

A Programme of Terror and Cruelty

Aspects of Mongol strategy in the light of Western Sources

JOHANNES GIEßAUF



At the beginning of the thirteenth century the Mongol emperor Chingiz-Khan mobilized a war-machine that succeeded, within the space of a few decades, in overwhelming the majority of the known world. In 1235 his third son and successor, Ögödei, launched a new attempt to realize his father's idea of Mongol world-conquest. He unleashed Mongol forces under the command of his nephew Batu, the son of Chingiz-Khan's eldest son Jochi, towards the west.¹ The strategic commander of the Mongol armies, however, was undoubtedly the experienced general Sübötei.² Between 1236 and 1240 the Russian principalities collapsed under the weight of successive Mongol attacks³ and in the winter of 1240-1241 Batu

¹ The plan to conquer the West was one of the main decisions of the *quriltai* of 1235. See *Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen*. M. Taube, ed., Munich 1989, § 270, 200-202; *The History of the World-Conqueror* by 'Ala ad-Din 'Ata-Malik Juvaini. Translated from the text of Mirza Muhammad Qazvini by J. A. Boyle with an Introduction by D. O. Morgan, Manchester 1997, 196-200 (henceforth: Juvaini, *History*); *The Successors of Genghis Khan* Translated from the Persian of Rashid al-Din by J. A. Boyle, New York - London 1971, 54-56 (henceforth: Rashid, *Successors*); W. Abramowski, "Die chinesischen Annalen von Ögödei bis Güyük. Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des Yuan-shih," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 10 (1976), 130. For the Mongol idea of world-conquest, cf. J. Masson Smith, "The Mongols and World-Conquest," *Mongolica* 5 (1994), 206-214.

² Probably no Mongol general played a greater role than Sübötei in establishing and maintaining the early Mongol empire. He was destined to be the mastermind of this campaign because he had been - together with general Jebe - commander of those Mongol troops, which had undertaken a raid through Armenia, Georgia and Russia in the years 1220-24. Due to his successes he held the honorary title *ba'atur* ("valiant"). Cf. P. D. Buell, "Sübötei Ba'atur (1176-1248)," in *In the Service of the Khan*, Wiesbaden 1993, 13-26; R. A. Gabriel, *Genghis Khan's Greatest General. Subotai the Valiant*. Westport 2004.

³ For the conquest of the Russian Principalities, see B. Spuler, *Die Goldene Horde. Die Mongolen in Rußland 1223-1502*. Leipzig 1943, 16-20; G. Vernadsky and M. Karpovich, *The Mongols and Russia*. New Haven 1953, 48-52; J. Fennell, *The Crisis of Medieval Russia 1200-1304*. London - New York 1983, 76-96; J. Martin, *Medieval Russia (980-1584)*.

and Sübötei were ready to enter Latin Christian territory for the first time.⁴ The right wing of their army passed through Galicia into Poland, where they defeated the combined forces of Poles and Germans near Liegnitz (Legnica) in Silesia on 9 April 1241.⁵ At the same time Batu and Sübötei had been advancing into Moravia and Hungary, where they achieved a victory on the banks of the river Sajó near Mohi on 11 April. A large part of Hungary was occupied for more than a year and utterly devastated. The defeated Hungarian king Bela IV fled before the Mongol advance and Qadan, a son of the Great-Khan Ögödei,⁶ was given the task of capturing him. First Bela tried to take refuge with Duke Friedrich II of Austria, who was contemptuous of the Hungarians' plight and extracted a large ransom from the king before sending him on his way to Croatia.⁷ There Bela hoped to find refuge in Zagreb but the Mongols followed in pursuit since the extirpation of the enemy's rulers and nobles was one of the main goals of Mongol strategy.⁸

Cambridge 1995, 135–140; L. de Hartog, *Russia and the Mongol Yoke. The History of the Russian Principalities and the Golden Horde 1221–1502*. London – New York 1996, 29–34.

- ⁴ For the Mongol invasion of Europe, see G. Strakosch-Grassmann, *Der Einfall der Mongolen in Mitteleuropa in den Jahren 1241 und 1242*. Innsbruck 1893; J. J. Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquest*. London 1971; H. Göckenjan and J. R. Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm. Berichte von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen 1235–1250*. Graz 1985, 36–63; H. Göckenjan, "Der Westfeldzug (1236–42) aus mongolischer Sicht," in *Wahlstatt 1241. Beiträge zur Mongolenschlacht bei Liegnitz und zu ihren Nachwirkungen*. Würzburg 1991, 35–75; J. Gießauf, "Der Traum von der Weltherrschaft. Eine Skizze der politischen Geschichte des mongolischen Großreichs vom Tode Chinggis Khans bis zum Zerfall in Einzelkhanate," in *Die Mongolei. Aspekte ihrer Geschichte und Kultur*. Graz 2001, 53–60; P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West 1221–1410*. Harlow 2005, 58–86.
- ⁵ See U. Schmilewski, *Wahlstatt 1241. Beiträge zur Mongolenschlacht bei Liegnitz und zu ihren Nachwirkungen*. Würzburg 1991.
- ⁶ According to Rashid ad-Din (Rashid, *Successors*, 27ff) and Yüan shih (L. Hambis, *Le chapitre CVII du Yuan Che. Avec des notes supplémentaires par Paul Pelliot*. Leiden 1945, 71ff.), Qadan was the sixth son of Ögödei and a concubine named Erkene. Cf. Göckenjan-Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm*, 263, n. 14; J. Gießauf, *Die Mongolengeschichte des Johannes von Piano Carpine. Einführung, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Graz 1995, 169, n. 473.
- ⁷ For the "Austrian hospitality", see J. Gießauf, "Herzog Friedrich II. von Österreich und die Mongolengefahr 1241/42," in *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Alpen-Adria-Raumes. Festgabe für em. O. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Othmar Pickl zum 70. Geburtstag*, Graz 1997, 173–199.
- ⁸ Cf. the report by Juvaini of Chingiz-Khan's order for the pursuit of the Choresm-Shah: "He claimed: It is necessary to make an end of him before men gather around him and nobles join him from every side" (Juvaini, *History*, 143). See also *Die Mongolengeschichte des Johannes von Piano Carpine. Einführung, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar* von J. Gießauf. Graz 1995 (henceforth: *Carpine, Historia*), cap. VI, 16, p. 104: "Et si aliquibus aliis parcunt, ut dictum est, nobilibus et honestis hominibus nunquam parcunt ..." and cap. VIII, 3, p. 108: "Intendunt etiam delere omnes principes, omnes nobiles, omnes milites et honestos viros de terra, ut superius dictum est, et hoc faciunt sub dolo et artificiose in subditos suos" .. Already in 1237–1238 the Hungarian Dominican Friar Julian, following his mission on behalf of Bela IV to "Greater Hungary", related similar details: "Omnium regnorum que obtinent, reges et duces et magnates, de quibus est spes quod aliquando possint facere

Therefore Bela moved to Trogir (Trau) and then to an adjacent island in the Dalmatian littoral which the Mongols could not reach for lack of ships. After ravaging Croatia and an unsuccessful attack upon Trogir, Qadan withdrew his troops to reunite with the main body of the army because Batu had ordered the sudden and unexpected withdrawal of Mongol forces from eastern Central Europe.⁹ They returned east via Zeta, Serbia and Bulgaria, all of which they looted as they passed through.¹⁰

Stupefied and shattered, the Europeans could hardly comprehend what had happened to them. Reading contemporary chronicles we meet bloody pictures of the Mongols and their ruthless atrocity. In western sources the name *Tartars* was applied to the Mongols and their subject peoples. This form, a corruption of the tribal name *Tatar*, apparently derived from *Tartarus*, the Latin term for the hell of classical mythology, was used quite specifically because it carried all the terrible connotations of the danger to the west: the *Tartars* were agents sent from hell, breaking forth from the mysterious East, the land of Gog and Magog, to unleash their fury upon the Christian world as instruments of divine chastisement.¹¹ The trail of death and horror across Eastern Europe was seen in apocalyptic terms. Consulting ancient writings – according to Thomas of Spalato especially the sayings of the sibylline prophecies of Pseudo Methodius – many thought the Mongols were the people prophesised to precede the coming of Antichrist.¹² We are confronted with such images for example in the *Chronica Maiora* of Matthew Paris. Despite his geographical distance from the events described, the monk of St

resistentiam, interficiunt sine mora" (= H. Dörrie, "Drei Texte zur Geschichte der Ungarn und Mongolen. Die Missionsreisen des fr. Julian OP. ins Uralgebiet (1234/5) und nach Rußland (1237) und der Bericht des Erzbischofs Peter über die Tartaren," *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Phil. hist. Kl.* 6 (1956), 125-202, cap. 3,5, p. 176).

⁹ For various theories historians have offered for this withdrawal, see G. S. Rogers, "An examination of historians' explanations for the Mongol withdrawal from East Central Europe," *East European Quarterly* 30 (1996), 3-26.

¹⁰ See J. V. A. Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*. Ann Arbor 1996, 145.

¹¹ For Latin sources alluding to the assumed provenance of the Mongols from the *Tartarus*, see C. W. Connell, "Western views of the origin of the 'Tartars': An example of the influence of myth in the second half of the thirteenth century," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3 (1973), 117-119; A. Klopprogge, *Ursprung und Ausprägung des abendländischen Mongolenbildes im 13. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden 1993, 155-159; Gießauf, *Die Mongolengeschichte*, 28, n. 104.

¹² Thomas Archidiaconus, *Historia Salonitana* ed. Fr. Rački, in *Monumenta Spectantia Historiam Slavorum Meridionalium XXVI, Scriptores*, Vol. 3. Zagreb 1894, 171 (henceforth: Thomas, *Historia*): "Tunc plerique litterati viri veteres scrutantes scripturas, conuiciebant maxime ex dictis Methodii martiris, has fore illas gentes, que precedere debent antichristi adventum." For the interpretation of the Mongols as Gog and Magog, see M. Steinicke, *Apokalyptische Heerscharen und Gottesknechte. Wundervölker des Ostens in abendländischer Tradition vom Untergang der Antike bis zur Entdeckung Amerikas*. Phil. Diss. Berlin 2002, 84-124.

Albans is one of the best-known European chroniclers of the Mongol invasion.¹³ However, like the majority of chroniclers of these events, he had never seen a *Tartar* with his own eyes. He shared the dominant view of the Mongols that we can find in the majority of European reports of the 1240s: Tartars are the devil's horsemen from a mysterious quarter of the Earth, pagans who lack a recognized law and indulge in unusual, even bizarre, customs.

Nevertheless, not everybody accepted such millenarian speculations. We also possess first-hand narratives that provide descriptions of Mongol customs and practices free of apocalyptic interpretations. However, the number of surviving eyewitnesses who had had direct contact with the Mongols was rather small, and again only a few of these eyewitnesses and principal reporters were able to look beyond the curtain of apparently unfounded and senseless slaughter.

In the last few decades studies by Bigalli, Connell, Bezzola, Fried, Reichert, Klopprogge, Schmieder, Münkler and Ruotsala have analysed the whole course of European-Mongol relations and enlarged our knowledge of the western image of the Mongols in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ In accordance with their results, the purpose of this paper is to focus on those early narratives that are free of apocalyptic speculations, which consider the causes of the success of the Mongol armies. In this context I want to take a closer look at first-hand accounts that show perception of two of the key factors of Mongol strategy, accounts that contain hints of the considerable attention the Mongols paid to propaganda and psychological warfare by means of cruelty and intimidation.¹⁵

¹³ Matthew Paris collected news, especially letters, about the Mongols from every part of Europe and inserted them into his work. See Matthaeus Parisiensis, *Chronica Majora*. ed. H. R. Luard, Rolls Series. *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores* 57, 7 vols. London 1872-1883, 3: 488ff, 4: 76-78, 109-119, 270-277; 6: 75-84, 113-116. For Matthew Paris and his Mongol narratives, see J. J. Saunders, "Matthew Paris and the Mongols," in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson*, Toronto 1969, 116-132; G. A. Bezzola, *Die Mongolen in abendländischer Sicht (1220-1270). Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Völkerbegegnungen*. Bern 1974, 63. K. Rudolf, "Die Tartaren 1241/42. Nachrichten und Wiedergabe. Korrespondenz und Historiographie," *Römisch historische Mitteilungen* 19 (1977), 91-99; H. E. Hilpert, *Kaiser- und Papstbriefe in den Chronica Majora des Matthaeus Paris*. Stuttgart 1981, 27-43, 153-164.

¹⁴ D. Bigalli, *I Tartari e l'Apocalisse. Ricerche sull'eschatologia in Adamo Marsh e Ruggiero Bacono*. Florence 1971; Connell, "Western Views," 115-137; Bezzola, *Die Mongolen*; J. Fried, "Auf der Suche nach der Wirklichkeit. Die Mongolen und die europäische Erfahrungswissenschaft im 13. Jahrhundert," *Historische Zeitschrift* 243 (1986), 287-332; F. E. Reichert, *Begegnungen mit China. Die Entdeckung Ostasiens im Mittelalter*. Sigmaringen 1992; A. Klopprogge, *Ursprung und Ausprägung*; F. Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden. Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. bis in das 15. Jahrhundert*. Sigmaringen 1994; M. Münkler, *Erfahrung des Fremden. Die Beschreibung Ostasiens in den Augenzeugenberichten des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin 2000; A. Ruotsala, *Europeans and Mongols in the middle of the thirteenth century. Encountering the Other*. Helsinki 2001.

¹⁵ More than thirty years ago, Denis Sinor wrote an article on Mongol strategy taking a particular interest in the importance of the long-range planning and the rigid timetable of Mongol military operations (D. Sinor, "On Mongol Strategy," in *Proceedings of the 4th*

The first reporter to emphasize the important part which terror played in Mongol strategy was Roger of Torre Maggiore who writes:

Soon rumours spread that the Tartars had occupied the German village of Thomasbrücke where they slaughtered everyone not fit for slavery. Hearing such news my hair stood on end with fright, my whole body started trembling and my tongue refused its duty because of the unavoidable and terrible death which awaited me. In my mind's eye I saw the slaughterers and the cold sweat of death made the blood freeze in my veins. I saw people in fear of death, unable to control their hands and weapons, unable to raise their arms or legs only staring into space. And what more? I laid my eyes on people half-dead from panic.¹⁶

This vivid description of the dreadful fear of the Mongols is found in Roger's report commonly known as the *Carmen Miserabile*. A canon of the Hungarian city of Várád (now Oradea in Romania), Roger had been taken prisoner by the invaders in 1241 and had lived several months under their dominion before he could escape. His account, probably written immediately after the unexpected withdrawal of the Mongols in 1242, represents one of the major western narratives of the Mongol invasion of Europe and there is nothing to discredit the details of which he was an eyewitness.¹⁷ Analogous to Persian, Chinese or Russian sources, Roger

East Asian Altaistic Conference. Taiwan 1975, 238–245). However, the role of cruelty and intimidation in Mongol warfare was not part of his considerations. The same applies to his article on Inner Asian warriors (D. Sinor, "The Inner Asian Warriors," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981), 133–144). Jean Richard in his paper about causes of the Mongol victories at least deals with the employment of captives as arrow-fodder (J. Richard, "Les causes des victoires Mongoles d'après les historiens occidentaux du XIII^e siècle," *Central Asiatic Journal* 22 (1979), 112.). The best outline of this topic so far is that by Hansgerd Göckenjan, who took a particular interest in spies and reconnoitres (H. Göckenjan, "Kundschafter und Späher. Ein Beitrag zur Strategie und Taktik reiternomadischer Kriegsführung," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 53 (2000), 187–202). Cf. also the analysis of the role of massacres and cruelty in Mongol warfare by C. Commeaux, *La vie quotidienne chez les Mongols de la conquête*. Paris 1972, 141–147.

¹⁶ *Epistola magistri Rogerii in Miserabile Carmen super destructione regni Hungarie per Tartaros facta* ed. L. Juhász, in *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum tempore ducum regumque stirpis Arpadianae gestarum*, Vol. 2. Budapest 1938, cap. 34, 579 (henceforth: Rogerius, *Carmen*): "Post hec statim invaluere rumores, quod dictum Pontem Thome Theutonicorum villam in auro Tartari occupaverunt et, quos tenere noluerant, horrenda crudelitas acerbitalis gladio dire iugulavit. Quo audito incorruerunt pili carnis mee, cepit corpus tremere ac pavere, lingua miserabiliter balbutire perspicens, quod dire mortis articulus, qui iam vitari non poterat, imminabat. Trucidatores cordis oculis intuebar, caro sudore mortis frigidissimum emittebat. Videbam et mortales mortem expectantes assidue non posse manus et arma extendere, erigere brachia, pedes ad deffensionis loca movere, oculis terram prospicere. Et quod plura? Homines conspiciebam ex timore nimio semivivos."

¹⁷ For his life and work, see F. Babinger, "Maestro Ruggiero delle Puglie, relatore prepoliano su i Tartari," in *Nel VII. centenario della nascita di Marco Polo*. Venice 1955, 51–62; Bezzola, *Die Mongolen*, 86–89; Göckenjan–Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm*, 129–138. For some considerations about the transmission of the text, see T. Almási, "The *Carmen Miserabile*: Some issues concerning the transmission of the text," *Chronica* 3 (2003), 84–93.

relates the unheard-of Mongol severity in punishing the citizens of towns which had tried to resist the Mongol assaults. The Mongols used to call a town showing no intention of surrendering to the besiegers *mo balyq*, which means 'bad city'. All the citizens of so-called bad cities were driven together outside the city's walls and slain.¹⁸ These proceedings were intended to be a warning of terrible retaliation for other cities and were aimed at intimidation. The message of the Mongols was clear: a peaceful surrender or an anticipatory declaration of allegiance could enable a ruler to keep his throne and a population to escape a massacre, but resistance almost invariably meant decimation or extermination.¹⁹

Very similar information about the Mongol tactic of demoralizing the foe by means of cruelty can be obtained from the Mongol chapters in the *Historia Pontificum Salonitanorum atque Spalatensium* of Thomas of Spalato, which is among the most outstanding sources of the 1240s about the Mongols.²⁰ Thomas pursued a career as canon of the cathedral chapter of Spalato (Split) and in 1230 he was elected archdeacon, a post he held until his death in 1268. It is likely that he began to write his *Historia* between 1245 and 1251. Thomas's Mongol narrative comprises four chapters of the *Historia* which treat the sequence of events in Hungary and Dalmatia from the first rumours of the approach of the Mongols late in the decade of the 1230s to their departure in the spring of 1242.²¹ The flamboyant manner in which he describes the *Tartars* shows that to him they are a plague, people lacking compassion and humanity. Although Thomas condemns them with the severest criticism he is curious about their origins and customs and includes such information in his *Historia*. Despite his conception of the *Tartars* as a "pestilential nation,"²² his Mongol chapters exhibit a high degree of factual accuracy. Apart from his own observation, Thomas's sources must have been refugees who streamed into Split in 1242, fleeing in terror from the troops of the Mongol prince Qadan. He says that his description of the Mongols is related "according to what I have been able to hear from more inquiring persons who have looked into the matter."²³

Thomas writes:

At this time this monstrous slaughterer [=Qadan] ordered his men to drive all the captives [...] together on a plain - men and women as well as boys and girls. Gathering them together like a flock of sheep he made his executioners behead

¹⁸ For such massacres in the realm of the Choresm-Shah, see Juvaini, *History*, 121, 131, 145. Cf. Göckenjan-Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm*, 52.

¹⁹ For possible demographic considerations behind these massacres, see J. Masson Smith, "Demographic considerations in Mongol siege warfare," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 13 (1993/94), 329-334.

²⁰ For his life and work, see J. R. Sweeney, "Thomas of Spalato and the Mongols: A thirteenth-century Dalmatian view of Mongol customs," *Florilegium* 4 (1982), 156-183; Göckenjan-Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm*, 227-235.

²¹ Thomas, *Historia*, cap. XXXVI-XXXIX, 132-178.

²² Thomas, *Historia*, cap. XXXVI, 132: "*gens pestifera Tartarorum*".

²³ Thomas, *Historia*, cap. XXXVII, 168: "*Nunc vero de natura et habitu gentis illius [= Tartarorum], prout ab his audire potui, qui rem curiosius indagarunt, pauca narrabo*".

them all. Everyone broke into loud lamentations and at the wail of people being slain the whole world seemed to quake. All captives were cut down and like sheaves in a cornfield, their corpses were strewn on the plain. But the Tartars did not plunder the dead, to make clear that they had not slaughtered them because of lust for booty. The whole host of murderous people, taking their ease in camp camaraderie in the midst of those dead, began to dance and feast with great delight, and to shake with great mocking laughter, as though these fine men had performed some great deed.²⁴

According to Thomas, after the battle of Mohi the Mongols did not show any interest in booty. They concentrated their efforts on pursuing and killing their exhausted and terrified enemies because this was the best way to avoid further Hungarian resistance.²⁵ Very similar observations were made by Roger of Torre Maggiore who writes about Mongolian slaughterers who were not interested in loot.²⁶ On another occasion, Thomas of Spalato reports that during the winter of 1241/42, to instill fear into the Hungarians, the Mongols rode up and down the left bank of the Danube – where they had piled their slain enemies – with the corpses of children impaled on lances, in Thomas's words, "like fish on a spear".²⁷

John of Piano Carpine gives a matter of fact description of Mongol tactics devoid of such dramatic sketches. He simply states:

When the Tartars are going to make war, they send ahead an advance guard and these carry nothing with them but their tents, horses and arms. They seize no plunder, burn no houses and slaughter no animals; they only wound and kill men

²⁴ Thomas, *Historia* cap. XXXIX, 174: "*Tunc truculentus carnifex iussit omnem captivitatem, quam ex Hungaria duxerat, congregari in unum, multitudinem magnam virorum et mulierum, puerorum et puellarum, fecitque omnes in quandam planiciem duci. Et cum omnes quasi quidam grex ovium coadunati fuissent, missis spiculatoribus, omnium fecit capita amputari. Tum ingens audiebatur ululatus et planctus, totaque terra moveri a voce pereuncium videbatur. Iacuerunt autem omnes in illa prostrati planicie, quemadmodum spicarum manipuli sparsim solent in agro iacere. Et ne cui videretur, quod cedis huius immanitas spoliolorum sit aviditate patrata, nullas ab eis vestes detrahare voluerunt; sed tota multitudo funeste gentis in circuitu occisorum illorum per contubernia discumbentes, ceperunt in magna leticia comedere, choreas ducere magnosque cachinnos ludendo movere, quasi multum aliquid perpetrassent boni.*"

²⁵ Thomas, *Historia* cap. XXXVI: 163: "*Iacebant autem per vias infelicitium opes, vasa aurea et argentea, purpurea indumenta, et arma copiosa. Sed Tartarorum inaudita crudelitas nil curans de spoliis, omnem pretiosarum rerum parvi pendens predam, in sola hominum cede crassarunt. Cum enim viderent iam itineris labore defessos, nec posse ad arma manus extendere, nec pedes ulterius ad fugam laxare, tunc ceperunt hinc et inde iaculis infringere, gladiis obtruncare, nuli parcere, sed omnes feraliter trucidare.*"

²⁶ Rogerius, *Carmen*, cap. 30: 573: "*Argentea quoque vasa et aurea, serice vestes et alia hominibus oportuna per campos et silvas a fugientibus proiecta, ut ipsi velociori cursu manus insequentium evaderent, non habebant aliquos collectores. Tartaris tantum interfectionibus hominum insistentibus de spoliis minime curare videbantur.*" Cf. Göckenjan-Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm*, 213, n. 163.

²⁷ Thomas, *Historia* cap. XXXVI: 167s. "*Et ut metum incuterent his, qui erant ex altera parte Danubii, collectam multitudinem occisorum in acervos plurimos super ripam fluminis locaverunt. Alii vero puerulos lanceis affigentes, quasi pisces in veru, per horas alvei baiulabant.*"

or, if they can do nothing else, put them to flight. They much prefer, however, to kill than to put to flight.²⁸

John of Piano Carpine, a Franciscan friar who had taken a leading part in the establishment of the Franciscan Order in Europe, had been dispatched in 1245 by Innocent IV as papal envoy to the Mongol court. He and his Polish companion, Brother Benedict, were the first European travellers of the thirteenth century who penetrated to the core of the Mongol Empire. John, however, was not only charged with the delivery of two papal bulls addressed to the "King of the Tartars"²⁹; he also had the task of furnishing the pope with first-hand intelligence about the "devil's envoys and servants of hell".³⁰ As a result of his two-year mission to Central Asia he compiled, in two redactions, a detailed dossier on the hitherto relatively unknown enemy. His *Historia Mongalorum*, which was by far the most widely known of all the early accounts of Mongols, provides information that can be shown to be largely trustworthy.³¹ He was the first European who properly understood the significance of the Mongol army establishment and presented an outline of it. Two chapters of his book are dedicated to Mongol warfare

²⁸ Carpine, *Historia*, cap. VI, 11: 103; English translation: *The Mongol Mission. Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries*. Translated by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey, ed. C. Dawson, London and New York 1955, 35. For the advance guard (*precursores*), see G. Dörfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, Vol. 4, Wiesbaden 1975, 148; Göckenjan, *Kundschafter und Späher*, 194. In similar words the Franciscan friar C. de Bridia gives an outline of the duties of the Mongol advance guards: "Cumque Tartari propinquare ceperint, premittunt uelocissimos cursors, qui terreant ex inspirato homines et occident, ne possit contra eos exercitus subito congregari" (*Hystoria Tartarorum C. de Bridia Monachi*. A. Önnersfors, ed., Berlin 1967, cap. 56: 34). C. de Bridia, however, cannot be regarded as an authentic and independent source because his *Hystoria Tartarorum* is only a summary of the reports of Carpine and his companion Benedict the Pole. For his work, see Gießauf, *Die Mongolengeschichte*, 55.

²⁹ The two letters of Pope Innocent IV (5 March 1245, *Dei patris immensa*, and 13 March 1245, *Cum non solum*) are addressed "... regi et populo Tartarorum". See MGH *Epistulae saeculi XIII selectae*: II, 72, n. 102, and 74, n. 105; K.-E. Lupprian, *Die Beziehungen der Päpste zu islamischen und mongolischen Herrschern im 13. Jahrhundert anhand ihres Briefwechsels*. Vatican City 1981, 141-145, n. 20 and 146-149, n. 21. For further details see Gießauf, *Die Mongolengeschichte*, 35, 77.

³⁰ "... Sathane nuntios tartarique ministros", as Innocent IV called them in a letter of 21 July 1243 (MGH *Epistulae saeculi XIII selectae*: II, 3s., n. 2).

³¹ For his life, his mission and his work, see Giovanni di Pian di Carpine, *Storia dei Mongoli*, P. Daffinà, C. Leonardi, M. C. Lungarotti, E. Menestò, and L. Petech, eds, Spoleto 1989, 49-92; Gießauf, *Die Mongolengeschichte*, 73-84; F. Schmieder, *Johannes von Piano Carpini. Kunde von den Mongolen 1245-1247*, Sigmaringen 1997, 14-31; J. Gießauf, "Johannes von Piano del Carpine. Provinzialminister 1232-1239," in *Management und Minoritas. Lebensbilder Sächsischer Franziskanerprovinziale vom 13. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Kevvelaer 2003, 2-18.

and to suggestions for practicable European counter-measures.³² Alongside strategy his interest is focused on other military questions like discipline, horsemanship, the equipment of the warrior's mount and his personal weapons.

The common denominator of the quoted sources is their realization that one important factor of Mongol success was the weakening and demoralization of the foe by means of cruelty. Beyond that we see from these quotations that some western reporters were able to comprehend that the Christian world was not confronted with the crude blood-thirst of barbarians but with a complex plan of total warfare and deliberate terror.³³

A second significant aspect of Mongol strategy combined this program of psychological warfare with the practical advantage of providing a buffer in the initial stages of an attack: the ruthless employment of captives as arrow-fodder.

We find very detailed descriptions of this tactical device in Mongol tradition, such as the *Secret History of the Mongols* of the thirteenth century³⁴, in the reports of Persian historians like Juvaini³⁵ and in contemporary Chinese sources like *Meng-Ta pei-lu*, which offers the most precise outline³⁶: The Mongols began with

³² Carpine, *Historia*, cap. VI (101-104) and VIII (107-111): "De bello, et ordinatione acierum, et armis, et astutiis in congressione, et crudelitate captivorum, et oppugnatione munitionum, et perfidia eorum in iis qui se reddunt eisdem"; and: "Quomodo bello Tartaris occuratur, et quid attendunt, et de armis et ordinatione acierum, et quomodo occuratur eorum astutiis in pugna, et munitione castrorum et civitatum, et quid faciendum est de captivis").

³³ Similar conclusions were drawn by Vernadsky-Karpovich, *The Mongols*, 116; Bezzola, *Die Mongolen*, 88; Göckenjan-Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm*, 52-54; and D. O. Morgan, *The Mongols*. Oxford 1987, 92, who states: "Chingiz's principle seems to have been much the same as President Truman's over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The apparent rationale was that if the population of one city was subjected to a frightful massacre, the next city would be more likely to surrender without resistance, thus avoiding unnecessary Mongol casualties. The morality of this approach to warfare is no doubt open to discussion, but there can be no disputing that it worked." For the topos of the wild and animal-like barbarian, see K. Lechner, *Hellenen und Barbaren im Weltbild der Byzantiner. Die alten Bezeichnungen als Ausdruck eines neuen Kulturbewusstseins*, Phil. Diss. Munich 1954, especially 107-114; B. D. Shaw, "Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk: The Ancient Mediterranean ideology of the pastoral nomad," *Ancient Society* 13/14 (1982/83), 5-31; J. Gießauf, *Barbaren - Monster - Gottesgeißeln. Steppennomaden im europäischen Spiegel der Spätantike und des Mittelalters*. Graz 2006.

³⁴ *Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen* § 265: 198.

³⁵ Cf. Juvaini, *History*, 107: "When the town [= Buchara] and citadel had been purged of rebels and the walls and outworks levelled with the dust, all the inhabitants of the town, men and women, ugly and beautiful, were driven out on the field of the *musalla*. Chingiz-Khan spared their lives; but the youths and full-grown men that were fit for such service were pressed into a levy for the attack on Sarmaqand and Dabusiya." For very similar accounts, see *ibid.* 53, 92 and 100.

³⁶ The following passage summarizes the German translations of the *Meng-ta pei-lu* and the *Hei-Ta shih-lüeh*. See *Meng-Ta pei-lu und Hei-Ta shih-lüeh. Chinesische Gesandtenberichte über die frühen Mongolen 1221 und 1237*. Nach Vorarbeiten von Erich Haenisch und Yao Ts'ung-wu übersetzt und kommentiert von P. Olbricht und E. Pinks, Wiesbaden 1980, 53 and 191.

the capture of the small settlements in a region in order to provide themselves with sufficient manpower to help in the capture of larger towns and cities nearby. In heavy assaults captives were given the task of advancing ahead of the Mongol army to weaken the enemy whose exhausted troops were finally overrun by the Mongols.

Several other eastern sources confirm this account³⁷ and similar information can be found in nearly all the major trustworthy western reports in which we hear about the custom of driving prisoners in front of the main army as arrow-fodder.³⁸ They had to fill up the moats of besieged towns, to erect siege engines under fire from the defenders and finally to head the storming parties. Only a few supervising Mongols took part in these suicide missions to prevent the captives from fleeing.³⁹ However, these captives did not only serve as human targets to minimize casualties among the Mongols; they also fulfilled a psychological role. The justified Mongol expectation was that the defenders under siege would be reluctant to kill their own relatives and compatriots as they were driven forward in front of the attackers. The intention behind these atrocities – to strike terror into the hearts of opponents – was indeed successful, as is shown by the evidence of several cities that surrendered promptly to the Mongols.⁴⁰

Concerning the treatment of captives and subdued peoples we owe the best Latin summary report to John of Piano Carpine who writes:

They send a detachment of captives and men of other nationalities who are fighting with them to meet the enemy head-on, and some Tartars may perhaps accompany them [...] Moreover, when it pleases the masters they take all the young men with their wives and children and compel them to follow them with all their household; from henceforth they are counted as Tartars, or rather as captives, for although they are numbered among the Tartars, they are never shown the respect

³⁷ Cf. B. Spuler, *Die Mongolen in Iran. Politik, Verwaltung und Kultur der Ilchanzeit 1220–1350*. Leipzig 1939, 415, 418; D. H. Martin, "The Mongol Army," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1943), 67. Liu K'i, "Aufzeichnungen von den Vorgängen in Ta-Liang," in *Zum Untergang zweier Reiche. Berichte von Augenzeugen aus den Jahren 1232–33 und 1368–70*. Wiesbaden 1969, 14.

³⁸ Cf. the Hungarian Dominican friar Julian cap. 3, 6–10 (= Dörrie, *Drei Texte*, 176s.); Mattheus Parisiensis, *Chronica Majora* IV, 76; Rogerius, *Carmen*, cap. 37, 582; Thomas, *Historia*, cap. XXXVII: 170; Carpine, *Historia*, cap. VIII, 6: 108s.

³⁹ From Juvaini, *History*, 53, we learn that some of these Mongols were criminals sentenced to death whose lives had been spared on condition that they took part in such dangerous operations. Cf. also *Meng-Ta pei-lu und Hei-Ta shih-lüeh*, 163, n. 7; Göckenjan, *Kundschafter und Späher*, 194.

⁴⁰ In my opinion, Stephen Turnbull's conclusion about the efficiency of Mongol terror in the Middle East is probably accurate: "... it is interesting to note the ease with which Genghis Khan captured cities in the central Asian Muslim world compared to similar operations in China. The Chinese had learned to live with nomad hordes over the centuries and were used to their ways, but to the subjects of the Khwarazm Shah the Mongols were strange, alien savages, and it was this barbarian factor that Genghis Khan exploited so well" (S. Turnbull, "Man or Monster? The Real Genghis Khan," *Military Illustrated* 184 (2003), 31).

that these enjoy but are treated as slaves and are sent into every kind of danger like other prisoners; they are first in battle and if a swamp or a dangerous river has to be crossed, they have to try the passage first.⁴¹

The Franciscan writes elsewhere that the Mongolian captains of a hundred divide those captives who are to be killed among other captives whom they want to keep as slaves and they force the latter to kill ten or more of their compatriots.⁴²

The facts of Mongol cruelty and massacres speak for themselves. They could produce a terror so stupefying that, as Ibn al-Atir records, a single Mongol horseman could enter a Persian village and begin killing people while no one dared to raise a hand to stop him. Furthermore the chronicler had heard that one Mongol took a man captive, but had no weapon with which to kill him. He told his prisoner to lie with his head on the ground without moving. The terror-stricken man did so, and remained there until the Mongol returned from fetching his sword and cut his head off.⁴³ It is quite obvious that Ibn al-Atir exaggerated the details. Important, however, seems to me the clearly visible effect of Mongol strategy behind this story. Because of the brutal success of the Mongols, their enemies were often in a state of terror and, in effect, were already defeated psychologically before they were even engaged in battle. Therefore the Mongols fostered their terrible image to fool their victims into thinking that they were super-human, mounted demons appearing out of nowhere to destroy utterly the known world.⁴⁴ One can find confirmation for this psychological advantage of the *Tartars* in the simple statement of the Franciscan Friar Jordan of Giano in his letter to Duke Henry of Brabant: "... *sola nominis sui [= Tartari] formidine multos in fugam convertunt*".⁴⁵ At the beginning of the fourteenth century the Byzantine historian Georgios Pachymeres confirms in similar words that the Mongols used their hor-

⁴¹ Carpine, *Historia*, cap. VI, 14: 103s. and cap. VII, 11: 107.

⁴² Carpine, *Historia*, cap. VI, 17: 104: "In bellis autem quoscumque capiunt occidunt, nisi forte velint aliquos reservare, ut habeant eos pro servis. Occidendos autem dividunt per centenarios, ut cum bipenni interficiantur ab eis; ipsi vero post hec dividunt per captivos, et unicuique servo ad interficiendum dant decem aut plures aut pauciores secundum quod maioribus placet". For the correct interpretation of this text, see Schmieder, *Johannes von Plano Carpini*, 144s., n. 143.

⁴³ I follow the French translation of the Persian text from M. C. d' Ohsson, *Histoire des Mongols depuis Tchinguiz-Khan jusqu'à Timour Bey ou Tamerlan*, Vol. 3, The Hague and Amsterdam 1834-1835, 69s.

⁴⁴ Cf. the thoughts of the Arabian doctor Ibn al-Labbad: "Sie [= Tartaren] töten ausnahmslos und unbarmherzig. Es ist, als ob ihr Zweck die Austilgung der Menschengattung wäre ... Es erhellt hieraus, dass sie nicht so sehr nach Besitz und Vermögen streben, sondern nach Zerstörung der Welt, damit sie zur Wüste werde", quoted in J. v. Somogyi, "Ein arabischer Bericht über die Tataren im 'Ta'riḥ al-Islām" von ad-Dahabī von ad-Dahabī," *Der Islam* 24 (1937), 115.

⁴⁵ Jordan's letter of May 1241 in Matthaëus Parisiensis, *Chronica Majora* VI: 84.

rible reputation as a psychological weapon that made the emperor shiver with dreadful fear.⁴⁶

To summarize this examination of the western sources of the 1240s, with additional reference to the eastern chronicles of the thirteenth century, it may be concluded that some of the early writers left the beaten tracks of interpretation to a remarkable extent. Reporters like Roger of Torre Maggiore, Thomas of Spalato and particularly John of Piano Carpino did not use the standard apocalyptic or barbarian models to explain Mongol atrocities but were able to recognize the concept of violence and fear as an intrinsic part of Mongol strategy. In this way they were undoubtedly pioneers in transforming the *Tartars* into human beings (cruel, greedy and irritating, of course, but still human beings) and cutting them down to size. In their reports dealing with the crushing defeats by the hitherto unknown enemies the authority of topos was undermined by the power of individual experience. As a result, several years later, the anonymous author of the annals of the cathedral chapter of Krakow had no problems in revealing the secrets of success of this strange people: neither outstanding strength nor courage but the deliberate employment of immeasurable atrocity and cunningness.⁴⁷ The Europeans had become acquainted with Mongol strategy. This did not help much in battle against the well trained steppe nomads, but the knowledge, and consequent demystification of the enemy, increased the potential for seeking counter-measures in place of the preoccupation with lamentations about the scourge of God.

⁴⁶ G. Pachymères, *Relations historiques*. A. Failler, ed., French trans. V. Laurent. Paris 1984, II: 24: 187: εννοειν ὡστε καὶ ἕως ἐκείνου καὶ τουνομα μόνον εἰς φόβον ηἰγεισθαι καὶ δεδιέσθαι.

⁴⁷ *Annales Capituli Cracoviensis* in MGH SS XIX, 598, ad annum 1241: "[Thartari]... illesi ad propria per Hungariam, totum mundum ex sua crudelitate gravi horroris percellentes formidine, redierunt. Quos tamen non robur virium efficit formidandos, nec robusti brachii fortitudo, verum sola cruenta crudelitas ac infidelitas versucia fraudulenta."