CHAPTER TEN

THE MONGOL INVASIONS
OF EUROPE

Stephen Pow

The Mongol invasions of Europe, and the larger set of Mongol-European interactions, comprise a field in which opinions differ even on fundamental issues that shape an overarching picture of events. Why did the Latin West avoid conquest by the Mongol Empire when nearby Kievan Rus’ and the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum submitted? Did the Mongols plan on conquering Europe, and why did they withdraw from it in 1242? Is it more accurate to discuss one Mongol invasion of Europe followed by small raids, or to refer to a series of Mongol invasions? Often discussions focus only on the large-scale invasion of East-Central Europe in 1241–42, which ended with Batu’s forces abruptly withdrawing to the Pontic Steppe – a decision regularly viewed as a response to news of the death of Ögödei Qa’an in Mongolia. As this can impart a somewhat distorted perspective on the duration and scope of Mongol-European relations, the following will provide a broader, long-term perspective. First, an effort will be made to understand Mongol intentions and what they knew about Europe before they invaded; the latest archaeological finds in Hungary will be used to shape a fuller picture of its brief Mongol occupation; the recent debates about the cause of the Mongol withdrawal from Europe will be briefly discussed; finally, the oft-neglected ultimatums and invasions which followed will be discussed along with European responses.

It remains the opinion of many historians that the danger passed with Batu’s withdrawal in the spring of 1242. Western Europe providentially escaped the conquest suffered by other regions owing to the qa’an’s demise the preceding winter, which plunged the Mongol Empire into political chaos and conflict for years.² That tidy version of events for historical overviews and textbooks,³ while basically adhering to the interpretation found in some primary sources, oversimplifies the situation. It stems largely from reports produced by friars in the wake of John of Plano Carpini’s mission as a papal emissary to Güyük Qa’an’s court in Mongolia in 1246. Güyük was the deceased qa’an’s eldest son and successor. Carpini stated that Ögödei Qa’an’s untimely death was the only reason the Mongols had withdrawn from Europe and had not yet returned, although he warned that they were actively
preparing to invade again in three or four years’ time. Another contemporary friar, C. de Bridia, simultaneously gave a more optimistic assessment of the threat, writing that Batu was returning to Güyük Qa’an’s territory and there was “great discord” between them, owing to which “the Christians [Europe] may have a respite from the Tartars for many years.”

Thus, we cannot ignore the crucial event of the death of Ögödei Qa’an on 11 December 1241. After the invasion of Europe, the tensions between the rival princes, Batu and Güyük, had indeed brought the Mongol Empire to the verge of civil war. For historians, the real possibility that war would inevitably break out between Güyük and Batu would have been a good reason for the latter to cease campaigning in Hungary, return to the Volga, and closely observe developments in Mongolia. This was especially true once Güyük succeeded his father as qa’an in 1246. However, Batu’s campaign did not mark an end to the Mongol threat to Europe. It was the largest, most destructive, and most consequential inroad into Europe, but a steady stream of threats and ultimatums followed from Mongol qa’ans to European rulers. These included Güyük Qa’an’s demands in 1246–47 for the pope and all European potentates to come to Mongolia and offer their submission or face annihilation. Threats were eventually followed by real attacks; a major invasion of Lithuania and Poland took place in 1258–59. In the mid–1280s, the Golden Horde launched large-scale invasions of the Balkans, Hungary, and Poland in quick succession. By the late thirteenth century, Mongol rulers had a good deal of direct control over various Balkan powers, having carved out an imperium on European soil. One could argue that the 1241–42 invasion marked the beginning of Europe’s Mongol danger rather than the end.

PRELIMINARY MOVES, PRECONCEPTIONS, AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

After four years of the Mongols conquering territory west of the Volga, the old capital of the Rus’, Kiev, fell in December 1240. For the commander of the entire campaign, Batu, and his veteran strategic advisor, Sübedei, the road to Europe lay open. There were still several subordinate princes under Batu’s command, but at this point in the campaign, two senior Chinggisid princes, Güyük and Möngke, departed for Mongolia on the orders of the qa’an. Both in turn would later become supreme khan and, as the eldest sons of Ögödei and Tolui respectively, their absence must have been felt among the Mongol troops – even though Batu and Güyük had parted from each other on hostile terms after a feast. Güyük had hurled insults and departed after becoming enraged by Batu’s display of preeminence among the princes by drinking first. A message which Batu sent back to Ögödei Qa’an in Mongolia after this altercation, surviving in the Secret History, reflects his great uncertainty about continuing their campaign of conquest: “We were wondering whether we had been successful.” Likewise, European sources report that the Mongols were greatly apprehensive before invading Hungary, and their shamans first employed divination. A “demon that inhabited an idol” told Batu that he would be victorious, and so he gave the order to proceed westward. His and his army’s nervousness could in part reflect diminished morale caused by the departure of two major princes and their personal contingents.
What did the Mongols know about Europe at this point, and what were they expecting to encounter that could have made them apprehensive? From their first encounters, the peoples of the northwest (i.e. west of the Volga) were perceived by the Mongol high command as staunch adversaries. I have argued that Jebe Noyan, a very important military leader under Chinggis Khan, died at the hands of the Qipchaq-Russian forces shortly before the Battle of the Kalka in 1223. Though the Mongols won the engagement decisively, they quickly returned eastward to Mongolia, getting mauled by the Volga Bulghars on their way back. Thus, they perceived that the conquest of the northwest would be extremely difficult. When they were planning their return invasion in 1235, Chaghadai advised Ögödei that all Mongols should send their eldest sons to take part so that the army would be larger than ever before, and Yelü Chucai, a chief advisor of Chinggis and Ögödei, discussed but ultimately turned down a strategic proposal the same year for sending masses of Chinese troops on the western campaign.9

Excellent studies by Peter Jackson, Gian Andri Bezzola, and Felicitas Schmieder have explored European perceptions of the Mongols, from initial hopes in 1220 that an Eastern Christian “King David” was coming as an ally against the Muslims, to apocalyptic fears and outrage during and after the first invasion of Europe.10 Much less has been written about the Mongol notions and preconceptions of Europe. Though the relative paucity of sources makes this a challenge, it is an important endeavor, not least because this might help explain how Mongol-European relations unfolded.

It is evident that the Mongols gained information from Europe’s people during the 1241 invasion. For example, they took local townspeople in a pass through the Carpathians and used them as guides across Transylvania, Hungary’s easternmost region. As they advanced into enemy territory, it was a standard tactic for the Mongols to detain and interrogate local people to discover the lay of the land and enemy positions. Certain words found in the Chinese (originally Mongolian) biographies of Sübedei probably came from Hungarian informants; the Danube is called “Tuna” (Duna in Hungarian), King Béla IV is referred to by a term resembling his royal title, Király, and his subjects are called the Mazhaer (馬札兒) tribe, which is quite a good transliteration of Magyar.11

More mysterious is the issue of how the Mongols gained so much intelligence about Europe before they invaded. A Mongol ultimatum from Ögödei Qa’an addressed to Béla IV was carried back from Russian territory by a Hungarian friar, Julian, in 1238. It read, “I know that you are a wealthy and powerful king, that you have many soldiers under you, and alone you rule a great kingdom.”12 How did the khan know this so early? Of course, there is the possibility that information was received from merchants, spies, and figures in Mongol employ like the Englishman who was reportedly captured during an attack on Austria in 1241.13 There is evidence that the Mongols also indirectly got information on Europe from Arabic geographical literature. A passage in the Secret History, composed in Mongolian for the Chinggisid dynasty in the 1250s or 1260s, contains a line in which Chaghadai advised his brother, Ögödei Qa’an, in preparation for this invasion: “The enemy people beyond consists of many states, and there, at the end of the world, they are hard people. They are people who, when they become angry, would rather die by their own swords. I am told they have sharp swords.”14 Mysteriously, this has a
resemblance to a brief passage on the “land of the Franks” found in the geographical work of al-Qazwini, composed c. 1262–63 with a later recension dating to 1276. It touches the same points – the Franks’ territory is a broad land, full of cruel, valiant, and perfidious people who do not think of flight in battle, preferring death. Moreover, the Franks have sharper swords than those of India. The reason that Qazwini’s geographical material on the Franks, a term broadly used at the time for Europeans, also appears in a Mongolian source is mysterious. The statements in Qazwini’s report originate in much earlier Islamic geographical reports from the tenth century and a lost account of the Crusaders in the Levant likely made in the twelfth century. His account must have had no direct influence on the Secret History or vice versa. Similar statements we see could be mere literary topos about the northwestern corner of the world’s inhabitants, but we might trust Chaghadai’s recorded statement that he received the account from informants, perhaps local literati in his territories who could have consulted what fragmentary geographical material on Europe they had. So, in preparation for their invasion, the Mongols sought information on northwestern people and heard about “the Franks” – described as huge numbers of fanatical, suicidal warriors with really sharp swords inhabiting a vast territory! Whether it was accurate, this sort of testimony could have contributed to the pre-invasion apprehension of Batu and his forces.

THE MAJOR INVASION

Sources from Mongol courts note their forces were divided along five routes as they advanced on Hungary in the first months of 1241. The northern “right” group under Orda (Batu’s elder brother) and Baidar (a Chaghadaid prince) moved swiftly through Poland, which at the time was fragmented into five principalities. They sacked Lublin and Sandomir in February. If we believe Polish chroniclers, Mongol forces were ambushed, suffering an initial defeat at Tursko or on the northeastern border. Afterwards, Mongol forces regrouped and swiftly won a number of victories as they proceeded westward, defeating Duke Boleslaw V’s army at Chmielnik on 18 March. Krakow was burned on 31 March, and the duke became a refugee in Bohemia as the commoners fled into the forests. In Silesia, the wealthiest and most westerly duchy, the Mongols besieged but failed to take Wrocław, something which was attributed to a celestial prodigy which terrified the Mongols into retreating. Further west, the high duke of Poland, Henry II, managed to assemble a coalition army at Liegnitz comprising his own contingents, local miners, and some elite units of Templars and Teutonic Knights. On 9 April 1241, the two opposing forces fought a decisive and hard-fought battle; the Mongols personally told a Polish friar a few years later that they were on the point of flight when suddenly Henry II’s army collapsed. Subsequently, the Mongol army made a few half-hearted advances on Bohemia and then passed through Moravia very rapidly in late April or May, only laying waste to the countryside and not besieging any fortified towns. They reached Hungary shortly afterwards.

When Orda and Baidar were still advancing through Poland, the other princely contingents had simultaneously moved into Hungary. The main force under Batu and Shiban (both Jochids), along with Sübedei, moved through the Verecke Pass in Hungary’s northeast. Forces under Qadan (an Ögödeid) and Büri (a Chaghadaid)
passed through the Borgo Pass and launched an invasion of eastern Transylvania’s Saxon centers. Böchek (a Toluid) led the assault southward through Vlach territory (later Moldavia and Wallachia) and entered Hungary, probably through the Vöröstorony (Turnu Roșu) Pass. Since Mongol sources consistently mention “five routes” of entry by Mongol forces into Hungary, it is possible that Büri and Qadan’s units entered the Carpathians via separate routes. Interestingly, the advances of Mongol armies might reflect a planned distribution of appanages. Representatives of all four filial branches of the Chinggisid family invaded from different directions in a way that could have led to the tidy division of Hungary’s territory. If not coincidental, there was a component of planned wealth distribution as well; Qadan and Büri’s attack fell on the silver mining center, Böchek had taken the salt production and trade routes, while the Jochid princes, Batu and Shiban, appear to have moved into the pastures of the Great Hungarian Plain.

A major consequence of the Mongol strategy was that Batu, Shiban, and Sübedei might have faced the Hungarian royal army at the decisive Battle of Muhi on 11 April 1241 without the assistance of other contingents. It has regularly been imagined that Batu and the whole Mongol army moved up to Pest, provoked Béla IV into pursuit, and then retreated as a body to their chosen site at the Sajó River to do battle. However, a close comparison of the most detailed European account with Asian sources suggests that Batu remained in northeastern Hungary after breaking into the Carpathian Basin before the battle. The Mongol practice of sending ahead vanguard forces is well attested in contemporary sources, some of which record that Batu sent ahead his brother Shiban with 10,000 men. Under Sübedei, who devised the scheme, they managed to “lure” the Hungarians to a chosen site. Interestingly, the Asian sources testify to intense anxiety felt amongst the Mongol troops before the engagement; Batu ascended a hill to pray and lament to Tengri in conscious imitation of Chinggis Khan’s habit before his greatest military undertakings. Nonetheless, the Mongols won the battle by crossing the Sajó in the darkness of night and surrounding the Hungarian camp at dawn. This led to a panic retreat with the Hungarian king barely escaping along with his brother, Coloman, who died a few months later from his wounds. In one fell swoop, the ability of the Hungarians to provide unified resistance was shattered. King Béla fled to Zagreb in Croatia, which was part of his kingdom, and then to an island on the Dalmatian coast when Qadan crossed the Danube and renewed his pursuit in early 1242. From the Mongol perspective, it appeared Béla had boarded a ship and put to sea, abandoning his kingdom.

In the year between the king’s defeat at Muhi and the Mongol withdrawal, the inhabitants of Hungary were on their own, responsible for organizing local defenses. Many improvised earthworks of concentric circles built around churches have been found in the Great Hungarian Plain, often accompanied by traces of a last stand against the Mongols. These earthwork forts were evidently not effective, but they were the only option for many rural communities. The exact numbers of casualties will never be known, but the distribution of abandoned villages, archaeological traces of destruction, human remains showing signs of mass killing, and buried coin hoards dated to the invasion all point to the devastation being highly concentrated on the Great Hungarian Plain. The area east of the Danube River which the Mongols directly occupied for most of the year-long invasion suffered most heavily. This accords with the textual sources which mention the Mongols were prevented by
Hungarian defenders from crossing the Danube until the severe winter of 1241–42 caused the river to freeze over. Advancing over the ice, the Mongols reached western Hungary, where resistance was increasingly staunch, and we read of citadels like Esztergom, fortified cities, and monasteries vigorously holding out against Mongol attacks. The onslaught did not last long, with the Mongols suddenly and mysteriously withdrawing, making their way to Bulgaria and perhaps considering an attack on Constantinople that never materialized. They gradually meandered their way to the northern Caucasus, where they wintered in 1242–43, reaching the Volga River and their assigned territories in 1243 or 1244, which suggests they were not compelled to return in any great haste.

EXPLANATIONS FOR THE WITHDRAWAL IN 1242

A “single, satisfying explanation” for the sudden withdrawal of the Mongols from the Kingdom of Hungary in 1242 is still a desideratum in the historiography, but several theories have been offered to explain it. The long-established theory that the Mongols withdrew from Europe on receiving news that the qa’an died, requiring them to return to Mongolia to elect a new khan, has had the widest support among historians (including Halperin, Fletcher, Buell, Fennell, Engel, et al.). Yet the Persian official and historian Rashid al-Din denied that they knew the qa’an was dead when they left the Kingdom of Hungary, nor did Batu’s forces return directly to Mongolia. Another problem is that primary sources which describe the duration of journeys from Mongolia to the Golden Horde or Europe do not support the argument that any messenger could reach Hungary in fewer than four months. Since Ögödei died on 11 December 1241 and Thomas of Split claimed the Mongols withdrew eastward at the end of March, it is unlikely that Batu knew the qa’an was dead when the withdrawal order was given. On the other hand, it is plausible that they could have known he was very ill, since Ögödei was an alcoholic whose health was deteriorating in his last years. This situation was not a well-kept secret.

Historian of Inner Asia Denis Sinor questioned the traditional explanation decades ago, observing that Batu and other leaders did not return to Mongolia to elect a khan. He posited that Europe had insufficient grasslands for nomadic occupation. The consideration of environmental factors was novel, but it lacks much primary source support; the king of Hungary stated after the invasion that his country was ideally suited for the Mongols and their herds. Ecological explanations re-emerged recently with Ulf Büntgen and Nicola Di Cosmo’s environmental hypothesis, which used paleoclimatic data to observe a sudden cold, wet period in Hungary in early 1242 and posited that the Mongols retreated owing to these weather conditions creating a food crisis and limiting their cavalry’s mobility. Problems emerge with both explanations. Sinor’s theory appears to underestimate the carrying capacity of the Great Hungarian Plain, judging by later medieval records of herd sizes there. The main obstacle to accepting the newer theory is that the textual evidence used to support the negative impact of the weather is almost wholly connected to a 1242 famine, but sources across Eurasia demonstrate Mongol armies intentionally triggered famines during invasions.

Peter Jackson considered the possibility that the Mongols intended a punitive raid against Hungary in 1241 with no intentions for permanent occupation, suggesting
that the simplest explanation was that the campaign was intended to chastise its ruler. Timothy May has offered that conquest was intended in the long run but has drawn attention to the fact that a regular feature of Mongol conquests was that they occurred gradually and were characterized by “tsunami” cycles of invasion and withdrawal, which broke down the enemy’s ability and desire to resist. I agree with the argument that when they withdrew, the Mongols certainly planned to return. Furthermore, we cannot discount the problem of fortresses, which were a major factor with which to reckon before effective gunpowder weapons emerged. It is hard to ignore the vast range of source materials across the whole of Eurasia that describe the Mongols struggling most with fortifications. Thomas of Split emphasized that the Mongols were the most skilled nation in warfare “especially on open ground,” yet he noted in a short timespan many examples of Mongols being foiled by fortifications in Dalmatia. In addition to the problem of the fortresses, the Mongols could have been deterred by concerns about coordinated attacks from states in the unconquered western part of Europe. Shamans possibly influenced the Chinggisid princes to order a withdrawal; they played a role in the decision to invade Hungary, and according to William of Rubruck in the early 1250s, it was shamans alone whose orders prevented a return to Europe in force.

Likely employing a more cautious approach owing to political instability within their empire in the aftermath of 1242, the Mongols attempted to gain the voluntary submission of Europe’s leaders through ultimatums and false offers of alliance — something which Peter Jackson demonstrates was essential to their successful conquest of other regions during the thirteenth century. They did not conquer solely by means of military force. Frequently, they resorted to negotiated settlements. In cases where they lacked major military advantages, they often opted for a less-than-total subjugation by allowing the native rulers to retain a greater deal of autonomy. Employing a divide-and-conquer strategy, the usage of flattery and promises was not uncommon, and at least at first, many of the Mongols’ subjects entered into pacts with them as would-be allies.

**AFTERMATH, REFORMS, AND LATER INVASIONS**

If the reasons for the withdrawal are mysterious, one thing was considered certain in its aftermath: Béla IV, the Hungarians, and many others across the whole of Europe expected the Mongols to return imminently. There was no prevailing sense that the threat had passed. In 1248, Béla wrote a letter to Pope Innocent IV in which he explained that the Mongols were still demanding his submission; informants had told him that they planned to invade Europe in the near future. As such, the king and his leading nobles decided to undertake a series of major fortification reforms. He turned to the Knights Hospitaller to fortify the parts of Transylvania as far as the Vöröstorony (Turnu Roșu) Pass and to construct other fortifications along the Danube because his own people lacked sufficient building knowledge. In a short time, he turned the river, or at least the narrow northern part near the Danube Bend, into a highly fortified zone, walling the new hilltop town of Buda and renovating the rugged castle of Visegrád. These reforms had a sense of urgency after a documented Mongol raid or advance in 1246–48 triggered fears that the Mongols had returned to Hungary.
Castle building was undoubtedly a reaction to the Mongol invasion and a measure to resist future attacks. Béla IV lamented his kingdom’s inadequate fortifications in a message to the pope after Batu’s withdrawal. However, such building reforms were carried out in the wider region beyond Hungary. Charter evidence reveals castle building reforms were taking place in Poland during the second half of the 1200s, allowing for the rapid construction of castles by the nobility, rather than remaining the prerogative of the ruler. Daniel and Vasilko, the co-rulers of Galicia-Volhynia, likewise engaged in building improved fortifications in the years following the Mongol arrival. The Rus’ chronicles record that Daniel of Galicia lamented that his lack of adequate fortresses had made him unable to repel the Mongols. It is no accident that the Kamyenyets Tower in today’s Belarus dates from the 1270s and is one of the earliest brick towers in the region. Polish towns started having their walls rebuilt in brick in the same period – for example, Poznan received its brick walls in 1275.

In 1259, the Golden Horde launched a serious invasion of Poland. This episode followed the Mongols stamping out resistance in Galicia-Volhynia in 1257–58 and devastating Lithuania in 1258 sufficiently enough to make the Lithuanian duke, Mindaugas, convert to Christianity for a time in hopes of receiving help. The Mongols even came to blows with the Teutonic Knights and inflicted heavy losses on them. The following year, Berke, the successor of Batu, sent an embassy to Paris demanding the French monarch’s surrender and threatening invasion of France. Simultaneously, he pressured Béla IV to enter into a marriage alliance with the Mongols and join in a campaign against his Latin neighbours, essentially by offering his kingdom as a base for the invaders and sharing plunder with them. This campaign had a wider scope than Poland and could have developed into a more serious and sustained assault on Christendom than even the first invasion. However, drastic developments diverted Berke’s attention away from Europe. In 1259, Möngke Qa’an died in distant Sichuan and his brothers, Qubilai and Ariq Böke, went to war for his throne almost immediately. In the western part of the Mongol Empire, the Jochid ulus under Berke went to war with the recently founded Ilkhanate, which was established in the Middle East by the Toluid prince Hulegu. As the former empire devolved into several enormous, mutually hostile realms, Europe was granted a reprieve, especially as Berke and Hulegu inflicted huge casualties on each other in pitched battles over the first half of the 1260s.

The last period in which the Golden Horde posed an existential danger to the kingdoms of East-Central Europe was in the 1280s. Charters and Persian sources agree that the Mongols were still putting considerable military pressure on Hungary at the time. In 1285, two preeminent Horde princes, Töle Buqa and Noqai, launched a major invasion of Hungary that pushed as far as Pest before coming to ruin. Besides concerted Hungarian attacks, the weather played havoc on Mongol forces. Noqai returned home by moving eastward across the Carpathians without major setbacks, but Töle Buqa’s army was surrounded and trapped in the mountains. Even Baybars al-Mansuri, a chronicler in the Islamic world, had heard of the calamity: “Nogai took his troops and left Töle Buqa. He reached his winter quarters safe and sound. Töle Buqa, on the other hand, went through shelterless deserts and wild steppes as he lost the main road. He and his troops experienced extreme difficulties and calamities; the larger part of his army died of cold and weakness. Just a few of them
survived.” European chronicles likewise describe how the invaders, returning with plunder and captives, were pursued by Transylvanian troops who suddenly sallied from their fortresses upon hearing that the Mongols were suffering from famine and disease. Fleeing into the forests and mountains, a huge number of the invaders died. Shortly afterwards, the Mongol princes made another drive into Poland and besieged Krakow unsuccessfully, its castle now fortified in stone. Despite some setbacks, the Golden Horde did subjugate several states and played a powerful political role in the Balkans during the 1280s and into the 1300s. Even the emergence of Romanian principalities appears to be tied to the Golden Horde’s activity in the region. During this period, the Golden Horde’s rulers behaved very much as regional potentates rather than loyal subjects of the Mongol Empire – the only legitimate power on Earth – and the qa’an in Mongolia. For instance, Noqai made an alliance with the Byzantines, accepted their gifts gladly, cooperated in their foreign policy at certain points, and married a daughter of Emperor Michael VIII. This sort of behavior, characteristic of a major regional power, signaled a transition. Noqai and other rulers in the Golden Horde had a continuing interest in carving out an imperium that extended in several directions, including Europe. Such policies and activities reflected their personal goals, and even those of their allies, rather than grandiose plans of world rulership.

CONCLUSIONS

We can see that the unified Mongol Empire, with its program of world conquest, was aiming to subjugate Europe in the 1240s. With the breakup of the western half of the Mongol Empire in 1260 into the mutually hostile Ilkhanate and Golden Horde, European powers came to distinguish different Mongol powers and the types of relationships they could cultivate with them. Likewise, Mongol khanates came to distinguish the various states in Europe and pursue different types of relationships with them, so that the Golden Horde cultivated trade with Italian merchants and the Ilkhanate reached out to France for an alliance in the Holy Land. In Eastern Europe, however, the Golden Horde remained a threatening power, playing an active role in regional power struggles before Lithuania’s rapid expansion toward the Black Sea created a buffer zone in the late 1300s.

Public interest in the 1241–42 invasion largely stems from the potential consequences of a Mongol conquest of Europe. Some authors argue that a Mongol conquest of Europe would have prevented the social and scientific developments of the Renaissance. Their viewpoint was a commonplace of Mongol historians in past decades of scholarship. With our present era of scholarship on the Middle Ages shifting to an increasingly global perspective, historians are less willing to make such pronouncements since they can easily be interpreted as a sort of charter myth – that is, Europe’s salvation matters because its special destiny was to eventually bring forth the Renaissance. Nevertheless, historians give rise to another problem when they argue that the Mongols had no intention to conquer Europe. First, overwhelming evidence shows that they did intend a conquest. Secondly, such a viewpoint smacks of European exceptionalism, essentially implying that the Mongols were conquering the world in the thirteenth century but not Europe. If the Mongols were conquering the world, why would they see Europe as a special case for exemption? Likewise, a
tendency in the literature to discount a priori any possibility that human resistance played a role in Europe’s escape from Mongol subjugation amounts to the creation of another charter myth, which holds that every force except the human agency of its inhabitants intervened to drive away the Mongols during this unique and exceptional historical episode. Through no merit of its own, we are told to believe, Europe was saved. Still, the wide range of sources invites alternative explanations, and the conclusion advanced here is that Europe’s size and defensive capacity amounted to a deterrent even in 1241–42, when Batu waged a campaign that was very successful in many regards.

NOTES

1 Churchill 1956, 9. Though not primarily remembered as a historian, Winston Churchill undoubtedly influenced many readers in the twentieth century by advancing this view in his popular works.
2 Coffin and Stacey 2005, 414. The authors of an important textbook perpetuate a commonplace when they state, “Mongol conquests continued in Persia, the Middle East, and China, but after 1241 the Mongols never resumed their attacks on Europe.”
3 TMM, 45; TR, 82–83.
4 Rashid al-Din’s chronicle reveals that Batu and Güyük were approaching each other with their respective troops when Güyük abruptly died in 1248. RDT, 354–355.
5 Jackson 2005, 72–73.
6 TMM, 85–86; Richard 1965, 113–117.
7 The translator, Igor De Rachewiltz, suggested that this statement meant Batu wondered when it would be appropriate to end the westward advance. SHM, § 275.
8 Richard 1965, 77.
9 The Yuan Shi refers to this larger campaign as a “western campaign” (四征). Pow 2017, 15–16; SHM, § 270; YS, 3460.
12 Jackson 2005, 60.
13 Giles 1889, 470–473.
14 SHM, § 270.
15 Lewis 1987, 123.
16 Richard 1965, 52.
17 Pow 2020, 69–76.
18 RDB, 70; Długosz 1823, 267, 271–272.
19 TR, 80–82.
20 Somer 2018, 240.
21 RDB, 70.
23 RDB, 71.
26 RDB, 71–72.
27 Rogers 1996, 3.
28 RDT, 332.
29 RDB, 65, 71.
30 Sinor 1972, 182; Göckenjan and Sweeney 1985, 309.
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HBSS, See List of Abbreviations.

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RDB, See List of Abbreviations.

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TMM, See List of Abbreviations.

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