cumans in Medieval Hungary: An Archaeozoological Approach," CEU Doctoral Dissertation (Budapest, CEU, 2015), 61, 136, 180.

special affection is felt toward any of his subservient governors or ministers. Thus, when Darius was defeated and killed, a potentate who had proven himself stronger could quickly replace him in Persia as the rightful ruler to whom all owed their allegiance. In his own time in the early sixteenth century, Machiavelli likened the Ottoman Turks' structure of government to that of the Persians, noting that the Turkish state was governed by one man who replaced and shuffled the administrators of the *sanjaks* as it suited him. By contrast, he observed, the king of France was surrounded by nobles who had their own loyal subjects. Such states as France were easy to invade but it was difficult to impose rule over them. It would be enough to "destroy the ruler's family, because there still remain nobles raise insurrections... you lose the state as soon as their opportunity presents itself."⁷⁴³ Therefore, Machiavelli, observed, regarding the nature of these two types of states, "it is difficult to win control of the Turkish empire, but, once it has been conquered, it can be ruled with ease. On the other hand, in several respects you will find that the French state can be more readily seized, but it can be held only with great difficulty."⁷⁴⁴ Writing of the cities of the Holy Roman Empire in Germany, he observed they were "independent, they control only limited territory and obey the emperor only when they want to. They fear neither him nor any neighbouring power, because they are so fortified that everyone knows it would be a protracted, difficult affair to reduce them. This is because they have excellent moats and walls," besides adequate artillery, stores of supplies to last a year, and a high level of military training.⁷⁴⁵

Granted, Machiavelli was writing centuries after the Mongol invasions but the conditions he described in Europe seem broadly, and usefully, comparable to the situation of atomistic yet organized resistance the Mongols encountered in Europe and were sure to continue to encounter

⁷⁴³ George Buell (trans.), *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* (London: Penguin, 1999), 15.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

if they made a sustained effort at military conquest. Regarding this issue, a fascinating situation was related by Jan ~~Dlugosz~~Długosz. Immediately after the crushing defeat and death of Henry II of Silesia and much of his forces at the Wahlstatt, the Mongols mounted his head on a spear, and displaying it to the townspeople of Liegnitz, they demanded their surrender. The townspeople defiantly replied that they had many such leaders to replace the one they lost.⁷⁴⁶

Such a situation would be a nightmare for would-be world conquerors when each leader had quasi-independent armies, independent loyalty, and worse yet, fortress walls to hide behind and defy invading conquerors. It would not be easy to subjugate such a region. At a glance, it appears that Europe in the High Middle Ages, unlike Inner Asia, yielded no great conquerors of huge swaths of territory. Moreover, it is hard to ignore the evidence that the “Franks” had created an impression of military might among the Mongols; perhaps there was even a degree of overestimation of their capacity to resist or even take the war to the Mongols. Simon of Saint-Quentin noted that Frankish mercenaries in the service of the Seljuk sultan had contributed to the Mongols’ having this impression during Mongol attacks on the Seljuk state in 1241-43, the same time as the invasion of Europe. He noted that small contingents of Franks had engaged the Mongols in Turkey and “crushed them twice” in what seem to have been minor engagements.⁷⁴⁷ Moreover, when the Mongols captured two such mercenaries and forced them to fight to the death so that they could study Frankish fighting techniques, allegedly the two Franks charged into the audience, killing several before they were finally dispatched. Because of this and other such incidents, the Dominican friar claimed, the Mongols came to fear the Franks above other peoples.⁷⁴⁸ It would be easy to dismiss this as mere chauvinism to galvanize resistance and encourage fearful European

⁷⁴⁶ Długosz, *Historiae Polonicae*, XII, 277.

⁷⁴⁷ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXI, 146.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

readers, were it not for the fact that a Mongol report apparently based on one sent from Hulegu to Möngke c. 1258 stated regarding the nation of *Fu-lang* (Franks): “The men of this country who serve in foreign armies are very brave.”⁷⁴⁹ It could be that the mercenaries in Seljuk service were helping to create an impression. Simon of Saint-Quentin stated that the Mongols banned the employment of Frankish mercenaries in their subject territories, and that they were extremely nervous when the Dominican emissaries showed up at Baiju’s camp in 1247, thinking an army was following them.⁷⁵⁰

If a crusading army actually had tried to confront the Mongols by invading their territory, undoubtedly it would have been a fiasco like the expeditions to Egypt or Tunis in the thirteenth century. Yet, it does seem the Mongols really had overestimated the power and capacities of Europe in the relevant period. Carpini suggested that in Batu’s territory, Qurumshi (Corenza) was posted on the Dnieper on guard against a possible surprise attack from the people of the West, which showed that such a possibility was feared.⁷⁵¹ Later, Batu asked William of Rubruck who the greatest lord of the Franks was, and when Rubruck stated it was the emperor, Batu corrected him that it was actually the king of France.⁷⁵² This sort of interest in foreign rulers is interesting in light of the fact that the Mongols were not in principle to recognize any other power on Earth besides the Chinggisid dynasty.

In light of the wide agreement on details, it is not hard to accept the assertion of Peter, the Russian bishop, speaking of the Mongols at the Council of Lyon in 1244:

They think, and even say, that they will have a severe struggle with the Romans, and they call all the Latins Romans; they fear the miracles wrought by the Church, and that sentence of

⁷⁴⁹ Richard, *Au-delà de la Perse*, 102; Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 135-136.

⁷⁵⁰ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXX, 87.

⁷⁵¹ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 54.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 117-118.

future condemnation may be passed against them. They declare that, if they can conquer them, they will at once become lords over the whole world.⁷⁵³

⁷⁵³ Giles, *English History*, vol. 2, 30.

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