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Deep Ditches and Well-built Walls:
A Reappraisal of the Mongol Withdrawal from Europe in 1242

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

In 1241, Mongol armies invaded Poland and Hungary, and small reconnaissance forces even penetrated the borders of the Holy Roman Empire. The following year, the Mongols pulled out of Central Europe though they retained their hold on Russia, the Black Sea steppe, and the Volga region. A number of explanations have been offered for the withdrawal by modern scholars. This thesis argues that these theories are unconvincing and contradicted by the existing primary source evidence. As an alternative explanation, it posits that European fortifications produced a strategic problem that the Mongols were unable to surmount in the 1240s with their available manpower and siege engine technology. In order to corroborate this theory, analyses of several Mongol campaigns against sedentary societies outside of Europe are provided. These analyses reveal that fortifications posed a serious problem to any Mongol effort to subjugate a sedentary population.

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Epigraph

What is the object of defense? Preservation. It is easier to hold ground than take it. It follows that defense is easier than attack, assuming both sides have equal means. Just what is it that makes preservation and protection so much easier? It is the fact that time which is allowed to pass unused accumulates to the credit of the defender.

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

Introduction

In the summer of 1241, Mongol felt tents spread out across the *Alföld* that defines the Hungarian landscape, and nomadic troops were laying waste to the territory east of the Danube. The Hungarian king, Bela IV, like countless others in his kingdom, had become a refugee. From his base at Zagreb, Bela wrote to Conrad, king of Germany and son of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, begging for immediate military assistance. Gloomily describing the barricades along the banks of the Danube being steadily broken down, he warned Conrad that if Hungary were to fall completely, reliable informants had let him know that Germany was the next target for conquest. The invaders, he asserted, posed a genuine existential threat to all of Christendom.¹

Though Hungary, as a European frontier state, had been no stranger to periodic harassment by nomadic tribes like the Cumans, these threats had been manageable and not particularly dangerous to the state itself. Regarding the Mongols, it was an entirely different situation. Bela compared the Mongols to a swarm of locusts, suggesting a force of nature rather than human agency. As with many Hungarians of the time, Bela saw the onslaught as something divinely permitted to happen because of the sins of his people.² At the same time as Bela was sending out pleas for urgent assistance to the rulers of Latin Christendom, a German chronicler recorded, “In this year, the kingdom of Hungary, which had existed for 350 years, was destroyed by the army of the Tartars.”³

¹ “Brief König Belas IV. an den deutschen König Konrad IV.,” in *Der Mongolensturm: Berichte von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen 1235-1250*, trans. Hansgerd Göckenjan and James R. Sweeney (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1985), 287.

² *Ibid.*, 286.

³ Pál Engel, Tamás Pálosfalvi and Andrew Ayton, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary: 895-1526* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 100.

Only a year later, Mongol forces had completely withdrawn from Europe, pulling deep into the steppe regions north of the Caspian and Black Sea. They had defeated several armies, laid waste to territory from Poland to the Balkans, and caused widespread panic throughout Western Europe since their arrival on its borders in early 1241. Hungary had been utterly devastated and its king had been pursued to a fortress on the Adriatic. As such, this sudden departure was a mystery to contemporary Europeans who feared the Mongols' eventual return. Modern historians still debate the causes of the withdrawal. A number of theories have been offered, but through my own research, I came to see these theories as unconvincing. Therefore, this essay will be an attempt to add to the debate by offering another theory that finds support in the available sources. I contend that the Mongols left Europe in 1242 primarily because its fortifications, being both numerous and defensible, presented a strategic problem that was not surmountable with their available manpower and siege engines.

In order to establish my argument, I will first outline the source material from which our knowledge of the events is taken, while providing a brief summary of the invasion. In the first chapter, I will explicate and critique the four most common scholarly theories for the Mongol withdrawal. My main intention is to show that the primary sources often contradict these theories, and therefore we should consider that there is an entirely different explanation. In the second chapter, I will lay out the reasoning behind my own theory related to European fortifications. The third chapter will be a comparative study of Mongol campaigns against sedentary societies outside of Europe. A detailed examination of those campaigns reveals that the Mongols had an established pattern of struggling with the problems of fortifications and defensive strategies.

Regarding the sources, the most important are probably Thomas of Split and Rogerius. They were both high-ranking churchmen living in Hungarian territory during the invasion. Rogerius was taken captive by the Mongols, so he provides great insight into how they waged war. Thomas was present on the Adriatic coast where the final acts of the invasion occurred in the spring of 1242. He personally witnessed the movements of the Mongol army and had contact with other eyewitnesses. As such, these accounts provide the most detailed description of the Mongol army's progress through Hungary, where Mongol forces were concentrated for most of their time in Europe. For events in Poland, Jan Długosz offers the most detail, although he was writing two centuries after the events. The chronicles of Novgorod and Galicia-Volynia also offer much detail from a Russian perspective. As a point of clarity, in this essay I do not consider Russia part of Europe, since as regards the Mongols, these two regions had very different fates.

The surviving correspondence of European rulers such as Bela IV, Frederick II, and several popes shed light on how the invaders were perceived by those in positions of power. Since much of this correspondence has survived in the *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris, it proves to be an invaluable source. A number of friars left narratives of their diplomatic missions which offer some insight into how the Mongols perceived Europe. Chief among these are the works of John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck.

In non-European sources, references to the campaign of 1241-1242 are unfortunately very scanty. The references that do exist, however, are important for providing something approaching a Mongol perspective. The *Secret History of the Mongols* contains references to the campaign. The Persian historians Juvaini and Rashid al-Din, writing under Mongol auspices, also provide brief accounts. The *Yuanshi*, the

official history of the Mongol dynasty that ruled China from 1279 to 1368, offers some brief but telling references to the invasion based on Mongol accounts.

Primary source material on the invasion is far from ample and often frustrating in what it neglects. The writers of the period were remarkably reticent on the motivation behind the withdrawal, which is why it remains a mystery. We can be much more certain about what led to the Mongols arriving in Europe. Chinggis Khan had unified the Mongolian tribes and established an empire in 1206. He held disparate bands of Inner Asian nomads together by the promise of new conquests and plunder, and the Mongols were ceaselessly campaigning in multiple directions. The axiom that Prussia was an army with a state rather than a state with an army could apply equally well to the early Mongol Empire. Though the Mongol population was by no means large, perhaps 700,000 at the time of Chinggis Khan's death in 1227,⁴ they were able to greatly augment their forces by levying troops from those who submitted to them. Mongols hunted and rode from childhood as a form of training for warfare, and Juvaini observed that they were "a peasantry after the fashion of an army."⁵ In warfare, they were fiercely obedient to the leaders and demonstrated superb discipline, traits that were to become widely admired by European contemporaries like Emperor Frederick II.⁶

The western campaign was envisioned at a *khuriltai*, or assembly of the Mongol nobility, during the reign of Chinggis Khan's son and successor Ögödei. This took place in 1235 at a highpoint in Mongol history. They had just conquered the mighty Jin Dynasty of northern China. Judging by the number of ambitious campaigns planned at the *khuriltai*,

⁴ Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶ Gian Andri Bezzola, *Die Mongolen in Abendländischer Sicht (1220-1270): Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Völkerbegegnungen* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1974), 79-80.

the Mongols must have viewed their destiny as limitless.⁷ The chief architect of the western campaign was Sübetei. A decade earlier, this old retainer of Chinggis Khan had campaigned against the Russians, Cumans, and Volga tribes. According to the *Secret History*, he had received trouble at their hands.⁸ Therefore he was put in a position of leadership for the planned conquest the region, perhaps because of a vendetta or perhaps because of his relative expertise on the West. The Chinggisid prince who would lead the campaign was Batu. As a son of Jochi, he lived close to the Urals and may also have had some experience with the nearby peoples.

Thus, the western campaign which was to end up in Europe in 1241 really began five years earlier in the Ural region. Rashid al-Din provides an account of the progress of the Mongol forces. In 1236 they proceeded against the Volga Bulgars and the Alans of the northern Caucasus. In early 1237, the Mordvins and Mokshas were quickly conquered, and in the autumn of the same year they destroyed most of the towns of northeastern Russia. The campaign against the Russians continued into the spring of 1238. In the autumn of that year they subjugated Crimea and conquered many of the Cumans of the Black Sea region. They also campaigned in the Caucasus. Only in late 1239 did they finally capture the Alan capital of Magas. In 1240 they were still occupied in the Caucasus, though they had pushed as far south as Derbent, on the Caspian Sea.⁹

In late 1240 the Mongols proceeded against Kiev and the remaining Cumans in the region. Immediately after taking Kiev, they continued through the present-day western

⁷ Rashid al-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, trans. J. A. Boyle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 54-55.

⁸ *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Igor de Rachewiltz (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 201.

⁹ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 57-61.

Ukraine and pushed into both Poland and Hungary in early 1241.¹⁰ As we can see from Rashid al-Din's account, there was really no demarcation between operations in Russia and operations in Europe. It was part of one relentless drive westward. Yet the drive halted on the borders of the Holy Roman Empire for about a year and then reversed. All of the areas which the Mongols invaded from 1236 to 1242 were absorbed into the Mongol Empire with the exception of those in Europe. This is what creates a glaring historical question. Of all the peoples affected by the Mongols' western campaign, why did Europeans alone escape subjugation?

In 1241, Europeans viewed the situation with as much dread as any of the Mongols' earlier victims had. The narrative of the invasion is so vividly recounted in a countless number of monographs as to almost not bear repeating. Moreover, the following two chapters of this essay will provide a close analysis of its events. Nevertheless, a basic outline of events is necessary. A column under the command of Orda and Baidar appeared in Lesser Poland in February. They defeated two armies and laid siege to numerous cities while that duchy's ruler fled for safety in Germany. In April, the Mongols arrived at Liegnitz where they encountered the first major resistance in the figure of Henry II of Silesia. A famous battle was fought which saw the Mongols employ their archery to great effect. The duke was killed in the fighting along with countless troops.¹¹ From Poland that column proceeded through Moravia. A certain Ivo of Narbonne reports that Wiener-Neustadt came under siege by a large Mongol force in the summer. Perhaps this was some or all of Orda and Baidar's army. The invaders were chased out of Austria by combined

¹⁰ Ibid., 69.

¹¹ Jan Długosz, *The Annals of Jan Długosz: Annales seu cronicae incliti regni Poloniae*, trans. Maurice Michael and Paul Smith (Chichester: IM Publications, 1997), 179.

forces of several dukes if Ivo's testimony is to be trusted.¹²

The main attack fell on the Kingdom of Hungary. Thomas of Split notes that the Hungarians had been hearing warnings of an impending Mongol invasion for years, so the news of their arrival was treated as a joke.¹³ To make matters worse, Bela and the nobles of his realm were at odds over his attempts to restore a traditionally autocratic form of government. He had also welcomed Cuman refugees into the country against the protests of the nobles and ordinary people. It was a poor time for a national emergency, as Rogerius suggests that the king was highly unpopular and many were openly criticizing him.¹⁴

Against Bela's wish to wait for reinforcements, the nobles pressured him to order an advance against the Mongol army. He did so, and the Mongols drew back over several days to a bridge spanning the Sajo River. Over the course of April 10th and 11th, 1241, the decisive battle was fought. It initially went in favour of the Hungarians. The king's brother displayed notable valour. However, the Hungarians were surrounded and a panicky rout commenced. Rogerius describes the slaughter of refugees on the roads to Pest as being so great that one could not find the reports credible.¹⁵

Bela escaped to the western side of the Danube and for the remainder of 1241 he sought help from his neighbours and the papacy in vain. The Mongols reduced various defensive points, but were kept from crossing the Danube. Their chance to cross arrived in the unusually cold winter. One source suggests they crossed as early as Christmas Day,

¹² Matthew Paris, *English History: From the Year 1235 to 1273*, trans. J. A. Giles v.1 (London: George Bell & Sons, 1889), 470.

¹³ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops of Salona and Split*, trans. Damir Karbić et al. (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006), 255.

¹⁴ Master Roger. *Master Roger's Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tatars*, trans. János M. Bak and Martyn Rady (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010), 159.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

1241.¹⁶ Batu's forces then set to attacking the towns and fortresses on the western side of the Danube, while a contingent under Kadan pursued Bela to the fortress of Trogir.

Kadan's army engaged in a few unsuccessful assaults on fortresses in the area before suddenly departing. Thomas of Split states that this departure occurred at the end of March, 1242 and that Kadan's army moved eastward to join with Batu's withdrawing contingent.¹⁷

Therefore, it is probable that both armies had commenced their withdrawal no later than March, leaving a path of destruction and a great historical question in their wake.

¹⁶ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 64.

¹⁷ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 301-303.

Chapter 1: An Analysis of Existing Explanations for the Mongol Withdrawal in 1242

The sudden withdrawal of the Mongols was greeted with surprise by European contemporaries, especially in the areas most affected by the invasion. Bela's cautious return to Hungary from the Dalmatian coast occurred only several months after the Mongols evacuated. Rogerius describes staying with other refugees on a defensible mountaintop for at least a month after making his escape from the withdrawing Mongol column. During his stay, scouts only briefly forayed into the villages to look for food. Based on their previous experience with Mongol ruses and feigned retreats, the Hungarians fully expected that the apparent evacuation was simply a ruse to lure refugees from their hiding places and improvised hilltop defences, or *Fluchtburgen*.¹

Remarkably, historians since that time have come no closer to reaching a universally satisfying explanation for what exactly prompted the abrupt termination of the western campaign. Those who delve into the topic of Mongol-European relations tend to have a theory which they support, but there is no theory which has anything close to the full agreement of scholars. In his 1996 article "An Examination of Historians' Explanations for the Mongol Withdrawal from Central Europe," Greg S. Rogers provides the first systematic overview of the various theories of historians. He outlines what support their arguments find in the sources, and what criticism these arguments have received. As Rogers observes, there is something paradoxical in that the Mongol withdrawal is supposed to have "saved Europe," and yet a general history of the Mongols or Eastern Europe will devote no more

¹ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 225.

than a few sentences to the *how and why* of Europe's salvation.² Typically historians are content to cite secondary source material alone when explaining the withdrawal without using primary source evidence to substantiate any such explanation.

Rogers notes there are four major theories used to explain the withdrawal. The first he terms the "political theory." This theory holds that the news of Ögödei Khan's death in Mongolia on December 11th, 1241 was received by Batu in March, 1242 as he was campaigning in Hungary. As a result of receiving this news, Batu ordered his forces to immediately evacuate Europe so that he could play his role in the succession crisis. Without doubt, this is the explanation that most often appears in any general overview of the Mongol Empire. Secondly, there is what Rogers terms the "geographical theory," but which I think might be better termed an *ecological theory*. It holds that the Hungarian plain offered insufficient pasturage for the Mongols' enormous herds of horses. Therefore they concluded that Europe in general was unsuitable for conquest. Returning to the Kipchak steppe, the Mongols recognized ecological constraints to any further westward expansion of their empire. Rogers also lays out a "gradual conquest theory" which holds that the invasion of Europe in 1241 was never intended as a conquest, but rather amounted to an exploratory raid. I have noticed that there is another argument very similar to this which suggests that the Mongols invaded Hungary simply to punish Bela IV for harbouring Cuman refugees. Since these two theories are similar in that they suggest the Mongols were not intending conquest, and since they can be challenged with similar criticisms, I have grouped them together into what I will refer to as the "limited goals theory." Lastly, there is the "military weakness theory," which suggests that the Mongols left Europe

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

because their forces had been badly weakened in the process of subjugating the Kipchak steppe, Volga region and Eastern Europe. Resultantly they were unable to continue their conquests in Western Europe.³

As for contemporary Europeans, they were more interested in ascertaining the identity of the invaders and the reason for their initial appearance than explaining their withdrawal. Carpini suggests that God had acted to hinder the Mongol advance by causing the death of the khan in Mongolia.⁴ Such notions of deliverance were rare since contemporaries had no way of knowing if the nomads would return. Thomas of Split echoes a more commonly found sentiment that the invasion was a punishment that had been inflicted primarily on Hungary because of its people's sins.⁵ During the invasion, many chroniclers and Western observers saw the Mongols as forerunners of the end times and attempted, using the prophecies of Pseudo-Methodius, to identify the Mongols as Ishmaelites or Gog and Magog. However, the friars who actually visited the Mongols in the immediate aftermath of the invasion were much less given to such apocalyptic speculations.⁶ They brought back sober reports which contained observations on a hitherto unknown and barbaric people that had no place in apocalyptic prophecy but still posed a very grave threat to the West. Thus, there was more interest in the possibility of a Mongol return than in the reasons for their departure in 1242.

In this chapter, I will analyse the four scholarly theories. In turn, I will discuss the basis of each before proceeding to highlight the criticisms and evidence against it. Some of

³ Ibid., 8.

⁴ John of Plano Carpini, "History of the Mongols," in *The Mission to Asia*, ed. Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 44.

⁵ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 305.

⁶ Jackson, *Mongols and West*, 150-151.

the evidence presented can be found in Rogers' article, but most of it comes from my own research. I will place particular emphasis on what the primary sources offer for or against each theory, as arguments surrounding the Mongol withdrawal often suffer from a lack of primary source citations. At the outset, it is important to note that my aim is to disprove all four of these theories, as they ought to be thoroughly discredited before offering an alternative explanation. Moreover, I contend that it does not make sense to imagine that it was some combination of the existing theories which brought about the withdrawal, since these theories often contradict each other on fundamental points, such as the actual intent of the Mongol leaders when they invaded Europe. As Rogers notes, the existing theories diverge so widely it would be difficult to convince someone that their differences are superficial rather than genuine.⁷

The Political Theory

The political theory is, perhaps understandably, the most popular explanation for the Mongol withdrawal. The shattering of unified resistance in Poland and Hungary provided an excellent opportunity to push farther west in early 1242. It would be a striking coincidence if the Mongols suddenly terminated their campaign three months after the khan's death without even being aware of the new political situation. Thus, one might imagine that political exigency forced Batu and his army to depart from Europe.

This argument finds support in the report of John of Plano Carpini, the Franciscan who journeyed to the Mongol court on behalf of the Pope (1245-1247). Part messenger and part spy, Carpini made his mission in hopes of either preventing further attacks through

⁷ Rogers, "Examination of Historians' Explanations," 21.

diplomacy or gaining knowledge of how to resist a future nomadic invasion. As such, Carpini was particularly interested in discovering the reason for Batu's earlier departure. He records, "The mistress of the Emperor (Güyük) had been arrested; she had murdered his father (Ögödei) with poison when the army was in Hungary and as a result the army in these parts retreated."⁸ On another occasion he mentions that the Mongols had planned to fight for 30 years when they were in Poland and Hungary, but the khan was poisoned and "consequently they have rested from battle until the present time." The present time refers to the reign of Güyük.⁹

Rogers notes that Carpini's statements are the fundamental piece of evidence in support of the political theory. In fact, they constitute the *only* statements in any primary source that attribute the withdrawal to the khan's death, unless one includes the *Tartar Relation* of C. de Bridia, which is known to be a summary of a lecture given by a member of Carpini's embassy after their return. It should be noted, however, that if one takes the political theory as an established fact, then other sources can appear to support it. For instance, Rogerius, who was still a captive of the Mongols during the campaign in 1242, states that while they were besieging Pannonhalma, west of the Danube, they were suddenly called back ("*subito revocati ita*").¹⁰ Lamentably, he uses the passive voice so we are left in the dark as to who exactly called them back from the siege. Nonetheless, one could assume that they were being called back to Mongolia by a courier, arriving with news of the khan's death, even when no such news is mentioned.

⁸ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 65.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 218-219.

The political theory finds notable supporters in the secondary literature. Joseph Fletcher, whose focus was often on the complexities of Mongol succession, notes that the death of a khan was a very serious matter. Thus, “the old wisdom found, for example, in Grousset”¹¹ suffices to explain why the European campaign was broken off. He notes that a campaign against India was also called off in 1241 after Lahore’s capture. Because, Fletcher suggests, the Mongol Empire was so closely tied to the person of the khan, and because Mongol ‘tanistry’ made every succession uncertain, the state itself stood in danger of collapse whenever a new khan had to be chosen.¹² Tanistry was the term Fletcher borrowed from Gaelic history to describe the nature of Mongol succession, which allowed any male relative of the deceased monarch to take power based on his popularity or competence. Batu and other princes would have understood the fragility of this system. For Charles Halperin, the political theory also seems the most viable. In his case, support for the political theory seems to stem from the fact that he finds the other theories less convincing. His belief in the power of the Mongol military machine to overcome any obstacle leaves only the tried and true explanation. A succession crisis ended the campaign and ongoing power struggles kept it from resuming. Internal problems alone ended Mongol expansion.¹³

There are, however, many serious problems with the political theory. The first is related to Carpini as a source of evidence on the matter. Much was depending on Carpini’s mission, and he was not trying to mislead the readers of his report. Yet, he relied on the accounts of Mongols and their subjects, reliable or not, for information on things he could

¹¹ Joseph Fletcher, “The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46 (1986): 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 46-47.

¹³ Charles J. Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 48.

not personally observe. Carpini did observe that the Mongols held people from other nations in contempt, even emissaries and “mighty dukes.” Moreover, it was his view that Mongols, despite their honesty to one another, were deceptive toward foreigners. He stated that they “tell lies to others and practically no truth is to be found in them.”¹⁴ If Carpini received his information on the withdrawal from a Mongol source, we have good reason to doubt it. A Mongol informant could have resorted to an excuse if, indeed, the campaign in Europe had failed for other reasons. Also, the premise in Carpini’s statements that Ögödei was poisoned by his son’s mistress is inaccurate. Rashid al-Din, a high-level minister in the Ilkhanate, tends to be a more reliable source on the inner workings of the Mongol Empire. In his version of events, it was Tolui’s widow’s sister and her son who were the cup-bearers of Ögödei when he died and initially some accusations were made toward them. However, an important Mongol *noyan*, or member of the Mongol aristocracy, finally protested, “What foolish words are these? Ibakha Beki’s son was the [steward] 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?”¹⁵ Carpini seems to provide a garbled version of these events mixed with those surrounding Güyüg’s later execution of his mother’s servant, Fatima, on charges of fatally bewitching his brother.¹⁶ Seeing as Carpini provides an inaccurate account of events surrounding Ögödei’s death, we might doubt the source that provided him with an explanation of the withdrawal.

Rashid al-Din contradicts Carpini on another issue; namely, he states that the Mongol forces were unaware of the khan’s death when they started their withdrawal from

¹⁴ Carpini, “History of the Mongols,” 15-16.

¹⁵ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 65-66.

¹⁶ Ala al-Din Ata Malik Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 245.

Central Europe. He describes the invasion of Hungary and Kadan's pursuit of Bela to Trogir on the Adriatic Coast. Then he relates that Kadan, having failed to capture the Hungarian king, "turned back" into the territory of the Vlachs. At that point in time, Rashid al-Din states, "the news of Khan's death had not yet reached them."¹⁷ This matches Thomas of Split's account of the Mongol withdrawal at the end of March, and we know that Kadan's forces were moving eastward to rendezvous with Batu, who was simultaneously withdrawing through Transylvania toward the Danube. Thus, Rashid al-Din is communicating that when the withdrawal had commenced, the Mongol commanders were unaware that they were required in Mongolia for the election of a new khan. What makes Rashid al-Din's commentary on this episode especially damning to the political theory is that his *Jami' al-tawarikh* was informed by the *Altan Debter*, a Mongol chronicle that has been lost to posterity. Bolad, the minister of the Great Khan at the Ilkhanate court and a supreme authority on Mongol history, related its contents to Rashid al-Din personally. Moreover, we can be certain that Rashid al-Din's account of this particular episode is taken from Mongol sources because of the orthography of names.¹⁸ So this is not simply a case of Carpini's word versus that of Rashid al-Din. The latter account is that of a political insider who was using Mongol sources. Those sources state clearly that the withdrawing Mongols were oblivious of Ögödei's death in Mongolia. Few historians have attempted to address this, with Ödön Schütz offering in the 1950s the somewhat half-hearted suggestion that the writings of Rashid al-Din are turbid and require closer scholarly examination.¹⁹

¹⁷ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁹ Rogers, "Examination of Historians' Explanations," 18.

Rashid al-Din's account of the Mongol army's movements right after the withdrawal from Europe does not suggest that they were aware that they were expected in Mongolia. In 1242 they attacked a number of Cuman rebels, at one point drifting into the Caucasus in pursuit of them. "The whole year was passed in that region." Then, over the course of the next year, they gradually made their way back to the Volga, arriving at the end of 1243.²⁰ The unfortunate Rogerius, who was marching eastward through Transylvania with the Mongol column in 1242, repeatedly describes the evacuation as slow. The Mongol army, loaded with carts of booty and innumerable animals, combed the forests and hiding places in search of refugees. Significantly, Rogerius mentions no rumours of the khan's death as the column meandered out of Hungary, though the interpreters were even telling the captives that the Mongols planned on massacring them in Cuman territory.²¹ The Galician-Volynian Chronicle refers to Batu sending two of his subordinates northward into Russian territory in search of Danilo of Galicia in late 1242 or early 1243.²² All of this demonstrates that Batu and the other Chinggisid princes present were not rushing to Mongolia to take part in a *khuriltai*. Their movements in the immediate aftermath of the withdrawal suggest something more akin to aimlessness or a desire to consolidate conquests made before 1241.

Non-European sources refer to a *khuriltai* being arranged to elect a new great khan after Ögödei's death and that Batu was summoned to Mongolia to take part. One might assume Batu received his summons in the spring of 1242, and therefore Carpini's version of events is vindicated. However, the sources seem to indicate that calls for a *khuriltai*

²⁰ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 71-72.

²¹ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 221.

²² "Galician-Volynian Chronicle." trans. George A. Perfecky, in *The Hypatian Codex, Part II: The Galician-Volynian Chronicle*, Harvard Series in Ukrainian Studies 16:2 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1973), 52.

were not made until the following year. Sübetei's biography in the *Yuanshi* states that "a great meeting of all the princes was convoked in the year [corresponding to] 1243."²³ Juvaini's account also suggests a delay. He states that Güyüg was still making his return to Mongolia when he heard of Ögödei's death. He rode hurriedly back to Mongolia where his mother, Töregene, subsequently contravened the *yasa* and took on the role of regent. Only after that were messengers dispatched to summon the princes to a *khuriltai*.²⁴ Moreover, when Batu finally did receive a summons, he adamantly refused to go, claiming that his gout made travel impossible. Rashid al-Din informs us that such medical problems were nothing more than an excuse.²⁵ Batu's repeated refusals to return to Mongolia delayed the *khuriltai* for a number of years until Güyüg was raised to the throne in 1246. Batu never went to Mongolia after the invasion of Europe. As Rogers observes, many historians have argued that the political theory would only make sense if Batu or his troops actually returned to Mongolia.²⁶ When Carpini travelled across the region shortly before Güyüg's enthronement, Batu was still based on the Volga with his massive armies.

Faced with Batu's lack of participation in the *khuriltai*, many historians have simply modified the political theory. They argue that Batu moved his forces to the Volga to keep an eye on affairs in Mongolia, and to ensure the security of his territory from Güyüg's enmity. Any such political theory only makes sense if Batu were actually notified of Ögödei's death before the withdrawal began in March, 1242. Therefore, it is useful to consider if it would be possible for couriers to travel from Mongolia to Hungary in a period of just over three months. Unfortunately we do not have Mongol records on the length of

²³ E. Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, v.1 (London : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1910), 332.

²⁴ Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 248.

²⁵ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 180.

²⁶ Rogers, "Examination of Historians' Explanations," 16.

time required to travel from Mongolia to Europe, but we can get clues from the writings of Europeans who made the journey.

Benedict the Pole, who made the journey from Poland to Mongolia as Carpini's interpreter, states that it took more than five 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.²⁷ Carpini records leaving Batu's camp on the Volga on April 8th and travelling eastward, reaching Güyüg's camp in Mongolia on July 22nd, 1246. The Mongol guides forced them to make this journey at "great speed" so that they would arrive in time for the election ceremony.²⁸ Thus, making use of Mongol guides and their horses, Carpini's party took about five months to cover the distance between Kiev and Mongolia. There is still a considerable distance from Kiev to western Hungary. William of Rubruck made the journey across the empire a few years after Carpini. At Batu's camp on the Volga, he was assigned a guide who estimated that the journey to Mongolia would take four months. Leaving in September, they travelled from morning until night and changed horses two or three times per day.²⁹ As they approached Naiman territory, east of Lake Balkash, they quickened their pace to two *yam* stations³⁰ per day, although these stations were intended to be a day's journey apart from one another.³¹ They ended up reaching Möngke's camp at the end of December.

²⁷ Benedict the Pole, "The Narrative of Brother Benedict the Pole," in *The Mission to Asia*, ed. Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 79-80.

²⁸ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 60.

²⁹ William of Rubruck, "The Journey of William of Rubruck," in *The Mission to Asia*, ed. Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 130-132.

³⁰ A *yam* was a postal relay station in the Mongol Empire used for providing horses, rations, and equipment to messengers. Rashid al-Din mentions that Ögödei made considerable efforts to establish stations between China and Mongolia during his reign. Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 62.

³¹ Rubruck, "Journey," 146.

Marco Polo and his family took very different routes to Khubilai's court so his account cannot be used to get an idea of how long it would take to travel the northern route between Mongolia and Europe. However, it is useful to keep in mind his claim that progress across the Eurasian landmass had been considerably slower in winter.³² Carpini's return journey from Mongolia to the Volga in the dead of winter took from November 17th to May 9th. By comparison, Rubruck, making his return journey in the summer, covered the same distance in two months and ten days, resting only a single day when his party could not obtain horses.³³ If a courier were actually dispatched from Karakorum immediately after Ögödei's death, he would be travelling during the severest months of the winter in Siberian climatic conditions. Presumably, an expert Mongol rider could outpace a group travelling with Franciscan monks, but there are limitations to what horses can do. Carpini noted that his party went "as fast as the horses could trot" when there were multiple changes of mount available.³⁴

The travel accounts of Carpini and Rubruck make it clear that there was very little infrastructure in the region between Mongolia and Sarai on the Volga. They describe a lack of *yam* stations or any kind of human settlements for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of kilometers. By contrast, Polo provides an impressive account of the *yam* system he observed, stating that messengers would reach a station every 25 miles, where they would immediately mount a fresh horse. Travelling through the night, a messenger could travel 200 to 250 miles in a full day.³⁵ However, Polo is specifically describing the Yuan realm which inherited China's enormous population and efficient administration. The state of

³² Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. William Marsden (Westminster: Modern Library, 2001), 11.

³³ Rubruck, "Journey," 206-207.

³⁴ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 55.

³⁵ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, 141.

affairs described by Polo in late thirteenth century China does not remotely resemble the conditions that existed in the northern frontiers of the unified Mongol Empire in the 1240s. Thus, it would be misguided to imagine that a courier could move between Karakorum and Hungary at a similar pace to a courier in the Yuan state, which utilized 200,000 horses, 10,000 stations, and whole communities in its postal service.³⁶ Although I cannot disprove that a courier could travel from Mongolia to Hungary in the space of three and a half months, the sources cast serious doubts on the possibility.

A further problem with the political argument is that Mongol campaigns continued to be waged immediately after Ögödei's death and during the interregnum (1241-1246). It is difficult to explain why the Mongols were obliged to "rest from battle" in the European theatre, completely evacuating Hungary, while they continued their conquests elsewhere. In the *Yuanshi*, we read that Mongol forces were already launching a campaign against multiple Song cities south of the Huai River in the autumn of 1242. We see another campaign against the Song in 1245 while there was still no khan on the throne.³⁷

Despite the death in late 1241 of Chormakhan in the Caucasus, Baiju replaced him and promptly launched a major invasion of Asia Minor. With a famous victory at Kösedagh in 1243, the Mongols gained the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum as a tribute-bearing vassal.³⁸ An army under Yasa'ur even advanced 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. He refused to cooperate, but Yasa'ur's

³⁶ Ibid., 138.

³⁷ Waltraut Abramowski "Die chinesischen Annalen von Ögödei and Güyük: Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des *Yüan-shih*," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 10 (1976): 135-136.

³⁸ J. J. Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 79.

army withdrew from the region without attempting any sieges.³⁹ What makes these invasions notable is that they occurred in the West immediately following Ögödei's death, suggesting there was no custom dictating that a *khuriltai* had to be held before campaigns could resume. At least, no such custom was being imposed in any recognizable way. The Mongols did abandon their campaign against the Delhi Sultanate after storming Lahore in December, 1241, but only about eleven days after Ögödei's death. They could not have known he was dead. The reason the campaign ended was that Dayir, the Mongol commander, had been killed in the assault.⁴⁰

One could argue that even though Batu was not obligated to go back to Mongolia or terminate his campaign, he still had good strategic reasons to evacuate Europe upon hearing of Ögödei's death. Historians infer that he suspected his enemy, Güyüg, would become khan. In such a situation, Batu would need to his troops to defend his eastern borders and his own life from the hostile khan in Mongolia. The problem with this viewpoint is that Batu likely could not have foreseen in 1242 that Güyüg would be elected khan. The *Yuanshi* indicates that Ögödei had openly expressed his desire that his grandson, Shiremün, succeed him.⁴¹ This was no secret. Rashid al-Din states that Ögödei raised Shiremün personally in his own *ordu* and officially proclaimed him as heir.⁴² Güyüg, on the other hand, had been recalled in disgrace recently from the western campaign. Chinggis Khan's appointed successor had been elected, so precedent certainly was not favouring Güyüg either. It was largely through the machinations of Töregene that her son somehow did win out over Shiremün. Yelü Chucai, who had long served the empire, resigned in disgust

³⁹ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 74.

⁴⁰ Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 105.

⁴¹ Abramowski, "Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des Yüan-shih," 151.

⁴² Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 180.

when Töregene refused to respect the wishes of the deceased khan for Shiremün.⁴³ Could Batu really have guessed that Ögödei's widow would take over the government and maneuver her son on to the throne?

The notion that Batu and Güyüg were on a path toward civil war from the moment of Ögödei's death is overstated. Though Batu adamantly refused to return to Mongolia for the election of Güyüg, fearing treachery, he did send many of his brothers, and Sübetei was permitted to return to the great khan's service. Batu does not seem to have worked against Güyüg after he became khan. He submitted to the new khan's authority and conducted a census in his own territory on Güyüg's orders in 1247.⁴⁴ It is often assumed that Güyüg was marching westward the following year intent on a military showdown with Batu. Yet Juvaini tells us that Güyüg had previously sent his trusted lieutenant Eljigidei to the Middle East with a large army and it was his intention to arrive shortly thereafter.⁴⁵ Güyüg was probably not intending civil war if he did not conserve his armies for a war against Batu.

As the khan was moving westward in 1248, he requested that Batu come to meet him in present-day Xinjiang. Batu, though certainly nervous, went to the appointed meeting place; an action which makes no sense if he believed civil war had begun. Güyüg died nearby in a way that Juvaini does not bother to describe.⁴⁶ This episode is often depicted in secondary literature as a civil war only narrowly averted by Güyüg's chance death. As such, it appears to vindicate Batu's decision to leave Europe. While undoubtedly the situation amounted to a tense standstill that could hypothetically have

⁴³ Antoine Gaubil, *Histoire de Gentchiscan et de toute la Dinastie des Mongous ses Successeurs, Conquéran de la Chine* (Paris: Briasson, 1739), 101.

⁴⁴ Thomas T. Allsen, "Mongol Census Taking in Rus', 1245-1275," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 5 (1981): 38.

⁴⁵ Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 256.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 267.

pitched into open warfare, it seems to me that Batu and Güyüg alike had much more to fear from assassination. A Chinese analyst relates that poisoning was such a common way of dealing with rivals in Mongol politics that their communal drinking ritual developed as a measure against it.⁴⁷ There were rumours that Güyüg would attempt to arrest or poison Batu at their meeting.⁴⁸ As it happened, it was Güyüg who suddenly expired in uncertain circumstances near the meeting place. William of Rubruck, who met with the widow of Shiban, tells us that he and Güyüg both perished when Shiban attempted to “hand a goblet” to the khan.⁴⁹ The point of this observation is simply that I do not believe Batu could have foreseen Güyüg’s election, nor concluded that it made civil war an inevitable and acceptable contingency. Therefore, I argue that such concerns cannot be used to explain Batu’s withdrawal from Europe.

The Ecological Theory

The ecological theory emerged as an important alternative to the political theory with Denis Sinor’s 1972 article “Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History.” Sinor, aware that Batu’s forces did not return to Mongolia, argues that an insufficiency of pasturage caused their sudden evacuation from Hungary. Sinor’s theory, as it relates directly to Batu’s invasion, is confined to the last three pages of the article and relies mainly on an impressive calculation. Sinor argues that if a single horse required 120 acres of pasturage per year in pre-modern conditions, then the *Nagy Alföld* of Hungary could support a herd of

⁴⁷ “Hei-ta shih-lüeh,” in *Meng-ta pei-lu und Hei-ta shih-lüeh: Chinesische Gesandtenberichte über die Frühen Mongolen 1221 und 1237*, trans. Peter Olbricht and Elisabeth Pinks (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980), 112.

⁴⁸ Rogers, “Examination of Historians’ Explanations,” 25.

⁴⁹ Rubruck, “The Journey,” 147.

205,920 horses. Since the sources consistently refer to Mongol warriors possessing multiple mounts, Sinor assigns an average of three horses to each rider. In the ideal but impossible situation that no other animals were using the pastures, that would only allow a force of 68,640 warriors to occupy Hungary.⁵⁰ The Carpathian Basin simply could not support enough horses for a nomad superpower to occupy it, as opposed to Mongolia which had adequate pastures for an almost unlimited supply of horses. This critical difference, Sinor reasons, allowed nomadic forces north of China to have more success in conquering and ruling China, whereas the successes of the Huns and Avars in Europe were modest owing to their inability to muster enormous cavalry forces. The Magyars later adopted the sedentary ways of their neighbours owing to Europe's unsuitability for nomadic pastoralism.⁵¹

David Morgan supports this line of argument. He offers that it is not implausible that Batu withdrew to the Kipchak steppe in order to monitor the situation in the Mongol heartland. Yet the fact that the Mongols did not launch a major invasion again after 1241 supports the notion that environmental factors were decisive in Europe's escape from sustained Mongol interference. While allowing that Sinor's figures are improbably precise, Morgan still holds that the ecological explanation "provides a much more satisfactory explanation of the Mongols' precipitate and permanent withdrawal."⁵²

Sinor was an expert on both Hungary and Inner Asia and constructed his argument from an astounding array of ancient and modern sources, including statistics of American horse-breeders and Chinese histories. The most serious problem with the theory, however,

⁵⁰ Denis Sinor, "Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History," *Oriens Extremus* 19 (1972): 182.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

⁵² David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 124-125.

is the lack of support it receives from primary source material related directly to the invasion itself. Sinor makes use of two incidents that can be found in the work of Thomas of Split. The first is that Kadan only took a fraction of his force when he approached the Adriatic Coast because “there was not sufficient fodder for all the horses in the army; for it was the beginning of March, and the weather was still harshly cold.”⁵³ This statement does not evince a fodder shortage in Hungary, but rather refers to a temporary frost-related shortage in a mountainous region of Croatia. The second incident is the famine in Hungary which immediately followed the Mongol withdrawal. Sinor sees this as evidence of his theory, but Thomas of Split specifically explains that the famine occurred because the peasants, hiding from the Mongols, had not planted crops, nor had they been able to take in the harvest of the previous year.⁵⁴ A Polish source reports that vast herds of livestock were taken by the withdrawing Mongols too, so that farmers desperately harnessed themselves to ploughs to till the soil.⁵⁵ I argue that the absence of food crops and livestock does not prove that pasturage was similarly absent. The Hungarians simply had few animals left to feed on it.

In the absence of any direct statements related to Mongol logistic difficulties in Hungary, it is necessary to investigate whether writers of the period regularly troubled themselves with recording minutiae, such as pasturage conditions in a region. It seems plausible that thirteenth century authors were less inclined to seek ecological explanations for human actions, or to find environmental phenomena noteworthy. If this were the case, then a pasturage shortage could go unmentioned in contemporary reports, even if it were

⁵³ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 299.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁵⁵ Długosz, *The Annals*, 182.

the actual cause of the withdrawal.

What we actually observe is that when the environment wrought its effects on the Mongols and their herds, contemporaries were quick to notice. Juvaini notes that such vast numbers of dignitaries assembled for Güyüg's enthronement in 1246 that it caused food shortages and no fodder was left for the animals.⁵⁶ The *Yuanshi* records an ecological disaster on the Mongolian steppe in 1248, when drought caused the drying up of most rivers, enormous grass fires, and the deaths of 80 or 90 percent of cattle and horses. It goes on to describe a humanitarian crisis which saw many Mongols migrate to neighbouring areas for support, and declares that the strength of the nation was badly affected by this disaster.⁵⁷ The Galician-Volynian Chronicle refers to "all the horses, cattle and sheep" of the Golden Horde Mongols dying in about 1287, perhaps due to pestilence.⁵⁸ Rubruck, during his time at Möngke's court, observed a disastrous cold snap which killed innumerable livestock.⁵⁹ These examples reveal that, across Eurasia, contemporary observers were able to notice when environmental disaster afflicted the herds that were so essential to the very existence of Mongol communities.

Sources from the period do not simply note how unusual environmental events shaped the destiny of the Mongols. They similarly observe how the ordinary behavior of the Mongols was dictated by their environment. Marco Polo observes how the Mongols used the pasturage of Greater Armenia during the summer. During the winter the snow was too deep for the horses to graze and so the Mongols were required to migrate southwards.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 251.

⁵⁷ Abramowski, "Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des Yüan-shih," 152,

⁵⁸ "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 98.

⁵⁹ Rubruck, "The Journey," 152.

⁶⁰ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, 23.

Carpini notices how Batu's *ordu* similarly moved northward along the Volga in the summer and returned to the mouth of the river in the winter in order to not overtax the pasturage. These patterns were mirrored by his subordinate commanders along the Dnieper, Don, and Ural as well.⁶¹

More significantly, sources from the period did not ignore the role that ecological factors played in Mongol warfare. In 1285, when the Golden Horde launched another significant invasion of Hungary, the Galician-Volynian Chronicle records "a great famine" that drove the Mongols to cannibalism with thousands of them perishing. Their commander apparently made it out of Hungary on foot.⁶² Polish sources echo that the Mongols suffered from famine and pestilence during that campaign.⁶³ If Sinor's theory is correct, then it is strange that multiple primary sources should describe how environmental and logistical factors brought ruin to Mongol forces in Hungary in 1285, and yet they should be completely silent about any such problems affecting Batu's forces in the earlier invasion.

Regarding the invasion of 1241-1242, several sources refer to the terrible famine in Hungary that followed the Mongol withdrawal, but there is no mention of a fodder shortage. Were Sinor's theory correct, it is very odd that Rogerius is silent about it. While a captive of the Mongols, he was employed by a *knes*, or headman, who oversaw a thousand villages and was responsible for managing the fodder, livestock, and equipment of the occupying force. Rogerius even attended their weekly logistics meetings!⁶⁴ He mentions no shortage of necessities on the part of the Mongols who managed the environment quite well to

⁶¹ Carpini, "The History of the Mongols," 55.

⁶² "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 96.

⁶³ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 205.

⁶⁴ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 209.

ensure their stocks for the winter.⁶⁵ The Mongols ended up leaving in the spring when the grass was first sprouting, and a nomadic army would feel the least environmental pressure to evacuate the area.

What is most peculiar is that Bela IV had no idea that his country was unsuited to the occupation of a massive Mongol army. In fact, in the aftermath of the invasion, he believed the opposite. Writing to the pope in roughly 1250, reporting rumours that another Mongol invasion was imminent, Bela IV asserts, “If ... [Hungary] should fall into the possession of the Tartars, the gate to other lands of the Catholic faith would lie open. For one, because there is no ocean to hinder their approach to the Christians, and moreover, because it is exactly here that they are able to settle their enormous hosts better than elsewhere.”⁶⁶ He goes on to mention how Hungary made a useful base for Attila in the past.

Bela did not see Hungary as presenting a serious ecological problem and he was adamant that the Mongols intended to conquer Hungary and all of Europe in the near future. The Hungarian king’s claims can be dismissed as mere attempts to gain some sort of concession or aid from the papacy, but they should not be dismissed lightly. In 1254 Batu demanded a marriage alliance and Bela’s troops for use on a campaign into Western Europe. In exchange, Hungary would be spared from tribute obligations and further destruction.⁶⁷ In 1259 and 1264 Bela received additional ultimatums. Berke, the brother and successor of Batu, demanded that Hungary provide a quarter of its army for a planned drive into Europe.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 211.

⁶⁶ “Brief König Belas IV. an Papst Innozenz IV. vom 11. November (1250),” in *Der Mongolensturm: Berichte von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen 1235-1250*, trans. Hansgerd Göckenjan and James R. Sweeney (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1985), 309.

⁶⁷ Jean W. Sedlar, *East Central Europe in the Middle Ages, 1000-1500* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 379.

In exchange, it would receive exemption from tribute and even a fifth of the plunder.⁶⁸

Bela avoided giving an answer to these ultimatums which became a regular feature of his long reign. Carpini reports that, while in Mongolia, he personally witnessed a ceremony in which Güyüg “raised the standard” to proceed against the Holy Roman Empire and all Christian kingdoms of the West.⁶⁹ In 1260, Berke sent an embassy to Paris, threatening France with invasion if Louis IX refused to submit.⁷⁰ It seems that if taking Europe were an ecological impossibility, nobody was aware of it in the decades immediately after the first campaign.

There is still the possibility that Batu concluded the pasturage in Europe was insufficient and withdrew before it became a large enough problem to be noticed by contemporary observers. However, as Halperin points out, Mongol conquests were not restrained by sober long-term calculations. Though Sinor’s theory shows a good understanding of the nomad economy, it ignores that the Mongols, driven by unabated victories rather than ecological considerations, conquered many areas unsuited to their pastoralism.⁷¹ Fletcher, too, points out that insufficiency of pasture and a hot climate 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.”⁷² I agree with these views and would add that the Mongols often overcame logistical problems by employing the know-how of sedentary peoples. Rogerius informs us how they duped Hungarian peasants

⁶⁸ Hansgerd Göckenjan, “Der Westfeldzug (1236-1242) aus mongolischer Sicht,” in *Wahlstatt 1241: Beiträge zur Mongolenschlacht bei Liegntiz und zu ihre Nachwirkungen*, ed. Ulrich Schmilewski (Würzburg: Bergstadtverlag Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn, 1991), 61.

⁶⁹ Carpini, “The History of the Mongols,” 44.

⁷⁰ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 123.

⁷¹ Halperin, *Russia and Golden Horde*, 47-48.

⁷² Fletcher, “Ecological and Social,” 47.

into coming out of hiding in the forest to collect the harvest of grain and grapes.

Afterwards, the Mongols massacred the unfortunate villagers.⁷³ On another occasion, during the long war of attrition with the Song in the late 1230s and 1240s, food supplies became very scarce along the static front. Zhang Rou (Chang Jou), a Chinese general in Mongol service, put his troops to work farming which alleviated the problem.⁷⁴

A problem with the calculation behind Sinor's theory is that it does not take account of certain subtleties related to both the Mongol armies and the European environment. Sinor used American horse-breeding statistics that suggest a "fairly productive grass range" amounts to 120 acres per horse per year, in order to arrive at his maximum number of horses that the *Alföld* could support.⁷⁵ Mongol horses, however, were widely noted by contemporaries for both their hardiness and ability to endure hunger. Thomas of Split observes, "Even after being ridden for three days on end they are satisfied with a small meal of chaff."⁷⁶ Ibn al-Athir relates how steppe horses were able to dig for roots with their hooves.⁷⁷ It is doubtful that animals adapted to the harsh conditions of the steppe would require the same grass range as a larger American horse. The ecological theory also implies that the *Alföld* was the only pasturage available in Europe, not taking into account that the herds of contemporary Vlach pastoralists and horse-breeders grazed from southern Poland to the Balkan interior.⁷⁸ It also might be noted that the distance from the Black Sea steppe to Novgorod, which did submit, is greater than the distance between the same steppe

⁷³ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 211.

⁷⁴ C. C. Hsiao, "Chang Jou," in *In the Service of the Khan*, ed. Igor de Rachewiltz et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), 54.

⁷⁵ Rogers, "Examination of Historians' Explanations," 11.

⁷⁶ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 285.

⁷⁷ 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*, trans. D. S. Richards (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 218.

⁷⁸ Sedlar, *East Central Europe*, 88.

and Hungary.

Similar ecological theories are applied wherever Mongol campaigns failed, and are seldom very convincing, with the obvious exception of Japan where tropical storms devastated the Yuan fleets. In Syria, for instance, the retreat of the majority of Hülegü's forces which preceded the disaster of Ayn Jalut in 1260 is often ascribed to news of Möngke's death or to ecological problems.⁷⁹ In a letter to Louis IX, only discovered in 1980, Hülegü does indeed mention that food and fodder in the area had been largely consumed when he withdrew. However, he asserts that it was simply a Mongol routine ("*nostris moris est*") to spend the summer in the cooler highlands of Armenia. Conspicuously, he makes no mention of any obligation to return to Mongolia for a *khuriltai* or that the ecology of Syria would hinder its swift incorporation into the Mongol Empire.⁸⁰ It seems that he had simply misjudged the Mamluks' capability to launch an audacious counterattack at the rump force he had left in Syria. Subsequently, the Ilkhanids won a major victory against the Mamluks and advanced into Syria in 1299. They suddenly and unexpectedly withdrew while besieging the citadel of Damascus in the early February of 1300. As Reuven Amitai-Preiss notes, scholars such as David Morgan and John Masson Smith, Jr. believe that the reasons behind this withdrawal were the environmental problems, such as the heat and a lack of pasture. However, Amitai-Preiss points out that the Ilkhanids returned in force the following year and were crushed at Marj al-Suffar. Even if environmental factors played some role in Mongol failures in Syria, he argues, they

⁷⁹ Jackson, *Mongols and West*, 116.

⁸⁰ Paul Meyvaert, "An Unknown Letter of Hulagu, Il-khan of Persia, to King Louis IX of France," *Viator* 11 (1980): 258; 249.

certainly do not tell the full story.⁸¹

Regarding India, Smith argues in *Mongol Armies and Indian Campaigns* that heat and lack of fodder accounted for the Mongols' failure, but in the same article he concludes that perhaps it was also attributable to the superior equipment, numbers, and training of the Sultanate of Delhi's forces.⁸² It is useful to remember that the Ghurids and Moghuls, before and after the Mongol Empire, were able to conquer much of India despite the fact that they were Inner Asian groups. Babur, who hailed from modern Kirghiz-Uzbek border region, probably encountered similar conditions to those the Mongols faced over two centuries prior. In his autobiography, the *Babur-Nama*, he identifies the heat and pestilence as problems upon first entering India, and he notes that many of his subordinates desired to call off the campaign. However, the most significant problem they encountered was a hostile populace that fled, destroying food and fodder supplies. Significantly, he notes that "not a fortified town but strengthened its defences and neither was in obedience nor submitted."⁸³ In short, the gravest problem facing the invaders was the resistance of the local people.

If the Mongol campaigns in southern China, Russia, or Iraq had failed, I could be tempted to speculate that scholars would argue this failure was solely due to the unsuitable environment of those regions, or that conquest was never the goal. However, the Mongols did emerge victorious in those areas and imposed their rule, whereas they were unable to gain the submission of states close to zones of significant steppe vegetation, such as the

⁸¹ , Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "Whither the Ilkhanid Army? Ghazan's First Campaign into Syria (1299-1300)," in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, ed. Nicola di Cosmo (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 259-260.

⁸² John Masson Smith, Jr., "Mongol Armies and Indian Campaigns," <http://www.mongoliantculture.com/MONGOL-ARMIES.htm>

⁸³ Babur, *Babur-Nama (Memoirs of Babur)*, trans. Annette Susannah Beveridge (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1979), 523-524.

Byzantine Empire and the Sultanate of Delhi. Moreover, it is odd that the Mongols continued to hold the forest zone of Russia, but withdrew from the *Alföld* if the borders of their empire were indeed dictated by suitable vegetation and climate. Thus, I believe that we should seek other explanations, besides ecological ones, to explain why the Mongols withdrew from Europe in 1242. We should not imagine that the Mongols viewed theirs as a strictly steppe empire.

The Limited Goals Theory

The limited goals theory holds that the Mongols were attempting an exploratory or punitive raid in 1241 rather than conquest. From that perspective, the Mongols had no desire to stay in Europe longer than they did, having achieved their objectives. Hungarian historian László Makkai and Soviet historian V.P. Shusharin argue that the objective of the campaign was to terrorize the local population and prepare the groundwork for a later occupation. Shusharin argues that further conquests could be achieved only after the wide swath of newly conquered territory to the east had been consolidated.⁸⁴ The limited goals theory finds support in the observation that other Mongol campaigns such as those in Korea and the Caucasus were characterized by a succession of invasions over decades, which eventually wore down the sedentary populations. The famous campaign of Jebe and Sübetei through the Caucasus and Volga region, often described as a reconnaissance raid, might best support the view that, as a rule, the Mongols preceded conquest with exploration. Rogers notes that the contemporary sources offer very little direct support for this theory,

⁸⁴ Rogers, "Examination of Historians' Explanations," 14.

but one Russian chronicle mentions the Mongols taking grain before invading Hungary, in order to provision themselves during the return journey.⁸⁵

In Peter Jackson's recent monograph *The Mongols and the West*, the author argues that the invasion of Europe was intended to punish the king of Hungary for harbouring Cuman refugees. Though they failed to capture or kill Bela, Jackson argues that the Mongols left after chastising him to the best of their ability.⁸⁶ The basis of this argument is Batu's ultimatum to Bela in which he warns, "I have learned, moreover, that you keep the Cumans, my slaves, under your protection; and so I order that you do not keep them with you any longer and do not have me as an enemy on their account."⁸⁷ Jackson's version of the limited goals theory has much literary evidence to overcome. However, it is bolstered by some recent numismatic scholarship. Coins found in Hungary, and once believed to have been minted by the Mongols, actually date largely from the twelfth century.⁸⁸ Those coins can no longer be used as proof that the Mongols intended a permanent occupation.

Rogers states that there is little direct criticism of the limited goals theory because it is never mentioned except by scholars who support it.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, the aforementioned evidence that Batu's goal was exploration is not convincing. The statement in a Russian chronicle about the Mongols carrying grain into Hungary seems unreliable, as it contradicts the frequently noted fact that Mongols, as nomadic pastoralists, disdained grain products. Ibn al-Athir observes "The Tartars do not need a supply of provisions and foodstuffs, for their sheep, cattle, horses and other pack animals accompany them and they consume their

⁸⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁶ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 74.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 60-61.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁹ Rogers, "Examination of Historians' Explanations," 20.

flesh and nothing else.”⁹⁰

Regarding raiding as a prelude to conquest, evidence suggests that the Mongols only raided when they did not have the available manpower to subjugate an area. Gaining a permanent tributary state was a much better use of limited Mongol manpower, and many so-called raids seem to have begun as conquests and devolved into raids due to unexpectedly stiff resistance or insufficient numbers. For instance, the war against the Jin Dynasty in the late 1210s and 1220s was characterized by raiding, but this was because Chinggis Khan had taken the majority of his forces to fight against the Khwarazm Shah. He left his generals in China with a meagre army to carry out the war against the overwhelmingly superior numbers of the Jin.⁹¹ Many invasions of Korea occurred, but this was because the Korean government continually reneged on its submission agreements after the Mongols withdrew from the peninsula.

As for the famous reconnaissance raid of Jebe and Sübetei from 1221 to 1224, Leo de Hartog states that it began with Jebe receiving permission from Chinggis Khan to continue his conquests in the Caucasus after the death of the Khwarazm Shah.⁹² That they were able to defeat, but not subjugate, the entire region at this point is due to the small number of Mongol troops, estimated at no more than 20,000.⁹³ When the campaign was finished, Sübetei requested and received permission from Chinggis Khan for the creation of an auxiliary force to enforce the Mongols' hold over the Kipchak steppe, proving that the

⁹⁰ Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle*, 203.

⁹¹ René Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*, trans. Naomi Walford (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 228-229.

⁹² Leo de Hartog, *Genghis Khan: Conqueror of the World* (London: Tauris Parke, 2004), 107.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 118.

so-called raid was intended as an actual conquest of the region.⁹⁴

The evidence that Batu's primary goal was to punish Bela IV is similarly unconvincing. It is true that Batu did threaten Bela to return the Cumans to him. However, if we examine the ultimatum in its entirety, we see that Batu states that the khan has power over the entire earth to lift up those who submit and destroy those who resist. He then remarks, "I am aware that you are a wealthy and powerful monarch ... Hence it is difficult for you to submit to me of your own volition; and yet it would be better for you, and healthier, were you to submit willingly."⁹⁵ Clearly the submission to which Batu is referring is *il* – peace bought with the Mongols by becoming a vassal of the khan, providing tribute, and assisting in his wars. Batu's message was a demand for surrender. Another problem with Jackson's argument is that the Mongols subjugated Bulgaria, likely during the withdrawal in 1242. Rogers asks if Bulgaria's fate is useful for understanding the withdrawal.⁹⁶ It is useful in discounting the notion that Batu's campaign was strictly intended as a punitive raid into Hungary.

The campaign against Europe was too large an undertaking to have been a minor raid. Admittedly, it receives scant attention from non-European contemporary authors. However, the reticence shown by Muslim authors like Rashid al-Din stemmed from a sense of indifference or contempt with which they viewed the West.⁹⁷ The *Secret History* reveals that from the Mongol perspective, it was considered a serious undertaking. Ögödei released a proclamation through the empire that the eldest sons of any prince or officer

⁹⁴ P. D. Buell, "Sübötei Ba'atur," in *In the Service of the Khan*, ed. Igor de Rachewiltz et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), 19-20.

⁹⁵ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 60.

⁹⁶ Rogers, "Examination of Historians' Explanations," 21.

⁹⁷ Morgan, *Mongols*, 168.

were to be sent on the campaign. This was on the advice of Chaghadai, who suggested, “If the eldest of the sons goes into the field, the army will be larger *than before*. If the troops who set forth are numerous, they shall go *to fight* looking superior and mighty.”⁹⁸ Rashid al-Din claims that Ögödei himself wanted to take part until Möngke convinced him to remain in Mongolia.⁹⁹ Still, the army contained Sübetei, the greatest living general in the Mongol army, the entire Jochid dynasty, and sons of Ögödei, Chaghadai, and Tolui, including two future great khans.¹⁰⁰ Möngke and Güyüg were recalled before the army continued against Hungary, but it still contained enough Chinggisids that it is hard to believe its intentions were anything short of conquest.

Muslim authors were of the impression that the invasion of Europe was intended as a conquest. Juvaini, writing less than eighteen years after the event, plainly states that Hungary *is* subjugated.¹⁰¹ Writing in about 1300, Rashid al-Din notes that the nations of Poland and Hungary had been conquered by the Mongols, but they subsequently rebelled and were not entirely subdued in the author’s own time.¹⁰²

According to Rashid al-Din, a western campaign had been envisioned by the founder of the empire himself. Chinggis Khan had issued an edict that Jochi should “sieve and take possession of all the northern countries.” When Jochi disregarded the order, it fell to Batu.¹⁰³ One could posit that the recall of Möngke and Güyüg in 1240 signalled a shift from a conquest phase to one of raiding. Yet, Rashid al-Din states that after the princes left

⁹⁸ *The Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 201-202.

⁹⁹ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 54.

¹⁰⁰ *The Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 202.

¹⁰¹ Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 271.

¹⁰² Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, 329.

¹⁰³ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 107.

for Mongolia, Batu's family set about subduing the remaining countries.¹⁰⁴ In another section he mentions that "Batu, with his brothers and the emirs and army, continued the conquest of those countries, as his posterity are still doing."¹⁰⁵ The subjugation of Europe was very much viewed as a work in progress in Rashid al-Din's own time.

Rogierius states that after victory at Mohi, the Mongols "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 of the news and to hurry as there was no longer any obstacle before them."¹⁰⁶ It certainly seems like the princes were distributing new appanages. Rogierius also reports that the Mongols had intended to invade Germany in the spring of 1242, but that they abandoned these plans.¹⁰⁷ In 1238, Friar Julian met the ruler of Suzdal who warned him of the Mongols' expressed intentions to conquer not only Hungary, but Rome and the land to the west of it.¹⁰⁸ A chronicler records that Emperor Frederick II received a submission ultimatum from the Mongols around the same time.¹⁰⁹ European accounts harmonize with that of Rashid al-Din in their frequent assertion that Batu's imperial ambitions extended to Hungary and beyond it.

I argue that the ultimatum and the alleged plans for an invasion of Germany suggest strongly that the Mongols had plans in early 1241 to conquer much of Europe, and that these conquests were only part of a larger program of world conquest. How exactly the Mongols imagined world conquest cannot be understood, but judging from the language of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 120.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 108.

¹⁰⁶ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 191.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 219.

¹⁰⁸ "Bericht des frater Julianus über das Leben des Tataren," in *Der Mongolensturm: Berichte von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen 1235-1250*, trans. Hansgerd Göckenjan and James R. Sweeney (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1985), 107.

¹⁰⁹ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 61.

their surviving ultimatums, it would seem to be a situation in which all the world's sizeable populations acknowledged Mongol supremacy and proffered tribute.

It is widely accepted, based largely on Güyüg's letter to Innocent IV in which he called on the pope and all European kings to submit, that the Mongols had a concept of world-rulership by 1246. Yet there is strong evidence that the concept predated the invasion of Europe. Juvaini records that the shaman Teb Tenggeri prophesized that heaven had given the "the entire earth" to Chinggis Khan and his family. Teb Tenggeri also gave Chinggis Khan his title when the empire was established.¹¹⁰ This title, translated as "Oceanic" or "Universal Khan," could be taken as evidence of its holder's ambitions, as Amitai-Preiss observes.¹¹¹ The *Mengda Beilu*, written in 1221, states that Mongol officials already carried tablets proclaiming Chinggis Khan's mandate of heaven, implying sovereignty over the earth.¹¹²

Though some scholars have tried to argue that these accounts merely reflect later justifications for the Mongol Empire, Peter Jackson, perhaps surprisingly, argues 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."¹¹³ Proof is found in the stock phrases of the khans' submission ultimatums which are "palpably archaic," particularly in their way of continuing to describing the constituent peoples of the Mongol Empire as

¹¹⁰ Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 39.

¹¹¹ , Reuven Amitai, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 11.

¹¹² "Meng-ta pei-lu," in *Meng-ta Pei-lu und Hei-ta shih-lüeh: Chinesische Gesandtenberichte über die Frühen Mongolen 1221 und 1237*, trans. Peter Olbricht and Elisabeth Pinks (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980), 65.

¹¹³ 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.

Mongols, Merkits, Naimans, and Muslims.¹¹⁴

Recorded statements demonstrate that the Mongols widely held this ideology of world-rulership. A Hungarian bishop reports that two Mongol prisoners, captured in Russia before the invasion of Europe, told him they had left their homeland to conquer the world.¹¹⁵ There is also a 1231 surrender ultimatum from Ögödei to the Korean government which is recorded in the Koryo-sa. In his own words, the khan states, “If you have love for your people, come and submit, all at once, as before... If you want to do battle, you shall know this: we Tatars have gathered all the nations surrounding us in the four directions. We have also gathered in the nations that did not submit.”¹¹⁶ A wide range of evidence shows that the Mongols were already attempting to conquer the world in 1241, so it is logical to place Batu’s advances into Europe within the framework of that project.

The Military Weakness Theory

The military weakness theory holds that the Mongols were weakened by battle losses incurred from 1236 to 1242, and thus found it expedient to call off the campaign. It differs widely from any other theory in that it suggests the agency of the Mongols’ opponents had an effect on the outcome of the campaign. As Rogers notes, this theory has found its widest acceptance, perhaps to its detriment, amongst Soviet historians like V.T. Pashuto who noted that the heroic, but doomed, resistance of the people of Russia and Eastern Europe “saved from destruction Vienna and Paris, London and Rome, the cities and

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁵ Matthew Paris, *English History*, v.3, 449.

¹¹⁶ Gari Ledyard, “Two Mongol Documents from the Koryō sa,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963): 228.

cultures of many countries.”¹¹⁷ Many Russian scholars have viewed their nation as something of a shield, keeping the rest of Europe safe against wave after wave of nomadic incursions.¹¹⁸

Though assertions of valiant Slavic and Magyar resistance sound like reverberations of some ongoing cultural tension between East and West, the contemporary sources actually provide support for the military weakness theory. Moreover, the evidence does not come solely from European sources. Carpini mentions that the Mongols suffered such great losses in Hungary that those who died in that campaign had their own cemetery.¹¹⁹ He also claims that Batu was barely able to restrain his troops from taking flight at Mohi.¹²⁰ This could be interpreted as mere wishful thinking on Carpini’s part, but it is similar to statements in the *Yuanshi*. In the Chinese account, Batu became discouraged by his losses and expressed the desire to flee until Sübetei reproached him.¹²¹ Juvaini states that the Hungarians were seen as formidable opponents and Batu despaired before the engagement.¹²² Perhaps Mohi was more of a near run thing than historians readily imagine.

Jan Długosz, while conceding that the Mongols won every pitched battle they fought in Poland, notes that the Mongols were horrified by their losses after the first surprise engagement on the Czarna River.¹²³ There was also an earlier disaster at Kozelsk in Russia, when the population of the town suddenly issued from the gates and killed thousands of Mongols, including three sons of generals, while destroying their siege

¹¹⁷ Rogers, “Examination of Historians’ Explanations,” 12.

¹¹⁸ Peter B. Golden, “War and Warfare in the Pre-Cinggisid Western Steppes of Eurasia,” in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, ed. Nicola di Cosmo (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 105.

¹¹⁹ Carpini, “History of the Mongols,” 13-14.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹²¹ Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, 331.

¹²² Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 270.

¹²³ Długosz, *The Annals*, 177.

engines. So grave was the disaster that the former Kozelsk became known to the Mongols as the “bad city.”¹²⁴ The memory of such mishaps is perhaps contained in a statement in the *Secret History* attributed to Chaghadai: “The enemy people beyond consist 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 that they have sharp swords.”¹²⁵

The fierceness of the struggle that was to unfold in Russia was already evident from the first engagement at the Kalka in 1223. Even the Arab historian Ibn al-Athir, almost certainly not partial, notes that “both sides held firm in a way that was unheard of,” before the Russians suffered a crushing defeat.¹²⁶ It is here that we see a major problem with the military weakness theory. No matter how hard-fought the battles were, they seemed to inevitably end the same way; with the complete rout of the Europeans and the slaughter of some or all of their commanders.

For all the references to stiff resistance, the Mongols had conquered an enormous amount of territory in a few years. The reality on the ground by mid-April, 1241 was that unified resistance in Hungary and Poland had collapsed. Russia was in complete ruins with its towns destroyed and its ruling class either dead or living as refugees in Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Mongols remained in Europe for another year, continuing to effectively reduce the towns of Hungary as Bela waited in Croatia for Latin assistance. At least superficially, the western campaign reads like a string of unbroken Mongol successes.

¹²⁴ “Galician-Volynian Chronicle,” 46-47.

¹²⁵ *The Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 202.

¹²⁶ Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle*, 223.

Rogierius states that at the siege of the moated village of Pereg, the Mongols sent in waves of Hungarians, Russians, and Cumans, while they stood behind the attackers. Greg S. Rogers suggests that this could be seen as proof that Mongol losses had been severe.¹²⁷ In reality, it only suggests the Mongols' widely attested method of sending levies of subjugated people against fortress walls to reduce their own casualties.¹²⁸ As such, it is actually evidence against the military weakness theory.

During the invasion, panic spread as far as Spain and the Netherlands.¹²⁹ Few attempts were made to assist the Hungarians while the emperor and pope remained at war with one another. A crusade was called in Germany in early 1241, but by the autumn it had dissolved without achieving anything notable. There are numerous claims of victories over the Mongols by western armies, but in Jackson's view, these amounted to little more than insignificant skirmishes with raiding detachments.¹³⁰ Matthew Paris refers to a "bloody battle" at the mysterious Delpeos River where Conrad, the son of Frederick II, finally repulsed the Mongols.¹³¹ However, if there really was some major victory over the Mongols, surely it would have been mentioned by the papal curia or the emperor in some document. It is highly unlikely that the Mongols ever received a decisive check on the battlefield at the hands of Latin chivalry.

There are also problems regarding the motivations that drive historians to support the military weakness theory. Jackson suggests that a problem with this theory "is that it

¹²⁷ Rogers, "Examination of Historians' Explanations," 13.

¹²⁸ 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), 267.

¹²⁹ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 65.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

¹³¹ Matthew Paris, *English History*, v.1, 357.

can all too easily become the vehicle of modern nationalistic fervour.”¹³² In my view, the fear of a historical argument being used to inspire chauvinism should never be a reason to avoid considering its historical truth. Nonetheless, Jackson’s point does highlight the motivations that surely drove Strakosch-Grassman, at the end of the nineteenth century, to argue that the Mongols withdrew out of fear of a mighty Teutonic emperor.¹³³ It could also explain why Friedrich II of Austria was turned into a Mongol slayer by German-speaking writers¹³⁴ despite his demonstrably negligible role in combating them, or why Soviet historians disproportionately viewed Russian resistance as the decisive factor that broke the Mongol advance.

The military weakness theory, as it exists, is a flawed and unpersuasive explanation for the withdrawal because the Mongols did not suffer any major reverses in the field, nor is there proof that their losses were too great to continue the war. Nonetheless, I contend that this is the closest of the four theories to the truth. A wide range of contemporary sources contain statements that support facets of it, and it at least allows that the events of 1241-1242 were shaped by two opposing groups. Clausewitz notes that war “is not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass (total nonresistance would be no war at all) but always the collision of two living forces... there is an interaction.” The gravest problem facing one group is the other’s means and desire to resist.¹³⁵ Thus, it is in Europe’s resistance that we should seek a new explanation for Batu’s decision to evacuate.

¹³² Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 73.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Johannes Gießauf, “Herzog Friedrich II. von Österreich und die Mongolengefahr 1241/42,” in *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Alpen-Adria-Raumes* (Graz: Instituts für Geschichte, 1997), 1-2.

¹³⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 77.

Chapter 2: Mongol Strategic Difficulties Related to Fortifications as an Alternative Explanation for Batu's Withdrawal from Europe

I contend that the Mongols evacuated Europe in early 1242 primarily because of military problems they were encountering during the campaign. As they advanced westward, they were being forced to engage primarily in siege warfare which negated many of the nomadic horseman's advantages such as speed of advance, mobility, and the ability to fight at a distance. Moreover, the sedentary population drastically increased with each westward advance, and the number of fortified places resultantly increased. Individually, these places may have been insignificant to the overall success of Batu's operations, but when there were overwhelming numbers of unconquered strongholds, it became impossible for strategic reasons to continue to bypass them. To compound matters, with each advance, these castles, monasteries, citadels, and walled towns were becoming more sophisticated in their defenses.

Two obvious and immediate criticisms can be leveled at this explanation. Firstly, the Mongols exceeded any former nomadic empire in their use of elaborate siege engines, and they possessed an artillery corps already in 1214.¹ Secondly, sieges were a part of any campaign the Mongols Empire waged against sedentary societies. I agree. Nevertheless, thirteenth century Europe's large population and the nature of feudal warfare had created a nightmarish system of fortifications for any conqueror to attempt to overcome. Latin castles of the period were predominantly built of stone and such technology was gradually diffusing into Eastern Europe. Eventually the Mongols hit a wall.

¹ Allsen, "Military Technology," 275.

I will begin my argument with a survey of the demographic conditions that existed in Europe and conduct a reanalysis of the western campaign in light of that information. The period between roughly 950 and 1300 saw Europe's population, free from the devastating plagues of earlier and later periods, experience considerable growth by preindustrial standards.² According to a table of population estimates produced by J. C. Russell in *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Poland and Lithuania had somewhere between two and three million inhabitants, and Russia had roughly seven million in the thirteenth century. Hungary's population is given at about two million inhabitants. In Western Europe the picture is quite different from that of Eastern Europe. Russell estimates the population of France and the Low Countries as something approaching 19 million people. Germany would have something around 10 million, with Italy holding another 10 million people.³ Russell puts the pre-plague population of Europe (including Kievan Rus) at roughly 74 million, but it was not evenly distributed. The areas which the Mongols did not invade had a much bigger population than the areas which they overran during their advance.

Economic historian Paolo Malanima notes that population increase was accompanied by the appearance of many new urban centers and the enlargement of older ones.⁴ He goes on to provide a much higher population estimate for Europe at the end of the thirteenth century than Russell's 74 million, suggesting it was approximately 94 million. He notes the results of four other studies, all of which provide figures somewhere between

², J. C. Russell, "Population in Europe 500-1500," in *The Fontana Economic History of Europe: The Middle Ages*, ed. Carlo M. Cipolla (London: Collins/Fontana Books, 1972), 25.

³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴ Paolo Malanima, "Energy and Population in Europe. The Medieval Growth (10th to 14th Centuries)," (paper presented at the Europa come problema conference, Villa Vigoni, April, 2009), 2.

his and those of Russell.⁵ Italy, Germany, France, and the Low Countries had a high population density. Moving eastward toward Poland, Hungary, and Russia, the density dropped off sharply.⁶ Moreover, urbanization was much higher in the densely populated regions, with Italy and Flanders having the highest percentage of town dwellers. By comparison, Eastern Europe was considerably less urbanized. For instance, when the Catholic Church attempted to establish a bishopric in Bosnia in the thirteenth century, a single town in which to erect a cathedral could not be found.⁷

According to contemporary accounts, the Mongol force that moved into Europe was vast. Shortly after the invasion, Matthew Paris asked in astonishment, “Where have such a people, who are so numerous, till now lain concealed?”⁸ However, the number of Mongols was likely overestimated due to their tactics which were used to create such an impression, and the fact that they brought along their families. Göckenjan estimates that roughly 130,000 warriors were put at Batu’s disposal for the western campaign.⁹ Allowing that significant numbers of Russians, Cumans, and others were levied by the Mongols in the course of the campaign, this force would still be greatly outnumbered by the surrounding peoples. The demographic disparity became significantly worse as the Mongols approached the borders of the Holy Roman Empire.

The nomadic way of life did not have the demographic sustainability of agriculture, and as a rule, steppe nomadic populations were not large compared to those of sedentary

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ Sedlar, *East Central Europe*, 109-113.

⁸ Matthew Paris, *English History*, v.1, 348.

⁹ Göckenjan, “Der Westfeldzug,” 39.

societies.¹⁰ Thus, the Mongols were not a large group of people. Carpini, who actually observed conditions in Mongolia, became aware of this surprising fact. In his view, Europe should never consider submission as the Mongols were “fewer in number” than Europeans. Moreover, he had heard that the auxiliaries on which their war effort depended would rise up if they had a good opportunity.¹¹

It is doubtful that Chinggis Khan had much information about the world west of the Urals. He had commanded Jochi to subjugate the “northern tribes” without reinforcements, like it was a mere mopping up operation. His view might be explained by the fact that the northerly-dwelling peoples in Asia were mostly nomadic pastoralists. However, taking into account the number of troops sent on the western campaign, Chaghadai’s statement in the *Secret History* about there being many peoples, and Sübetei’s account of receiving trouble at their hands during his famous expedition, we can conclude that this perspective had changed by the 1230s. Yet, there was little the Mongols could do to offset the demographic imbalance. There had been proposals by members of the Mongol supreme council to send the numerous Jin infantry troops against the West, while bringing subjugated Turkic horsemen east to fight against the Song. Yelü Chucai was opposed to this idea. He suggested that the differences in water, food, and climate would cause epidemics in the Chinese forces, and the logistical problems of moving such an army across Eurasia would prove devastating.¹² His viewpoint was upheld.

¹⁰ David Curtis Wright, “The Northern Frontier,” 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), 54.

¹¹ Carpini, “History of the Mongols,” 44-45.

¹² Jean Pierre Abel-Rémusat, *Nouveaux Mélanges Asiatiques*, v.2 (Paris: Schubart et Heideloff, 1829), 76.

In the *Secret History*, Ögödei references a popular aphorism of Chinggis Khan, which could be paraphrased as, “A multitude causes fear. Depth causes death.”¹³ The statement is part of a historically inaccurate conversation in which the great khan upbraids Güyüg for his self-centered conduct on the western campaign. We know the khan died before Güyüg’s arrival at Karakorum. Nonetheless, if the aphorism is authentic, it suggests that Chinggis Khan was fully aware of the psychological impact that numbers had in warfare. Moreover, what we find is that the existing sources reveal that the Mongols were finding the demographic trends worrisome.

The Dominican Riccardus reports that another friar, Julianus, was present in the Volga Bulgar and Greater Hungary region, as Batu’s forces were amassing nearby in early 1236. Julianus encountered some Mongols and their polyglot envoy who personally stated that they were intending to invade Germany. This messenger also assured the resisting people that the Mongol land contained a huge population and that reinforcements were arriving from Persia.¹⁴ He was attempting to bring about surrender by suggesting that vast armies were coming from the East. Yet, Bar Hebraeus indicates that the *yasa* of Chinggis Khan dictated that Mongol surrender ultimatums never resort to boasts about the vastness of their armies. Rather they were to simply state that if war breaks out, “God knows what will happen to you.”¹⁵

¹³ *The Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 208.

¹⁴ “Bericht des frater Riccardus: Über die Entdeckung Groß-Ungarns zur Zeit Papst Gregors IX,” in *Der Mongolensturm: Berichte von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen 1235-1250*, trans. Hansgerd Göckenjan and James R. Sweeney (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1985), 79-80.

¹⁵ Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, “X. The Laws of Chingiz Khan,” <http://rbedrosian.com/BH/BH.html>

The envoy was breaking a cardinal rule because the Mongols were aware of the inauspicious odds they were facing if they were unable to gain auxiliary troops from the local populations. Julianus notes that the Volga Bulgars were strong and he visited one city that could supply 50,000 warriors. In their first battle with the Mongols, many years previous, the Volga Bulgars and Bashkir (Greater Hungary) had emerged victorious.¹⁶ Ibn al-Athir supports this statement by recounting that the Volga Bulgars ambushed the returning horsemen of Jebe and Sübetei in 1224, killing the majority of them.¹⁷ It might be interesting to note that Jebe disappeared from the historical record at that time, never returning to Mongolia.

The Mongols launched their invasion shortly afterwards, wiping out the Bashkirs and the Volga Bulgars. In the territory west of the Volga, the Mongols encountered a variety of problems. Juvaini mentions the vastness of the territory, the dense forests, and that the inhabitants of Magas, the Alan capital, were as numerous as ants or locusts. The Mongols supposedly collected 270,000 Alan and Russian ears after the fall of the city.¹⁸ They are well-known to have also counted ears after Liegnitz. Outside of the western campaign, the Mongols are recorded to have cut off the ears of fallen enemies after a notable victory against an enormous Jin army in the early 1230s.¹⁹ Far from being a commonly attested Mongol practice, I could find only these references to ear tallying – on campaigns against two regions with big populations. It perhaps reveals a preoccupation with the numbers of the enemy.

¹⁶ “Bericht des frater Riccardus,” in *Mongolensturm*, 78-79.

¹⁷ Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle*, 224.

¹⁸ Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 269.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

It is exactly after the brutal assault on Magas that we see the first evidence of cracks in the Mongol leadership forming, and these divisions were related to when the western campaign could be acceptably terminated. The *Yuanshi* states that Magas fell in late 1239. In early 1240, it records that “in the course of the subjugation of the lands of the west, Prince Güyüg had not yet conquered all the nations. [Despite this] he sent back messengers to report that victory had been attained.” We read that in the same year, Güyüg and his troops were recalled from the campaign on the orders of Ögödei.²⁰ Rashid al-Din records that Möngke and Güyüg were removed from the campaign by Ögödei’s decree shortly before the assault on Kiev, which happened in December, 1240.²¹ Indeed, there is no mention in any source of Möngke and Güyüg taking part in any operation after the capture of Magas.

Kirakos of Gandzak asserts that when Ögödei planned the western campaign in 1235, he decreed that the armies should not return until they had placed every kingdom under his dominion.²² In reality, the campaign did not progress smoothly. Very few nations were submitting. They would fight, flee westward as refugees, or lock themselves in cities which had to be reduced. Two Cuman emirs did submit, only to revolt immediately after the Mongols left the area. Sübetei was forced to move against them a second time.²³ Another Cuman leader, Bachman, engaged in an effective guerilla campaign until Möngke finally captured him.

²⁰ Abramowski, “Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des Yüan-shih,” 134.

²¹ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 61; 69.

²² Kirakos of Gandzak, *History of the Armenians*, trans. Robert Bedrosian, “20. How the T’at’ars arose to pollute the entire world,” <http://rbedrosian.com/kgtoc.html>

²³ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 57.

The evidence suggests that Güyüg had lost his taste for the campaign and simply declared it successfully concluded, which put him at odds with hardliners like Batu and Sübetei who were aware that there were still many nations which had not submitted. This explains why Güyüg was recalled and why the *Secret History* has Ögödei raging about how his son demoralized the entire army.²⁴ It also explains why Batu informed Ögödei that they were holding a “parting feast” when the enmity between the princes broke out in the open, and Güyüg threatened Batu.²⁵ It is certain that Batu’s campaign in Europe was still underway when the great khan died in Karakorum, so this parting feast must in fact have been *Güyüg’s parting* feast. The reason for Güyüg’s uncontrollable hostility toward Batu was not something as banal as drinking etiquette. It was because he was going back to Mongolia in disgrace.

It might be thought that the loss of Güyüg and his troops proved devastating to the continuation of the campaign, as he had been designated commander of the impressively named Army of the Center. However, this was not the case. D’Ohsson claims the Army of the Center comprised only 1000 soldiers, though to be fair, it had once formed Chinggis Khan’s elite guard.²⁶ Yet it seems a sense of doubt persisted in the Mongol camp as the commanders considered their next advance. This is revealed in a very telling statement made by Batu. He lamented that open discord had to erupt at the feast, “just at the time when, having been sent to ride against a rebellious people of a different race, we were asking ourselves whether we had been successful...”²⁷ Cleaves interprets the statement to

²⁴ *The Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 208.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁶ Constantine D’ohsson, *Histoire des Mongols depuis Tchinguiz-Khan jusqu’à Timour Bey ou Tamerlane*, v.2 (Amsterdam: Van Cleef, 1834), 3.

²⁷ *The Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 206-207.

mean that Batu was asking, “Will the campaign end well?”²⁸ It appears even the remaining commanders were uncertain as to how far they could keep extending their advance.

Batu took Kiev in late 1240, at which point the Mongol army organized into a massive hunting ring and swept rapidly across the principality of Galicia-Volynia. They made short work of numerous settlements, but bypassed Danilov and Kremenets after their assaults failed.²⁹ Both settlements were situated atop imposing hills. As they entered Poland and Hungary, proceeding to the Danube and the borders of the Holy Roman Empire, the Mongols initially experienced the type of highly mobile warfare they preferred. Since Chinggis Khan’s time the Mongols had a “penchant” for pitched battles, though this was not a traditionally nomadic behaviour.³⁰ In Europe they were getting what they wanted. The enemy was coming out to fight them in repeated engagements, where superior organization and tactics consistently prevailed.

They cast their hunting ring over a vast front which spread terror and caused a perception of limitless numbers. The Landgrave of Saxony and Thuringia reported that the Mongol army was spread out a distance of 20 days march in length, and 15 days breadth as their advance reached the borders of Bohemia in the spring of 1241.³¹ Yet there were inherent risks in this strategy. Only a much reduced Mongol force could be brought to bear at Mohi, and resultantly, the battle came close to disaster for Batu. Juvaini insists that the Mongols were outnumbered by Bela’s forces, and Thomas of Split echoes this

²⁸ *Secret History of the Mongols*, trans. Francis Woodman Cleaves (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 216.

²⁹ “Galician-Volynian Chronicle,” 49.

³⁰ Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 203.

³¹ Matthew Paris, *English History*, v.3, 451.

assessment.³² According to Carpini, Batu was supposed to have told his troops in the course of the battle that perhaps they would all die in Hungary.³³ In the *Yuanshi*'s version, Sübetei stopped Batu's own attempt to flee by saying that he personally would not turn back until they had at least reached the Danube and overthrown the Magyars.³⁴ The fact that an East Asian source has Batu expressing the desire to evacuate Europe in early 1241 should immediately raise suspicions toward ideas that local resistance had nothing to do with his later decision.

Rather than becoming a disaster, Mohi ended in resounding victory. Liegnitz had been won only two days earlier. The secondary literature devotes much detail to the battles, but little attention is given to the remaining year of the campaign. In a sense this is justified, as the remaining year was characterized by less interesting sieges and standoffs. Yet, the drastic shift in the type of warfare which characterized the campaign was the result of an emerging awareness in Europe that offensive strategies had failed. Sieges had long been the defining activity of warfare between Europe's various centers of power, as well as amongst petty local lords.³⁵ A battle such as Bovines in 1214 where France defeated the Holy Roman Empire and England, causing the loss of most English holdings in France, was an exception to the rule. Too much hinged on the outcome of a single day's events for battles to be preferred to sieges and the *chevauchée* form of protracted raid.³⁶ Thus, Europeans were not particularly adept in battle vis-à-vis the Mongols, and experience had proven that by early 1241.

³² Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 283.

³³ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 30.

³⁴ Abel-Rémusat, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 96.

³⁵ Geoffrey Hindley, *Medieval Sieges & Siegecraft* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

The available documentary evidence reveals that defensive policies began to be adopted along a very wide front due to the re-evaluation of Mongol military capabilities which accompanied the death of Henry II of Silesia and the flight of Bela IV. Vaclav of Bohemia had attempted to link up with Henry's forces at Liegnitz but the battle had taken place before his arrival. He immediately pulled his forces back to a defensive position in the Sudetes. Baidar and Orda's detachment attempted to overrun Bohemia at the fortress of Kłodzko, but the narrow passes suited the defence, and the assault failed.³⁷ The Mongols pulled back eastward toward the softer target of Moravia, as Vaclav gave orders to strengthen and provision the castles and cities of his kingdom. He even armed the monks and turned the monasteries into fortified refuges for the civilian population.³⁸ While the Mongols marauded freely over the open spaces of Moravia for more than a month, Vaclav refused to move his forces from this defensive posture.³⁹

Duke Friedrich of Austria took similar steps to fortify his border against the expected onslaught. He extorted several border territories from Bela who had entered Austria briefly as a refugee. Taking possession of the castles in the region, Friedrich immediately had them strengthened at his own expense.⁴⁰ Thomas of Split mentions that throughout Europe there was a frenzy of fortifying castles and cities as people widely believed that the Mongols intended to advance on Rome.⁴¹ The emperor was in central Italy attempting to gather intelligence on the poorly understood enemy that had approached his borders. By early summer, he held a firm conviction that a defensive posture was preferable for the present. A message found in the *Regesta Imperii*, dated to June 20th,

³⁷ De Hartog, *Genghis Khan*, 173.

³⁸ Harold T. Cheshire, "The Great Tartar Invasion of Europe," *The Slavonic Review* 5 (1926): 97.

³⁹ Długosz, *The Annals*, 181.

⁴⁰ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 195.

⁴¹ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 287.

1241 and intended for all his vassals in Swabia, includes a number of new military instructions. His forces were to avoid engaging the Mongols in field battles, provision every stronghold, and arm the general populace.⁴²

Even the Hungarians took up strictly defensive positions. In his letter to the pope from 1250, Bela mentions that the Hungarians desperately held back the Mongols along the banks of the Danube for 10 months despite the kingdom suffering from a dearth of adequate fortifications and defenders.⁴³ On the other side of the Danube, Rogerius vividly describes the various attempts made by the populace to gather at central locations for defense. People gathered from 70 villages at Pereg and fortified the town with a moat. The Mongols took it after eight days, but it was costly in terms of auxiliary troops. Many places of this kind were systematically reduced over the course of the summer of 1241.⁴⁴

It is often taken as proof of an inability to organize any coordinated resistance that Western European states did not come to the aid of Hungary.⁴⁵ We must be cautious about drawing this conclusion. For one thing, Bela IV was not popular with his neighbours. Before the invasion, the Hungarian king had not supported Frederick in his struggle against the papacy, and Frederick had been in negotiations with disgruntled Hungarian nobles to replace Bela as sovereign. This conspiracy was discovered which led to lasting animosity.⁴⁶ Yet the emperor actually saw it as his imperial obligation to lead the resistance to the Mongols, and he set about trying to unify other monarchs under his banner

⁴² *Regesta Imperii*, (RI V) n. 3210, <http://regesten.regesta-imperii.de/>

⁴³ "Brief König Belas IV. an Papst Innozenz IV.," in *Mongolensturm*, 309.

⁴⁴ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 211-215.

⁴⁵ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 65.

⁴⁶ Denis Sinor, *History of Hungary* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), 70.

in the summer of 1241.⁴⁷ He also cautiously weighed reports about the Mongols to better understand how to combat them. He came to the conclusion that discipline and unquestioning obedience was the secret to their deadly effectiveness.⁴⁸ Frederick II was hardly a disinterested observer in what was happening in Hungary. A Crusade was called across Germany and his son Conrad took the cross along with other magnates. Allowing for hyperbole, the response of ordinary Germans was enormous and many took the cross.⁴⁹ Yet, Conrad was not prepared to come to the rescue of Hungary and specifically took his vow for the defense of the empire on “this side of the Alps.” The duke of Brunswick vowed to defend Germany, Poland, and Bohemia from Mongol incursions, but he made no mention of Hungary.⁵⁰ The Crusade’s objective was in keeping with a defensive strategy.

Leaving the Hungarians to their fate was not a humanitarian gesture, but it was a prudent one. I have demonstrated that Europeans in areas threatened by the Mongol invasion were now employing defensive strategies. As such, it was a sensible idea for those in the Latin West to remain within their own borders as there was a great disparity in the quality of fortifications between Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Eastern Hungary, where the Mongols had concentrated, lagged behind the Latin states in the development of fortifications. To march into Hungary and fight in the open with opponents who already had achieved great successes in pitched battle would be a terrible risk and would negate what possible advantages those in the Latin West had against the Mongols.

Erik Fügedi, in his detailed study on Hungarian castles, notes that there were 29 counties which had fallen under Mongol occupation after the Battle of Mohi. Each of these

⁴⁷ Bezzola, *Die Mongolen*, 78.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁴⁹ Peter Jackson, “The Crusade against the Mongols (1241),” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1991): 6-8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

counties had a so-called castle at its center. Only six of these comital castles survived the invasion, and all but one of the holdouts was built on an elevated site. The reason that they fared so poorly is that the comital castles were “earth- or mudpies that [before 1241] used to be called castles.”⁵¹ Mongol siege methods consisted of a paralysing bombardment, conducted day and night, as they filled up moats with twigs and sacks of earth. Then the Mongols brought their numbers to bear in overrunning the walls. These tactics worked quite well against cities and castles situated on a flat plain and defended by ramparts of earth and wood.⁵² An example of this was seen at Pest. The people there were advised to flee across the Danube, but they ignored the advice, opting to “dig a ditch, throw up a rampart, weave wicker barricades and make all sorts of useless preparations.”⁵³ The town fell after a few days of steady bombardment.

The Mongols achieved very little against fortifications which were built of stone along Western European guidelines. There were only ten “new-style” stone castles in Hungary at the time of the invasion, and five of these were found along the border with Austria. However, all five of those located deep in Mongol occupied territory survived the occupation.⁵⁴ These modern castles were situated atop hills, which made Mongol tactics considerably less effective.

Western Europe had a great number of what Fügedi terms “new style” castles. The first half of the thirteenth century saw the construction of the most spectacular examples of Latin medieval fortifications ever built.⁵⁵ The castles of the period showed many new and

⁵¹ Erik Fügedi, *Castle and Society in Medieval Hungary (1000-1437)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 47.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵³ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 275.

⁵⁴ Fügedi, *Castle and Society*, 46-48; 53.

⁵⁵ Peter Purton, *A History of the Late Medieval Siege, 1200-1500* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 27.

unprecedented developments in their defensive features. Lowland sites were almost wholly abandoned in favour of elevated sites. Higher inner curtain walls were built inside a lower outer wall, which allowed more firepower to be brought to bear on attackers, while also reducing the impact of mining efforts. This represented a major shift from the older three-bailey castles. Regular flanking towers with improved arrow loops also appeared as a counter measure against escalades, and bent entrances foiled attacks on the gates. These stone castles were also much larger than Latin castles of any previous period, equipped with enormous cisterns and platforms on the walls for stone throwers.⁵⁶ Frederick II had been engaged in significant castle building in Italy since the 1220s in order to secure his tenuous rule there. The long war in which he was engaged with rebellious Italians and the papacy was characterized by siege warfare, but the remarkable lack of progress made by both sides in the long conflict demonstrates how difficult it was to take even one castle or city in Italy.⁵⁷

In pitched battles, Western European armies were far from invincible, especially against non-European light cavalry. The presence of the elite military orders did not prevent defeat at Mohi or Liegnitz. In the same decade, European knights were mauled at La Forbie in the Holy Land by refugee horsemen from the Khwarazm Shah. The Bulgarians and Cumans, employing the traditionally nomadic feigned retreat, suddenly turned and routed a crusading army at Adrianople in 1205.⁵⁸ The newly appointed emperor of Constantinople was taken prisoner there only a year after the establishment of the Latin Empire. Even groups that lived in fear of the Mongols could inflict crushing defeats on

⁵⁶ Ibid., 28-29.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁸ Villehardouin, "The Conquest of Constantinople," in *Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. M. R. B. Shaw (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 121.

European armies in open battle.

The reputation of European arms was considerably better in relation to siege warfare, and those on the frontiers of the Latin world seem to have widely acknowledged this. In reference to the Fifth Crusade, Ibn al-Athir relates that the Franks, upon taking the city of Damietta, “embarked on repairing and fortifying Damietta and went so far in this that it was left unassailable.”⁵⁹ When the city was handed over to Muslim forces, they stood in awe of the intricate fortifications. In 1246, the Seljuk Turks, who had recently submitted to the Mongols, attacked Tarsus in Lesser Armenia. Smbat Sparapet, the constable of the Armenian kingdom, was personally present at the siege. He relates that there were heavy casualties on both sides but that the enemy “lost a hundred times more since we had good Frankish warriors with us inside.”⁶⁰ The city held out until such time as the Seljuk attackers abandoned the siege. Similarly, Thomas of Split states that Székesfehérvár successfully resisted vigorous Mongol assaults in 1242 owing largely to a garrison of Latins who had built siege engines for its defense.⁶¹

The Mongols withdrew from Europe before its best castles could be tested in earnest, but we receive clues as to the problems they might have encountered by reflecting on their limited incursions into the Levant. Advanced fortifications had been erected in great numbers to secure the Crusaders’ conquests. Krak de Chevaliers, considered by many to be the greatest surviving military structure of the Middle Ages, was largely completed a century before the Mongols arrived in the area. In its 130 years as a Crusader bastion, it

⁵⁹ Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle*, 178.

⁶⁰ Smbat Sparapet, *Chronicle*, trans. Robert Bedrosian [107] <http://rbedrosian.com/css1.htm>

⁶¹ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 291

successful withstood 12 sieges before surrendering to the Mamluks in 1271.⁶² The very fact that Crusaders were able to preserve their presence in hostile territory for two centuries is testament to the strength of their fortifications.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, when a Mongol detachment entered Syria in 1244, its commander demanded the submission of Antioch. When the ruler of Antioch rejected the ultimatum, the Mongols simply left the area without enforcing their demands. In 1260, a significant force was again in the region under the command of Ked Bukha, who was charged with the task of holding Syria. A detachment of Franks from Sidon ended up killing his nephew during a raid. Het'um relates that Ked Bukha, eager for revenge, attacked Sidon and destroyed the city but few of its inhabitants were killed as they had withdrawn to an island.⁶³ What he fails to mention is that the island, joined by a causeway to the mainland, is the site of the city's thirteenth century stone castle, the ruins of which are still visible today. Ked Bukha was unable or unwilling to reduce it. The Mamluks destroyed his forces at Ayn Jalut and reoccupied Syria the same year so that the incident at Sidon was quickly overlooked. However, it is worth noting that the Mongols, before they saw the Franks as potential allies against Egypt, never attempted to reduce Sidon's castle or any other Crusader stronghold.

The Mongols admittedly showed unprecedented adaptation and improvement in siege warfare compared to other nomadic groups. Already in 1221, a Song envoy reports the usage of Chinese siege technology such as ramps, catapults, and siege towers. However, Mongol siege warfare relied heavily on the forced labour of prisoners from the surrounding

⁶² Hindley, *Medieval Sieges*, 19.

⁶³ Het'um, *History of the Tartars (The Flowers of the Histories of the East)*, trans. Robert Bedrosian "c. 30 Quibilai-Khan, Fifth Ruler of the Tartars" <http://rbedrosian.com/hetumtoc>

area. They were merciless driven to collect materials such as stones for the machines and earth for filling moats. They were even forced to man the catapults.⁶⁴ As the Mongols pushed into the Middle East, they continued to use these methods. Chinese expertise remained essential, but the Mongol Empire gradually adopted Islamic trebuchets. These were deemed to be particularly refined, according to another Chinese envoy, who mentions that such machines had reached East Asia in 1236.⁶⁵

At its inception in 1214, when Ambughai was appointed Imperial Agent of Catapult Operators of all Circuits, the Mongol army's corps of siege specialists was composed of Chinese auxiliaries.⁶⁶ This dependency on foreign expertise continued as the Mongols chose to forcibly recruit artisans and engineers rather than develop technical skills amongst their own people. The coercion of sedentary people was essential to Mongol success, but sometimes they chose to escape from this coercion. In the case of Russia, large numbers of armour, saddle, and weaponry artisans fled westward in the aftermath of the conquest to avoid being forced into Mongol service.⁶⁷ The Mongol dependency on the local populace to take part in sieges as labourers and human shields could also backfire if that populace was already aware of the invaders' ruthlessness. Then they would simply hide or take refuge in behind walls. When Kadan's army arrived in Croatia in 1242, the Croats simply disappeared into the surrounding forests and mountains.⁶⁸

Carpini claims that an Alan city which had been holding out for 12 years had

⁶⁴ "Meng-ta pei-lu," 53.

⁶⁵ Allsen, "Military Technology," 266-267.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁶⁸ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 295.

caused the deaths of countless Mongols and their nobles.⁶⁹ This is in keeping with what we see elsewhere. A surprisingly high number of Chinggisid princes and *noyans* died in sieges, due to the greater personal risks they took in such situations. In pitched battle, the Mongol princes and generals took position far behind the ranks rather than taking part in the fighting.⁷⁰ Resultantly, there are few documented cases of Mongol generals dying in battles, Ked Bukha being a rare exception. Curiously, this same level of caution was not applied in siege warfare and leaders seemed to share the risks with their men. A model of this behaviour is seen in the Chinggisid prince Tolui, who showed an almost suicidal lack of restraint. At the siege of Dexing early in the war against the Jin, it was Tolui who first mounted the enemy ramparts in a direct assault.⁷¹ Juvaini provides a vivid picture of Tolui's conduct at the 1221 siege of Merv, after a group of enemy soldiers issued from the gates:

Tolui dismounted in person – *He uttered a roar like a furious elephant, raised his shield above his head and showed his hand* – and advanced upon them. And the Mongols attacked in his company driving them back into the town. Others issued forth from another gate but the Mongols stationed there repelled their attack. And so the townspeople were nowhere able to achieve any result...⁷²

Tolui had a high military reputation because of such personal acts of valour.

Moreover, the impact it had on morale is palpable. The governor of Merv surrendered the city the following day. This suggests that perhaps there were practical reasons for high commanders to accept enormous risk when Mongol troops were taking part in a type of warfare that did not come naturally to them. Regardless of the reason for it, Mongol generals displayed this same pattern of personal leadership during the western campaign.

⁶⁹ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 49.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷¹ Purton, *Late Medieval*, 6.

⁷² Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 161.

Rashid al-Din states that Möngke's personal deeds of valour at the siege of Vladimir were vital to overcoming resistance,⁷³ and the *Yuanshi* recounts that Güyüg and Möngke personally led an attack on Magas with only about 30 troops.⁷⁴

There were costs for this type of leadership. Kölgen, a son of Chinggis Khan and one of the senior commanders of the entire expedition, was mortally wounded attacking the insignificant Russian town of Kolomna in early 1238.⁷⁵ Another commander was killed while besieging Sandomir and a Chingissid prince was reportedly killed in Hungary.⁷⁶ A highly esteemed leader was captured in a sortie when he approached the walls of Olomouc too closely, and the Mongols were unable to secure his release.⁷⁷ Möngke, the eldest son of Tolui, took quite a few documented risks before he was called off the campaign in 1240. His relations with Batu and Ögödei remained excellent, so it is tempting to speculate as to why Ögödei decided to recall the prince whose name implied long life, and of whom astrologers had predicted a great destiny.⁷⁸ The Mongols had unusual reverence for their leaders, in particular those who descended from Chinggis Khan, and their deaths must have had a terrible effect on morale.

There were a number of dangers that the Mongols encountered during sieges which were less acute when they engaged in mobile warfare. Their standards of hygiene were far from stringent, and there was a greater possibility of epidemic disease breaking out in the Mongol camp during prolonged sieges. Cholera devastated Möngke's army during his final

⁷³ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 59.

⁷⁴ Abramowski, "Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des Yüan-shih," 151.

⁷⁵ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 59.

⁷⁶ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 73.

⁷⁷ Długosz, *The Annals*, 181.

⁷⁸ Waltraut Abramowski, "Die chinesischen Annalen des Möngke: Übersetzung des 3. Kapitels des Yüan-shih," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 13 (1979): 16.

campaign against the Song, but perhaps the most famous example of this scenario occurred during the siege of Caffa, when the Black Death began to decimate the Mongols, who resorted to launching the bodies of plague victims into the city.⁷⁹ Rubruck unwittingly suggests a reason for the Mongols' susceptibility to epidemics when he notes that they had a tendency to follow the call of nature in the company of their fellows, "without going so far as one can toss a bean."⁸⁰ Like all people of the time, they did not understand the mechanism behind infectious disease, but they must surely have noticed that it was more likely to occur when a Mongol camp remained in a set location for a prolonged period. Rubruck mentions that the Mongols had a "superstition" of never passing near a campsite as long as there were signs of previous users' fires, and they avoided, on a return journey, using the same campsites they had occupied on their departure.⁸¹

Armour was another liability for the Mongols. Ordinary troops typically wore leather armour.⁸² This tendency was disadvantageous when having to assault a fortified place and engage the enemy on the ramparts and in narrow streets. Rubruck came to the conclusion that they had almost no armour at all, besides leather tunics, or the occasional hauberk of Alan or Persian manufacture.⁸³ Others held a higher view of their leather armour, but it seems the Mongols themselves recognized it as a deficiency while engaging against heavily armoured opponents. In a letter from July, 1241, Frederick II laments that the Mongols had begun to use looted European armour.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Mark Wheelis, "Biological Warfare at the 1346 Siege of Caffa," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 8 (2002): 973.

⁸⁰ Rubruck, "The Journey," 113.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁸² Golden, "Western Steppes," 150.

⁸³ Rubruck, "The Journey," 210.

⁸⁴ Matthew Paris, *English History*, v.1, 344.

Even with heavy armour, they would have considered taking cities and forts an odious activity since it generally required them to dismount. A wide range of sources, such as the Byzantine *Strategikon* and Chinese records from the Han dynasty, take note of the fact that nomadic tribes were not adept at fighting on foot. Referring to the Xiongnu, a Chinese record states, “Once you get them off their horses and fighting on the ground, battling it out with swords and halberds, pressing them back and forth, then the Huns can’t keep their footwork together.”⁸⁵ Carpini observes that they preferred to avoid hand to hand fighting and would only close with opponents who had previously been wounded with arrows.⁸⁶ The Hungarian bishop who interrogated some Mongols states that in battle they could “do nothing” on foot because of their short legs.⁸⁷ In reducing the cities of Russia, Crimea, and Europe, the Mongols showed that they could *do something* while dismounted, but it came with high casualties. When the Mongols stormed the city of Hamadhan, the streets were so crowded that the citizens and Mongols were only able to make use of daggers. The Mongols overpowered the defenders but casualties on both sides were heavy.⁸⁸

To make matters worse, Europeans, like the Chinese, possessed the crossbow. Carpini observes that the Mongols were very afraid of that weapon in particular. The crossbow was so deadly that a twelfth century pope famously tried to ban its use against Christians, and in fact it was the most effective weapon sedentary civilizations had for combating nomadic opponents.⁸⁹ It had a slower rate of fire than a compound bow, but

⁸⁵ David Curtis Wright, “Nomadic Power, Sedentary Security, and the Crossbow,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 58 (2005): 19.

⁸⁶ Carpini, “The History of the Mongols,” 37.

⁸⁷ Matthew Paris, *English History*, v.3, 450.

⁸⁸ Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle*, 219.

⁸⁹ Wright, “Nomadic Power,” 21.

when used from a secure defensive position, or in an ambush, its greater range could prove decisive against nomadic cavalry.⁹⁰ An eleventh century Song scholar suggested that the crossbow, in its efficacy, was to the Chinese what the horse was to the Khitan nomad,⁹¹ and Europeans seemed to be reaching similar conclusions during the Mongol invasion. In January, 1242, Bela specifically requested the help of the Venetians because of their crossbowmen (*balistarii*) which he believed would be particularly useful in defending the Danube. The duke of Austria also made urgent requests for crossbowmen, and the emperor likewise ordered Germany to assemble large numbers of them.⁹² When the Mongols did cross the frozen Danube and besiege Esztergom, their assaults on the citadel failed owing to the large number of crossbowmen who defended it.⁹³

In the preceding section, I have produced a list of reasons why the Mongols should not have liked siege warfare, but did they ever express their aversion to it? I was unable to find direct statements in which Mongols declared their hatred for siege warfare, but there are many clues that they did. Benedict the Pole suggests that in 1246 Güyüg demanded Europe surrender its fortifications as a condition for peace.⁹⁴ Christopher Atwood argues convincingly that, based on its contents, the *Secret History* must have been composed a decade after the invasion of Europe.⁹⁵ If so, then a statement in it hints that a bad memory of the fortifications of Europe lingered in the Mongol collective memory. When he received a report about Güyüg's conduct on the western campaign, Ögödei apparently wished to punish him by placing him in the vanguard to assault "the town walls *which are*

⁹⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁹¹ Ibid., 27.

⁹² Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 71.

⁹³ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 219.

⁹⁴ Benedict, "Narrative," 83.

⁹⁵ Christopher P. Atwood, "The Date of the 'Secret History of the Mongols' Reconsidered," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 37 (2007): 43.

*as high as mountains.*⁹⁶

Bayan made a statement during the campaign against the Song in 1274 which best demonstrates that the Mongols actually did have an aversion to siege warfare. When his Chinese generals were urging him to attack a fortified city which he bypassed, Bayan responded with a reference to the theorist Sunzi: “Military writers regard attacks on walled cities as last-resort tactics.”⁹⁷ Since Bayan is famous as the conqueror of the Song, one might imagine that his statement simply reflects an early education in Chinese classics. In reality, Bayan came from Western Asia and his father had been killed in the campaign against the heavily fortified Assassins of northwest Persia.⁹⁸ He referenced military classics, but his ready agreement with their tenets might have had its origins in his own experiences as a Mongol officer.

Mongol methods of siege warfare had weaknesses and much of Europe had very strong fortifications for the period. However, the sophistication of fortifications varied between regions, and I argue that this largely explains why the Mongols had success in certain parts of Europe, why they failed in others, and why they decided to avoid some areas altogether.

Poland which suffered a major assault during the invasion was largely lacking in stone fortifications, its border fortresses being made of wickerwork and earth.⁹⁹ Jan Długosz states that the eastern town of Lublin and the castle of Sandomir fell to Mongol

⁹⁶ *The Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 207.

⁹⁷ 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.

⁹⁸ C. C. Hsiao, “Bayan,” in *In the Service of the Khan*, ed. Igor de Rachewiltz et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), 585.

⁹⁹ Sedlar, *East Central Europe*, 207.

sieges. Subsequently, a large number of refugees fled for Germany and Hungary, while most of the peasantry hid in the forests and marshes. The citizens of Krakow fled from the city while Duke Boleslaw hastily abandoned its castle, which was then burned down by the Mongols.¹⁰⁰ Even Krakow's castle was made of wood, so it is no surprise that the people of Lesser Poland were no longer attempting to defend their fortresses. Yet in Silesia, close to the borders of the Holy Roman Empire, the castles became more effective. The towns of Wroclow and Liegnitz were both previously torched by their inhabitants, who then fled or took shelter in their respective castles. The subsequent siege of Wroclow failed, which was mysterious enough to the Poles that hagiographic tales attributed it to a miracle.¹⁰¹ After their victory at Liegnitz, the Mongols rode around the nearby castle for days, demanding its surrender. When the inhabitants refused, the Mongols simply continued to Moravia.

The Mongols continued to struggle with taking fortresses in Moravia. Its major cities such as Olomouc and Brno withstood sieges. Some towns were destroyed but a contemporary report states that the fortified places escaped devastation.¹⁰² There are some clues as to why Czech and Silesian fortifications performed well in comparison to those of Lesser Poland and Hungary. These territories had experienced a major influx of German settlers in the early thirteenth century. In Silesia, these immigrants often transformed Polish communities into essentially German towns. Merchants, knights, and artisans were especially valued for the skills they brought to these regions, and they attached themselves to local lords.¹⁰³ Thus, the fortifications in these westernmost parts of Eastern Europe experienced some technical advancement in the thirteenth century through this cultural

¹⁰⁰ Długosz, *The Annals*, 178.

¹⁰¹ Boleslaw 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.

¹⁰² Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 67.

¹⁰³ Sedlar, *East Central Europe*, 408.

interchange, as the creation of German settlements was accompanied by the construction of castles.¹⁰⁴

Hungary was the main target of the invasion and it bore the brunt of the Mongol onslaught. The devastation was particularly bad there because of inadequate fortifications. When the Hungarians first took up agriculture in the region, they gradually constructed a system of defences known as the *gyepü* line along their northern and eastern borders. It consisted of rows of fallen trees, boulders, ditches, and natural obstacles. Gradually, fortresses were added in the twelfth century, but they were built of wood or earth, and placed much too irregularly to amount to an effective defence.¹⁰⁵ The Mongols easily broke through the *gyepü* line in early 1241, and two thirds of the country came under occupation. As mentioned, Fügedi's study reveals how poorly the comital castles fared.

When the Mongols finally crossed over the frozen Danube in the winter, they found an enemy considerably better prepared for defensive warfare. A letter from Hungarian religious and secular leaders sheds light on the last stage of the Mongol campaign. Dated to February 2nd, 1242, it records that when the Mongols finally crossed the river, the "numerous and well-armed" Hungarian defenders fell back to over 17 fortified places. Furthermore, the defenders expressed a willingness to continue their resistance, even though they had lost contact with Bela IV. Their fortresses were secure enough that the defenders claimed to fear Mongol ruses more than their actual attacks.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ William Anderson, *Castles of Europe from Charlemagne to the Renaissance* (New York: Random House, 1970), 164.

¹⁰⁵ Sedlar, *East Central Europe*, 207.

¹⁰⁶ "Schreiben der Ungarn an den Papst vom 2. Februar 1242," in *Der Mongolensturm: Berichte von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen 1235-1250*, trans. Hansgerd Göckenjan and James R. Sweeney (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1985), 295.

Batu proceeded with most of the army to the city of Esztergom. His siege engines destroyed its wooden towers while prisoners filled the moat. Rogerius states that when the Hungarians and foreigners in the city realized it was going to fall, they torched the houses along with huge amounts of dyed fabrics and any other valuable commodities. They also slaughtered the animals and buried their gold and silver. Upon taking the city, the Mongols flew into a rage and began frying prisoners, presumably to get them to reveal where their valuables were hidden. Some of the townspeople continued to resist in stone palaces which then had to be separately reduced. Out of fury at not having won any booty, Batu ordered the immediate execution of 300 of the “better ladies,” dressed in their finery, who had requested an audience with him.¹⁰⁷ To add to the frustration, the citizens had previously taken much of their valuables to the citadel, which held out against Mongol attacks.¹⁰⁸ Being robbed of the plunder from Hungary’s wealthiest city was undoubtedly demoralizing for the Mongols. In their recent wars with the Jin, they could invariably expect loot and bribes to induce them to leave.¹⁰⁹ In Europe, people were actually destroying their wealth rather than allowing it to fall into Mongol hands.

Kadan similarly encountered frustrations in his pursuit of Bela to the Adriatic coast. He attacked the fortress of Klis where it was believed Bela might be hiding. The defenders launched boulders down the hillside onto the Mongols who were crawling toward the citadel and the attack failed.¹¹⁰ Following this setback, the main force rode for Trogir where Bela actually had taken refuge. The Mongols sent a messenger to the walls who tried to incite the Croatian defenders against their Hungarian overlords. For all Bela’s

¹⁰⁷ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 217-219.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 289.

¹⁰⁹ Morgan, *Mongols*, 58.

¹¹⁰ Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 299.

faults as a general, he knew that negotiations with the Mongols were futile, and he gave his troops the order to remain silent. In the face of this silence, Thomas reports that the Mongols disappeared into the mountains, periodically rushing upon the cities.¹¹¹

Kadan seems to have been completely stumped by the fortresses along the Adriatic coast. He attempted no major sieges, despite having a good strategic reason to do so. Moreover, when his forces began their evacuation at the end of March, a subsequent attack on Dubrovnik ended without achieving anything. It was not until the Mongols reached present-day Montenegro that they started successfully reducing towns.¹¹² This lack of success might be explained by the fact that medieval Dalmatian towns were built, during the Slavic invasions, on sites chosen for their defensibility. Often they were located on rocky islands, joined to the mainland by a narrow isthmus. Other sites inherited Roman architecture and fortifications.¹¹³ Adriatic fortresses were widely regarded for their defensibility. Villehardouin relates how the participants on the Fourth Crusade remarked upon seeing Zara, “How could such a city be taken by force, except by the help of God Himself?”¹¹⁴

In the final stage of the campaign, Batu was on the western side of the Danube. His armies were besieging the citadel of Esztergom, the hilltop monastery of Pannonhalma, and the city of Székesfehérvár. Kadan had failed to capture Bela, who was now on a secure island and using a ship to conduct reconnaissance missions. Thus, the Mongols had no hope of gaining Hungary’s submission except by systematically reducing its remaining fortresses. This was not an ideal situation for an army composed mainly of nomadic

¹¹¹ Ibid., 301.

¹¹² Ibid., 302.

¹¹³ Sedlar, *East Central Europe*, 111.

¹¹⁴ Villehardouin, “The Conquest,” 46.

cavalry. Batu and Sübetei must have realized that Hungary would not be a quick victory and they had lost their momentum for a drive farther into Europe. The fortresses were becoming difficult to capture with the available artillery and tactics. Finally, the amount of booty was meagre for the amount of effort they were exerting to get it. That incentive to stay in Europe had greatly decreased shortly before the withdrawal is undeniable.

It makes sense if they no longer wanted to drive farther into Europe, but why did they also abandon the occupied portions of Hungary east and north of the Danube? I believe two things explain this. The occupied areas were not fully pacified. As the retreating columns passed through Transylvania, Rogerius mentions seeing several resisting castles which the population had fortified during the Mongols' absence.¹¹⁵ More importantly, Mongol-held Hungary would amount to a salient deep in enemy territory. Various Polish, German, and Bohemian armies could unite and conduct a counteroffensive at a time and place of their choosing. Carpini and Rubruck state that Batu's Mongols feared a surprise attack by the Latin West.¹¹⁶ These statements could be dismissed, but Carpini specifies that the Mongols had an advanced outpost to watch for armies coming from Europe. Moreover, Möngke later warned the Europeans, "If you bring an army against us, we know what we can do."¹¹⁷ We might scoff at the possibility, but the Mongol generals would be unwise if they did not consider it. When Hülegü left reduced forces to hold Syria, the Mamluks seized the moment to successfully counterattack them at Ayn Jalut.

The number of fortresses that would hold out if the Mongols continued their advance made such considerations impossible. Carpini states that the Mongols had a

¹¹⁵ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 221.

¹¹⁶ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 54; Rubruck, "The Journey," 113.

¹¹⁷ Rubruck, "The Journey," 204.

strategy of leaving a few thousand men to besiege any resisting fortress, while the remainder of the army continued to spread throughout the countryside.¹¹⁸ Such tactics may have worked in regions with a small population or few towns. In the case of Europe, there were simply too many fortified places to attempt such a strategy. The army would become fragmented, and there was the risk of sorties against smaller Mongol forces, as European castles of the time were specifically designed to allow these when the opportunity arose.¹¹⁹ The Mongols would face many such sorties if they only had 3000 men guarding each fortress, and as Kozelsk demonstrates, sorties by people who had nothing to lose could prove disastrous.

That Europe's ability to retain its independence from the Mongols depended on its fortifications is bolstered by the fact that the Balkan interior was the only area that came under their rule. Bulgaria was subjugated in 1242 and Serbia also recognized Mongol overlordship in the 1290s.¹²⁰ The Balkan interior was coincidentally too impoverished to build any substantial fortifications beyond simple wooden palisades, and Western Europeans frequently observed that its towns possessed no walls.¹²¹ Yet nearby Greece, which in Villehardouin's view possessed some of the most magnificent castles in Christendom,¹²² escaped from this interference. Moreover, despite its proximity to the Golden Horde, Mongol forces never besieged the famously well-fortified city of Constantinople while it was under Latin or Greek rule. Subsequently, Emperor John III Vatatzes "sent envoys and after he got to know the Mongols, took little heed of them."¹²³

¹¹⁸ Carpini, "The History of the Mongols," 46.

¹¹⁹ Anderson, *Castles of Europe*, 78.

¹²⁰ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 203.

¹²¹ Sedlar, *East Central Europe*, 117.

¹²² Villehardouin, "The Conquest," 101.

¹²³ Rubruck, "The Journey," 187.

This surprising attitude likely had to do with the Empire of Nicaea's system of strongholds, which allowed its armies to avoid pitched battles and starve out invaders.¹²⁴

The best proof of the usefulness of stone fortifications is that stone became the primary castle-building material in both Hungary and Poland after the invasion. This tendency was especially pronounced in Bela's kingdom. He showed moral courage in reversing his autocratic policies and he granted numerous privileges to nobles on the condition that they build castles.¹²⁵ Before this time, castle building was solely the domain of the Hungarian monarchy. Bela's energetic policies saw the construction of 66 "new style" castles during his reign. All of them were built of stone and most were situated on an elevated site.¹²⁶ Initially the project of castle construction progressed slowly. Bela admitted to Innocent IV that his own people had little expertise in building so that he had employed the knights of a military order to construct fortresses along the Danube.¹²⁷ If the Hungarians had seen no reason for building strong fortresses before 1241, their outlook had changed drastically in the aftermath of the invasion. For Bela to implement such drastic and expensive policies, he must have been certain that stone castles were useful in countering the Mongols.

Bela continued to employ a purely defensive policy vis-à-vis the Mongols. There was a false alarm that Batu was returning in 1246. Bela apparently had the entire population of Hungary evacuated to the most defensible fortresses in the country.¹²⁸ The following year, castle-building increased at an intensified rate. Yet the Mongols only

¹²⁴ Sedlar, *East Central Europe*, 199-200.

¹²⁵ Fügedi, *Castle and Society*, 50.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹²⁷ "Brief König Belas IV. an Papst," in *Mongolensturm*, 308-309.

¹²⁸ Matthew Paris, *English History*, v.2, 165.

returned in 1285 after Bela's death. They accomplished very little in terms of taking fortified places and met with defeat in Transylvania. Moreover, they seemed to have suffered from famine and some kind of epidemic.¹²⁹

Lesser Poland also changed its laws to allow the clergy and nobles to construct fortifications. It suffered a major invasion by Nogai and Telebuga in 1287 and 1288. The Mongols were able to destroy some fortresses and towns, but their siege of Sandomir failed. Their attack on Krakow was also repelled with the loss of many of their leaders, and for their resistance, the citizens of Krakow received tax exemption.¹³⁰ The Galician-Volynian Chronicle records that Krakow's castle at the time was entirely built of stone, and "well-protected by catapults and large and small crossbows."¹³¹

In summary, the Mongols who conducted the western campaign were grossly outnumbered by the peoples they encountered. When they reached Europe, the demographic odds became even more unfavourable. As Clausewitz holds, "Superiority in numbers is the most common element of victory."¹³² The Mongols initially won a number of battles, but because of their successes in the field, Europeans opted to switch to a defensive strategy. The fortifications in Western Europe were much superior to those in Lesser Poland and Hungary, where the Mongols directed their offensives and encountered their greatest successes. Few towns or fortresses submitted to the Mongols and their campaign became bogged down in a series of frustrating and costly sieges. The king of Hungary escaped to a secure strategic point and the Mongols were robbed of any significant booty when they sacked the wealthiest city in Hungary. Faced with the inability

¹²⁹ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 205.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 194.

¹³² Clausewitz, *On War*, 194.

to bring about a rapid shift to the course of the war, the Mongol leaders opted to withdraw rather than leave some of their forces in Hungary where they could be counterattacked. Subsequently those states which had suffered most due to inadequate fortifications launched castle-building projects in order to combat future Mongol invasions.

Chapter 3: A Comparative Study of Mongol Campaigns in the Thirteenth Century in Order to Illustrate the Decisive Influence of Fortifications

As Thomas T. Allsen observes, the linguistic problems posed by sources on the multi-ethnic Mongol Empire have resulted in a type of compartmentalization in its study. Those who have taken the trouble to learn medieval Persian or Chinese, for example, are likely to direct their research toward texts in those specific languages. The natural consequence of this is that scholars tend to focus on the local conditions in a certain area under Mongol influence, without seeing how they connect to a larger set of developments. To get a clearer picture of the Mongol Empire, Allsen advises, we ought to take a holistic approach to its study.¹ Thus, in this chapter, I will provide a comparative study of Mongol campaigns in the regions of Russia, China, Korea, the Middle East, and India in order to illustrate how Mongol success or failure often depended on the fortresses they encountered. An overview of campaigns in regions outside of Europe will reveal that strong, strategically located fortifications were a defining feature of states which were able to slow or halt the Mongol advance.

In Chinggis Khan's early campaigns against other nomadic societies on the steppe, there are occasional references to attacks on fortresses, but these could have been little more than crude palisades.² Building materials such as stone and wood were in short supply in much of Inner Asia, and Marco Polo mentions that even Karakorum had earthen walls due to the difficulty of procuring other materials.³ Like the Spartans of antiquity, nomadic groups seem to have viewed their warriors as their walls, and it is no surprise that

¹Allsen, "Mongol Census Taking," 32.

²Purton, *Late Medieval Siege*, 6.

³Marco Polo, *The Travels*, 72.

the Mongols, with their organizational skills and tendency to incorporate defeated tribes into their confederacy, were able to expand so quickly through the steppes. By the time they arrived in Europe, the Mongols had already unified all the “people of the felt tent” from Manchuria to Hungary under their banner.⁴ Sedentary societies with their comparatively large populations and fortresses proved more difficult adversaries to subdue than pastoralists. Matters could not be settled in a single battle, and defeated sedentary opponents could always fall back to their strongholds and cities. The fate of sedentary states was often determined by sieges. However, the quality of fortifications varied, and Mongol siege tactics and equipment underwent a steady evolution throughout the thirteenth century. This goes a long way to revealing why the Mongols were able to easily reduce some opponents, whereas others were able to retain their independence for significant amounts of time.

Russia

It is important to first look at the campaign in Russia from 1237 to 1240, because it met with tremendous success and resulted in more than two centuries of indirect Mongol rule. Moreover, it was an earlier segment of the larger western campaign that eventually terminated on the borders of the Holy Roman Empire. Though they were outside of the Roman Church’s influence, the Russians were a sedentary people and part of the Christian milieu. If Russia fell so quickly and totally, it might be reasoned, why should we imagine that Europe would have fared any better if the Mongols had pressed their advance?

⁴ Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 321.

Kievan Rus was unable to present anything approximating a unified front when the Mongols arrived. The more influential princes were in open war with each other while the Mongols were finalizing their plans for the invasion. The Chronicle of Novgorod records that in 1235, the devil incited Russia's rulers into discord. Danilo of Galicia-Volynia continually invaded the territory of Mikhail of Chernigov, as Vladimir, the prince of Kiev, was defeated and taken prisoner by the Cumans in the same year.⁵ This state of affairs continued throughout the invasion period, even as the Mongols were systematically wiping out Russian principalities, and some princes sought to benefit from the chaos. Yaroslav II of Suzdal seized and occupied Kiev from 1236 to 1238, probably in hopes of retaining a headquarters closer to Europe. In 1239, shortly before its disastrous sacking, Danilo captured Kiev and placed his own nobles in control of the city.⁶ Thus, it should not be surprising to read that during the invasion, Rostov and nearby Suzdal "each went its own way," or that when the town of Torzhok held out against Mongol battering rams for two weeks, it received no help from Novgorod.⁷ The mutual antagonisms between the princes, along with the vastness of the region, certainly worked to the advantage of the invaders by limiting coordinated resistance.

Whatever role other factors had, the gravest problem facing Russia was the inadequacy of its fortifications. As Konstantin Nossov observes, no comprehensive studies on early Russian fortresses have been produced yet in English.⁸ Despite this, his own brief monograph on the subject, which makes use of Russian scholarship, reveals why Russia was so poorly equipped to withstand Mongol siege techniques. Before the mid-thirteenth

⁵ *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016-1471*, trans. Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes (London: Camden Society, 1914), 80.

⁶ "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 45-47.

⁷ *Chronicle of Novgorod*, 83.

⁸ Konstantin S. Nossov, *Medieval Russian Fortresses: AD 862-1480* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2007), 60.

century, walls of cities and fortresses alike were built entirely of logs atop earthen ramparts, and stone was virtually non-existent as a building material.⁹ Such defense works were considered adequate as the Russians and their nomadic foes rarely resorted to sieges in the period before the Mongol invasion. Cumans preferred lightning raids in which cattle and prisoners were taken, and they did not have the intention of permanently occupying Russian territory. Between 1060 and 1237, only one in five recorded engagements in Kievan Rus involved the attempted capture of a fortified settlement.¹⁰ Towers were extremely rare, so that a preferred method of taking a settlement was simply to ambush its defenders before they could close the gates. Passive blockades were the most typical method of conducting a siege in the pre-invasion period, and throwing machines were uncommonly used until the mid-thirteenth century. Attacks were much more likely to involve the use of axes and fire on highly flammable walls.¹¹ A few years before the Mongols arrived, Danilo made use of a catapult against the walls of Chernigov, and this single siege engine was considered noteworthy by the chronicler of Galicia-Volynia.¹²

In general, the Russians did show a strong willingness to resist. When the Mongols first appeared at the outskirts of Ryazan in late 1237 and demanded a tenth of everything in the town, the town leaders responded, “Only when none of us remain, then all will be yours.”¹³ With the untested defense works of their settlements, however, the Russian princes had more or less prophesized what was to follow. Fortified towns fell remarkably quickly to Mongol siege techniques, which were of the same type used in other campaigns. The invaders first built a stockade, from behind which their numerous catapults would

⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰ Ibid., 46.

¹¹ Ibid., 51.

¹² “Galician-Volynian Chronicle,” 43.

¹³ *Chronicle of Novgorod*, 81.

conduct a barrage, continuing night and day. Lacking machines, the defenders could do little to counter the barrage. After the ditches were filled, simultaneous assaults could be conducted at multiple breaches in the wooden walls. In the flat plains of Russia, these towns stood little chance despite their steep ramparts. Even the best fortified towns typically fell within four to six days.¹⁴ Torzhok and Kozelsk defied the odds in the spring of 1238 by lasting for weeks rather than days. Kozelsk achieved something truly remarkable in that Batu had to await reinforcements from Kadan and Büri before he was able to finally take it.¹⁵ The few fortified places that actually did hold out were those built on hills like Danilov and Kremenets. According to Nossov, steep elevations rendered the stone throwers almost useless.¹⁶ Unfortunately, inaccessible sites were rarely chosen for Russian towns as such precautions presumably would have seemed unnecessary before the Mongol invasion.

The disaster culminated in the fall of Kiev in late 1240. Batu directed his catapults, hidden by foliage, at a single point in the wall to create a breach. The inhabitants then filled the breach and continued fighting, until they were forced back by arrows. The Mongols climbed to the top of the rampart where they rested for a full day without advancing into the city. Meanwhile the citizens withdrew to an inner perimeter around the Church of the Blessed Virgin. The following day, the Mongols conducted their final assault on the building, which had been turned into a fortress. Lacking a true citadel or castle, the citizens had attempted to improvise, but so many citizens had gathered on the roof of the church that it collapsed during the fighting.¹⁷ This marked the end of Kiev's

¹⁴ Nossov, *Russian Fortresses*, 48.

¹⁵ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 60.

¹⁶ Nossov, *Russian Fortresses*, 48-49.

¹⁷ "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 48.

resistance and its period as the greatest city in Russia.

By the time the invaders had passed through Russia, two out of every three cities had been destroyed, and a third of these would never be rebuilt. Only a quarter of the smaller villages and fortresses of the pre-invasion period still existed in the fourteenth century.¹⁸ Russia's surviving rulers drew lessons from the devastation of their homeland, and they clearly realized that their fortifications had suffered from inadequate building materials and poorly chosen sites. The Galician-Volynian Chronicle records that shortly before going in person to tender his submission to Batu in 1245, "Danilo was greatly distressed for he had not fortified his land with citadels."¹⁹ All the princes seem to have drawn similar conclusions, as sooner or later they showed up at Batu's camp on the Volga to receive patents to rule. Russia's magnates had seen only too clearly how their cities fared against a Mongol onslaught.

That Russia attempted to apply the lessons of the invasion in its aftermath is clearly evident. Galicia-Volynia was the westernmost part of Russia and therefore where Mongol rule was most tenuous. The sudden construction of stone and brick donjon towers first occurred there in the second half of the thirteenth century. These freestanding towers were often placed inside settlements, and nearest to the most vulnerable section of wooden walls. The watchtowers offered the defenders a secure point from which to fire at attackers, as well as a refuge in the case that the walls were breached. Nossov attributes the sudden appearance of stone towers to the influence of Poland and Hungary.²⁰ What he seems to neglect is that Poland and Hungary were also rapidly overhauling their own systems of

¹⁸ Nossov, *Russian Fortresses*, 53.

¹⁹ "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 57.

²⁰ Nossov, *Russian Fortresses*, 31.

fortifications in the exact same period specifically because of the arrival of the Mongols on their borders. The sudden evolution of castles in Poland and Hungary was mirrored in Galicia-Volynia in the second half of the thirteenth century precisely because all of these states were being threatened by potential Mongol invasions during that period. Nossov notes that the widespread transition to stone defensive walls in Russia also began in the mid-thirteenth century. Often times, fortresses were hybrids of wood and stone, as the most vulnerable sections of wall were the first to be rebuilt in stone.²¹ The fact that these drastic evolutions in Russian fortifications occurred so soon after the Mongol invasion makes it very difficult to not infer a causal relationship.

We do not actually have to infer why these new types of fortifications were being built. The chronicler tells us that Danilo of Galicia-Volynia was building new fortifications in the 1250s specifically for war with the Mongols.²² In the hopes of regaining his independence, he accepted the pope's supremacy and a crown in the early 1250s, in exchange for military aid. When this aid did not materialize, Danilo complained that he had received a crown when he expected an army.²³ He was able to frustrate Kuremsa's attempts to assert control for some time, but when a huge Mongol force under Burundai (Boroldai) arrived in Galicia-Volynia in 1259, Danilo fled temporarily to Hungary and abandoned his bid for independence. When Burundai's army approached Danilo's capital of Kholm, they saw that its fortifications had been upgraded and its walls were heavily guarded by crossbows and catapults. According to the chronicler, Burundai realized that the city could not be taken and sent Danilo's brother, Vasilko, to demand its surrender.

²¹ Ibid., 27.

²² "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 76.

²³ Saunders, *Mongol Conquests*, 101.

When the citizens refused, the Mongols abandoned the attempt and raided Poland.²⁴ It would be difficult to imagine this event taking place two decades earlier, when the Mongols were able to overrun Russian cities in a matter of days. Though Danilo's actions were too little and too late to regain independence, they do reveal that Russia had fallen largely because of its poor fortifications and that its rulers understood this.

China

The fact that China was conquered by the Mongols poses a challenge to my thesis. China, like Europe, had a large sedentary population. The extant census information provides numbers of households rather than people, and so it is difficult to ascertain what the actual population of China was when the Mongol invasions began. John D. Durand estimates that in the early thirteenth century it was perhaps somewhere around 125 million persons, with the majority living in the southern Song rather than northern Jin territory.²⁵ Whatever the actual numbers were, we can comfortably say that China had a considerably larger population than all of Europe. Moreover, the Chinese had waged siege warfare for centuries and had sophisticated systems of defenses including enormous city walls built to withstand attacks by siege engines. Since China was completely conquered, it stands to reason that Europe's large population and fortifications could not have been antidotes to a Mongol conquest either. I believe, however, that a close examination of the Chinese campaigns will reveal the reasons why the Song and Jin collapsed and how narrow the margins of Mongol victory truly were.

²⁴ "Galician-Volynian Chronicle," 79.

²⁵ John D. Durand, "The Population Statistics of China, A.D. 2-1953," *Population Studies* 3 (1960): 228.

It is useful to look at the conditions in China which were disadvantageous for its survival. Obviously, it was very close to the Mongol homeland, which meant that the Mongols could readily attack it while maintaining close communication with their supreme leadership. This also enabled them to respond more easily to developments on the front, and to bring larger numbers of troops to bear against the Chinese. Another problem China faced was its enormous wealth, which was such that foreign visitors often struggled to describe it in a way that would be credible to readers. When Carpini arrived in Mongolia in the 1240s, he observed that Chinese artificers were the best in the world and that the former Jin territory was abundant with grain, gold, silk, and everything that sustains life.²⁶ Rubruck echoes these sentiments and notes the enormous tribute that the northern Chinese paid to the Mongols, amounting to 15,000 silver marks every day, besides silk and foodstuffs.²⁷ The Song territory was even wealthier, and south of the Yangzi, its cities were great centers of mercantilism and the largest in the world. At a time when Venice, one of Europe's great commercial centers had perhaps 100,000 people, the Song capital of Hangzhou's population has been conservatively estimated at 1.5 million people.²⁸ It was clear to Marco Polo when he visited southern China in the aftermath of the conquest that it was the wealthiest and most magnificent province in all of Asia.²⁹

The wealth and refined products that were found in China undoubtedly made it the most attractive target to the Mongols from the very beginnings of their empire, though they portrayed their war against the Jin as an entirely just one. The *Mengda Beilu* records that the Mongols developed a profound hatred of the Jin because of massacres and atrocities

²⁶ Carpini, "The History of the Mongols," 22.

²⁷ Rubruck, "The Journey," 144.

²⁸ Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 43.

²⁹ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, 182.

that they committed in the late twelfth century. Whether these stories were real memories or a form of propaganda being used against the Jin is difficult to ascertain.³⁰ Chinggis Khan certainly tried to unite other tribes to his cause by evoking their shared hatred of the Jin. On meeting the Khitan prince, Yelü Chucai, for instance, Chinggis Khan claimed that his war against the Jin was vengeance for their actions against the Khitan people.³¹ Yet, if Mongol efforts to conquer the Jin stemmed from some sort of past injustice, then it is mysterious that after that dynasty collapsed in 1234, the Mongols launched operations against the Song with the same vigour. As Paul Ratchnevsky suggests, the Mongols' motivations to attack China were those that had always made it an enticing target for nomads; its immeasurable riches and the prestige that its previous nomadic conquerors had enjoyed.³² Anthropologist Thomas J. Barfield argues that Chinese luxury items were vital to regional steppe leaders because they could be used to shore up the loyalty of otherwise unreliable petty chieftains.³³ As its products were essential for healthy relations between powerbrokers on the steppes, China was generally the Mongol Empire's highest priority. Even when Sübetei and Batu were assigned an enormous army for the conquest of the west in 1235, Ögödei allotted double the amount of troops to his son Köchü for the campaign against the Song.³⁴

Because China was waging a primarily defensive war against the Mongols, its walled cities were constantly being put to the test. The typical building material was

³⁰ "Meng-ta pei-lu," 60-61.

³¹ Paul Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy*, trans. Thomas Nivison Haining (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 172.

³² *Ibid.*, 105.

³³ Wright, "Northern Frontier," 55.

³⁴ Gaubil, *Histoire de Genghiscan*, 90.

hangtu, rammed earth, with stone and bricks often layered along the outer wall.³⁵ Chinese walled cities frequently used nearby rivers to provide moats, and this system did allow in some cases for the besieged cities to receive relief from supply boats.³⁶ As Stephen Turnbull notes, the cities were formidable barriers to invaders, but there were some inherent weaknesses in Chinese defenses when compared to those of Europe. Most significantly, the city walls were the only system of defense that the inhabitants had. In the event that the walls were bypassed, there were no castles or citadels to which the defenders could withdraw. Unlike Europe with its fractious, semi-independent lords, the relatively stable internal situation of China's dynasties had not been conducive to the construction of private castles. China, for the most part, had no castles.³⁷ Moreover, Chinese cities had to function as large metropolitan centers, and therefore the overwhelming majority of them were constructed on open plains rather than elevated, defensible sites.³⁸ Because we know that Mongol siege tactics were most effective against fortifications situated on plains, this tendency made the work of Chinese defenders difficult.

From the very first attacks on Chinese territory, it was clear how fortifications could bring a rapid halt to the advance of the nomads. The Mongols invaded Xi Xia territory in Gansu several times on plundering expeditions before 1209. In that year, the Mongols invested the Tangut capital, and met with a sort of defeat when their camp was flooded. The Tanguts paid off the Mongols with tribute, but they refused to provide Chinggis Khan with any auxiliary troops for his continued conquests. He still was unable to surmount the

³⁵ Stephen Turnbull, *Chinese Walled Cities: 221 BC-AD 1644* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009) 16-17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁸ K'uan-chung Huang, "Mountain fortress defense: The experience of the Southern Song and Korea in resisting the Mongol invasions," trans. David Wright, in *Warfare in Chinese History*, ed. Hans Van de Ven (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 223-224.

problem of walled cities and had to be content with these mere tokens of submission.³⁹ He only destroyed the Xi Xia state in 1227, at the end of his life and after he had recognized the importance of incorporating siege engineers from China and western Asia into his army.

The Jin proved more difficult adversaries and they fought the Mongols from 1211 until their collapse in 1234. In 1212, at the siege of Datong, the western capital of the Jin, Chinggis Khan was wounded by an arrow. The wound was serious enough that he evacuated China for at least a year, leaving the command to his son Tolui.⁴⁰ The *Mengda Beilu* asserts that an otherwise unmentioned eldest son of Chinggis Khan was killed at the same siege.⁴¹ Since the author of that report provides an accurate sketch of Chinggis Khan's other family members, and he was a contemporary of the events, it is not easy to dismiss this claim. In 1214, the struggle for the imperial residence of Zhongdu (present-day Beijing) was also hard-fought. Unable to surmount the city walls, the Mongols ran out of supplies and according to Carpini, Chinggis Khan gave the order for his troops to cannibalize every tenth man.⁴² This, and an epidemic which broke out in the Mongol camp, certainly explains why he accepted peace negotiations with the emperor and withdrew to Mongolia.⁴³ The Jin had won for the moment but when the emperor evacuated Zhongdu for Kaifeng, safely south of the Yellow River, mutinies broke out amongst his troops and many defected to the Mongols. Chinggis Khan renewed the attack on Zhongdu, but it really seems to have been more of a blockade, and it was the Chinese, in turn, who were reduced to cannibalism. Finally in 1215, its governor committed suicide while the

³⁹ Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 105.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴¹ "Meng-ta pei-lu," 24.

⁴² Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 21.

⁴³ Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 113-114.

beleaguered city fell to a month of slaughter and plundering. Conspicuously, Chinggis Khan was absent when the city was taken.⁴⁴

It at least appears that Chinggis Khan's experiences of protracted siege warfare in China were not to his liking. By early 1216 he was back in Mongolia, leaving his trusted lieutenant Mukhali in charge of the frustrating campaign against the Jin, while he troubled himself with suppressing nomadic steppe and forest tribes for a number of years.⁴⁵ War with the Khwarazm Shah did not erupt until 1219, so it must not be imagined that Chinggis Khan was pulled from his command in China by that emergency.

The Jin fared better when they fought a cautiously defensive war with the Mongols. Mukhali's early advances were met with stiff resistance from garrisons, and towns that fell to the Mongols were often retaken by the Jin multiple times.⁴⁶ All too often Jin commanders, trusting in their numerical superiority, were willing to risk pitched battle with the Mongols. Their army met a crushing defeat in 1211 which opened a strategic pass to Zhongdu.⁴⁷ In 1231, Tolui confronted a numerically superior Jin force entrenched behind a stockade at an important strategic location. When he withdrew, the Jin army left their defensive positions in pursuit and were slaughtered on open ground. Their victory was so total that the Mongols were able to ford the Yellow River in force.⁴⁸ Disastrous battles often preceded Mongol breakthroughs.

Mongol victory in China ultimately was made possible by the widespread cooperation of the Chinese themselves. Many scholars have observed this fact. Igor de

⁴⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 116-117.

⁴⁶ Igor de Rachewiltz et al. eds., *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁸ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 36-38.

Rachewiltz observes, “Despite the brilliance of their generals, it would still have been difficult to conquer northern China, and virtually impossible to consolidate their hold without the collaboration of the Chinese, for the invaders were few in number and had no experience in either siegecraft or in ruling a sedentary society.”⁴⁹ David Morgan notes that the Song cities in particular were so well-defended that no number of cavalry maneuvers could have reduced them. Chinese infantry was vital for reducing cities and holding them as garrison troops. The Mongol army, for all its strengths, could not have done it alone.⁵⁰ From the beginnings of the campaign against the Jin, defections were common. Especially important to the Mongol war effort were the frequent defections of the hereditary lords of the Jin. They ruled over wide swaths of territory, provided large numbers of troops, and greatly aided the Mongols in overcoming their initial incompetence in siege warfare.⁵¹ The Mongol leadership recognized the importance of these collaborators. Hereditary lords such as Zhang Rou rose to the highest commands in the army and were granted the same privileges that the Mongol aristocracy traditionally enjoyed. They also were handed authority over large sections of China, where they attempted to restore economic stability.⁵²

For the widespread defections to be understood, we have to remember that the Jin state had been imposed on northern China by Jurchen invaders in the twelfth century. Before that, the Khitan Liao had ruled much of the same area. However the rule of foreign dynasties actually began much earlier. The era of the Sixteen Kingdoms (301-439), a period of instability which lingered after the collapse of the Han Dynasty, saw the first appearance of foreign dynasties in northern China. These dynasties accommodated tribal

⁴⁹ De Rachewiltz, *In the Service*, xviii.

⁵⁰ Morgan, *Mongols*, 81.

⁵¹ De Rachewiltz, *In the Service*, xviii.

⁵² Hsiao, “Chang Jou,” 50.

social structures with Chinese style governments.⁵³ The rule of foreigners also caused the diffusion of Chinese titles and rituals into the governments on the Manchurian frontier.⁵⁴ As an inheritor of this tradition, it should not surprise us that Chinggis Khan rewarded Mukhali with a Chinese title or that his officials carried tablets of authority, *paizi*, declaring their emperor's mandate of heaven. In the Tang period, much of northern China had been under foreign rule for 300 years. These Turkic rulers were sinified in the process, but Barfield suggests that we do not overlook the process by which northern China's people were altered by steppe influences. The Northerners came to view those in the Yangzi region as effete tea drinkers, while the Southerners viewed themselves as inheritors of Han culture and their neighbours as unrefined and warlike.⁵⁵

For many Chinese of the invasion period, being ruled by northern barbarians was thus a longstanding reality of life rather than some unacceptable disaster. Still, the Jurchen had done much to alienate the native population with their racial laws which limited Khitans and Han Chinese in many political and military offices. As Mongol successes mounted, the government abandoned these laws in an attempt to foster the allegiance of their subjects.⁵⁶ This did very little to offset the discontent of the Han Chinese, and warlords rose up in rebellion against the Jin. By 1219, the authorities had lost control of all of Shandong to rebels. Liaodong had long since thrown in its lot with the Mongols.⁵⁷ The Jin government was also in turmoil, a military commander having executed the emperor in a palace coup in 1213. As Jurchen state authority imploded, there was widespread drought and famine coinciding with the Mongol invasions, which impeded the ability of the Jin to

⁵³ Barfield, *Perilous Frontier*, 97.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

⁵⁶ Franke and Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6*, 254.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 256.

organize its military and relief efforts.⁵⁸ Presumably, many Chinese came to the conclusion that they would be better off in the service of the invaders. After all, the Jin seemed to have lost the mandate of heaven, northern China had incorporated elements of steppe culture into its own, and there was a precedent of rule by northern barbarians. This goes a long way to explaining the continual, widespread defection of Chinese from all levels of society to the Mongol cause.

Despite the myriad problems they faced, the Jin did manage effective resistance. The much-praised Sübetei was badly defeated by them in 1231, for which he was severely reprimanded by Ögödei. If not for Tolui's influence, the general might have fallen out of favour.⁵⁹ As it was, the following year Sübetei was in command of a force of Mongols and a much more sizeable contingent of local auxiliaries as he moved against Kaifeng, the Jin capital.⁶⁰ A Jin official has left behind a vivid account of the desperate siege. The Mongol armies were using traction trebuchets which were operated by crews of hauliers and their limited range enabled the Jin to return fire with exploding "thunder-crash bombs" which pierced iron armour and burned many of the attackers alive.⁶¹ Sübetei's armies were forced to dig a network of trenches in order to approach the walls, but the Jin countered this by lowering thunder-crash bombs on chains into the trenches. The result was, according to the official, that not a trace of the attackers remained.⁶² However, Kaifeng's situation became desperate due to the town being strangled by a blockade. It is easily forgotten that an enormous Song army, allied with the Mongols, was blockading the city from the south. It was the joint efforts of the Mongols and Song armies that convinced the Jin emperor to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 252-254.

⁵⁹ Buell, "Sübötei Ba'atur," 21.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 21-22.

⁶¹ Turnbull, *Walled Cities*, 56.

⁶² Ibid., 57.

abandon the city.⁶³ The demoralized leaders in the city capitulated to the Mongols, and in 1234 the Jin Dynasty was utterly destroyed. Sübetei's most important success was achieved with a mostly Chinese army, using Chinese technology, and fighting alongside Chinese allies.

The Song had opted to give aid to the proverbial unknown devil. Rashid al-Din tells us that Mongol-Song relations were cordial and that Song assistance had been useful in the defeat of the Jin.⁶⁴ One has to wonder if the Song regretted their decision when they realized they were, alone, facing an expansionist Mongol Empire which had incorporated vast numbers of former Jin auxiliaries. Within a year of the Jin's collapse, Sübetei launched a pre-emptive attack against the Song at Luoyang which marked the beginning of almost five decades of warfare.⁶⁵ Early in the war, the Song showed that they were to be extremely difficult adversaries. Marco Polo mentions that the Song, though utterly lacking in cavalry, possessed cities which were "remarkably well fortified, being surrounded by deep-ditches, a bow-shot in width."⁶⁶ The reason that the Song lacked cavalry was that their terrain and society little suited it, but this worked against the Mongols too, since it hindered their preferred method of warfare. Their success would depend on infantry and the Chinese and Muslim advisers in their employ.⁶⁷ That the war was going to be costly was demonstrated quite early as well. Köchü, who was Ögödei's favorite son and commander-in-chief of operations against the Song, died in China in 1236. The sources are reticent as to how specifically he died, but it was a few months after capturing a town and putting the population to the sword. Whether it was from sickness or wounds, the young

⁶³ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 39-40.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁶⁵ Buell, "Sübötei Ba'atur," 22.

⁶⁶ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, 183.

⁶⁷ Rossabi, *Khubilai*, 44.

prince whom Ögödei had envisioned as his successor was a casualty of war.⁶⁸

The Mongols were aware that crossing the imposing Yangzi River was essential to their victory over the Song. Their first invasions were aimed at conquering Sichuan which contained the upper reaches of the river and offered a less protected backdoor into Song territory. They had almost succeeded in taking it when the general Meng Gong took over Song operations in the area.⁶⁹ He transformed Chongqing into a network of fortifications which formed the cornerstone of the Song's border defenses, while securing food supplies in storage facilities. Another visionary, Yü Jue, took command in 1242 and established a highly effective mountain fortress defense system. Breaking with traditional Chinese defense theory, the new commander recognized the importance of situating fortresses strategically to give them a better chance against the stubborn Mongols. He established the cornerstone of his defense at Diaoyucheng, an elevated site at the confluence of three rivers.⁷⁰ In general, his fortresses were built atop cliffs, surrounded by rivers, and near to metropolitan centers whose officials could make use of these fallback points.⁷¹

The construction of numerous small fortresses at inaccessible points mirrored the principles of defense being used in Europe during the same period. Moreover, the system succeeded brilliantly against the Mongols. A four-pronged assault on Sichuan in 1246 failed miserably and the Mongols avoided attacking the area for a time.⁷² A major offensive launched by Möngke in 1258 collapsed even more spectacularly. For five months in 1259, Möngke directed his army against the fortress of Diaoyucheng where the

⁶⁸ Gaubil, *Histoire de Gentchiscan*, 91.

⁶⁹ Huang, "Mountain fortress," 230-231.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 236.

campaign bogged down in heavy spring rains, and his chief general, Wang Decheng, was killed by a stone.⁷³ According to a Chinese account of events provided by Gaubil, Möngke, frustrated and desperate for a breakthrough, took personal command of the troops. In August he ordered a direct assault, during which storm winds overturned many of the ladders. In the general slaughter which ensued, Möngke himself could be seen covered in mortal wounds.⁷⁴

If that is what actually transpired, it was undoubtedly a very dark moment for the Mongol Empire. The account certainly fits with the descriptions of personal risks which Möngke took in the earlier western campaign. It is also corroborated by the Syriac historian Bar Hebraeus.⁷⁵ The *Yuanshi* records that in 1288, after the conquest of the Song, Khubilai reviewed a series of historical documents about the previous khans which he had commissioned from Chinese scholars. When he read the report on the reign of Möngke, he angrily accused the scholars of lapses in memory and demanded a rewritten version.⁷⁶ It is tempting to speculate on what might have offended him. That Rashid al-Din describes Möngke's death as being the result of the same dysentery or cholera that was devastating his troops holds little weight.⁷⁷ As a pro-Mongol historian working for a Toluid patron, he may have feared that it amounted to *lèse-majesté* to write that the great khan was killed by the Song Chinese.

Möngke's death marked what Jackson views as the dissolution of a unitary Mongol Empire, though what he calls a "Toluid axis" persisted between the Yuan and the distant

⁷³ Rossabi, *Khubilai*, 46.

⁷⁴ Gaubil, *Histoire de Gentchiscan*, 121.

⁷⁵ Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, "XI. The Enthronement of Kublai [Qubilai] Khan."

⁷⁶ Abramowski, "Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des Yüan-shih," 121.

⁷⁷ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 228.

Ilkhans in Persia.⁷⁸ Even if one does not agree with Jackson's assessment, it must be admitted that hostility and occasional warfare characterized relations between various khanates in subsequent decades. From our vantage point, it is easy to imagine that the conquest of southern China was inevitable. In 1259, however, it must have appeared to the victorious Song that the Mongols would simply be another barbarian dynasty on their northern frontier like the former Jin and Liao. The succession struggle that erupted between Khubilai and Arigh Böke had the potential to make the Mongol dynasty a short-lived one. Remarkably, Arigh Böke surrendered in 1264 and Khubilai, though dogged by an aura of illegitimacy, was able to establish himself as great khan and "emperor of China."⁷⁹ He was also able to renew the war against the Song.

Yü Jue's mountain fortress system had proven effective. Diaoyucheng only surrendered after the Song's collapse in 1279.⁸⁰ However, the system was not widely adopted across the country, and the Mongols shifted strategies. A Song defector persuaded Khubilai that a large naval force was necessary for a successful conquest. If they could conquer the strongly fortified city of Xiangyang, on the Han River, they could subsequently sail into the Yangzi.⁸¹

The siege began in 1268, but continued for several years due to Song supply ships persistently slipping through the attempted Mongol blockade. With their available artillery, the Mongols were unable to take Xiangyang or Fancheng, situated on the opposite bank of the Han River. Song fortifications had again halted the Mongol advance until Khubilai resourcefully borrowed technology from the other side of the Eurasian landmass. In 1271,

⁷⁸ Jackson, *Delhi*, 109.

⁷⁹ Rossabi, *Khubilai*, 62.

⁸⁰ Huang, "Mountain fortress," 237.

⁸¹ Wright, "Artillery," 91.

he requested and received some “catapult makers” from Syria who were in the service of the Ilkhanate. The Muslim engineers arrived in Dadu (Beijing) and provided a demonstration of their powerful, new machine for the court.⁸² Paul E. Chevedden asserts that, based on its description, the siege engine must have been the double counterweighted trebuchet, or *bricola*. These weapons first appeared in Western Europe in the thirteenth century and Frederick II sent some of them to the Levant in 1242. They were rapidly adopted by the Mamluks in the 1250s. It was batteries of counterweighted trebuchets that were now to rain destruction on the Song, breaking their will to fight.⁸³ Rashid al-Din, who had no pro-European bias, plainly states that Frankish siege engines were brought to China and they were decisive in bringing a swift end to the war.⁸⁴

The new trebuchets were capable of throwing stones which were ten times heavier than those the Mongols formerly used.⁸⁵ In late 1272 they had already smashed through the walls of Fancheng, and the beleaguered Xiangyang surrendered shortly afterwards. Following the sudden fall of the two strategically vital and well-fortified cities, Song troops and officers began to defect en masse. His mysterious artillery and the swelling numbers of his troops gave the newly appointed Yuan general Bayan an aura of invincibility.⁸⁶

Khubilai still perceived that it would be costly to reduce each city. He urged Bayan to spare cities which surrendered, while attempting to cow the Song by sailing his fleet up the Yangzi and landing troops on its southern banks.⁸⁷ When they resorted to massacring

⁸² Allsen, “Military Technology,” 268.

⁸³ Paul E. Chevedden, “Black Camels and Blazing Bolts: The Bolt-Projecting Trebuchet in the Mamluk Army,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 8 (2004): 232-233.

⁸⁴ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 290-291.

⁸⁵ Turnbull, *Walled Cities*, 12.

⁸⁶ Wright, “Northern Frontier,” 66.

⁸⁷ Wright, “Artillery,” 92.

the populace of a captured city, which they only did at Changzhou and one other, it was intended to have a psychological effect on all resisting cities. The strategy had its desired results, Song cities defecting with remarkable speed. Lin'an (Hangzhou), the Song capital, capitulated in 1276 without offering even token resistance.⁸⁸ That such a remarkable breakthrough occurred so shortly after the arrival of counterweighted trebuchets suggests that the Song believed these weapons rendered their situation hopeless. They actually had a huge capability for resistance, but the will to resist had suddenly evaporated.

To conclude, Bayan's conquest of the Song was accomplished with an amphibious, multi-national force sailing on Chinese ships that had been mounted with European artillery.⁸⁹ This was not the force of nomadic cavalry that had unified the steppes, nor more pointedly, the force that had invaded Europe in 1241. There are popular notions that Chinggis Khan and his cavalry overcame the Great Wall and conquered China, when in fact there was no Great Wall⁹⁰ and no unified Chinese state. Moreover, it does not appear that any sense of pan-Chinese nationalism or religious identity motivated the rulers and ordinary people in their resistance. An accurate appraisal of the campaigns against the Jin and Song reveals that it was Chinggis Khan's aged grandson who completed the conquest of China after decades of continuous warfare which had seen the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire. Furthermore, China's conquest was greatly hindered by its fortifications. This problem was only surmounted by vital assistance provided by large segments of the Chinese populace and by artillery that was not available to the Mongols in the 1240s. Had there been no "Toluid axis" during the reign of Khubilai, it is entirely probable that the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁸⁹ Hsiao, "Bayan," 589.

⁹⁰ Morgan, *Mongols*, 58.

Song could have survived. The most important factor in victory over both the Jin and Song was the pattern of Chinese people defecting en masse to the Mongol cause at key moments. When we consider these circumstances, then it should not be surprising that Europe retained its independence in the 1240s, whereas China became part of the Yuan Dynasty in 1279.

Korea

The Mongol campaigns in Korea provide a powerful illustration of how well-situated defenses could enable even a small nation to resist the Mongols for a long period. Korea faced many disadvantages. Like China it was geographically close to the Mongol homeland, but unlike China, the Koryo kingdom was confined within a narrow peninsula. Möngke once compared Korea, with its natural strategic defenses, to a fish trapped in a barrel that would eventually perish.⁹¹ Yet from 1231 to 1259, the Koreans did hold out against repeated ultimatums and invasions. Above all else, this was possible because of the Koreans' usage of mountain and island fortresses, and the removal of their government to Kanghwa Island. The strategic use of the rugged topography and a scorched earth policy also impeded Mongol operations.⁹² Koryo's policy versus the Mongols was a strictly defensive one, meant to preserve their independence as long as possible. They knew the Mongols were a much stronger power, and they hoped to avoid direct confrontations while using negotiations to delay further efforts to assert control.⁹³

⁹¹ Huang, "Mountain fortress," 243-244.

⁹² Ibid., 244.

⁹³ Ibid., 247.

Though the Korean government's chosen methods of resistance were remarkably passive, the will to resist was quite strong, which might be surprising, given Korea's longstanding policy of *sadae*, or "serving the great." It meant Korea's acceptance of "Younger Brother" status to whichever dynasty dominated China. The desire to resist partially stemmed from a deep aversion to the Mongols. When a Mongol army first arrived in Korea in 1218 on the pretext of rooting out Khitan rebels, its commander proposed the establishment of an Elder-Younger Brother relationship. The Koryo court protested that it did not wish to enter into a relationship with "the most inhuman of the northern barbarians."⁹⁴ The military leadership, which held real decision-making power, opted to placate the Mongols while building up the defenses of the country. Relations were severed in 1225 when Mongol envoys were murdered. The Mongols could not respond immediately due to the succession of Ögödei and setbacks in northern China.⁹⁵ Finally in 1231, a large Mongol army under the command of Sartaq crossed the Yalu, plunging Korea into open war. The Koryo government offered to surrender, but a list of the Mongols' exorbitant demands explains why it ultimately decided to prolong its resistance. Sartaq demanded one million sets of clothing for his troops, 10,000 pieces of purple gauze, 20,000 of the best otter skins, 20,000 horses, and 3000 children of the higher and lower nobility.⁹⁶ For Korea, submission to the Mongols meant slavery.

Like Europe, Korea had an established tradition of situating its cities and fortresses on defensible hilltops.⁹⁷ These proved difficult to capture from the outset of the campaign. The city of Kuju in the northwest put up a spirited defense, even when it was breached in

⁹⁴ W. E. Henthorn, *Korea: The Mongol Invasions* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 14.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁶ Ledyard, "Two Mongol Documents," 234.

⁹⁷ Huang, "Mountain fortress," 223-224.

200 places by Mongol catapults. In exasperation, Sartaq told a Korean negotiator, “If your country is going to fight defensively, then defend yourselves... If you are going to face us in battle, then face us in battle. Let it be decided quickly!”⁹⁸ Sartaq likely would have preferred battle, but the defenders wisely opted for a siege. Mongol attempts to ignite the city with human fat were countered with mud. They deployed 30 catapults but accurate fire from the Korean machines inflicted heavy casualties. Every type of attack failed, and a septuagenarian Mongol general supposedly said, “I am accustomed to seeing the cities of the earth attacked and fought over. Still, I have never seen [a city] undergo an attack like this which did not, in the end, submit.”⁹⁹ The attackers concluded that Kuju was protected by heaven and lifted the siege.

In that instance the military dictator of Korea, Choi U, did order his troops to lay down arms. Furthermore he paid an enormous indemnity to the Mongols. This was only to lull the Mongols into complacency so that he could transfer the capital from vulnerable Kaesong to Kanghwa Island, an operation he completed in 1232. He also sent commissioners throughout the country to organize the population into various mountain fortresses and island refuges. With this completed, the recently arrived Mongol *darughachis* were massacred, and the war resumed.¹⁰⁰ Sartaq returned in force, but quite early in his campaign, he led an attack on a small fortress. A Buddhist monk who had taken refuge in the fortress managed to kill him with a well-aimed arrow, and the Mongols withdrew for the time being.¹⁰¹ Sartaq was neither the first nor the last campaign commander to die in this manner. His death serves as a reminder of the personal risks

⁹⁸ Henthorn, *Korea*, 64.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

which Mongol commanders so often took in attacks on fortifications.

On Kanghwa Island, the Koryo government could safely conduct the war, even as they struggled to find a way to end it through interminable negotiations. In the 1230s, Mongol armies rode freely through Korea and no field army was sent against them, while on the island an elaborate set of defense works were built.¹⁰² As it dawned on the aristocracy that life on Kanghwa was becoming permanent, palaces, temples, and even a national academy were constructed. It became a functioning capital city.¹⁰³ In the 1250s the Mongols attempted to surmount the problem of islands by building ships and trying their luck in naval warfare. In this they were outperformed and frequently defeated by the Koryo navy, which had drilled for such an eventuality. They accomplished very little before abandoning their naval experiments.¹⁰⁴ This situation is reminiscent of Bela's establishment of a headquarters on an island behind Trogir where Mongol efforts to capture him proved similarly futile.

Attacks on fortifications remained costly and frustrating. In 1253, the Mongol commander-in-chief, Prince Yekü, was forced to withdraw after falling dangerously ill during a protracted siege.¹⁰⁵ In an attack on the mountain fortress of Sangju the following year, the Mongols lost roughly half of their attacking force, including a high ranking official.¹⁰⁶ Despite such successes, persistent drought and famine throughout the 1250s began to take its toll on the Korean populace. This was only exacerbated by the greater frequency of invasions which resulted in more frequent evacuations to islands and

¹⁰² Ibid., 103.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 107.

¹⁰⁴ Huang, "Mountain fortress," 242.

¹⁰⁵ Henthorn, *Korea*, 113.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 127.

mountain fortresses. The number of people succumbing to starvation mounted despite some relief efforts.¹⁰⁷ The powerful Choi military family had always advocated continued resistance against those in the court who advocated accepting submission. This political tension was relieved when a group of Koryo officials assassinated the fourth Choi dictator and restored the king to power. Their stated reason for the assassination was that the dictator was allowing his people to starve to death.¹⁰⁸ In 1259, the peace party had won out and the Koryo monarchy agreed to Mongol demands to evacuate Kanghwa Island.

As Henthorn observes, Korea's submission "was due more to internal events than as a result of conflict."¹⁰⁹ That a small nation in close proximity to the Mongol power base was able to resist for almost 30 years is testament to the value of strategically situated defenses in foiling Mongol efforts to consolidate their rule. There was a silver lining to the end of Korean resistance. Like the Song, Korea had held out until the reign of the relatively benevolent Khubilai. His policies toward Korea were noticeably indulgent. There was an immediate halt to pillaging and Mongol troops withdrew rapidly. Perhaps most importantly, Korea's monarchy and customs were preserved, and prisoners were returned to their homeland.¹¹⁰

The Middle East

From Transoxiana to the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, the Mongols gradually were able to impose their will on much of the sedentary Islamic world. Since the resident populations,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 128.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 134.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., x.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 154.

like Europeans, made use of fortresses and walled cities, it is worth examining why the Mongols encountered so much success in the region. Beginning in 1219, Chinggis Khan launched his brutal assault against the Khwarazm Shah, Ala al-Din Muhammad, who ruled Persia and much of Central Asia. Largely because he could not trust his own troops, the Khwarazm Shah chose the strategy of dividing his reputedly large army to garrison the cities, while he withdrew at the approach of Chinggis Khan's main army.¹¹¹ The trading cities of Transoxiana were systematically annihilated in what is probably Chinggis Khan's most famous campaign; the one that solidified his reputation as a conqueror of continental rather than regional significance. If one had in mind the complete failure of the Khwarazm Shah's defensive strategy, then my thesis would appear to rest on shaky ground. However, I contend that the campaign in the early 1220s was in fact anomalous, and that the collapse of Ala al-Din Muhammad's state was hastened by a number of conditions which worked together to bring about such a decisive defeat.

In the first moves of the campaign, we see a very serious problem facing the Khwarazm Shah's state. He had hardly consolidated his rule over his territory, much of it only recently conquered from the Kara-Khitai, and this was a factor in reducing the effectiveness of his resistance. For instance, in 1220 he passed through Nishapur and urged the citizens to repair the fortifications which he himself had destroyed in the city's earlier conquest.¹¹² The ethnic divisions of the empire also worked hugely to the Mongols' advantage when attacking cities. The Turkic warriors who were charged with defending the cities apparently felt no sense of loyalty to the citizens. Ibn al-Athir reveals that when

¹¹¹ Morgan, *Mongols*, 61.

¹¹² John Andrew Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 5: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 307.

Bukhara was attacked, the Khwarazmian army simply abandoned the city, leaving the demoralized citizens to seek terms with the Mongols.¹¹³ When Samarkand was subsequently attacked, the Turkic soldiers in the city allegedly said, “We are their race. They will not kill us.” They turned over the city to their Mongol brothers within a few days, which unfortunately was not enough to save them from the same fate as the citizens.¹¹⁴ The fact that the city’s fortifications had been strengthened before the Mongols arrived could not save it from the treachery of its defenders.¹¹⁵

No defensive walls could be of any use, I contend, when they were defended by groups who identified with the invaders rather than the people they were charged with defending. The mercenary character of the Central Asian armies constantly undermined the Khwarazmian war effort. Jalal al-Din, the Shah’s son, gathered together an army and began to wage a successful resistance, even defeating the Mongols on occasion. However, desertions due to disputes amongst the Turkic emirs about the distribution of booty greatly weakened his army shortly before a decisive engagement with Chinggis Khan on the Indus River.¹¹⁶

As the Mongols proceeded from Transoxiana into Khurasan, some cities like Khwarazm chose to offer strong resistance. In a five month siege, Ibn al-Athir claims that Chinggis Khan’s army suffered much higher casualties than the defenders. At last, the Mongols flooded the city with the Amu Darya (Oxus) River, because even when the walls were breached, the inhabitants continued to fight district by district.¹¹⁷ Yet the tendency of

¹¹³ Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle*, 207.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹¹⁵ Boyle, ed., *Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 5*, 308.

¹¹⁶ Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle*, 229.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

cities to seek terms with the Mongols, in the face of all the evidence that such a policy was disastrous, continued to work to the Mongols' advantage. This was partially the result of Chinggis Khan's use of psychological warfare to exploit the social discord in the Khwarazmian state. Merchants, expecting to benefit from Mongol victory, often exhorted citizens to offer no resistance and they spread rumours intended to cause panic.¹¹⁸ Balkh surrendered without a fight. When Tolui arrived at Merv, the region's chief city, and inspected its moat and walls, he concluded that it would be able to withstand any attacks. Fortunately for Tolui, the defenders surrendered the city after a mere eight days and a few feeble sorties. To the apparent surprise of the citizens, Tolui drove them into a wide plain and massacred almost everyone.¹¹⁹

It is clear how Mongol success in the region was abetted by the dysfunctional nature of the Khwarazm state, and by the tendency to surrender strategic population centers with very little fighting. However, there might be concrete reasons why resistance was so often thought to be futile. Morgan mentions that the walls of the Khwarazm Shah's capital Samarkand are still standing today. Though rising to a considerable height, they were built of mud bricks.¹²⁰ Otrar, which was the first city to come under Mongol attack, was similar in construction. The surviving portions of its citadel's walls from the period are composed of mud bricks.¹²¹ In the case of Otrar, its governor had started the war by murdering Mongol envoys, and he knew that he could expect no quarter for himself or the citizens. He held off the attackers for five months until his lieutenant treacherously opened the city gates one night. After that, the governor and 20,000 retainers continued to resist for

¹¹⁸ Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 173.

¹¹⁹ Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 160-161.

¹²⁰ Morgan, *Mongols*, 67.

¹²¹ "The Ancient Settlement of South Kazakhstan," Orexca, http://www.kazakhstan.orexca.com/kazakhstan_history_cities.shtml

another month in the citadel, but at last it was breached and he was captured.¹²² A defensive strategy would have been much more effective in slowing the Mongol war effort if more Khwarazmian governors had decided to offer real resistance, but the fortifications of the region, being built of readily available mud-bricks, could be breached easily. When Nishapur's offers to surrender were refused because Chinggis Khan's son-in-law had been killed attacking it, siege engines sufficed to quickly smash through its walls.¹²³

The fortifications in the mountainous regions of present-day Afghanistan inflicted the Mongols with considerably more hardship than those in the riparian oases of Transoxiana and Khurasan. An arrow fired from the fortress of Bamyan claimed the life of Chaghadai's favorite son, Mötüken.¹²⁴ Juzjani vividly describes the high casualties that the Mongols suffered in 1223 while attacking the fortresses of Saif-Rud and Tulak. Boulders were rolled down the steep approaches on to the attackers.¹²⁵ He tells us that fortifications in this region were often built into the rock in the summit of mountains and supplied with natural springs. In the case of the fortress of Ashiyar, Chinggis Khan discovered that his siege engines could not break down its walls, so he had to resort to a blockade which gradually starved the small garrison over the course of 15 months. The fortress could only be entered when there were 30 starving defenders left inside its walls.¹²⁶

Though the Khwarazm Shah had died in 1221, Jalal al-Din was still fighting the Mongols when Chinggis Khan turned eastward. With his disappearance, the Islamic states achieved some breathing room. Jalal al-Din won a spectacular victory against the Mongols

¹²² Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 83-85.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹²⁴ Rashid al-Din, *Successors*, 137.

¹²⁵ Minhaj Siraj Juzjani, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia*, trans. H. G. Raverty (London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1881), 1068-1071.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1077.

at Isfahan in 1227 which secured the front for some time.¹²⁷ He then squandered whatever gains could have been obtained from the few years of security by attacking his neighbours rather than attempting to create a unified front against the Mongols. In this climate of fear, the cities of Khurasan were not rebuilt and the entire province remained in ruins. When the Mongols returned in the early 1230s, Jalal al-Din could not rouse any support and he was finally defeated. Courageous but short-sighted, Jalal al-Din lost an opportunity with his neighbours, in that “he did not leave one without showing hostility to him.”¹²⁸

Adequate fortifications did offer some states in the region more leeway in their relations with the Mongols. When the Mongols overran the Seljuk realm in the early 1240s, they did not invade the nearby kingdom of Lesser Armenia, which Marco Polo observes had many towns, castles and fortified places.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, its king submitted voluntarily within a few years to avoid devastation. As a Christian king surrounded by Muslim enemies, he likely saw the benefits of becoming a vassal of the Mongols. In the case of Georgia, Marco Polo notes that it retained its own monarchy specifically because of the strength of its fortresses, which made the Mongols more willing to allow the kingdom special privileges.¹³⁰ Indeed, it does seem that fortifications had slowed advances in the region throughout the 1230s and 1240s, and the Mongols were seeking a negotiated solution to the problem. Rubruck was present in Karakorum during diplomatic exchanges between Möngke and the envoy of the Abbasid caliph in the early 1250s. According to witnesses, Möngke said he would only make peace with the caliph if he dismantled all of

¹²⁷ Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle*, 289.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹²⁹ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, 21.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

his fortifications. The envoy retorted that it would only be done when the Mongols removed the hooves from their horses.¹³¹

Möngke placed his brother Hülegü in command of an enormous army with the intention of bringing the remainder of the Middle East under Mongol sovereignty. He appears to have sensed that siege engines would be essential to success. Juvaini claims that he dispatched a thousand households of Chinese siege engineers on the expedition.¹³² From 1255 to 1260, Hülegü's army did admittedly make some remarkable progress against heavily fortified adversaries such as the Assassins and the Abbasids. One could rightly wonder how it was possible for Hülegü to obtain such a rapid victory over the Assassins if fortresses were truly a problem for the Mongols. The Assassin state contained a network of 105 strategically situated fortresses in the mountainous landscape of western Persia.¹³³ Juvaini, who took part in the campaign, explains the means by which Hülegü conquered the Assassins, and it certainly was not by systematically overrunning the fortresses. In 1256, Mongol forces approached Maimun-Diz, the residence of the ruling imam, Rukn al-Din. They employed a variety of intimidation tactics, such as shouting in unison while encircling the fortress.¹³⁴ They also bombarded it with missiles but there is no indication that any breach was made. After only a few days, the young and thoroughly cowed imam agreed to offer his surrender. Hülegü, with assurances of forgiveness and safe conduct, insisted that the ruler come to him in person. Once Rukn al-Din was being held, the defenders were ordered to evacuate the fortress. The Mongols quickly set to work demolishing it.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Rubruck, "The Journey," 201.

¹³² Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 608.

¹³³ Juzjani, *Tabakat*, 1205.

¹³⁴ Juvaini, *World Conqueror*, 632.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 635.

Hülegü compelled the captive Rukn al-Din to send orders for all the other fortresses to surrender. Even the famous stronghold of Alamut surrendered when Rukn al-Din ensured its garrison that quarter would be given.¹³⁶ Earlier in the year, a Mongol siege of Alamut had failed to accomplish much.¹³⁷ So we see the Assassin strongholds ultimately fell to Hülegü's effective use of psychological warfare rather than siegecraft. Juvaini enthusiastically reports that as the fortresses were being dismantled, secret orders were handed out for the surreptitious massacre of Rukn al-Din's family and followers. Meanwhile, Rukn al-Din journeyed to the court of Möngke Khan, who had him and his companions "kicked to a pulp and then put to the sword."¹³⁸

From our perspective, it might seem painfully obvious that it was a bad idea to negotiate with the Mongols during an invasion. However, many times we observe the will to resist ebb away at the approach of their armies, even when the defenders were equipped with sufficiently strong fortifications. The sources suggest that the fall of Baghdad in 1258 was at least partially due to various parties in the city siding with Hülegü. Juzjani claims that a Shiite vizier plotted to undermine the defenders of the city in order to avenge some indignity the state's Shiite minority had suffered.¹³⁹ Whether or not the account is true, it certainly reflects religious and ethnic tensions which had worked to the Mongols' advantage since their first appearance in the Middle East.

An anonymous Iraqi chronicle from the period suggests that Baghdad's downfall was hastened by the caliph's negligence. When the Mongols were approaching Baghdad,

¹³⁶ Ibid., 636.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 713.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 724.

¹³⁹ Juzjani, *Tabakat*, 1237.

local troops refused to fight for the caliph as he had not paid their salaries for some time.¹⁴⁰ Subsequently Hülegü was able to secure the approaches to the city and brought his siege engines to bear on Baghdad's walls and gates. When the defenders tried to return fire, their siege engines were found to be faulty and useless. Eventually, the Mongols succeeded in creating a breach and mounting the walls in one area.¹⁴¹ They did not enter the city, perhaps because of its size and the number of defenders. The chronicle tells us that the vizier convinced the caliph to surrender to Hülegü in person. The Mongol commander then compelled the captive caliph to order the people to lay down arms. Having ended Baghdad's resistance with this ruse, Hülegü then executed the city's important leaders before ordering a general massacre of the populace.¹⁴² Hülegü's success came about as much through military might as through the willingness of his opponents to surrender their defensive advantage.

Mongol defeat at Ayn Jalut in 1260 is widely viewed as a turning point. This victory is often said to have been made possible only by the death of Möngke which forced Hülegü to turn back to Mongolia, mirroring Carpini's account of Batu's withdrawal from Europe. Yet Hülegü's own explanation for temporarily leaving Syria was that it was customary to pass the summer in a higher altitude region.¹⁴³ Moreover, he never returned to Mongolia so this political theory for the events of 1260 is as unconvincing as the political theory used to describe the withdrawal of 1242. Nonetheless, the simultaneous fragmentation of the empire certainly helped the Mamluks in their subsequent war with the Ilkhanate. Conflict with the Golden Horde hindered Hülegü and his successors in bringing

¹⁴⁰ Hend Gilli-Elewy, "Al-Ḥawādit al-gā mi'a: A Contemporary Account of the Mongol Conquest of Baghdad, 656/1258," *Arabica* 58 (2011): 361.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 365.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 367.

¹⁴³ Jackson, *Mongols and West*, 116.

their full might to bear against Syria. Yet the Mamluks staved off numerous invasions over the next five decades, so it cannot be imagined that Ayn Jalut was simply a lucky victory made possible by circumstances. Mamluk field armies were highly trained in tactics adopted to counter the Mongols.¹⁴⁴ Amongst the other factors that have been suggested for the Ilkhanate's defeat, fortifications should not be overlooked as a deterrent. No explanation exists for why the Mongols failed to take the citadel of Damascus in 1300, after their success at the Third Battle of Homs.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, the final engagement in the long conflict occurred in 1312 when the Mongols besieged a Mamluk fortress in Syria. After heavy losses, they withdrew beyond the Euphrates, marking the final boundary of Mongol expansion in the Middle East.¹⁴⁶

India

India, like Europe, was not incorporated into the Mongol Empire. Therefore it is useful to search for explanations for how the subcontinent managed to preserve its independence in order to better understand what happened in Europe. India was not a single political unit during the period, but the Sultanate of Delhi which encompassed the Indus valley and north Gangetic plain blocked all approaches into the subcontinent and thus became the principal barrier to the Mongols' southward expansion.

In light of the fact that India was not conquered, it might be asked if the Mongols even had the desire to conquer it. Peter Jackson, in his seminal work on the Delhi Sultanate,

¹⁴⁴ John Masson Smith, Jr., "Ayn Jalut: Mamluk Success or Mongol Failure?" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44 (1984): 314.

¹⁴⁵ Amitai-Preiss, "Whither the Ilkhanid," 259.

¹⁴⁶ Saunders, *Mongol Conquests*, 144.

is skeptical of notions that Chinggis Khan respected the Sultanate's neutrality, noting that if that were so, it would be a singular instance of this policy. Moreover, the Mongols undeniably had an ideology of world conquest by Ögödei's death at the very latest.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Mongol operations on the Sultanate's western frontier since 1241 failed to accomplish very much. Jackson notes the reasons for this chronic failure are not certain, but he suggests that explanations based on climate are implausible since Mongols wintered in Punjab continually in the fourteenth century. It might be added that so many Mongols lived in Delhi during the same period that it had a quarter called *Mughalpur*.¹⁴⁸ Jackson posits that perhaps tensions within the imperial dynasty limited the effectiveness of Mongol campaigns in the subcontinent.¹⁴⁹ Certainly those tensions hampered coordinated activities, but such an explanation ignores the possibility that the Mongols' armed opponents played a role in defending their own territory.

If luxury items and booty were the basis of relationships between steppe confederates, as Barfield argues, then it is absurd to imagine that the Mongols would not want to rule India. Jackson suggests that the enormous booty found there played an important role in drawing the Ghurids and their *ghazis* to India before the Mongols arrived.¹⁵⁰ In the late thirteenth century, Marco Polo notes that Khubilai was striving to bring Bengal under his dominion, but that a powerful ruler there had resisted these overtures.¹⁵¹ The Chaghadaids in the same period were hemmed in by other khanates. India was really their only option for expansion, and some contemporary sources do state it

¹⁴⁷ Jackson, *Delhi*, 103-104.

¹⁴⁸ Stanley Lane-Poole, *History of India: Volume III: Medieval India from the Mohammedan Conquest to the Reign of Akbar the Great* (London: The Grolier Society Publishers, 1906), 102.

¹⁴⁹ Jackson, *Delhi*, 106.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵¹ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, 174.

was their actual goal to conquer the Sultanate.¹⁵² So there was a long period when India faced the same threat as the rest of Eurasia. Notions that the Mongols had no interest in India probably stem from the fact that they did not conquer it. When we operate from the *a priori* assumption that the Mongols could not be stopped by any contemporary state, then it appears that they must not have desired to rule any areas which they did not subjugate, even if those areas suffered Mongol incursions for a century.

Mongol involvement first began when Chinggis Khan defeated Jalal al-Din on the Indus River. He considered entering India, but Juzjani tells us that sheep bone divination did not prognosticate victory so he decided against it.¹⁵³ The *Yuanshi* tells us that he actually entered India, but turned back upon seeing a unicorn!¹⁵⁴ If that was really his reason for aborting his advance into India, then it is a pity that he did not run into a unicorn earlier in his career, but I am doubtful that more practical concerns did not deter him. He sent one of his lieutenants into the area who laid siege to Multan in 1223. After either 40 days or three months, the siege was abandoned and the Mongol forces retreated, allegedly because of hot weather.¹⁵⁵

In the reign of Ögödei, Mongol pressure steadily built up on the borders of the Sultanate. In the late 1230s a force under the command of Dayir actually pushed into its frontiers, using the same approach that the Ghurids had used in their conquest of the area in the late twelfth century.¹⁵⁶ Juzjani tells us that they made for Multan again, but on hearing of the size of the army in the area, they diverted their advance to Lahore which was ill-

¹⁵² Jackson, *Delhi*, 235.

¹⁵³ Juzjani, *Tabakat*, 1081.

¹⁵⁴ Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, 289.

¹⁵⁵ Jackson, *Delhi*, 34.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

prepared for an attack.¹⁵⁷ The city did fall, but in the brutal street fighting, Dayir and many of the senior commanders were killed. The Mongols promptly abandoned their conquest. In 1245, another campaign resulted in the abortive siege of Uchch, before a relief army caused the Mongols to retreat. Then in the late 1240s, the Sultanate's forces went on the offensive, though no farther than the Indus.¹⁵⁸ Clearly there was a pattern of unsuccessful sieges which characterized the Mongols' early attacks on India.

In the 1260s annual attacks on the Sultanate were the established pattern. Furthermore, in the 1280s the sultan's son was actually killed in a pitched battle with the Mongols.¹⁵⁹ However, the gradual collapse of Mongol unity did provide some relief due to the infighting which followed. Then in 1290s, the Chaghadaids reunified the Mongol factions in Afghanistan and subsequently launched two major invasions of the Sultanate on a scale surpassing the attacks of previous decades. The first of these invasions occurred in 1299, when the Delhi army was far away from the capital. The Mongols withdrew after their chief commander was mortally wounded in an indecisive battle. A few years later, another Mongol army invaded while the Sultanate's armies were again scattered against Hindu foes. The Mongols actually rode straight for Delhi which they besieged for two months before withdrawing. Both of these invading armies consisted of over 100,000 men according to the sources, and they "represented crises of the first magnitude."¹⁶⁰

The Mongol departure without taking the capital was widely regarded as a miracle and the sultan of the period subsequently launched a major fortification building project in

¹⁵⁷ Juzjani, *Tabakat*, 1133.

¹⁵⁸ Jackson, *Delhi*, 106.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 222-223.

the area to strengthen its defenses.¹⁶¹ Jackson agrees that this “miracle” has no explanation, but posits that perhaps the Mongols came unprepared for a siege.¹⁶² That is totally unconvincing because the Mongols made a rapid advance for the capital, which only makes sense if they intended to take it.

I believe that the failure of the Mongols in India makes sense if we consider the conditions in India at the time. There are no population figures for medieval India, but Babur who invaded the same regions in the early sixteenth century notes that from Kashmir to Bengal, “the people are without break.”¹⁶³ This undoubtedly meant that the Sultanate had an inexhaustible supply of people to serve in its armies, which were already huge when the Ghurids first invaded India. Sources record that when Muhammad of Ghur first established his hold on the north Gangetic plain in the 1190s, his army had 120,000 heavy cavalry and 10,000 light horse archers.¹⁶⁴ When Hülegü’s envoys visited Delhi in 1260, Sultan Balaban treated them to a review of 200,000 infantry and 50,000 cavalry troops. The total number of cavalry available is recorded in one source to have been more than 600,000.¹⁶⁵ Allowing for hyperbole, these were massive armies. The Mongols had ironically bolstered the Sultanate’s armies by destroying the Islamic states of Central Asia which caused a flood of displaced warriors to arrive in Delhi. Balaban, who ruled from 1266 to 1287, recognized the Mongols as an existential threat and had his army trained specifically for the task of combating them.¹⁶⁶

The Sultanate also showed a strong unwillingness to negotiate with the Mongols.

¹⁶¹ Lane-Poole, *History of India*, 115-116.

¹⁶² Jackson, *Delhi*, 223.

¹⁶³ Babur, *Babur-Nama*, 484.

¹⁶⁴ Jackson, *Delhi*, 17.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁶⁶ Lane-Poole, *History of India*, 86.

During the 1299 invasion, when the capital was caught off guard, the sultan's advisors urged him to attempt negotiations. He asked them how he would be able to face his harem if he resorted to such cowardice.¹⁶⁷ Judging by Mongol successes in the Middle East and China, where rulers readily made concessions, it appears that he made the right choice. He did not allow the Mongols to gain through deception and intimidation what they could not gain through force of arms. Mongol persistence was matched by the Sultanate's unwavering determination to resist.

Medieval India's fortresses were problematic for the Mongols. Their main building material was stone.¹⁶⁸ These fortresses were most commonly placed on the summits of hills and other strategic sites. Castle building was facilitated by the abundance of stone throughout the whole subcontinent, enormous granite boulders littering its surface.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, most Indian castles had a citadel. The tendency for long sieges in the subcontinent meant that there was a tradition of supplying fortresses with enough food to endure a siege of several years. Furthermore, they contained enormous water tanks that would fill with monsoon rain.¹⁷⁰ It should not surprise us to read that such fortresses were generally taken by bribery or passive blockade during the period of the Sultanate.¹⁷¹ For the Mongols, consolidating their hold on India would mean an endless series of blockades in the territory of well-organized enemy who could field larger armies. Interestingly, Fletcher notes that historians such as I. H. Qureshi and S. M. Ikram attribute Mongol failure

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 101.

¹⁶⁸ Konstantin S. Nossov, *Indian Castles 1206-1526: The Rise and Fall of the Delhi Sultanate* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2006), 12.

¹⁶⁹ Sidney Toy, *The Strongholds of India* (Melbourne: William Heinemann Ltd., 1957), 2.

¹⁷⁰ Nossov, *Indian Castles*, 43.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 45.

to Indian fortifications and military might.¹⁷² He dismisses their arguments, but I find myself in total agreement with them. The results of a century of pressure on the Sultanate's borders are roughly what we should expect.

Summary

What we see from this comparative study is that siege warfare was problematic for the Mongols in many regions besides Europe. However, it was also necessary for the conquest of sedentary peoples. The building materials of thirteenth century fortresses varied widely, often depending on what material was most readily available. Judging from the speed with which the Mongols reduced cities in Russia and Transoxiana, wood and mud brick fortifications could be easily breached with the Mongol artillery of the first half of the thirteenth century. Therefore defensive strategies failed in those regions. Events in Korea suggest that well-situated fortifications could enable a defensive policy to be carried out as long as the will to resist was present. The *hangtu* and stone fortifications of China did actually provide a potentially insurmountable problem to the Mongols, but widespread collaboration and the arrival of superior artillery in the 1270s undermined Chinese efforts. In the Middle East, the Mongols often overcame the better fortifications only through ruses. The Sultanate of Delhi, which had stone fortifications and large armies, was able to resist the Mongols.

Europe possessed many of the advantages that India had. It had a large population from which to field armies. It had an abundance of stone fortifications. European rulers also showed an unwillingness to negotiate or buy off the Mongols. These problems,

¹⁷² Fletcher, "Social and Ecological," 45.

combined with its relative poverty when compared to China or India, likely made Europe an unappealing target. In any case, what this comparative study demonstrates is that it required decades for the Mongols to impose their rule on heavily populated sedentary regions with adequate fortifications. If they persisted in their attacks on Europe, we must then imagine a conquest spanning decades.

Conclusions

In this thesis I have attempted to demonstrate three points. In the first chapter I attempted to show that the existing theories for the Mongol withdrawal from Europe in 1242 rest on little evidence. The most widely offered explanation, namely that the Mongols withdrew because of the death of Ögödei, originates from the important but flawed testimony of Carpini. Rashid al-Din, who was in a position to know the Mongol version of events, states that the Mongols were not aware of the khan's death when they began their withdrawal. Other explanations rest on even less substantial evidence. Thus, in the second chapter I argued that the Mongols must have encountered an insurmountable strategic problem. Since multiple sources suggest that the Mongols experienced limited success in attacks on European fortresses, I reasoned that it was plausible to infer that fortifications, above all other factors, were that problem which persuaded the high command to abort the campaign. In the third chapter I provided summaries of Mongol campaigns against other sedentary societies to demonstrate the important role that fortifications and defensive strategies had in slowing or halting Mongol conquests. I attempted to show that not all medieval fortifications were of equal defensibility, though all sedentary societies depended on fortresses and walled cities in their struggles with the Mongols. If all three of these arguments have been made sufficiently convincing, then we arrive at a specific conclusion. Because Europe's fortifications were predominantly built of stone, strategically situated, and numerous, it fits with what we observe in the Mongol Empire's larger history that Batu would not have been able to conquer it in 1242 with roughly 150,000 men and artillery which had not yet reached its medieval apogee.

There is an interesting irony in Carpini's uncritical assertion that the Mongols much prefer their enemies to shut themselves in fortresses, because "then they have got their little pigs shut up in their sty."¹ In another section, he lists the nations that were still manfully resisting the Mongols as the Song, India, the Saxi, and some of the Alans. He then relates stories of how the Saxi, apparently a Crimean people, and the Alans were able to inflict defeats on the Mongols from fortified defensive positions.² We know that the Song and Delhi Sultanate also relied on fortifications for their survival. So were people like the Russians conquered simply because they built with wood, whereas the Europeans built with sturdier materials? Did a formula of *Three Little Pigs* simplicity really determine who survived and who was subjugated?

While fortifications were hugely important to Europe's ability to retain its independence, it would be overly simplistic to assert that this tells the full story. On the topic of historical analysis of campaigns, Clausewitz notes,

The deduction of effect from cause is often blocked by some insuperable extrinsic obstacle: the true causes may be quite unknown... They may be intentionally concealed by those in command, or, if they happen to be transitory and accidental, history may not have recorded them at all... Apart from that problem, critical research is faced with a serious intrinsic one: effects in war seldom result from a single cause; there are usually several concurrent issues.³

Europe's distance from Mongolia certainly helped it by limiting troop numbers and the amount of intelligence the Mongols could gather on it. Since the Mongols took their herds, families, and equipment with them, we cannot argue that their supply lines were in any kind of danger. However, by 1242 there was a wide swath of territory that had been

¹ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 49.

² *Ibid.*, 42;48.

³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 156-157.

overrun but not organized into a functioning part of the Mongol Empire. When they returned to the Kipchak steppe in 1242, Batu and Sübetei had to campaign against Cuman rebels whom they had subjugated earlier. Not all Russians accepted the new situation gracefully. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Danilo of Galicia attempted to rid himself of the Mongol yoke in the following years. The Lithuanians also became a threat by exploiting the new weakness of their neighbours. In 1245, the *Chronicle of Novgorod* records that they were making raids deep into Russian territory.⁴ Carpini states that upon taking the throne in 1246, Güyüg “said with his own lips that he wanted to send an army to Livonia and Prussia.”⁵ The pagan Lithuanians inadvertently helped Christendom by rapidly emerging as a significant menace to Mongol rule in the region.

Perceptions, both Mongol and European, of the other also helped Europe to survive the Mongol onslaught. Unlike much of China, Europeans had not experienced rule by nomadic tribesmen in the High Middle Ages. It was not a possibility they were willing to countenance. In Carpini’s view, submission to the Mongols could not be accepted because of the crushing servitude they imposed on their subjects. Moreover, no proposals or negotiations could be entertained because the Mongols were deceitful pagans who simply reneged on their promises when it suited them.⁶ That left resistance, however costly, as the only option. Carpini was writing in 1247, but such conclusions had already been reached during the invasion period by those who had encountered the Mongols. Not trusting his foes, Bela believed that there was nothing to be gained by submitting to them. These perceptions also frustrated future Mongol attempts to gain by diplomacy what they had

⁴ *Chronicle of Novgorod*, 92.

⁵ Carpini, “History of the Mongols,” 45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

failed to gain militarily. When Bela received a proposal for an alliance with the Mongols in 1259, the pope reminded him that an agreement with perfidious pagans would be worthless.⁷

Even Marco Polo, an admirer of Khubilai, states that the Mongols had a fundamentally “cruel” character.⁸ While they often used their fearsome reputation to convince their enemies to join them, in Europe there was very little active collaboration from the European nobility and commons. It is true that Rogerius mentions that there were “certain Hungarians who in deeds had become Tatars.”⁹ However, when 600 Germans from the unfortified town of Rodna surrendered and acted as guides for Kadan’s army in Transylvania, this action is taken to be noteworthy.¹⁰ Generally those in occupied areas just gathered together in the most defensive or hidden spots they could find. As Allsen observes, the Mongols relied on subject peoples for their manpower needs, and whatever state was pulled into their empire was immediately subjected to this type of “national-service obligation.”¹¹ The lack of cooperation from a wider base of the population and nobility in Europe was thus extremely problematic for Batu’s war effort.

As for Mongol perceptions of Europeans, they are harder to ascertain since the Mongols left few records, but they can be gleaned indirectly. We sometimes read in secondary sources of how the Venetians worked as the Mongols’ “intelligence service” and that the Mongols would have known “the distribution of the European armies and the

⁷ Bezzola, *Die Mongolen*, 188.

⁸ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, 79.

⁹ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 209.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹¹ Thomas T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism: The Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russian, and the Islamic Lands, 1251-1259* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 190.

political allegiances of their princes.”¹² In reality they had little reliable knowledge on Europe. The primary sources suggest that they imagined it as a single power which comprised a much larger geographic area than it actually did. Güyüg’s letter to Innocent IV reveals that he imagined the pope as the overlord of the rulers of Europe.¹³ The Mongols encountered by Rubruck were curious to know about the pope, whom they had heard was 500 years old.¹⁴ That they overestimated the power and longevity of the pope means that they likely also overestimated his ability to coordinate European military operations.

Jackson argues that the Mongols considered an advance into Europe a serious undertaking. This certainly explains why Rubruck was told that Mongol shamans had not allowed another invasion of Hungary.¹⁵ Compared to China, Europe was relatively poor, so the sacrifices necessary for its conquest may not have seemed worth the rewards. However, there is a danger of overstating this. Medieval Europe had a thriving textile industry and Batu used the fine linen tents which had formerly been the property of the Hungarian king.¹⁶ Venetian traders who arrived on foreign shores seemed to have no trouble providing goods for exchange. Also, there was an abundance of potential slaves and artisans in Europe at a time when these were a valuable commodity.

I have argued that political and ecological problems played no role in the Mongol withdrawal from Europe in 1242, but these problems did play a role in preventing their return. The feuds between Chinggisid princes which ended in the fragmentation of the empire had already begun in the 1240s. When Armenian monks arrived in England in 1252,

¹² James Chambers, *The Devil’s Horsemen : The Mongol Invasion of Europe* (Edison : Castle Books, 2003), 111.

¹³ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 135.

¹⁴ Rubruck, “The Journey,” 134.

¹⁵ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 73.

¹⁶ Carpini, “The History of the Mongols,” 79.

they reported that disease had greatly weakened the Mongols.¹⁷ Perhaps this is a reference to the various ecological disasters of Güyüg's reign described in the *Yuanshi*. However, we must remember that dynastic strife and civil war did not preserve the Song. In 1274, when Khubilai's armies made their first major breakthrough in southern China, the Ögödeid prince Hokhu simultaneously launched a rebellion against him in northern China.¹⁸ Even when divided, the Mongols were still capable of conquest.

Does Batu's withdrawal because of strategic challenges mean that Europe *won* the war? I do not imagine that the Poles who returned to the charred ruins of Krakow or the Hungarians who faced starvation in the subsequent years were congratulating one another on their victory. Writing to the pope in the years after the invasion, Bela observed, "They hate us especially, since even after such a disastrous defeat, we do not think of submitting to them."¹⁹ Yet, Europe in a larger sense gained by avoiding the upheaval and destruction that accompanied a Mongol conquest. This leads to a more important question: Why does the reason for the withdrawal matter? It matters because of the powerful influence that Europe went on to exert on world history. A Mongol conquest would have had incalculable consequences. As Saunders notes, "Had Rome and Florence suffered the fate of Kiev or Baghdad, it is hard to see that the Renaissance could ever have occurred."²⁰ We ought to have better support from the primary sources before we glibly attribute Europe's escape to what Saunders terms in the same passage "a lucky chance."

The accounts of the destruction inflicted on the Islamic world are so shocking that

¹⁷ Matthew Paris, *English History*, v.2, 532.

¹⁸ Michal Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State in Central Asia* (Richmond:: Curzon, 1997), 38.

¹⁹ "Brief König Belas IV. an Papst," in *Mongolensturm*, 306.

²⁰ Saunders, *Mongol Conquests*, 187.

some historians would like to suggest that they reflect no more than the biases or imaginations of their authors. However, as Morgan points out, the accounts of the pro-Mongol Juvaini, writing for Mongol patrons, and the hostile Juzjani, writing from outside Mongol territory, report the same atrocities.²¹ I agree with Morgan's view that notions of a *Pax Mongolica* do not reflect the reality of events in the thirteenth century. Referencing the Roman historian Tacitus, Morgan observes that the peace established by the Mongols would aptly compare to a desert.²² Recently science has lent credence to the descriptions of wholesale slaughter which are found in the primary sources. Atmospheric carbon dioxide levels decreased during the Mongol conquests, but not during other disasters such as the Black Death and the conquest of the Americas. This implies that a massive culling of the human population and a decrease in agricultural land usage occurred in the thirteenth century.²³

When we consider what the historical consequences of a Mongol conquest of Europe might have been, we enter the realm of counterfactual history. Richard Ned Lebow observes that though counterfactuals are routinely used in the biological and physical sciences, they tend to be dismissed by historians. The negative view of counterfactuals held by many historians has been bolstered by the popularity of counterfactual history as a genre of fiction writing. M. M. Postan reflects a widely held view when he argues that "the might-have beens of history are not a profitable subject of discussion."²⁴ In *Historians' Fallacies*, David Hackett Fischer similarly condemns the use of fictional historical

²¹ Morgan, *Mongols*, 69.

²² *Ibid.*, 73.

²³ "Mongol Invasion in 1200 Altered Carbon Dioxide Levels," <http://www.livescience.com/11739-wars-plagues-carbon-climate.html>

²⁴ Richard Ned Lebow, "Counterfactual Thought Experiments: A Necessary Teaching Tool," *The History Teacher* 40 (2007): 153; 173.

scenarios as an “ancient form of error” because such scenarios “*prove* nothing and can never be proved by an empirical method.”²⁵ He argues that counterfactual scenarios are unconvincing because they fail to account for the human factor; the unpredictable nature of people makes attempting to construct a hypothetical scenario something of an absurd pursuit.²⁶

In *Unmaking the West*, a number of experts in various historical fields consider the alternative paths that history might have taken, and their views on the profitability of considering the “what-ifs” have softened with good reason. Geoffrey Parker and Philip E. Tetlock observe that historians can suffer from a type of “hindsight bias.” Our awareness of what actually did happen creates an illusion of inevitability in historical events. “The more retrospectively obvious we can convince ourselves the outcome was, the more difficult it becomes to achieve the central mission of the historian: to acquire the capacity to see the world as it once appeared to those alive at the time.”²⁷ Moreover, warfare is an activity that depends very much on chance. In Clausewitz’s view, there is no other human activity more bound up with chance than it, and the founder of the Manchu dynasty noted that “giving battle is like throwing knuckle-bone dice: they can fall on one side or the other.”²⁸ Thus, it is very much worth considering if Batu’s campaign might have actually met with success if a few alternative paths had been taken. Parker and Tetlock ponder the possibility of a Mongol conquest of Europe. They argue that “without doubt” the Mongols could have accomplished the task, and that such a conquest would have halted the

²⁵ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), 15-16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁷ 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), 365-366.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 364.

expansion of early modern Europe. In short, the events of the thirteenth century could have prevented the rise of the West.²⁹

In the view of Robin Yates, the rise of the Mongol Empire could have also been prevented in its infancy. Had the Song emerged victorious over the rising Xi Xia in the late eleventh century, they could have become the overlords of Central Asia. Yates reasons that Chinggis Khan would not then have had a freehand to unify the tribes or receive his early tutorial in siege warfare in Tangut territory. The Song would undoubtedly have employed their sizeable armies and the divide-and-rule strategy of their Han and Tang predecessors.³⁰ With their own downfall averted, the Song might well have been able to exert a much more palpable influence on the world in the coming centuries. This scenario serves to remind us of how victory in China was far from inevitable, and how the dynastic divisions of the region greatly aided the Mongols.

In Holger Herwig's counterfactual thought experimentation on the possibility of a German victory on the Eastern Front in 1941, he states that it is his intention to pursue a "minimal" and "plausible" rewrite of events; one embedded in history. The "miracle" counterfactuals which allow, for instance, that Napoleon possessed stealth bombers, must be avoided or the experiment descends into a type of social science fiction.³¹ However, it serves the historian well to remember that military leaders are always confronted with uncertainties. A counterfactual experiment which is grounded in real evidence allows us to

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 381.

³⁰ Robin Yates, "The Song Empire: The World's First Superpower?" 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), 224.

³¹ Holger Herwig, "Hitler Wins in the East but Germany Still Loses World War II," 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), 323-324.

see the importance of human decision making and “choice, in paths both taken and not taken.”³² Following that model, I argue that the evidence suggest that the events of 1241-1242 could easily have coursed down a different path.

A Mongol detachment was actually seen at Udine in Italy, eighty kilometers from Venice, during the invasion. The purpose for their expedition into Italy is not certain, but this detachment is thought to have been part of Kadan’s army which had pursued Bela to the Adriatic coast.³³ As such, the Mongols had found a fairly accessible route by which to enter Italy from the east. This force quickly disappeared. Yet what if it had conducted a more thorough reconnaissance or raid into Italy? What if Kadan, having failed to capture Bela, decided to follow this detachment in order to test Italy’s defenses? Had a Mongol force approached the walls of Rome or another significant city, they likely would not have succeeded in their assaults. However, as Paul E. Chevedden mentions, counterweighted trebuchets existed in Italy at the time. Emperor Frederick II sent some of these machines from Italy to the Levant in 1242. If this Mongol detachment had rapidly advanced through Italy, they might well have chanced across a poorly protected settlement or even a detachment of troops with a counterweighted trebuchet in their possession. If they managed to capture one of these weapons, and recognized its utility, they could have returned to Batu’s main army with it in their possession.

The atomistic resistance which was troubling Batu would not have immediately ceased and in all likelihood the withdrawal would have proceeded as it did. However, Rogerius mentions that the artillery specialists in the Mongol army did not simply operate siege engines. They built them from scratch out of local materials. Before besieging

³² Ibid., 324.

³³ Chambers, *Devil’s Horsemen*, 111.

Esztergom, for instance, they had stopped nearby and built thirty machines.³⁴ If these artillery specialists had left Europe with even a single counterweighted trebuchet in their possession, there is no reason to believe they could not have used it as a template for their future constructions. In their continued suppression of the Alans and Saxi, mentioned by Carpini, they would have realized that they now had a huge technological advantage which they did not possess during the first invasion. This likely would have encouraged Batu to attempt a second invasion in the following years, seeing as the counterweighted trebuchet offered him a better chance of reducing the individual fortifications and parity with the best artillery in Europe. We know that the Mamluks were able to reduce the Crusader strongholds of the Holy Land quite rapidly after these weapons appeared in their arsenal. They were also decisive against the Song at Xiangyang and Fancheng.

A renewed invasion of Hungary with counterweighted trebuchets could have broken the will of both Bela and his people to resist. In 1250, Bela specifically warned the pope that in the case of a renewed invasion, he was uncertain that his people would have the desire to continue their resistance. More ominously, he suggested that if he did not receive real support from the Latin West, then he wished to apologize beforehand that he “would see it necessary to come to an agreement with the Tartars.”³⁵ Thus, it is not implausible to imagine that if the Mongols returned to Hungary before he could launch his castle building program, armed with the very artillery that the Latin West should have used for the defense of his kingdom, Bela might have offered his submission. Isolated and betrayed, he would have felt that it was the only opportunity for the survival of Hungary, and Batu, recognizing that he was in need of local support to conquer Europe, would have

³⁴ Master Roger, *Epistle*, 217.

³⁵ “Brief König Belas IV. an Papst,” in *Mongolensturm*, 310.

welcomed the gesture. Upon meeting, the Mongol chieftain would probably have offered Bela a cup of *kumis*, as he did when Danilo of Galicia came to offer his submission. He would likely have uttered the same haunting words: “Get used to this drink. You are a Mongol now.”³⁶

In the scenario that Batu had a reliable base in Hungary, its entire population producing the foodstuffs and weaponry for a prolonged war, Europe’s long-term prospects for survival would have been bleak. Bela would have set a dangerous precedent by showing that European monarchs could be made to turn their back on Christendom. His crossbowmen and heavily armoured knights would enhance the capability of the Mongol army to conduct a European war. Moreover, the real knowledge of Europe’s geography and political structure that Bela could provide would be decisive. I do not know if the Mongols would have conquered all of Europe, but without doubt the struggle would not be passed over in a few paragraphs in any monograph on the history of Europe. The name of Batu would have seared itself into the collective consciousness of the West like another Attila the Hun.

Were Europe conquered, we might consider how it would have fared under a Mongol administration. Judging by the awkward and exploitative relationship which existed between the Mongols and their Russian subjects, Europe would not have thrived under a khan. As it was, Europeans ended up gaining a relatively accurate picture of the larger world due to the reports of the friars and Marco Polo. This represented their first real knowledge of Asia, and it is interesting to note that when Columbus sailed west, his destination was Cathay and the court of the khans. He carried with him a copy of Marco

³⁶ “Galician-Volynian Chronicle,” 57-58.

Polo's *Travels*.³⁷

Clausewitz asserts that accomplishing even the simplest of tasks is difficult in war.³⁸ The Mongols made war look easy. This can be detrimental to the study of their campaigns because it tempts us to forget that there were limitations to their means and abilities. We start to see every one of their victories as a foregone conclusion and we become apologists for their failures. When we allow that they were human beings constrained by morale, technological, and demographic factors, we realize that nothing was a foregone conclusion for the Mongols. Events in Syria, Japan, and even Europe should suffice to demonstrate that their commanders, lacking prescience, sometimes went a bridge too far.

³⁷ Morgan, *Mongols*, 171-173.

³⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 119.

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