



TARTARS ON THE FRONTIERS OF EUROPE: THE ENGLISH PERSPECTIVE

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This article will examine the image of the Mongol invasion in Europe as reflected in contemporary English sources. Understanding this brings us closer to comprehending the medieval frontier concept, at least the way it was reflected in contemporary historiography. The relevant records in English chronicles reveal little about the actual historical events of the East Central European region in the thirteenth century but say a great deal about the perception and knowledge of a core country about the periphery of Western Christianity. “A frontier implies a center, just as a periphery implies a core:”¹ core and frontier are relative, self-definitive terms which often do not correspond with geographical or political boundaries. England, a core country of Christian Europe, implies the existence of frontier where Western Christianity meets non-Christian regions. On this premise, the kingdom of Hungary, as I will point out in the conclusions, was seen as a frontier in the specifically medieval sense of the word.

It appears that the authors of thirteenth-century English sources worked in relative ignorance of the Eastern end of Europe even though some of them definitely had access to information about the region, as is more or less noticeable in their works. Generally speaking, their attention turned towards the region in times of great cataclysms when the shockwaves were expected to reach England at some time. The Mongol invasion was such a series of events, which shook an unready Europe in the middle of the century amid the growing popularity of apocalyptic expectations for 1250.

The increased intensity of references to the East Central European region is an apt terrain for examining the underlying characteristics of the Anglo-Hungarian relations of the age as well as the knowledge and perceptions of the two countries, which in turn can be a basis for further conclusions about the concept of frontier and the complex nexus of core and periphery. The study of

¹ Robert Paynter, “Surplus Flow between Frontiers and Homelands,” in Stanton W. Green and Steven Perlman ed., *The Archeology of Frontiers and Boundaries* (London: Academic Press, 1985), 165. More on medieval concepts of core, periphery, and frontier can be found in Owen Lattimer, *Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers 1928–1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); Robert Bartlett and Angus Mackay, ed. *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); David Abulafia and Nora Berend, ed., *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002).



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Anglo-Hungarian relations looks back to a long series of publications.² This examination of the contemporary perceptions of a major trauma on the eastern end of Europe is the analysis of only a tiny segment in the line of such works.³ However, as such an inquiry provides another building block in our understanding of the medieval concept of frontier and periphery, it is indeed interesting to embark on a close analysis of the English records.

The temporal focus here will be the years directly prior to and after the Mongol irruption into Hungary and Poland around 1241. Kiev fell on 6 December 1240, but the turning point for Hungary (and for the English chroniclers) came in the early spring of 1241. On 12 March 1241 the main wing of the Mongols entered the confines of Hungary, annihilated the troops defending the Verecke pass, and marched on towards Pest. These troops had been sent there by the Hungarian king upon the news of the fall of Kiev.

Meanwhile, after the Mongol plunder of Cracow and Wroclaw, Henry of Silesia lost the battle and his life at Legnica (Liegnitz) on 9 April 1241 to the northern wing of the Mongol army. Following this victory, the northern wing set off to catch up with the main wing marching into Hungary. Another strike came on 11 April 1241, at Muhi, halfway between Verecke and Pest; the Mongols won the battle and continued their progress to the north and east of the Danube and the Hungarian king had to run for his life. On the way to Trogir (Trau) in Dalmatia he sent out a large number of letters pleading for help. The news of the Mongol invasion reached the European courts, including

² The most extensive, albeit somewhat conceptual, literature on the topic comes from the 1930s and 1940s. The most prolific authors on the subject were Alexander Fest, Stephen Gál, Lajos Kropf, Jenő Horváth and the scholarly circle of Arthur Yolland. See e.g. Alexander Fest, *Skóciai Szent Margittól a walesi bárdokig: Magyar–angol történeti és irodalmi kapcsolatok* (From St. Margaret of Scotland to the Bards of Wales: Hungarian–English literary and historical contacts), ed. Lóránt Czigány and János H. Korompay (Budapest: Universitas Könyvkiadó, 2000); Stephen Gál, *Hungary and the Anglo-Saxon World* (Budapest: Officina, 1947).

³ More up-to-date publications and indices include: György Kurucz, *Guide to the Documents and Manuscripts in Great Britain Relating to the Kingdom of Hungary from the Earliest Times to 1800* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1992), József Laszlovszky, “Angol–magyar kapcsolatok Szent Istvántól a 13. század elejéig” (Anglo-Hungarian contacts from the age of St. Stephen to the beginning of the thirteenth century), PhD dissertation, (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem 1992), Attila Bárány, “A joint effort for a new Europe in the early 15th century: political relations between Emperor Sigismund and Henry V of England,” in *Das Zeitalter König Sigmunds in Ungarn und im Deutschen Reich*, ed. Tillmann Schmidt and Péter Gunst (Debrecen: Debrecen University Press, 2000), Zsuzsanna Papp, “Perceptions of the Kingdom of Hungary in Thirteenth-Century English Sources,” MA thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2004).



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those of the pope and the emperor, yet no one came to help. Conrad IV, son of Emperor Frederick II, gathered troops against the pagans, but when the Mongol invasion halted, the troops were dismissed. The Mongols crossed the frozen Danube in February, 1242. After an unsuccessful attempt to capture the king, in May, 1242, Mongol troops left the country by different routes; some went across Serbia to unite with Batu's main army in Bulgaria, other divisions went through the Carpathian passes.

An article about the English perspective on the 1241–1242 Mongol invasion is inevitably an article about the perspective of one particular contemporary chronicler, Matthew Paris, and his *Chronica Majora*. Born around 1200, Matthew became a monk at the Benedictine monastery of St. Albans on 21 January 1217, where he lived and worked until his death in 1259. He knew Henry III and his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall, personally and it is suggested that he acquired a wide acquaintance with the details of contemporary foreign affairs from them. As will be discussed below, he probably had access to more information than is shown in his chronicle at the first superficial glimpse.

The first part of his most important work, the *Chronica Majora*, is an abridged version of Roger of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum*, which he then continued until his death. Matthew's chronology is generally reliable. Although some of the materials were obtained and inserted later than the actual date of the incidents, the chronology within the chronicle is more or less precise to the year:

On the whole, Matthew is careful with chronology, and few events and documents are badly misdated. Information seems to have been entered up on rough drafts more or less as he received it, and copied thence into the *Chronica Majora*, so that an approximate chronological order was usually achieved.⁴

Besides Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora*, some other contemporary English chronicles have sporadic mentions of the Mongol invasion: the Waverley Annals, the Tewkesbury Annals and the Burton Annals. Later accounts, namely the Osney Annals and the Worcester Annals, deal with later developments, especially those in the Holy Land.

Tracking the invasion across contemporary English sources, two distinct phases are conspicuous, the dividing line being the year of the irruption of the Mongols into Hungary; the records show a distinct change in tone after 1240–1241. In the following pages I will analyse the characteristics and possible sources of the most important English records before and after the invasion and

⁴ Richard Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 136.



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draw attention to some features that show the characteristics of a peculiarly distorted image of the Mongol invasion.

Before 1241: News about *Hungaria Major* and the Appearance of the Tartars on the Frontier of Christendom

The ideas of Westerners about the Mongols were quite favourable up until the 1240s, when Western Europe, too, learned about their deeds. The people emerging from the haze of the far Orient were first identified with Prester John, and the Christians had high expectations of them crushing the Saracens in the Holy Land. Matthew Paris himself was aware of the legend of Prester John. In his copy of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum*, a colourful crown is drawn in the margin of an 1181 letter from Pope Alexander III to the "King of India" and the rubric *Nota de Johanne presbytero rege Indiae* scribbled in Matthew Paris's hand next to it.⁵ However, the arrival of the first less-than-flattering descriptions of the Mongols brought about a formidable change in their reputation in Europe. Among the pre-1241 records the most interesting is by Matthew Paris from 1238.

The first mention of the Mongols is intertwined with an intriguing question in the *Chronica Majora*; Matthew Paris seems to have had a fairly precise idea about *Hungaria Major* and was aware of the information known to the West from the Hungarian Friar Julianus' reports. The entry comes from 1238 and the validity and time of the event it relates are corroborated by two letters of the English king from June and July 1238, preserved in Rymer's *Foedera*.⁶ Matthew reports that Saracen envoys related the Mongol threat to Louis IX, mentioning among the first things in their account that *Hungaria Major* had been depopulated. Matthew states that the envoys were Saracens, chiefly on behalf of the Old Man of the Mountain (*Saracenorum legati...*, *principaliter ex parte Veteris de Monte*). Daftary claims that the visit Matthew recorded was a joint mission from the Isma'ili ruler of Alamut and the Abbasid caliph,⁷ but that is debatable.

In 1238 both rulers had a great deal to fear. The Mongol campaign the Saracen envoys were reporting on was surely not the 1220s campaign of Ghengis Khan, sweeping across the empire of Khwarizm Shah and plundering

⁵ Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 283 (hereafter: Lewis, *The Art*).

⁶ Thomas Rymer, *Foedera, (Conventiones,) Literae et Cujuscunque Generis Acta Publica inter reges Angliae*, (London: J. Tonson, 1727), 235–236.

⁷ Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (London: L. B. Tauris & Co., 1995), 59.



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Rayy, about 150 kilometers from Alamut, the centre of the Isma'ilis.⁸ The campaign that made the Isma'ilis and the Abbasids uneasy was that of their old enemy, the Mongols, who were preparing to strike again. They were alarmed by the news coming from the area plundered and destroyed in 1236 before the horde moved on towards Moscow. This area was *Hungaria Major*. In 1238, threatening letters about planned campaigns and accounts of the destruction were beginning to circulate in the Middle East. The same news arrived in Europe, too, as early as 1237. The harbinger was Friar Julianus, a Hungarian Dominican. The 1238 entry by Matthew Paris combines the information arriving from both Easts: the 1237 news from East Central Europe and the 1238 news from the Saracens of the Middle East.

I propose that Matthew Paris had a fair idea about *Hungaria Major* in the Volga region, and that his notions probably originated not only from the Saracen mission to Louis IX, but from an account in the Julianus report. I infer this from Matthew's use of the Latin name *Hungaria Major* and the mention of Mongol threatening letters. Both peculiarities feature relatively early in the *Chronica Majora* and are unique among other sources. The analysis of Matthew's 1238 entry and its background will shed light on Matthew Paris' sources and how he used the information that he alone seems to have possessed among his fellow chroniclers.

The historiography of the question of the whereabouts and inhabitants of *Hungaria Major* is long and ambiguous. As Györffy points out, the legendary concept of the origin of Hungarians found in most contemporary chronicles, Hungarian and non-Hungarian alike, is in striking contrast with the Danubian Hungarians' precise knowledge about Eurasian Hungarians. Muslim writers as late as the twelfth century reported on how the Hungarian court kept in touch with the other branches of the Hungarian people.⁹

A different written tradition, entirely oblivious of the living contact between the Danubian and the Eurasian Hungarians, was fossilised in Latin chronicles. One of the most persistent theories was Regino's Scythia legend;

⁸ Ibn al-Athir describes the route of the Mongol campaign of the 1220s in detail and mentions the following places: Turkestan, Kashgar, Balashagun, Transoxania (the Central Asian region north of the Oxus river, roughly present day Turkestan), Samarkand, Bukhara, Khurasan, Rayy (east of modern-day Tehran), Hamadan, the Zagros mountains, Azerbaijan, Arran, Derbent, Shirvan, Qipchaq, Ghazna (in present-day Afghanistan), Seistan (Sijistan), and Kerman in India, *Chronicon, quod perfectissimum inscribitur*, quoted in Bertold Spuler, *History of the Mongols*, (New York: Dorset Press, 1968), 30–31.

⁹ György Györffy, Foreword to *Julianus barát és a Napkelet felfedezése* (Friar Julianus and the discovery of the East), (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1986), 16–17.



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another was the Hun analogy speaking of the Meothide marshes.¹⁰ The first documented official Hungarian inquiry into the matter was that of four Dominican friars lead by Otho in 1232, whose aim was to find the *priores Ungari* somewhere in the East. The Dominican Julianus and his companions were the first to actually reach *Hungaria Major*. His first journey in 1235 was documented in the so-called Riccardus report, which was registered immediately upon receipt in the *Liber Censuum*, the collection of the most important papal documents.¹¹ The second journey was recorded by Julianus himself and it is one of the earliest surviving Latin sources about the Mongols.¹² The clerical and secular literates disseminated the content of the report on Julianus' second journey all across the Latin West within a very short period of time.

After Julianus there were several other important missions to Asia. By the time of the journey of William of Rubruck in 1253, the name *Hungaria Major* had begun to fade again; in the *Itinerarium* one can see Volga Hungarians living in *Paskatur* (Bashkiria), and a couple of decades later the idea of an Eurasian "Old Hungary" sank into oblivion completely. Eighty years after Julianus, the Hungarian Friar Johanca journeyed into the region on a mission to Christianize the Mongols.¹³ He makes no mention of Hungarians in the region. Czeglédy assumes that by that time they must have been subdued and annihilated by the Mongols.

¹⁰ The Greek name of the Azov Sea.

¹¹ Seven manuscripts of the report have survived. The most recent publication of the text appeared in Heinrich Dörrie, *Drei Texte zur Geschichte der Ungarn und Mongolen: Die Missionreise des Fr. Julianus O.P. ins Uralgebiet (1234/5) und nach Russland (1237) und der Bericht des Erzbischofs Peter über die Tartaren*. Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957) (hereafter: Dörrie, *Drei Texte*). For a detailed bibliography of the texts and the relevant literature see the reprint edition of Emericus Szentpétery, *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricum Tempore Ducum Regumque Stirpis Arpadianae Gestarum* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1938; reprint, Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 1999) (hereafter: SRH).

¹² Despite the seemingly intensive afterlife of the texts, only three manuscripts have survived, out of which one disappeared shortly after its publication in Joseph Freiherr von Hormayr-Hortenburg, *Die goldene Chronik von Hobenschwangau, der Burg der Welfen, der Hohenstaufen und der Scheyren*, (Munich, 1842). This lost manuscript seems to be the most complete. It is reprinted in Heinrich Dörrie, *Drei Texte*. For a detailed bibliography see the reprint edition of SRH.

¹³ Károly Czeglédy, "Magna Hungaria," *Századok* 77 (1943): 12.



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Veszprémy and Szovák¹⁴ suggest that as soon as the Julianus report was put down in writing it was handed over to Salvius de Salvis, at the beginning of 1238 at the latest. Matthew Paris, Rubruck, and Plano Carpini probably also knew about the contents of the report. The information could have reached St. Albans as early as 1238, the nominal date of the first Mongol-related entry by Matthew Paris. The other argument suggesting that Matthew learned about the existence of *Hungaria Major* from the Julianus report first is of a linguistic nature. Arabic and Persian sources unanimously call the Middle Volga region Bulghar, not *Hungaria Major* or Greater Hungary.¹⁵ The widespread appellation of “Greater Hungary” could not have come from the “Saracens.” It was the Julianus report that drew attention to the former abode of the Hungarians and the variants of its Latin name. In Matthew Paris’ time, the report was a fresh and vivid reminder of *Hungaria Major* and the facts contained therein came into the public domain among the learned or at least Matthew Paris and his circle.

The other feature pointing towards the Julianus report is the question of Mongol threatening letters, to which Matthew repeatedly refers. These and his description of the khan correspond with the authentic threatening letter contained in the Julianus report. Later, in 1240s records, Matthew asserts again that the Hungarian king (1241: *Quorum rex deses et nimis securus per Tartarorum nuntios et literas requisitus, ut si suam vitam cuperet et suorum, per suam et regni sui deditionem eorum gratiam festinus praeveniret*),¹⁶ the Armenian king, and some Saracen sultans (in an entry following the 1244 account of Peter, archbishop of Russia: *Similique modo significatum est a praedictis Tartaria regi Armeniae, et quibusdam potentibus Sarracenorum Soldanis. Quid autem ab eis renuntientur, ignoramus*)¹⁷ received threatening letters and knew about the forthcoming invasion.

In a first-hand copy of one such threatening letter to the Hungarian king, the khan (whom Sinor identifies as Batu Khan) appears exactly as Matthew

¹⁴ László Veszprémy and Kornél Szovák, postscript to *SRH*, 798. Page citation is to the reprint edition.

¹⁵ E.g. Juvaini, “The History of the World Conqueror,” quoted in László Balogh, “A mongol támadások a Volga vidéki népek ellen: 1222–1236,” (Mongol attacks against the peoples in the Volga region: 1222–1236) in *II. Medieviztikai PhD Konferencia* (2nd PhD Conference of Medieval Studies) *Szeged, 3 April 2001*, ed. Gyula Kristó. (Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely: 2001), 16, or the *Al-Kamil fi ‘t-Tarikh* from 1231 by Izz ad-Din Ibn al Athir quoted in William E. Watson, “Ibn al-Athir’s Accounts of the Rus’: Commentary and Translation,” *Canadian/American Slavic Studies* 35, no. 4 (2001): 6–38.

¹⁶ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora* in *Rerum Britannicorum Scriptum* 57 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1877, reprint, Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint, 1964), Vol. 4, 113 (hereafter: *CM*).

¹⁷ *CM* 4, 390.



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describes that the *dux se nuntium Dei excelsi affirmat, ad e[do]mandas gentes sibi rebelles*.¹⁸

Ego Chaym nuncius regis celestis, cui dedit potentiam super terram subicientes in se exaltari et deprimere adversantes. Miror de te, rex Ungarie, quod cum miserim ad te iam tricesima vice legatos, quare ad me nullum remittis ex eisdem? sed nec nuncios tuos vel litteras mihi remittis. . . . Intellexi insuper, quod Cumano servos meos sub tua protectione detineas. Unde mando tibi, ne eos de cetero apud te non teneas, et me adversarium tibi non habeas proper ipsos, facilius est enim eis evadere, quam tibi, quia illi sine domibus cum tentoriis ambulantes, possunt forsitan evadere, tu autem in domibus habitans, habens castra et civitates, qualiter effugies manus meas?¹⁹

This letter was intercepted by Grand Duke Yuri Vsevolodovich of Vladimir-Suzdal, who, in turn, informed Julianus. The Latin translation of the Mongol threatening letter is included in Julianus' report, in which he summarised his second journey, undertaken in 1237–1238 for Salvius de Salvis, the papal legate to Béla IV and the Bulgarian tsar. The repeated mention of threatening letters from the Mongols corroborates my argument that accounts in the Julianus report may have been one of Matthew's sources.

Apart from the question of how and in what form the report reached St. Albans, there is another point here; there are no references to *Hungaria Major* in other contemporary English chronicles. To answer these questions, however, the presently available evidence is not sufficient.

The next phase of the Mongol campaign is documented by two important sources containing copies of letters from a Hungarian bishop to the bishop of Paris. The Waverley Annals, written in the Cistercian Waverley Abbey in Surrey between 1066 and 1292, contain an entire letter, also to be found in a slightly truncated form in the *Additamenta*²⁰ of the *Chronica Majora*. The dating of the letter is possible from the comment that the Tartars are waiting for the Dnieper River (*aqua Damai*) to freeze over (*volentes expectare hyemem ut possint supradictam*

¹⁸ *CM* 3, 488–489.

¹⁹ Denis Sinor, "The Mongols in the West," *Journal of Asian History* 33, no. 33 (1999): 1–44.

²⁰ Matthew Paris' compilation of authentic material was appended to the end of the *Chronica Majora*, probably between 1254 and 1257. Matthew developed a system of symbols to refer to pieces of the *Additamenta* in the main body of the chronicle. Much of it can be found in other sources with few alterations (e.g. the letter of the Hungarian bishop), which supports the idea that Matthew rarely included seriously amended, edited or false material among these letters and reports.



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aquam transire in glaciē). Since the Mongols crossed the river in the winter of 1240, the letter must have been written in the summer or autumn of 1240.

The annalist retained the last paragraph of the letter, which suggests that at least two copies were sent out by the Hungarian bishop. While the version in the *Chronica Majora* is probably copied from the one sent to Guillaume of Auvergne, that quoted in the Annals is probably copied from another duplicate of the letter which was sent to a French archdeacon, a former fellow student of the Hungarian bishop.²¹ The last paragraph, included only in the Waverley Annals, not only reveals that the letter was sent out in several copies, but also contains a warning, which is fairly unusual to find before the actual irruption of the Mongols in 1241. The other peculiarity of this document compared to the other accounts is the amount of first-hand information; actual, easy-to-identify geographical places (Hungaria, Russia, *aqua Damaii*—in the *Chronica Majora*: Deinphir), personal names (Churcitan—in the *Chronica Majora*: Zingiton), and the names of various peoples (Turci—in the *Chronica Majora*: Ungarii et Comanii, Mordani). Below it will be shown how uncommon this is in the richest storehouse of Mongol-related news, the *Chronica Majora*.

I would call this a “dividing-line letter;” before this letter there are accounts of the Mongols ravaging distant eastern lands, afterward comes the phase of graphic descriptions of the barbarian plunder and the plight of Christians. A large number of graphic accounts describe the unnatural cruelty of the pagan Mongols after the spring of 1241. Hungary at the time was already a Christian kingdom of consequence on an international scale and her plight was disseminated all across Europe by word of mouth, letters, reports, and other means. Written records right on the eve of the invasion of Hungary are less common. Despite the cruelties committed against Christians in Kiev, based on information from contemporary continental sources, for the English, the Mongols breached the confines of Latin Christianity only when they entered the frontier kingdom of Hungary in 1241.

Among contemporary English records, this is the earliest document reporting the imminent threat to Christianity. Though it is not known when exactly the letters reached England, this document can safely be praised as one of the most authentic, detailed, “real-time” pieces of information reaching England, a prelude to the series of the horrendous Tartar-related articles in the *Chronica Majora*.

²¹ Alexander Fest, “Egy magyar püspök levele volt Párizsi iskolatársához” (The letter of a Hungarian bishop to his fellow schoolmate from Paris) *Levéltári Közlemények* 12 (1934), 223–225; see also: Lajos Tardy, *Régi híriünk a világban* (The our old reputation of Hungary in the world) (Budapest: Gondolat, 1979), 7–13.



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The last two entries that belong to the pre-1241 records are one by Matthew Paris²² and one in the Tewkesbury Annals.²³ Matthew's 1240 entry is the first graphic account of the barbarian ways of the Tartars, although it is still presented in a stereotypic setting; there are no references to actual places or people, except for Saracens *passim*. The other is a false piece of information probably entered in hindsight: The Tewkesbury Annals record an ambiguous entry in which the Duke of Bavaria is said to have destroyed the Tartar army at an unidentified river (*Sed dux Baverensis multos interfecit et in fluminis rivo praecipitavit*). The Duke of Bavaria, Otto II (1231–1253), was nine at the time; his father Louis, his predecessor in the Bavarian court, was assassinated in 1231, so it is quite unlikely that either of them engaged in any battle around 1240.

Regardless of their validity, these small notes are interesting, especially the reference to the Bavarian duke; the threat was gradually extended to the Western parts of Europe, too. Both records can be seen as prefiguring the vast amount of blood, murder, and mayhem which would later fill the blank parchment leaves of the chronicles.

1241: The Mongol Irruption into Hungary, the Eastern Frontier of Christianity

The Mongol irruption eventually happened in the spring of 1241. The series of dramatic records and letters begins with the letter by Count Henry of Lorraine to the Duke of Brabant containing the “emperor’s letter.” It not only gives an account of how the Hungarians were defeated, but also includes the first contemporaneous English image of Tartars. The marginal drawing is evidently based on the generic image of the barbarian horsemen described in the texts next to it, especially the emperor’s letter to the king of England, which is suggested by Suzanne Lewis to have been the invention of Matthew Paris himself.²⁴

The peak of the intensity of records is the collection of letters in the *Additamenta* in the *Chronica Majora*, all dated to 1242 by Matthew. The English historiography of the Mongol invasion is mostly shaped by a number of letters by literates of lesser status describing the horrors and asking for help rather than by correspondence at the highest socio-political levels. Matthew Paris collected

²² CM 4, 77–78.

²³ Tewkesbury Annals, *Rerum Britannicorum Scriptum* 36, Vol. 1, 118.

²⁴ Lewis, *The Art*, 283.



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and copied six dramatic pieces into the *Liber Additamentorum*,²⁵ and diligently recorded three of them in the *Chronica Majora*²⁶ as well.

The turbulent times in Central Eastern Europe brought about an increase in correspondence, where the papal court acted both as initiator and as transmitter. Letters and reports reaching the court often contained a note that stated the distribution of the same letter to other royal and ecclesiastical persons. The answers were disseminated likewise. The factual information in such letters contributed a great deal in the Occident to the general perceptions of the Mongol invasion. The relatively small number of letters commemorating direct contacts suggests that written information about the Mongol threat was more likely to have been obtained from letters reporting news in the region, e.g. those sent from or via the papal court.

The possibility of one example of such fertile interaction, the Julianus report, was noted above, in which case information from the papal court was likely to have made its way to Matthew Paris and his chronicle in a short period of time. As is seen in the case of how the contents of the Julianus report may have reached England and been precipitated in written form, the English were generally in touch with continental events. Another good example of such information flow is the account about the Tartars by Peter, Archbishop of Kiev.²⁷

²⁵ (1) N. Landgrave of Thuringia and Saxony to the Duke of Brabant and Boulogne; (2) the Hungarian abbot of St. Mary's to all Christians, (3) Jordan, a Minorite vicar of Poland to the rest of the brethren, (4) Richard of the Preachers and Jordan of the Minorites to all brethren, (5) G., warden of the Cologne Franciscans enclosing the letter of (presumably the same) Polish Brother Jordan and A., the warden of Pinsk to Henry, Duke of Brabant; (6) Yvo of Narbonne to Gerald, the bishop of Bordeaux.

²⁶ Henry, Count of Lorraine, to the Duke of Brabant in 1241, Frederick II to Henry III in 1241, and Yvo the Narbonne to Gerard, archbishop of Bordeaux in 1243.

²⁷ Piotr Akerovich was the igumen. (originally a priest-monk who was the superior of a monastery, but in the Russian church this is more often a title of honour given to priest-monks. An igumen ranks below an archimandrite; a monk supervising several monasteries or the superior of an especially important monastery) of the Spas Monastery in Kiev-Berestov until Mihail Vsevolodovich came to the throne of Kiev and made him *metropolita* (archbishop). Peter arrived in Hungary with Mihail's son Rostislav, who married Anne, the daughter of the Hungarian king. From Hungary he traveled to Italy, then to the Council of Lyon, where he gave a report based on ten questions. His answers were recorded on the spot and reached England in a seemingly uncorrupted form. There are no other surviving sources of his report.



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The Burton Annals include the report concerning the Mongols given by Peter at the Council of Lyons,²⁸ in a slightly different form than Matthew Paris recorded under the year 1244. While Matthew's account is flowing and verbose, the material of the Burton Annals is brief and precise. Similarly to the letter in the Waverley Annals, this document can be seen as a source of first-hand information from the afflicted areas. It gives a detailed account of the Mongol ravages prior to their arrival at the Hungarian border.

Peter's report was one of the most important sources of information about the Mongols after Julianus and before Plano Carpini. His answers were influential on a grand scale; each detail started an avalanche of its own, e.g. the (false) statement that after ravaging Russia, Poland, and Hungary, the Mongols united their powers in the middle of Syria, upon which the pope promptly sent missions to the Mongols from Syrian territories.

The most important feature besides this and the surprising accuracy of the data (compared to other entries in England around the same time) is the fact that this report seems to have been the one that triggered a transformation of attitude in the papal court. Peter's most important message was that the threat was not yet gone. He emphasized the desire of the Mongols to subjugate the whole world as a means of divine punishment. As for the report's influence on the English perspective, it seems that it was definitely thought to be worth recording, even though it came much later than the peak of intensity of Mongol-related information, which was already dwindling at the time of the Council of Lyon. Judging from the lack of any documents or records from the same time, I infer that by 1245 Peter's report did not stir the English as much as it did the continent. Should it have raised the same fears as overseas, there would surely be some surviving accounts of responses or measures taken to prepare against the Mongols.

Despite Peter's warnings about a new Mongol threat to Europe, the Tartar-related entries of the *Chronica Majora* turn to the Holy Land from this point on, and the number of references to Hungary or East Central Europe dwindles. Apart from a few notes, mentions of Hungary in the *Chronica Majora* always return to referring to the Mongols in Europe. It was the cataclysm around the Eastern frontier of Christianity that attracted attention to an area otherwise scarcely mentioned.

²⁸ *Annales de Burton*, RBS 36/I, 324–325, (*CM* 4, 386–8; *EH* 2, 28–31).



The Mongol Invasion as Seen from England: A Distorted Image

Reading contemporary English sources, the major milestones of the Mongol campaign can be traced as a rough sketch; the outlines of the campaign are shown by the sequence of entries recording the Mongols ravaging closer and closer to the frontier of Christian Europe. However, what is missing in these sources is what the continental chroniclers like Guilelmus de Nangis, Andrea Dandolo, Thomas of Spalato or the authors of the Heiligenkreuz Annals (mostly in hindsight) thought worthy of note: the situation and circumstances in the afflicted countries.

The entries concerning the Mongols, disregarding those that are entirely wrong or misplaced, show a spurious historiography of the events of the 1240s: The Mongols emerging from the Northern mountains ravaged *Hungaria Major* (1238), then turned against Russia and Poland and eventually Hungary (1241). The king of Hungary was either too inept or simply left to his own devices in defending his country. After receiving threatening letters from the khan and frightful news from the Preachers and Minorites he set out to explore and he tried to move into the more fortified areas of the country. The Mongols arrived at the Hungarian border with devastating force and speed and killed everyone they found. The king managed to flee to Illyria and pleaded for help from Emperor Frederick II and the pope. Finally, several years later, Frederick embraced the wretched kingdom and brought peace in return for doing homage to him (1244). Later mentions of the Mongols have a decreasing number of references to Hungary and an increasing number concerning the Mongols in the Holy Land. The afflicted area was gradually relocated.

As is clear, the overall picture somewhat diverges from the historical truth in the account of the final events concerning the Mongol invasion. Matthew Paris's rare remarks about *Hungaria Major* reveal that he was relatively well informed in this matter. Other sources do not mention *Hungaria Major* or any Mongol activities before the Tartars threatening Hungary in 1241. As the story goes on, however, Matthew's writing becomes more and more stereotypical with regards to the Mongols and less exact about the afflicted countries. One common characteristic of Matthew Paris's accounts of the Mongols becomes increasingly conspicuous; even though he collected quite an impressive amount of first-hand data, most of the time he seems to have been unaware of the things he had included in his chronicle or the *Additamenta* earlier.

Eventually, the long series of accounts are closed by a fictitious incident (Frederick's liberation) and the flood of descriptions is reduced to a trickle of chronologically misplaced items about the Mongol ravages in Europe and finally their presence in the Holy Land. The last powerful entry, Peter's account at the



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Council of Lyon, comes from 1244 (*Chronica Majora*) or 1245 (the Burton Annals) describing the Mongols as the ultimate threat to the whole of Christendom, but this piece of news no longer seems to have been sufficient to create any reverberations in England.

What is missing in these chronicles is more revealing than what is contained therein. In the *Chronica Majora* there are no mentions of Eastern European place names or individuals (not even the name of the often-mentioned Hungarian king, for example), apart from the intitulations of the letters copied into the *Additamenta*. No reference is made to the internal politics or the inhabitants of the afflicted countries, even though incidents like the Cuman settlement in Hungary and its consequences were echoing across Europe. And finally, there is no data about the Mongols ravaging other European peoples, apart from a very few remarks found in the copies of letters.

The most discernible trend is the opposite curve of the intensity of information. It is not by serendipity that the peak of frequency of Tartar-related material in chronicles and annals coincides with the low ebb of evidence for direct contacts, i.e. royal correspondence. The two curves, even if they cannot be seen as reciprocal, share the same cause: the Mongol invasion. While the creative minds of the chroniclers, especially Matthew Paris, found inspiration in the graphic accounts of the Tartar ravages and their cruelty towards a worthy Christian people for a while, the day-to-day affairs between the royal courts of Britain and the afflicted countries were more or less discontinued.

Although it cannot be safely assumed that György Kurucz's list of surviving thirteenth-century documents deposited in British archives and libraries²⁹ is complete, nor can the surviving body of evidence serve as an absolute representative sample of the original correspondence and documentation, the hiatus in letters from the middle of the century is clearly visible. Many letters were written concerning the Mongol irruption, however there is no sign of royal contact in this respect. The cataclysm in Europe seems to have dominated the outgoing correspondence of the Hungarian king and his circles.³⁰ Communication on any other issues was discontinued and Henry III of England was clearly not involved in this particular one.

²⁹ György Kurucz, *Guide to the Documents and Manuscripts in Great Britain Relating to the Kingdom of Hungary from the Earliest Times to 1800* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1992).

³⁰ Comprehensive Hungarian language collections of Mongol-related sources in Europe are Tamás Katona, ed., *A tatárjárás emlékezete* (Remembering the Mongol Invasion) (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1981) and Balázs Nagy, ed., *A tatárjárás* (The Mongol Invasion) (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2004). Other sources in the original language are found in *SRH*, György Fejér, *Codex Diplomaticus Hungariae Ecclesiasticus ac Civilis* (Buda: Typis Typogr. Regiae Universitatis Ungaricae, 1831) or referred to in the index of



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This does not mean that the country was deleted from international affairs altogether. The predicament of Eastern European countries, including Hungary, and the proclamation of a crusade against the Mongols feature in papal and royal correspondence, except England somehow seems to be too distant to be involved. Contact, however, was quickly resumed after the direct Mongol threat had gone, and with the Angevin bond it actually seems to have been stronger than before.

The Peculiarity of the English Perspective Reflected in the Sources

In the previous pages, by briefly analysing some aspects of the most prominent records, I have summarised the main tendencies of how the Mongol invasion was reflected in contemporary English sources. The series starts from the scarce records of the pre-1241 period (e.g. Matthew's 1238 entry about the Saracen envoys and *Hungaria Major*), moves through the increasingly frequent and dramatic accounts of the barbarian ravaging in Christian Europe (e.g. the 1242 letter of a Hungarian bishop in the *Additamenta*) and gradually comes to a halt in a period of flagging interest (e.g. Peter's report in the 1245 Council of Lyon seemingly falling on unresponsive if not deaf ears in England). The peak is undoubtedly the collection of first-hand accounts in the *Additamenta* by Matthew Paris.

The arrangement and distribution of these texts in the surviving English sources suggest that although contemporary English sources seem to be altogether distant from the Mongol threat, chroniclers were curious and inquisitive about the "new" race appearing in Europe. Tracking the records, the point in time from which the chroniclers turned their eyes towards the Mongols can be pinpointed exactly; it happened when the first news arrived of the barbarians reaching the frontier of Christianity, i.e. Hungary. While the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241 was important for the English chroniclers, there are scarce remarks about ravaging Orthodox Kiev before the campaign in Hungary and nothing about the South Slavs afterwards.

In conclusion, the term "Christian frontier" needs to be reappraised in the context of the Mongol invasion. The progress of the Mongol campaigns was more or less documented in English sources from 1238 on. The necessity of including a definition of Hungary as a frontier crops up due to a visible change in attitude and the intensity of information after the Mongols had reached the confines of Hungary.

Albinus Franciscus Gombos, *Catalogus Fontium Historiae Hungaricae* (Budapest: Szent István Akadémia, 1937, reprint: Budapest: Nap, 2005).



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The frontier nature of the kingdom of Hungary in the thirteenth century was somewhat different than modern frontier interpretations. Medievalists like Nora Berend³¹ or Charles Halperin use the generic definition of frontier in modern medievalist historiography: “In general the frontier functioned as a zone across which mutual influences flowed rather than as a barrier or boundary.”³² This historiographical conception no doubt applies to medieval Hungary, with the Bogumils, Cumans, Iasians, Pechenegs, Ismaelites, and Jews in its midst. However, from the perspective of contemporary English sources the statement must be turned around. This concept of frontier must be closer to the original Turnerian vision³³ of the frontier theory in America: man’s fight against nature. The frontier of Christianity crossed by the pagan Mongols in 1241 was seen less as a buffer zone or an interaction zone or “middle ground,”³⁴ than as a more or less sharp dividing line between areas of Christian interest and the rest of the world.

³¹ Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary c. 1000–1300*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³² Charles J. Halperin, “The Ideology of Silence: Prejudice and Pragmatism on the Medieval Religious Frontier,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 3. (July 1984): 442–466.

³³ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 1–38.

³⁴ Richard White’s expression instead of frontier to emphasize relations and common consensus rather than two separate sides in *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).