ОТЕЧЕСТВЕННАЯ ИСТОРИЯ

Later Rumors of Mongol Defeat in Europe in the Mid-Thirteenth Century: Batu's Drowning in Austria and the Saint Ladislaus Legend in Russia

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The object of this paper is to explore false reports of Batu's combat death in East-Central Europe that were recorded in both Western European and Russian sources in the decades and centuries following his invasion of Europe in 1241–1242. Het'um's *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient* (1307) contains a clearly inaccurate description of Batu drowning during an attempted Mongol invasion of Austria. Fifteenth-century Russian chronicles and a hagiographic text separately report on Batu being slain in Hungary by a saintly king, "Vladislav". This *Tale of the Death of Batu* (*Повесть об убиении Батыя*) suddenly became quite popular in Rus' chronicle records during the period leading up to the Great Stand at the Ugra River when Moscow defied the demands of the Horde. While such diverse and post-thirteenth-century accounts of the Mongol khan's death are fundamentally untrue — Batu certainly returned from Europe and ruled the Jochid territory from the Volga River for many years into the 1250s — they are also not the purely baseless products of medieval authors' imaginations. This paper analyzes and speculates as to how genuine historic events or at least widespread stories,

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such as a Mongol general's death at Muhi, and even the *Legenda of Saint Ladislaus of Hungary*, became inserted into these amalgamated narratives over time. The results in both cases shed light on how news and local memories were intriguingly transferred and shared across Europe and its peripheries over the course of the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Mongol Invasion of Europe, Batu, Het'um, Rus' Chronicles, Saint Ladislaus Legend, Kingdom of Hungary, Varadin, Ladislaus I of Hungary.

Поздние слухи о поражении монголов в Европе в середине XIII века: утопление Батыя в Австрии и легенда о святом Владиславе на Руси

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Автор исходит из презумпции, что слухи, которые распространяются в те или иные эпохи в тех или иных регионах, сами по себе являются ценным историческим материалом и могут многое прояснить в исторических событиях. Целью данной статьи является исследование ложных сообщений о гибели Батыя в битве на территории Восточной Центральной Европы, которые были зафиксированы как в западноевропейских, так и в русских источниках в течение десятилетий и столетий после его вторжения в Европу в 1241–1242 гг. В сочинении Хетума «Цветник историй земель Востока» (1307 г.) содержится явно неточное описание утопления Батыя во время попытки монгольского вторжения в Австрию. Русские летописи XV в. и агиографический текст отдельно сообщают о том, что Батый был убит в Венгрии святым королем Владиславом. Эта «Повесть об убиении Батыя» внезапно стала довольно популярной в летописных записях Руси в период, предшествовавший Великому стоянию на реке Угре, когда Москва готова была отвергнуть требования Орды. Хотя такие разнообразные и относящиеся к периоду после XIII в. рассказы о смерти монгольского хана в корне не соответствуют действительности (Батый, несомненно, вернулся из Европы и правил территорией джучидов с Волги в течение многих лет до 1250-х гг.), они также не являются полностью беспочвенными продуктами воображения средневековых авторов. В статье анализируется, как подлинные исторические события или, по крайней мере, широко распространенные истории, такие как смерть монгольского генерала в Мухи и даже легенда о святом Ладиславе Венгерском, со временем были включены в эти объединенные повествования. Результаты в обоих случаях проливают свет на то, как новости и местные воспоминания интригующе передавались и распространялись по Европе и ее периферии в течение Средних веков.

Ключевые слова: монгольское нашествие на Европу, Батый, Хетум, русские летописи, легенда о святом Ладиславе Венгерском, Венгерское королевство, Варадин, Ласло I Святой.

Surprisingly, there are two independent medieval literary traditions which both make the claim that Batu had died while invading Europe in the 1240s. As the senior Mongol prince who reigned over the huge Jochid *ulus* (state) in Western Eurasia from the late 1220s to mid-1250s, he had been the supreme commander of the major Mongol Western Campaign of 1236–1242 that pushed as far as the borders of Austria in 1241. Even a cursory glance will suffice to demonstrate that both literary traditions on his death are

unrelated narratives that had grown up in separate times and places — they differ on all points except that Batu died in the fighting in Europe. The earlier one is found in *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient*, a history of the Mongols which was composed in French from the dictation of the Armenian noble turned Premonstratensian canon, Het'um (i. e., Hayton the Historian, c. 1240–1320), during his exile in France in 1307. He claimed that Batu had drowned in an unnamed large river in Austria while trying to cross it to engage the Duke of Austria's forces on the other bank. The second, much later story is the *Tale of the Death [or Killing] of Batu*, the first surviving texts of which are found in Rus' Muscovite chronicles from the second half of the fifteenth century. In this tale, Batu met his death during an invasion of Hungary in hand-to-hand combat with its pious king, Vladislav.

Scholarly treatment of these peculiar passages does exist. Regarding the first text, Strakosch-Grassmann demonstrated over a century ago that Het'um's account was replete with errors and the drowning episode never happened to Batu during his famous European campaign, making any attempt to identify the river pointless. Johannes Giessauf supported this viewpoint in a relatively recent study of Austrian Duke Friedrich II's much exaggerated role in driving back the invading Mongols in 1241–1242, demonstrating as well that a later fourteenth-century reference by Johannes Longus (c. 1315–1383) to the drowning was directly taken from Het'um's popular work originally[1]; it does not serve as any independent corroboration.

Regarding the distinct Rus' tradition of a Mongol defeat in Europe, it held that Batu was personally slain by the Hungarian king in a subsequent invasion in 1248. Within the very limited English-language literature dealing with this intriguing topic, Charles Halperin published a study on the dating of the manuscripts which contain the *Tale of the Death of Batu*, focusing on what the insertion of such fictionalized accounts into Muscovite compilations indicates about attitudes to Mongols and their invincibility in the time between the Battle of Kulikovo Pole in 1380 and Moscow's "liberation from the Tatar yoke" in 1480. Regarding possible inspirations for the dubious record, Russian and Hungarian scholars have long suggested the saint-king, Ladislaus I of Hungary (r. 1077–1095), and the legend of his individual combat with a Cuman, the *Saint Ladislaus Legenda* — a popular one in later medieval East Central Europe. Possibly, Halperin noted, the tale was inserted into Muscovite chronicles because it inspired resistance[2]. Denis Sinor, among others, argued that the Serbian hagiographer, Pachomius (d. 1484), invented the *Tale of the Death of Batu* whereas Sergei Rozanov suggested in 1916 that it had probably originated in a Muscovite chronicle of 1472, perhaps owing to a different Serbian author who interwove the popular thirteenth-century Orthodox figure, Saint Sava (d. 1236), into the tale[3]. It is important to note here that the Slavic name "Vladislav" became "László" in its Hungarian form and "Ladislaus" in its Latin form during the Middle Ages, hence the variations encountered in this article — but all originate from "Vladislav" meaning "possessor of glory".

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[1] *Strakosch-Grassmann G.* Der Einfall der Mongolen in Mitteleuropa in den Jahren 1241 und 1242. Innsbruck, 1893. P. 204–208; *Giessauf J.* Herzog Friedrich II. von Österreich und die Mongolengefahr 1241/42 // Forschungen zur Geschichte des Alpen-Adria-Raumes. Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Geschichte 9. Graz, 1997. P. 25.

[2] *Halperin Ch.* The Defeat and Death of Batu // Russian History. 1983. Vol. 10. P. 63; *Zoltán A.* Szent László és Batu kán // Ad vitam aeternam. Olvasatok (6). Budapest, 2017. P. 355–359.

[3] *Halperin Ch.* The Defeat and Death of Batu. P. 60–65; *Zoltán A.* Szent László és Batu kán. P. 358; *Sinor D.* La mort de Batu et les trompettes mues par le vent chez Herberstein // Journal asiatique. 1941–1942. P. 201–208.

While these two separate accounts of Batu's death have attracted past interest and historians' theories and studies, they attract little interest from modern specialists on the Mongol Empire and its military history. The main reason would be because they are both obviously inaccurate. To an expert, they can appear as mere curiosities. Better historiographical evidence from Mongol court insiders, other well-informed contemporaries in Asia, and European ambassadors who had audiences with him at his base on the Volga River all serve to inform us that Batu was alive until at least the autumn of 1254; he had a preeminent influence on the Mongol Empire until his death, likely in 1255[4]. Contemporary sources never recorded his battle death, and the king of Hungary in the 1240s was Béla IV (r. 1235–1270) rather than any Vladislav. Yet, we still must ask why such claims about Batu's death during an invasion of Europe became so widespread that there were two separate traditions of them. They serve to demonstrate information being exchanged from an Eastern Mediterranean authority to Western Europe in one case, and evidently from Hungary or Serbia to Russia in the other. Research heretofore often discussed only one or the other of these traditions rather than in combination.

The present study aims to explore the two narratives in turn, and I would suggest that a dual exploration is pertinent to global and Mongol Empire historians. Allowing that any such account of Batu's fate is historically inaccurate, dismissing them as useless information divests historians of crucially useful material that sheds light on wider connections in the Middle Ages. For one reason, these accounts are valuable because they reflect genuine exchanges of information between disparate regions in the Middle Ages and therefore offer clues to how news, rumors, and historical memory were shared. For another reason, both broad narratives of Batu's death in Europe seem to reflect amalgamations of scattered but authentic historical details and rumors that would be of interest to Mongolists or to those investigating the larger range of nomadic interactions on sedentary Europe's edges.

Regarding Het'um's account, I argue that it originates from a garbled memory of the author that owes its main inspiration to a real episode — the Battle of Muhi fought between the Hungarian king's army and the Mongol army of Batu on April 11, 1241. Judging by references to it in records across the whole of Asia, including in the only medieval Chinese report of a battle in Europe, it seems it was a widely remembered event across Eurasia in its aftermath[5]. Like Strakosch-Grassmann earlier observed, I argue there is a strong connection between Het'um's confused description — which moved the action to Austria and presented it as a local victory — and the account of the Battle of Muhi in the *Yuan Shi* biographies of the Mongol commander, Subutai[6]. However, there was likely no extremely implausible textual transmission or direct borrowing by Het'um despite Strakosch-Grassmann arguing as much. One would not imagine that Het'um had access directly to Mongolian or Chinese imperial records in textual form; it is much more probable in his context

[4] For some important contemporary testimonies to Batu still reigning in the 1250s, see: *Boyle J. A.* The Successors of Genghis Khan. New York, 1971. P. 121, 180–201; *Raverty H. G.* Tabakat-i-Nasiri: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia: in 2 vols. Vol. 2. London, 1881. P. 1172–1173; *Dawson C.* The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. New York, 1955. P. 208.

[5] *Laszlovszky J., Pow S., Pusztai T.* Reconstructing the Battle of Muhi and the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241: New Archaeological and Historical Approaches // Hungarian Archaeology E-Journal. 2016. P. 30.

[6] *Strakosch-Grassmann G.* Der Einfall der Mongolen in Mitteleuropa… P. 203–205, 207.

as a military ally to the Mongols that he received information in conversation or from indirectly involved Western Asian authors such as Juvaini[7]. Additional sources that I wish to address, unavailable or unknown to nineteenth-century authors like Strakosch-Grassmann, point to a variety of other historical elements which entered Het'um's story.

As for the fifteenth-century Rus' chronicles' "Tale of the Death of Batu," I contend that the story is primarily inspired and connected to the folklore, artwork, and iconography all dedicated to the royal promotion of the cult of King László I in Hungary — and particularly the tale of László and the Cuman which was a favorite topic of fresco painters[8]. To ignore the context of the growing cult and fascination with the eleventh-century Hungarian king throughout Eastern Central Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth century fails to highlight what was probably the single most important factor in the story being taken and adapted even in Northeast Russia in the same period. However, here again we can see some additional influences on the Russian texts via Balkan hagiographic elements. I would suggest as well that later Hungarian victories over the Mongols in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries could have fed into the Russian adaptation of the tale. As such, it makes a compelling case for the view that this story — a legend of László and the Cuman transported to the circumstances of Batu's invasion of Europe — was really being used to inspire resistance against nomad power in the Grand Duchy of Moscow just as the story of the royal saint László was used in Hungary for largely the same purpose. In the case of both narrative traditions, examined in detail below, we can conclude that they do not stem from ahistorical baselessness — mere wishful thinking or pious fiction drawn from the fancy of individual authors who were simply trying to please and entertain their readership.

Het'um's Story of Batu's Drowning in Austria

Regarding the details of Batu's drowning, Het'um's account in *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient* can be summarized as follows: After conquering Hungary and capturing the Cumans, Batu led his forces toward Germany. In the Duke of Austria's territory, he encountered a great river. The bridge across it was blocked by Austrian forces so Batu tried to ford the river on horseback, but he and a great number of his troops perished when their horses' strength gave out. The survivors retreated eastward and did not return to Germany.

> *Son cheval fu tant traveillies qu'il ne pout plus, e fu noiez Batho, e grant partie de ses genz dedeins le flume avant que poissent venir a l'autre rive. Quant les Tartars, qui encore n'estoient entrez en l'eive, virent leur seignor Batho e leur compaignies noier, dolens e tristes s'en retournerent au roiaume de Roussie e de Comaine, ne onques puis les Tartars n'entrerent en Alemaigne.*

[His horse was so exhausted that it could not continue, and Batu was drowned with a great number of his people in the river before they could reach the other bank. When the Tartars who had not yet entered the water saw their lord Batu and their companions

[7] *Bedrosian R.* Het'um the Historian's History of the Tartars. New York, 2004. P. 2, g70.
[8] *Klaniczay G.* Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses. Cambridge, 2002. P. 191, 388–393.

drown, they returned mournfully and sadly to the kingdom of Russia and of Cumania; never again did the Tartars invade Germany][9].

What inspired this tale? Het'um, dictating the work in France in 1307, likely did not have access to the written sources of Lesser Armenia, let alone any Mongol ones, but rather relied on his memory of things he had learned previously while there and as a royal subject in the Mongol Empire's service. He specifically stated that the section of his work describing Chinggis Khan to the reign of Möngke (r. 1251–1259) was what he had found in the Tartars' [Mongols'] own histories[10]. Yet, it is also clear that he conflated totally different historical events in ways that would be impossible to imagine if he had closely consulted Mongol official sources of the thirteenth century. For instance, his account of Möngke Khan's death, which occurred in landlocked Sichuan in 1259, seems to be a conflation with the sinking of Qubilai's fleets in the 1274 and 1281 naval invasions of Japan[11].

The episode of Batu's drowning in Austria and his army's resultant withdrawal appears to be a hodgepodge of several details originating from authentic events, but most of all, it relates to the Battle of Muhi which was in fact fought in Hungary and was a decisive Mongol victory. Despite the outcome, it was widely documented to have been a tough battle, and Batu's army suffered a serious setback in the initial stages as it crossed a bridge over the Sajó River to attack the Hungarian camp in the darkness of night. Carpini, a papal emissary to the Mongols in 1245–1247, had heard that Batu managed to halt the attempt of his troops to flee the country in terror as the struggle turned against them. Thomas of Split (1200–1268) provided the most detailed account of the engagement. He noted that the Mongol troops who had already crossed over the Sajó were surprised by a sudden attack of the forewarned Hungarians, driven back to the bridge, and many were drowned in the river[12]. Another resident of the Hungarian kingdom, Rogerius (c. 1205–1266), noted that the landscape was marshy and the river wide and muddy, making it seem that nobody could cross the river except by the bridge[13]; a factor which might explain why the retreating Mongols drowned.

For identifying Het'um's main inspiration, we know an important Mongol general was among those who drowned in this incident. A crucial record of the battle is found in the biography of the Mongol general, Subutai, surviving in the Chinese-language *Yuan Shi* but based on a Mongolian original biography already composed by the early 1260s[14]. It describes how the shrewd, veteran commander devised a plan to split up from Batu's force

[9] *Hayton*. La Flor des estoires d'Orient // Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Documents Armeniens II. Paris, 1906. P. 161–162; *Bedrosian R.* Het'um the Historian's History… P. g42. — I made an English version of the exerpt here that closely reflects the original text of Het'um.

[10] *Bedrosian R.* Het'um the Historian's History… P. g70; *Jackson P.* The Mongols and the Islamic World. New Haven, 2017. P. 43.

[11] *Hayton*. La Flor des estoires d'Orient. P. 159–160; *Bedrosian R.* Het'um the Historian's History… P. g40.

[12] *Pow S., Laszlovszky J.* Finding Batu's Hill at Muhi: Liminality between Rebellious Territory and Submissive Territory, Earth and Heaven for a Mongol Prince on the Eve of Battle // Hungarian Historical Review 8. 2019. P. 273–175; *Dawson C.* The Mongol Mission. P. 30; *Karbić D., Perić O., Sweeney J. R.* Thomas of Split, History of the Bishops of Salona and Split. Budapest, 2006. P. 262–263.

[13] *Bak J. M., Rady M.* Master Roger's Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tatars. Budapest, 2010. P. 180–181.

[14] *Atwood C.* Pu'a's Boast and Doqolqu's Death: Historiography of a hidden Scandal in the Mongol Conquest of the Jin // Journal of Song-Yuan Studies. 2015. Vol. 45. P. 249–250; *Pow S., Liao J.* Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction Surrounding the Mongol Empire's Greatest General (with Translations of Subutai's Two Biographies in the Yuan Shi) // Journal of Chinese Military History. 2018. Vol. 7. P. 40.

and secretly cross the river far upstream by making a pontoon bridge with the purpose of surrounding the Hungarians. Before the work was complete, Batu's forces already crossed over the river. In their disadvantageous position, they were mauled by the enemy; thirty armoured troops, likely important officers, were killed and Batu's subordinate general, Ba'atur, died. Even after crossing, the Chinggisid princes had to be shamed out of fleeing Hungary by Subutai who had finally arrived to surround the Hungarian camp. Though they then won decisively, the Battle of Muhi is depicted rather negatively in the Mongols' official record. Not only does it describe the death of a general, but it revisits these traumas in the context of a personal dispute between Batu and Subutai that arose afterwards over who was to blame for it, owing to the botched river crossing[15].

Importantly for making sense of the connection of Het'um's story to the reports of a leader's death at Muhi, the general's name, "Ba'atur" (Baatur, Baghadur, etc.) was a common epithet for great military leaders which could stand in for a personal name or be part of a given name. It is rendered, when describing the Battle of Muhi-related episode, in relevant *Yuan Shi* biographies of Subutai as "Bahatu" (八哈秃) which bears a conspicuous resemblance to "Batu" (拔都). Even more conspicuously, the epithet "Ba'atur" appears frequently throughout the *Yuan Shi* via this transliteration: (拔都魯)[16]. The common Chinese transliteration of Batu's very own name can be seen in the initial two characters. We notice this same tendency in the case of Baɣatur (Ch. Ba-du-er 拔都兒), an important Asut figure in East Asia who died in 1297, or in the Yuan-era Chinese rendering of Asut commander, Šira Baɣatur (失剌拔都兒), both of whom possess biographies in the *Yuan Shi*[17]. We see another Chinese variant rendering of a name that simply meant Ba'atur in a separate section of the *Yuan Shi* with "Batulu" (灞都魯), the son or grandson of Bo'al, Muqali's son[18]. Most compellingly, however, we see cases of individuals with whom "Ba'atur" is rendered with the identical characters for "Batu" — for instance, the Chinese general in early Mongol Empire service, Hao Heshang Ba'atur (郝和尚拔都), or another northern Chinese general, Wang Xila, who was officially appointed Wang Xila "Ba'atur" (昔剌拔都) by Qubilai Khan for his valour[19].

Thus, this literary evidence leaves no doubt that in the earlier Mongol Empire and later Yuan period, "Batu" and "Ba'atur" likely sounded strikingly similar in spoken form. One can then imagine how easily the respective terms could be confused even in the memory of an outsider like Het'um who spoke some degree of Mongolian, as well as those who merely heard garbled renderings of Mongol leaders' names. This would not of course be the case for the Mongols themselves. One can imagine how a conflation of Batu with Ba'atur could be made, intentionally or not.

Building on the evidence, a source that was only found in the second half of the twentieth century, the *Tartar Relation* of Friar C. de Bridia, confirms a prominent Mongol general's death in the Sajó River. The Polish or Bohemian friar related that during the Battle of Muhi, a principal chief of the Mongols was hurled over a bridge to his death by the brother of Béla IV, Coloman, in the Hungarians' very first onslaught[20]. Thus, we now have direct

[15] *Pow S., Liao J.* Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction… P. 63, 66–67.

[16] For a clear example, see: Yuanshi. 元史. Beijing, 1976. P. 39.

[17] Yuanshi. P. 3212, 3284.

[18] *Hambis L.* Le Chapitre CVII du Yuan Che // T'oung Pao: in 3 vols. Leiden, 1954. Vol. 1. P. 64.

[19] Yuanshi. P. 3553, 3911.

[20] *Painter G.* The Tartar Relation // The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation. New Haven, 1995. P. 82–83.

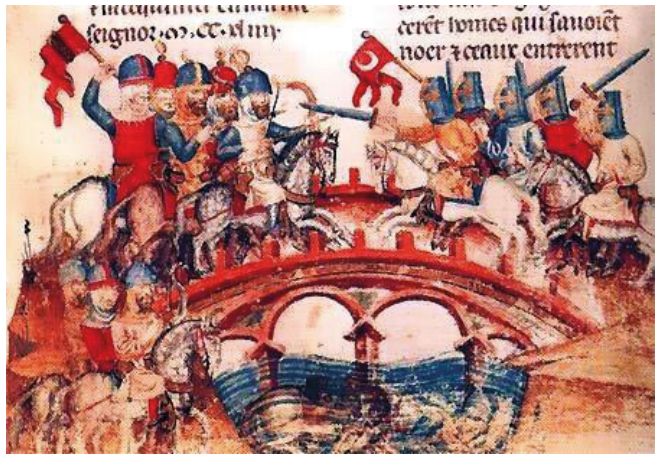

Fig. 1. A frequently reproduced depiction of the *Battle of Muhi* in historical print and online works
Source: Wikimedia Commons. Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battle_of_Mohi_1241.PNG (accessed: 20.09.2024).

Western European corroboration of the account of an important Mongol leader drowning in a river during the Battle of Muhi — something which would have been unavailable to earlier scholars like Strakosch-Grassman in their attempts to analyze Het'um's story.

Just as independent accounts of the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258 were provided by diverse authors across Asia and Europe because it was a noteworthy event[21], it is probable that Het'um's account of the battle in Europe shares details with a Mongolian/Chinese text composed in East Asia because accounts of the events were widely shared in ensuing decades — it is not from a direct connection as Strakosch-Grassmann imagined. Het'um had attended the enthronements of several Ilkhanate khans and served in Mongol campaigns. He likely heard tales of their past campaigns directly from the Mongols, but he erred on specific details when recounting them in France in 1307. Moreover, there were other related events that could have influenced the form which Het'um's account took.

Interestingly, historians are still inadvertently mixing up the Battle of Muhi with Het'um's story of an invasion of Austria — at least in the realm of medieval art. There is a manuscript image of a battle on a bridge that regularly shows up in books, exhibitions, and prominent websites as the "Battle of Muhi" (Fig. 1). Since no provenance of this image is ever provided anywhere, I took up the task of finding it, and with the capable help of several art historians, found that it is at the Austrian National Library of all places: ÖNB Cod. 2623. In reality, it belongs to a manuscript of Het'um's work from the mid-fourteenth century and is of possibly Catalonian origin. The image is intended to depict Batu's drowning in Austria rather than the Battle of Muhi *per se* (Fig. 2). A closer investigation shows that the artist of this oft misrepresented image added some fanciful touches yet clearly based it on an earlier manuscript of Het'um's book, also from a Catalonian workshop but dating to very shortly after he finished dictating it — BNF Nouvelle acquisition

[21] *Jackson P.* The Mongols and the Islamic World. P. 129–130.

Fig. 2. Full folio of Het'um's La Flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient, depicting Batu's imagined drowning in Austria. "Reiterkampf auf der Donaubrücke in Österreich; Baitho stürzt in die Donau und ertrinkt. Fotografische Reproduktion". ÖNB Cod. 2623, fol. 29r: Geschichte der orientalischen Königreiche. Dated: 1350–1375

Source: Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek [Austrian National Library]. Available at: https://onb.digital/result/10FFD47C (accessed: 20.09.2024).

française 886 (Fig. 3). The earlier work, housed in Paris, shows a level of authenticity such as the Mongols all carrying bows, as well as their conical helmets reminiscent of Mongol troops depicted in well-known manuscript images of Rashid al-Din. This might suggest some artistic advice had been provided via Het'um's eyewitness knowledge. While the focus of the present paper is not art history, this digression should provide nuance to future discussions of the "Battle of Muhi" image.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Fig. 3. An earlier manuscript depiction of Batu's drowning. The Mongols' equipment, smaller horses, etc., could reflect Het'um's input. *Hayton, Fleur des histoires d'Orient*. BNF Nouvelle acquisition française 886, fol. 19r. Dated: c. 1307–1325

Source: HAYTON, Fleur des histoires de la terre d'Orient // Bibliothèque nationale de France. Available at: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000425w/f49.item (accessed: 20.09.2024).

Regarding the question of why Het'um shifted the event to Austria and made it into a European victory, there were some Mongol forays on the duchy's Danube frontiers in the spring of 1241 as was documented by Duke Friedrich II of Austria himself in two surviving letters. Yet, he only claimed 300 and 700 Mongols were killed in the respective missives, and we can be certain Batu was not among the casualties[22]. A famous letter of a certain Ivo of Narbonne recounted a Mongol attack on Austria being repelled. Surviving

[22] *Hormayr J.* Die goldene Chronik von Hohenschwangau. Munich, 1842. P. 65–66, 70.

in Matthew Paris' *Chronica Majora*, it has long been dismissed as sensationalistic fiction, but many circumstances suggest its historical connection to the same clashes described in the duke's letters and a Mongol assault directed at Korneuburg and the much more established Klosterneuburg[23]. A Mongolian-originating account of the 1241 invasion of Europe mentions, in the context of Orda and Baidar's victory over the Poles and Batu's victory over the Hungarians at Muhi, that Mongol forces were advancing in the direction of ASTARYLAW (استازی لاو) — an uncertain name which might be a corrupted form of Austria since it was commonly called *Osterreiche* or *Osterlant*, as well as the Latinized *Austria*, already long before the thirteenth century[24].

There are multiple claims in diffuse sources on the Mongols suffering setbacks at rivers or after fording them in Europe in 1241–1242. A contemporary Coptic Egyptian account noted that a detachment of the Mongols invaded German territory and fought a battle, stating, "defeat was for the Tartars (at-Tatar), and there did not escape of them, except a small part because they had crossed over the river"[25]. A victory of Duke Otto of Bavaria over the Mongols during their invasion is noted in more than one contemporary source, with the *Annals of Tewkesbury* specifically noting that he killed many of them and threw them into a river (*Venit quedam gens que dicuntur Tartari. <…> Vastaverunt omnes provincias, per quas transitum faciebant. Sed dux Bavarensis multos interfecit et in fluminis rivo precipitavit*)[26]. Perhaps Het'um's story of the invasion even reflected or was influenced by more recent memories of a Mongol chieftain who had been captured and beheaded by Serbian forces during a fording of the Drim River in Serbia in 1282[27]. Beyond singular events, Het'um's account could also reflect the frustrations of the Mongols who were actively prevented from crossing the Danube by its defenders for ten months, according to Béla IV[28]. Moreover, we need not imagine that a tale of Mongols being run into a body of water and massacred during a battle is farfetched. In a totally unrelated text, al-Nasawi describes a very similar incident which he personally witnessed in Khorasan around 1220 when Sultan Jalal al-Din's cavalry drove a detachment of Mongols into an irrigation ditch, raining missile weapons down on them as they drowned[29].

There are no separate accounts that directly corroborate Het'um's version of events though later texts and editions of texts might mislead historians. The *Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross (Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis)* records the episode, but it is a more or less verbatim citation of Het'um, being written between 1307 and 1321[30]. It

[23] For this argument in detail, see: *Pow S.* Ivo of Narbonne's Account of a Mongol Attack on Austria: Fact or Fiction? // The Mongols in Central Europe: The Profile and Impact of their Thirteenth-Century Invasions. Budapest, 2024. P. 105–139.

[24] *Rowshan M., Mūsavī M.* (eds). Rashīd ad-Dīn Fażl Allāh, Jāmi' at-tavārīkh: Tārīkh-i Ghāzānī: in 3 vols. Vol. 1. Tehran, 1994 (2016). P. 678 (607). For the variant reading of ASTARY-LAWT (استاریلاوت), see: Ibid. Vol. III. P. 1781 (1599); *Boyle J. A.* The Successors of Genghis Khan. P. 70. N. 330; *Beller S.* The Eastern March, to 1439 // A Concise History of Austria. Cambridge, 2007. P. 10.

[25] *Khater A., Khs-Burmester O. H. E.* History of the patriarchs of the Egyptian Church: Known as the History of the Holy Church: in 4 vols. Vol. 4, pt. 2. Alexandria, 1974. P. 294.

[26] MGHS XXVII, 468; *Jackson P.* The Mongols and the West. Harlow, 2005. P. 67.

[27] *Uzelac A.* Tatars and Serbs at the End of the Thirteenth Century // Revista de Istorie Militară. 2011. Vol. 5/6. P. 10.

[28] *Nagy B.* Tatárjárás: Nemzet és Emlékezet. Budapest, 2003. P. 197.

[29] *Houdas O.* Histoire du Sultan Djelal ed-din Mankobirti Prince du Kharezm par Mohammed en-Nesawi. Paris, 1895. P. 113.

[30] *Lock P.* Marino Sanudo Torsello, The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross. London, 2011. P. 375–376.

only reflects the author's familiarity with Het'um's work. The *Chronica van der hilliger stat va coelle* of 1499 records an account of a failed attack on a bridge in Austria, but comparison reveals that the passage is merely Het'um's account translated into German, perhaps from the earlier work of Johannes Longus[31]. A nineteenth-century French translation of Riccoldo of Monte Croce's *Liber peregrinationis* (c. 1288) includes an abridged version of Het'um's Austria invasion narrative, but consulting a manuscript dated by a colophon to 1333 reveals this was not in the original work[32].

Yet, it is interesting that a late thirteenth-century Latin Crusader tract, describing the Mongols, seems to hint at a similar theme to that expressed by Het'um. In some manuscript versions, it mentions that a son of the Mongol ruler (viz. Chinggis Khan) who was appointed with conquering Europe crossed the Danube, was defeated by the king of Bohemia and duke of Austria, and thus died in Europe (*Alius filius super Danubio cum Boemie rege et duce Osteringie similiter in campo debellatus et ibi occubuit*)[33].

Het'um's account is partly the product of the faulty memory of an individual who casually dictated a history. In fact, however, a separate Armenian source echoes a similar message. Mekhitar of Ayrivank (Մխիթար Այրիվանեցի; 1230–1297) was a contemporary of Het'um but he resided in the cave monastery of Geghard in the Greater Armenian homeland, far away from France. In a brief note, characteristic of his world history, he recorded that the Mongol army dispatched by Ögedei against the northern regions conquered many countries and crossed the Danube. Then, however, it was encountered by the German emperor and retreated[34]. While this does not substantiate Het'um's story or that of Ivo of Narbonne, it does strongly suggest there was a widespread rumour already prevalent in Armenia by the later thirteenth century that the Mongols had hastily withdrawn from Europe because of some such defeat in the vicinity of Germany. This at least discounts the simpler explanation that Het'um personally invented his tale from scratch. Thus, while it is grossly inaccurate, the story is useful for reflecting an explanation for the Mongol withdrawal from Europe that perhaps had currency in the Ilkhanate and wider Eastern Mediterranean region in his era — and which Europeans enjoyed imagining.

Rus' Chronicle Accounts of Batu's Death in Hungary

The second broad narrative about the death of Batu emerged in the second half of the fifteenth century in Russia, judging by the surviving records, and is clearly in no way influenced by Het'um. The "Tale of the Death of Batu" has long been known to have first appeared in Rus' historical sources, particularly Muscovite texts, at the earliest c. 1450–1480 — the period immediately preceding Ivan III's so-called lifting of the "Tatar Yoke"[35]. However, the latest scholarship suggests the earliest chronicle records of the tale date more

[31] *Gombos A. F.* Catalogus Fontium Historiae Hungaricae: in 4 vols. Vol. 1. Budapest, 1938. P. 487.

[32] *De Backer L.* L'extrême Orient au moyen-âge. Paris, 1877. P. 293. — For the manuscript of 1333 which lacks the material on Batu's invasion of Austria, see: *Ricoldus de Monte Crucis*. Liber peregrinationis. Ms. lat. qu. 466: fol. [23] -10r. For the colophon with the date of 1333, see: fol. [51] -24r. Available at: https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN792518055&PHYSID=PHYS_0051&DMDID=DMDLOG_0002 (accessed: 20.09.2024).

[33] *Kohler C. A.* Mélanges pour servir à l'histoire de l'Orient latin et des croisades. Paris, 1900. P. 557.

[34] *Brosset M.* Histoire chronologique par Mkhithar d'Aïrivank, XIIIe s. St. Petersburg, 1896. P. 106.

[35] *Halperin Ch.* The Defeat and Death of Batu. P. 60.

or less immediately before a momentous development in the Grand Duchy of Moscow's history amid its tense relationship with long-reigning Mongol-Turkic overlords — the Stand at the Ugra River. The story could have been first composed in the 1470s (usually dated to 1473 and certainly no later than 1477) by Pachomius the Serb as suggested by A. A. Gorsky[36]. A Serbian hagiographer, Pachomius had lived a monastic life in Moscow and was dwelling in Novgorod in the 1470s when he was commissioned to write a book of hagiographical biographies. In any case, the Tale's earliest surviving version is found in Moscow chronicles dated to 1479 and onward[37]. Evidently, the story had found resonance there in the ongoing struggle of the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the Great Horde over non-payment of tribute — something which would lead to the standoff at the Ugra River in 1480.

In the Rus' *Tale*, rather than being drowned in Austria, Batu invades Hungary and is defeated and killed personally by the Hungarian king. Though the chronicle sets this event in 1248, instead of Hungary's monarch being the historical Béla IV (r. 1235–1270), it is a pious ruler whose name is given as Vladislav (Владиславь) or Vlaslov (Власьловь/Власловь) in various instances. There is something of Orthodox hagiographic quality to the tale. The Hungarian king, Vladislav, a secret convert to Orthodoxy by Saint Sava, spends a prolonged period in a tower in fervent prayer in the city of Varadin (Oradea, Nagyvárad). Blessed at last by God to fight the invading Mongols, Vladislav receives a splendid horse and battle axe. Rushing from the fortress town, the king and his troops put the Mongols to flight. Batu manages to escape but is run down by Vladislav on his steed. The Hungarian king at last dispatches him in hand-to-hand combat. Then, the pious Hungarian king likewise kills his own sister who had gone over to Batu's side and had been riding away with him. To commemorate the victory, a bronze statue was cast in Varadin portraying the saintly king on horseback and wielding his axe[38].

To the first glance of military and political historians focused on the Mongol Empire, the story seems to be only a pious fiction, its author and readership looking back at a distant period of which they have little knowledge. Yet, it has been acknowledged to contain a hodgepodge of disparate historical elements with S. P. Rozanov connecting its inspiration to the *Ladislaus Legenda*, the tale told of László I's supposed victory over a Pecheneg *cum* Cuman at the Battle of Kerlés in 1068. A. A. Gorsky argued, on the contrary, that its main inspiration was the Mongol defeat in Hungary in their invasion of 1285[39]. Intriguingly, Alexander Maiorov recently argued that the story has a clear connection to the real Batu, and so it might well have contained a distant reflection of the Mongol setbacks experienced at the Battle of Muhi against the Hungarians in 1241 which was indeed more of a bloody and discouraging affair for Batu and his troops than has been widely acknowledged[40]. If

[36] *Gorsky A. A.* "Povest' o ubienii Batyia" i russkaia literatura 70-kh godov XV veka // Srednevekovaia Rus'. Issue 3. Moscow, 2001. P. 199–205.

[37] *Maiorov A. V.* K voprosu ob istoricheskoi osnove i istochnikakh "Povesti o ubienii Batyia" // Ibid. Issue 11. Moscow, 2014. P. 105.

[38] *Maiorov A. V.* K voprosu ob istoricheskoi osnove… P. 105–106. — For a comparison of 1470s (i. e. earliest) versions of the *Tale* text in the original, see: *Trunte N.* Wie König Ladislaus Chan Batu erschlug // Die Welt der Slaven. 2016. Vol. 51. P. 317–319. For an English translation of the mid-sixteenth-century *Nikonian Chronicle* text of the *Tale*, see: *Zenkovsky S. A., Zenkovsky B. J.* The Nikonian Chronicle. Vol. 3. Princeton, 1984–1989. P. 24–27. For the *Nikonian Chronicle* text, see: PSRL. X. P. 136.

[39] *Maiorov A.* K voprosu ob istoricheskoi osnove… P. 106.

[40] Ibid. P. 107–109. — For the discussion of the Mongol setbacks in battle against the Hungarians, see the above section on Het'um's account.

so, then we encounter the surprising situation that both the Armenian Het'um and the Rus' *Tale of the Death of Batu* have the same historical jumping point as their basis for their ahistorical claims about Batu dying in Hungary.

All the above viewpoints likely have validity in terms of episodes involving a nomadic defeat in Hungary that could serve as inspiration that drove the creation of the *Tale*. My view is that the saint-king "Vladislav" in the *Tale* has a variety of inspirations — some from perhaps genuine setbacks in 1241, some from hagiographic lore from the Balkans, and some from the historical resistance to the Mongols by Hungary in 1285. There is, after all, an interesting connection between the *Tale of the Death of Batu* and the 1285 Mongol invasion of Hungary which has been observed by A. A. Gorsky and other scholars. Though Batu's invasion of 1241 was a military success, the later invasion by the Golden Horde in 1285 had far different results and led to serious military setbacks for the Mongols. They indeed left the Kingdom of Hungary in haste and, intriguingly, the Hungarian ruler at the time was a king named László, that is László IV (r. 1272–1290)[41]. Vladislav — the name of the hero of the fifteenth-century tale — is the Slavic equivalent of the Hungarian name László. So it could be that the events of the 1280s formed a layer of historical fact that played into the confusion with an eleventh-century saint-king's legend. Moreover, I would posit that another supplementary layer of inspiration behind the *Tale* could have been added by Hungarian victories over the Mongols in the Golden Horde's territory in 1345 and 1346 — a series of events in which László I was said to have provided divine aid as a saint to the Hungarians in the fighting[42].

Returning to the argument for the document's main inspiration, my view is that despite fluid inspirations, the *Tale* has a clear literary template — and that is the story of László versus the Cuman. Indeed, the main inspiration must be from the *Ladislaus Legenda* when one takes note of the striking narrative similarities, the references to a bronze statue, and the connections to Varadin where László I's tomb was a holy site of pilgrimage for centuries in the Middle Ages.

A comparison of the *Tale of the Death of Batu* with the story of King László I's rescue of a Hungarian maiden at the Battle of Kerlés in 1068, recorded in the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of the Deeds of the Hungarians*, reveals so many striking parallels that it is impossible to ignore. The latter source describes that in the battle in Transylvania, László, who at that point was duke of Hungary's eastern frontier rather than king, saw a Hungarian maiden being carried off by one of the nomadic invaders (erroneously remembered as a Cuman in folk memory rather than one of the Pechenegs who fought the historical battle). Thinking it was the daughter of the bishop of Varadin, László personally galloped off on horseback in pursuit. As he closed the distance, he yelled for the maiden to throw herself off the nomad's horse, but she showed loyalty to her captor. At last, László caught the nomad, unhorsed him, and personally killed him. A great victory was won. The story concludes with a point — much like the one made in the *Tale of the Death of Batu* illustrated by the king's sister falling in love with Batu and trying to ride off with him — that women are disloyal and prey to carnal lusts[43].

[41] *Gorsky A. A.* "Povest' o ubienii Batyia"… P. 197–198.

[42] *Vásáry I.* Mongol-Hungarian Encounters in the Fourteenth Century // The Routledge Handbook of the Mongols and Central-Eastern Europe. London, 2021. P. 163–165.

[43] *Bak J., Veszprémy L.* Chronicle of the Deeds of the Hungarians from the Fourteenth-Century Illuminated Codex. Budapest, 2018. P. 196–199.

Most of the same details overlap in both short narratives regarding the battle, the chase on horseback, the personal combat, and the disloyalty of the kidnapped woman. However, the same connection to Varadin (Oradea) in both stories is important not to overlook. The fortress town of Varadin was made an episcopal center during the reign of László I. Although its fortifications were then probably less significant than those of nearby Bihor, the former bishopric, Varadin's strategic location made it a more important fortified town as time progressed[44]. The monastery founded there, again by King László, further strengthened its position. As an additional connection, he was buried in Varadin's cathedral, and after the canonization of László as a Catholic saint in 1192, the cathedral became a prominent site for pilgrimage, one famous for healing miracles.

The proverbial smoking gun for demonstrating the connection between the *Tale* and the story of László is the reference to the equestrian statue of Vladislav wielding an axe, vividly described in the *Tale of the Death of Batu*. This is a well-known medieval statue, and it unquestionably depicted László I. The bronze equestrian statue, built in 1390, represented him indeed on horseback wielding a battle axe[45]. It remained standing through the next two centuries — precisely the period when the *Tale* was composed. It was subsequently destroyed, probably in 1660 when the city of Varadin was captured by the Ottomans. That was the same point at which the tomb of László was plundered and destroyed[46]. For the question of Vladislav in the *Tale*, it must be noted that the descriptive elements of the story closely overlap with the character of László, and more particularly with the city of his medieval cult: the high fortress, the equestrian statue, the name of the city itself. Indeed, early modern depictions show the imposing fortress of Varadin (Fig. 4) and the statue itself (Fig. 5) can be seen near the church that housed the tomb of the saint-king. The statue of the axe-wielding figure was noteworthy enough that it was illustrated by early modern artists (Fig. 6). Even a crude sketch by a traveller confirms the imposing statue's position outside of the central church (Fig. 7).

Thus, it seems that Orthodox travellers, passing between the Balkans and Rus' through Varadin in the fifteenth century, were acquainted with the statue and learned the background story if they were not already familiar with it. Indeed the *Tale* provides a precise description of the Hungarian landscape and agriculture around Varadin — having few trees, but plentiful crops and an abundance of wine ("Великаго Варадина, града угорьскаго, той бо среди Угорьскиа земля лежить, древесъ простыхъ мало имущи, но много овощиа, изъобилиа же и вина")[47]. This strongly suggests the author had personally travelled through the area or at least had direct information from an eyewitness. The Tale's addition of Saint Sava's secret conversion of King Vladislav of Hungary to Orthodoxy would have made the saint king more palatable to the intended audience of such hagiographic writings. This highlights the possible origin of the author, likely a Serb, but does not totally explain the motivation driving the creation of the *Tale of the Death of Batu*. It seems possible that the driving factor behind Central Eastern Europe's interest in the cult of László and the popularity of the *Ladislaus Legenda* was the same thing that

[44] *Rusu A. A.* Várad vára a 16. századig // Várak nyomában: tanulmányok a 60 éves Feld István tiszteletére. Castrum Bene. Budapest, 2011. P. 220–221.

[45] *Magyar Z.* Szent László-alakos kályhacsempék // Ethno-lore. 2010. Vol. 27. P. 127–130.

[46] *Zoltán A.* Szent László és Batu kán. P. 358–359.

[47] Tekst Slova ob ubienii Batyia publikuetsia po Uspenskomu spisku sentiabr'skoi Minei // Biblioteka literatury Drevnei Rusi. Vol. 12. St. Peterburg, 2003. P. 599–600.

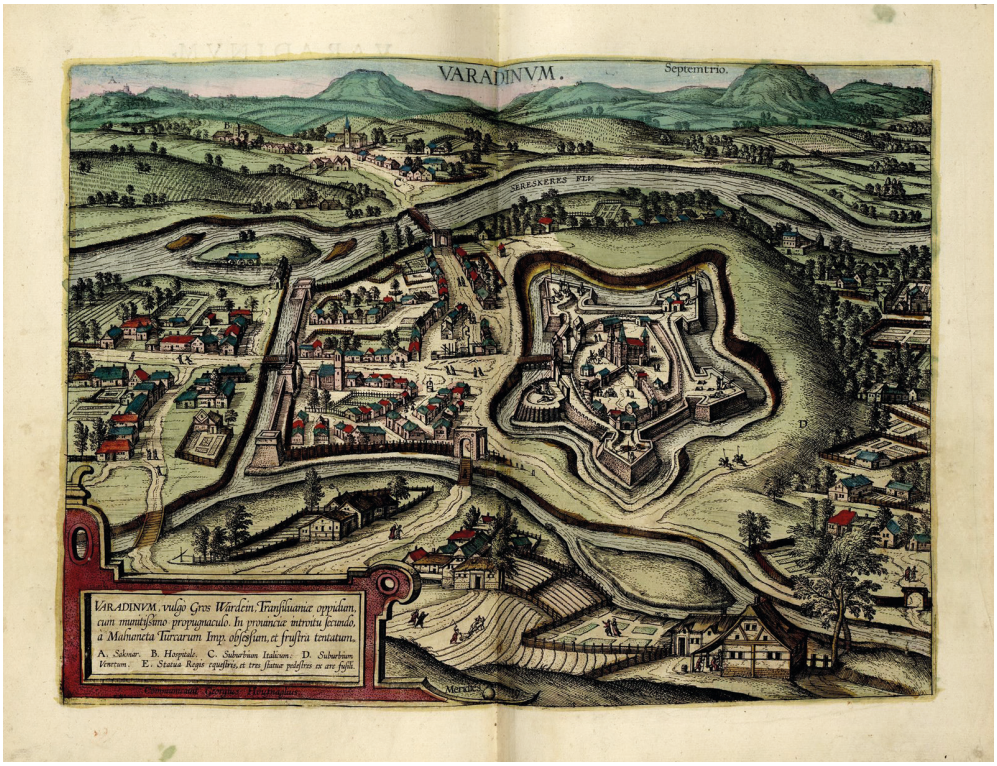

Fig. 4. The city of Varadin (Várad, Oradea) in the early seventeenth century, depicting the equestrian statue of King László I near his cathedral tomb. The legend notes that the statue is made of bronze as is claimed in the Rus' *Tale of the Death of Batu*. Braun G., Hogenberg F., Brachel P. V., Hierat A., Hogenberg A., Novellanus S., Hoefnagel J., Hoefnagel, J., Deventer J. van, Rantzau H. Civitates Orbis Terrarvm [Coloniae Agrippinae: apud Petrum à Brachel, sumptibus auctorum, to 1618] [Map]

Source: Library of Congress. Available at: https://www.loc.gov/item/2008627031/ (accessed: 20.09.2024).

Fig. 5. A close-up detail of the preceding figure depicting the equestrian statue of László I in the fortress

Fig. 6. A depiction from 1595 of the László statue holding an axe as described in the Rus' chronicles' *Tale of the Death of Batu*. ÖNB Cod. 9423, fol. 126v: Symbola Romanorum pontificum, imperatorum, regum, cardinalium

Source: Available at: https://onb.digital/result/BAG_5053486 (accessed: 20.09.2024).

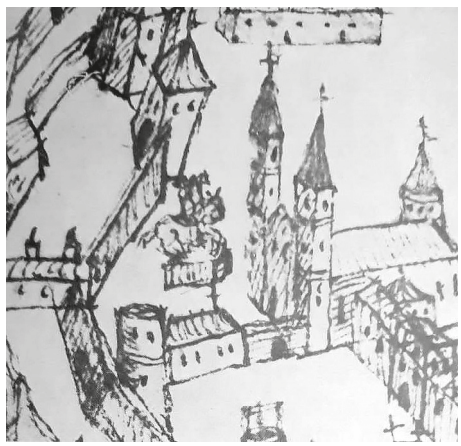

Fig. 7. A sketch of the László equestrian statue by Cesare Porta in 1598. Image taken from: *Zoltán M.* "Keresztény lovagoknak oszlopa": Szent László a magyar kultúrtörténetben. Budapest, 1996

Source: Available at: https://patriotak.hu/hianyjelek/ (accessed: 20.09.2024).

later made the story so intensely appealing to the Rus', and especially to Moscow. It offered some comfort to rulers and subjects alike regarding their fear and insecurity in the face of the powerful military threat posed by the Mongol-ruled Horde and steppe raiders.

In the case of Hungary, the connection between Saint László and resistance to the Golden Horde is made explicit in surviving source material. John of Küküllő (d. 1393) recorded how the Transylvanian voivode, Andrew Lackfi, stealthily invaded Golden Horde territory in 1345, apparently in response to repeated nomad harassment on their frontier. There, they managed to slay a local prince, Athlamos, along with a great number of his men, taking many prisoners. Now on the offense, the Transylvanians penetrated "the land of the Tatars" the following year and won another major victory, this time aided directly, according to a certain Minorite author, by the Virgin Mary and Saint László himself who was fighting along with them[48]. The Hungarians used the story and cult of László I in the broader period clearly to galvanize resistance against ongoing threats emerging from powerful nomadic or semi-nomadic forces. The fifteenth-century French courtier, Antoine de la Sale, recorded in his account of a knight, *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*, that during the Battle of Nicopolis against the Ottomans, the Hungarian troops were shouting "Nostre Dame!" and the name of their king, "Saint Lancelot!"[49]

Stamped by the terrifying memory of past dangers posed by the Mongols in Hungary, even at the local level of small-scale raids, it ought not be surprising that the inspiration Hungarians derived from their king's individual act of courage was the same reason that a variation of the story exercised such a strong impression on fifteenth-century Rus' audiences and was thought worthy of being recorded in their chronicles. In the Grand Duchy of Moscow, it may have been used to inspire and encourage a bid to break away from the Horde's taxation in the 1470s and 1480s. This tale, which touched at some deeper sentiment, was not a uniquely Serbian concoction or aimed primarily at commenting on partisan Orthodox-Catholic themes. To Moscow at the time, even if the degree of the significance of the standoff event of 1480 has been retrospectively exaggerated[50], this would have been an immensely appealing story of successful Christian resistance against the military strength of the Inner Asian nomadic steppe polities. After all, Batu was described as the "powerful tsar" in the thirteenth-century *vita* of Alexander Nevsky[51]. If Batu could be, and had been, defeated, then the grand duke and people of fifteenth-century Moscow, too, stood a chance against the formidable and terrifying political and military might of the Horde.

Conclusion

András Zoltan noted that scholars in Hungary and Russia, totally independent of each other, long ago realized and argued that the *Tale of the Death of Batu* had at its core the medieval legend of László and his battle with a Cuman[52]. A century later, totally un-

[48] *Vásáry I.* Mongol-Hungarian Encounters in the Fourteenth Century. P. 163–165, 172, no. 23.

[49] *Szabics I.* La Hongrie et les Hongrois dans Le Petit Jehan de Saintré d'Antoine de la Sale // Les Hongrois et l'Europe. Conquête et integration. Paris; Szeged, 1999. P. 434.

[50] *Galimov T. R., Mirgaleev I. M.* The Interpretation of the "Great Stand on the Ugra River" in 1480 // Zolotoordynskoe obozrenie = Golden Horde Review. 2019. Vol. 7. P. 652–662.

[51] *Halperin Ch.* The Defeat and Death of Batu. P. 51.

[52] *Zoltán A.* Szent László és Batu kán. P. 357–358.

aware of the immense literature on the topic, I reached the same conclusion independently because of an awareness of the László legend's impact on the imagination and heartstrings of medieval Hungarians. I have argued that it even influenced another story in Western Europe, being the basis for the creation of the famed Arthurian knight, Sir Lancelot, in the French court in the 1180s[53]. That would explain why the French at Nicopolis heard the Hungarians chanting "Szent László!" and recorded it as "Saint Lancelot". The French customarily rendered László as Lancelot — and indeed in the twelfth century they had already incorporated the saint-king and his heroic act of single combat against a nomad to rescue a kidnapped woman into Arthurian literature. The name "Lancelot," I argue, originated when the French rendered the eleventh-century monarch's Hungarian name, which in turn originated from the Slavic "Vladislav". If that hypothesis is true, then we can see that the tale of László travelled widely and in many guises. In Western Europe, László as Sir Lancelot became the premier knight of the Round Table, a seeker after the Holy Grail, and what is best in men. In the region of its origin, the tale, via the *Ladislaus Legenda*, developed a widespread cult across medieval Central East Europe. It is a commonplace amongst scholars of the Hungarian saint-king that he was recognized as an intrepid knight by medieval people in this region, something reflected in artwork — frescoes, stove tiles, coins, etc. — besides the copious literature which testifies to his depiction as a hero in the chivalric mode[54]. Then we can see that this same tale went on to inspire the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans and ultimately Rus', testifying to the powerful pull that the legend of László's single combat with a Cuman inspired in East and West, across the whole breadth of Europe.

Beyond pointing out the ahistorical nature of any of the narratives of Batu dying during a clash in Europe in the 1240s, we take from them a larger story. We encounter, in the so-called parochial and closed-off medieval world, an Armenian who attended Mongol imperial coronations, received the Mongols' own histories, and then shared these stories in France. Moreover, we witness travellers between the Balkans and Rus' passing through Varadin, carrying the tale of a Transylvanian duke's heroics as far as Moscow, perhaps even indirectly affecting historical events that impacted the great powers of Inner Asia. Faced with these realities, the scales fall from our eyes; it becomes clear that the watertight barriers that scholars sometimes try to impose on distinct regions in the medieval world are illusions — just as such barriers are today.

References

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[53] For a brief summary of the theory that Sir Lancelot was based on László I and inserted into the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes by the order of Countess Marie of Champagne, reflecting a burgeoning and unprecedented Franco-Hungarian royal alliance in the 1180s, see: *Pow S.* Evolving Identities: A Connection between Royal Patronage of Dynastic Saints' Cults and Arthurian Literature in the Twelfth Century // Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU. Vol. 24. Budapest, 2018. P. 65–74.

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