The East and West in Late Medieval Travel Writings

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INTRODUCTION

'Now on the third day after we left Soldaia, we encountered the Tartars; and when I came among them I really felt as if I were entering some other world.'[1] So wrote the thirteenth-century Franciscan friar William of Rubruck (c.1220-c.1293) upon seeing the Mongols for the first time. His contemporary, Rabban Sawma (c.1230-1294), a Nestorian Christian monk originally from Khanbaligh (Beijing), traveling in the opposite direction three decades later, wrote the following words upon his encounter with the Latin West: 'And from that place (Bordeaux) we came to the city of Genoa, in order to pass the winter there. And when we arrived there we saw a garden which resembled Paradise…'[2] These two narratives are among the only firsthand accounts in existence which date to the earliest period of medieval transcontinental encounters. From the moment when the Mongols rode into Eastern Europe in 1237, the Western and Eastern ends of the Eurasian landmass began to gain a new awareness of one another and to impinge on one another's histories more directly than ever before. Yet their imaginings of one another were still, for many centuries to come, largely shaped by hearsay and mistaken projections. In the midst of a slow process of mutual discovery, a number of travellers personally encountered distant lands. For the historian now writing in a world that so consciously thinks of itself as 'global', these accounts offer a precious lens through which to enter into the world before globalization.

The travellers to be examined here are John of Pian de Carpini (1182-1252), William of Rubruck, Rabban Sawma, Marco Polo (1254-1324), Ma Huan 马欢 (accompanied Zheng He 郑和 on his voyages in 1413, 1421 and 1431), and Christopher Columbus (c. 1451-1506). They cover the period from the Mongol expansion outward in all directions from their Central Asian centre, to the Western Age of Discovery. In the West it was a time of transition from the medieval period to the Renaissance, whereas in China it was the time encompassing the Mongol domination in the Yuan

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[1] William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck, His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke,1253-1255*, trans. Peter Jackson (Indianapolis, 2009), pp. 70-71.

[2] Wallis Budge (trans.), *The Monks of Kublai Khan Emperor of China* (London, 1928), p. 187.

period and the reassertion of Chinese rule in the early Ming. They will be discussed in the following chapters: Carpini and Rubruck's views of 'the Mongol Orient'[3] (Chapter One), Sawma's views of the Latin West (Chapter Two), views of Yuan China as seen in *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Chapter Three), Ma Huan's views of the 'Western Oceans' (Chapter Four) and Columbus's views of the New World (Chapter Five).

The reasons why this particular set of travellers have been chosen for inclusion in this book needs to be explained. Carpini offers an authentic eyewitness account of the first contact between the Franciscans and the Mongols. Rubruck provides a significant corpus of information on the Mongols and their society. Sawma's account is the only account by someone from the East of the Latin West in the Middle Ages. *The Travels of Marco Polo* gives the first direct observation of Yuan China made by a European. Ma Huan's account contains a good deal of information on the peoples and societies of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. Finally, Columbus thought he was going East, and his records of the first intercourse with the Native Americans actually reflect certain views of the East.

One might wonder why the fourteenth century missionaries John Montecorvino, Odoric of Pordenone and John of Marignolli, who travelled from the West to the East and left descriptions of Yuan China, are not included here. The reason is that a contemporary counterpart needed to be found for Rabban Sawma. Rabban Sawma was the only person from the East who went to Europe and left an account before the 16th century. Carpini, Rubruck and Polo went to Asia in the same century as Sawma, and it was thought to be best for each period examined here to include travellers from both Europe and Asia for comparative purposes, to serve as counterparts for one another. Christopher Dawson considers that Rabban Sawma's account 'provides a Mongol counterpart to William of Rubruck's narrative of his embassy from St. Louis to Mongka Khan.[4] David Morgan mentions in his book *The Mongols*, 'Sawma's account … stands as the only known equivalent to the narratives of Carpini, Rubruck and Marco Polo'.[5] There is no Eastern contemporary counterpart for the fourteenth-century Western Christian missionaries.

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[3] 'The Mongol Orient', see Charles Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography, Vol. III, A History of Exploration and Geographical Science from the Middle of the Thirteenth to the Early Years of the Fifteenth Century* (c. A.D. 1260-1420) (Oxford, 1906), p. 17.

[4] Christopher Dawson, edited and with an introduction, *The Mongol Mission, narratives and letters of the Franciscan missionaries in Mongolia and China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries translated by a nun of Stanbrook Abbey*, p. xxviii.

[5] David Morgan, *The Mongols* ((Oxford, 2007), p. 163.

Also, although Montecorvino, Odoric of Pordenone and Marignolli all went to China, Sawma was the Il-Khan's ambassador to the Latin West. He was born in about 1230, brought up and educated in a Nestorian Christian family in the Mongol Empire (1206-1271, in November 1271 Qubilai adopted a Chinese dynastic title 'Yuan') and as such is more a representative of the Mongols than China. This is another reason why the European travellers Carpini and Rubruck who depicted Mongol Empire were chosen rather than others who reached China. The comparison is thus between Western Christians and the Mongols, Latins and Chinese.

The Travels of Marco Polo is singled out for treatment here because it provides such extensive information on the political, social and economic structure of Yuan China. In breadth and depth, *The Travels* greatly surpasses all other Western sources for China, even allowing for the debate about whether he actually went to China or how much he actually witnessed.

Finally, Zheng He, as seen through the account of his scribe and interpreter Ma Huan, and Columbus, who sailed west hoping to find Japan and China but instead found the New World. Ironically, the latter both travelled in the same direction, east to west, but from different starting points. They also travelled in radically different circumstances and roles. The Chinese travellers reached what they more or less expected, part of the well-healed Indian Ocean trade route that had been plied by Indian, Arab and Chinese traders for centuries. Columbus reached a place that was entirely new to anyone else of his millennium.

One of the main questions examined in this book is how people from vastly different cultures viewed the lands and peoples they encountered on their travels. The modern scholar cannot journey very far down this path of investigation without stumbling upon the views of Edward Said, as articulated in his book *Orientalism* (1997). However, this book attempts to distance itself from the views expounded in this work. In speaking of the travellers' observations of people different from themselves, it purposely avoids using the term 'the other' because it evokes Said's views. The reason for this attempt to distance this book from his views is for the following reasons. First, according to Said, 'The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.'[6] However, this relationship does not apply to the world in the Middle Ages. Instead it refers to a much later time period.

Second, the 'different cultures' encountered here encompass not only the Occidental viewing the Oriental but also the Far East viewing the Latin West, the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. The use of the term "different

[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1977), p. 5.

cultures" in this book refers to any distant foreign people or society, known or unknown, whom a traveller seeks to describe, in contradistinction with the people and customs of his homeland. The people of difference in Carpini's and Rubruck's cases are the Mongols, whereas in Sawma's they are European Christians; for Marco Polo they are the powerful Mongols and wealthy Chinese, whereas for Ma Huan they are the people of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. In Columbus's case, the different cultures are the unknown people he encountered in the Caribbean, as well as the East Asians he was expecting to find, as described by other Europeans.

Third, according to Said, the concept of 'another culture' or a 'distinct culture' always involves hostility and aggression against the 'other', depicted as alien and exotic, set up in direct contrast to 'our' (European) values, civilization, and interests. I do not find such hostility or aggression in any of the travellers to be examined here, except perhaps Columbus. Although most of the cultures visited by these travellers were completely strange, living under hugely different climatic, social, and historical conditions from those the European knows, this did not inspire hostility or aggression in the travellers. Instead, individual circumstances, such as a desire to make a religious conversion or to make one's fortune, came into play. Said's description of 'the other' as acting, speaking, and thinking in a manner exactly opposite to the European,[7] is somewhat true of the encounters examined here, except that the term "exactly opposite" would need to be examined. However, the focus in this book is on travellers who move both directions, and the Orientals who also experience difference in their Occidental travels help to counter Said's claims. His statement that the 'other' is always beyond or outside the European self, characterized by permanent estrangement from the West, is definitely not true of Rabban Sawma, who was in awe of what he saw in the West. Marco Polo also stayed in China for 17 years, obviously finding it a place where he could be happy and succeed. Ma Huan did not have direct hostility but only curiosity and the occasional admiration and criticism of the people he met. For Rabban Sawma, the common denominator was religion, while for Marco Polo it was commerce. Other comparisons will be made in the course of this book.

Said's interpretive line derives much of its force from centuries of colonial conquest. In the period studied here, in contrast, the Mongol conquests and the Ming maritime expeditions challenge the retrospective imposition of a narrative of Western hegemony. Foreigners were regarded as strange and alien in both directions. European reactions to distant civilizations especially in the thirteenth century, were shaped less by a

[7] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 40, 129, 333.

desire to present it as some mystical inverse of Europe and more by their awareness of the Mongols as potential threats and possible trading partners. Thus their accounts were more clear-eyed appraisals than Said's terminology would allow. Of course, Said's lens should also not be replaced with that of Chinese scholar Zhou Ning, who examines the Western image of the East since Marco Polo in his *Tianchao yaoyuan* 天朝遥远. He insists that, before the eighteenth century, Western writings mentioning China 'gave their highest praise to China', projecting onto it their utopian imaginings.[8] This was not true even in *The Travels of Marco Polo*, as the *Travels* analyzes critically the 'cowardice and effeminacy' of the Southern Song Emperor, through which he lost of his dominion to the Mongols. The historical record suggests that such meta-narratives of Western attitudes towards the East and vice versa are a poor substitute for actually examining the perspectives of the travellers themselves.

Each one of these travellers has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation. One might therefore well ask why yet another study is needed. The reasons are threefold. First, they have never been studied together before, in this combination. Not only that, but the combination of both Eastern travellers journeying west and Western travellers journeying east in a single study is also unique. Moreover, it is also uncommon for travellers of such different time periods – Yuan and Ming, Mongol and post-Mongol era – to be compared.

Second, the focus of this study is on the individual travellers themselves as actors, how they reflect and represent both their own cultures, and the ones they encounter on their travels. It focuses on their roles, experiences, beliefs, interests and personalities and how these influenced their interpretations and records of what they saw. These aspects of their professions and personalities are difficult to separate from one another, often overlapping and sometimes conflicting, but much can be learned by examining them from these different perspectives.

Third, when the travellers made their journeys in an official capacity, either as a representative of a government or a religious institution, they sometimes controverted their official roles, showing their initiative and independence from these institutions. These instances show that these encounters were not between monolithic entities, but between complicated human beings. Because of the inconvenience of communication in the time periods examined here, these individuals acted and reacted more or less on their own, independently from the institutions who sent them. They had to

[8] Zhou Ning 周宁, *Tianchao yaoyuan* 天朝遥远 (Western Images of China) (Beijing, 2006), pp. 11, 15.

make their own judgments about situations when the unpredictable happened, and to work out their own solutions to problems themselves.

The travellers and their writings included in this book have seldom been examined together. Expertise in the immediate historical context of one such text has often precluded interest in the others. Moreover, broader surveys of medieval travel literature have historically been hampered by a lack of appeal to the primary sources in Chinese. For example, in one of the foundational works of the field, *The Dawn of Modern Geography, Vol. III, A History of Exploration and Geographical Science from the Middle of the Thirteenth to the Early Years of the Fifteenth Century (c. A.D. 1260-1420)*, published in 1906, Charles Beazley's dismissive commentary on early Ming China indicated his ignorance of the state of affairs there. As he wrote, "… after the great expulsion of 'foreign devil' (the Mongols) in 1370, … the life of the Celestial Empire, under the Ming, was the life of a race which had ceased to progress, to discover, to aim at conquests beyond its old borders, either political or mental.' Beazley's statement completely ignored the vast flotillas commanded by Zheng He between 1405 and 1420, which reached as far as Mecca and East Africa and aimed to bring the civilizing influence of the Son of Heaven, the Ming Emperor, to the countries and peoples of the Indian Ocean. Zheng He's oceanic expeditions resulted in records which enlarged Chinese knowledge of southern Asia and eastern Africa. *The Dawn of Modern Geography* included some eastern sources, such as the journeys of Chang Chun and Rabban Sawma, yet because the defining interest of the text lay in 'the Expansion of Europe in the Middle Ages', Beazley did not consider the possibility that genuine exploration westward continued to occur after the Chinese relations with Europe were largely severed.[9] Beazley's text is now more than a century old, but it set the terms of a historiography that still often sees the history of past intercourse between distant cultures from either a primarily European or primarily Chinese perspective.

Much more recently, Jerry H. Bentley, in his *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (1993), analyzes cross-cultural encounters in pre-modern times, focusing on the 'cultural effects of encounters between peoples of different civilizations.'[10] His work includes major pre-modern travellers and missionaries from both the East and the West, and he briefly mentions Zheng He. Yet owing to his lack of familiarity with Chinese-language sources, Bentley's discussion of the Ming-era expeditions is very limited. He does not refer to the travelogues by Ma Huan and others about Zheng He's voyages, for example,

[9] Charles Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography*, pp. 13, 541.
[10] Jerry Bentley, *Old World Encounters* (Oxford, 1993), p. vii.

so he was not able to include Ma Huan's characterization of the local people of the 'Western Oceans'—discussed at length in Chapter Four of this book—in his catalogue of encounters. Indeed, although Bentley's valuable study claims a 'global' scope, it remains limited to encounters between Europeans and a variety of eastern people and cultures.

This book aims to integrate Chinese sources into the study of medieval travel literature. Such sources should be read together with the Western ones. Through examining these medieval travel writings in conjunction with one another, rather than considering each one only in its most immediate context, similarities across the genre become apparent. One of the main contributions of this book is to examine extensively the research that is published in Chinese on these topics, thereby presenting the findings and perspectives of Chinese scholars to Western scholars who cannot read Chinese. Thus the challenge of bridging communication gaps between the 'east' and the 'west' becomes both a methodological and historical theme of this book. It also gives this historical inquiry a relevance to the present.

Indeed, it remains true even today few Western scholars have access to Chinese research because of the language barrier. As mentioned above, the major studies published in the area of medieval encounters between east and west, those by Beazley and Bentley, do not draw upon research published in Chinese at all. Yet China played an important role in communication between different civilizations of the Middle Ages. This situation is beginning to change as more scholars mastering the Chinese language become active in writing the history of East-West relations. Historians have long examined questions about the Latin West's encounter with the East and ancient Chinese foreign relations. For example, in his *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (2012), David Kang explores how China and its neighbors interacted from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, while Europe was consumed by internal warfare. Kang considers East Asia as a whole, rather than solely comparing China and the West. He observes that China ranked other polities according to their cultural similarity to China, rather than by their relative power. Moreover, allegiance was based on acknowledgement of the Chinese Emperor's cultural superiority rather than on his political authority over their polities.[11] Chinese scholars are interested in China's role in past encounters between cultures. They have attempted to make China's identity and position in such processes clear. Of course, the West's lack of knowledge about China is mirrored by China's sometimes inadequate understanding of the West. This

[11] David C. Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York, 2012), p. 57.

book seeks to bridge this gap and help illuminate the evolution of China's conception of itself in relation to the West.

Structure, Methods, and Source Materials

This study proceeds chronologically, alternating between Western and Eastern perspectives. Each chapter first explicates the background and context of the primary sources and then analyzes the encounters they narrate. Chapters One, Two and Three focus on four thirteenth-century travellers who travelled from one end of the Eurasian landmass to the other during the period of the Mongol conquests and the subsequent breakup of the Mongol Empire. They comprise three Western travellers who travelled east and one Eastern traveller who travelled west, and analyze the accounts of cultural encounters attributed to them, respectively. Chapters Four and Five examine the fifteenth-century maritime enterprises of Zheng He, as recorded by Ma Huan, and Columbus, and their respective cultural attitudes towards the people encountered on those journeys.

Chapter One analyzes the encounters between the two Franciscan monks, John of Pian de Carpini and William of Rubruck, and the Mongols at the height of their campaign to conquer the world. Carpini reached the neighborhood of Qaraqorum on 22 July 1246, and Rubruck reached Qaraqorum (1253-1255). Their accounts of their impressions of the Mongols and their ways of life were the earliest to record European encounters with the Mongols. The Mongols were primarily a military threat to the West, but they also thought of the Mongol Empie as fertile ground for Christian evangelization. Both men of the cloth, Carpini and Rubruck travelled slightly different times and also had different individual perspectives. Carpini was on an explicitly strategic mission as an emissary of the Pope, whereas Rubruck, though carrying a letter from Louis IX, was primarily on a personal proselytizing mission. As a result, Carpini's reports were those of a politically-sharp military intelligence gatherer, while Rubruck paid much more attention to broader aspects of the Mongol way of life: food, clothing, shelter, character, behavior and, of course, religion.

The chapter draws chiefly on *History of the Mongols* by Carpini and *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*.[12] The English translations used are those of Christopher Dawson and Peter Jackson. In addition, the important Mongol work *The Secret History of the Mongols*, will also be used. It has

[12] The Latin versions of these texts are approached via *Viaggio in Mongolia*, edited and translated by Paolo Chiesa, and *Storiadei Mongoli*, edited and translated by P. Daffina.

been termed 'the only substantial surviving Mongol work about the Mongol Empire, the only direct insight we possess into how the Mongols viewed things, undistorted by the spectacles of the conquered or the hostile', and it will also be consulted in its recent translation by Igor de Rachewiltz.[13]

Chapter Two focuses on Rabban Sawma, a Uigher and a Nestorian Christian monk from Khanbaligh (present-day Beijing) and his journey from the East to the Latin West. His is one of the few travel accounts we have of an Easterner travelling West in this period, and the only eyewitness account by someone from the East to include detailed information about Latin Christians. Other travel literature was written in Chinese in the thirteenth century, which is described briefly in this chapter, but very little of it relates to the Christian West. Rabban Sawma, however, travelled to Europe and wrote about the Latin Church and states. His career reflects the political chaos of the period. He did not initially travel as a diplomatic envoy from Yuan China to Persia, but went to Baghdad for religious reasons on the first leg of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. After that journey was thwarted by disorder, he spent longer than anticipated in Baghdad, he was then sent to Europe by the Il-khan of Persia. Sawma's narrative of his travels to the West conveys his deep reverence for Christianity, which proved useful for the diplomatic role he played as the Mongol rulers developed a more conciliatory approach to Europeans in light of changes in the political situation within their Empire. The investigation of Rabban Sawma relies on *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China* translated by Wallis Budge, as well as Morris Rossabi's work *Voyager from Xanada* which offers much valuable information.

There is some other travel literature written by Chinese authors, but these focus only on the Mongols rather than on the distant civilizations of the Latin West and are therefore not covered here. These include Peng Daya's 彭大雅 report on his diplomatic mission to the Mongols in the 1230s, and the narrative by Yelu Chucai 耶律楚材 of 1228, which traces his expeditions alongside Chinggis Khan in the latter's campaigns of conquest against Central Asia. These campaigns extended no further than Afghanistan. Other Chinese travel accounts of the late thirteenth century offer information on Annam and Cambodia. Such sources do not serve the main purpose of this book which is to examine medieval encounters between remote civilizations.

Chapter Three focuses on The *Travels of Marco Polo*, a work that aroused much interest and curiosity in the medieval West and remained in wide circulation, in a variety of forms, for centuries after its initial publication. The chapter examines the way in which Qubilai Khan and Yuan China are

[13] D. Morgan, *The Mongols*, p. 9.

depicted in *The Travels*. As is well known, Marco Polo did not write the work himself, but related his experiences to his fellow prisoner in Genoa, Rustichello, a popular romance writer, who wrote them down, and presented to the reading public as *The Travels*.

This chapter also examines the Chinese scholarship on *The Travels.* The study of *The Travels* in China is somtimes concerned with using the information in *The Travels* to fill in the gaps in the Chinese primary sources of Yuan China. In the process of comparing *The Travels* with the Chinese sources, sufficient details in *The Travels* have been verified so as to convince historians and scholars that Marco Polo did go to China. They find it odd that there is so much skepticism surrounding these issues among Western scholars; and the doubts of Frances Wood and others as to the veracity of his journey have come as a blow. Marco Polo is viewed in China as an important pioneer who first introduced European readers to China and a pioneer of cultural exchange between East and West; it has been a source of pride that Marco Polo traveled to China and was so favorably impressed by its prosperous cities, thriving industry and commerce, and advanced technology.

The Travels of Marco Polo will be approached via the English translation made by H. Yule and H. Cordier. The widely accepted Latin translation by the Dominican friar Pipino's will also be consulted. The latter was done in the 1320s, based on the Venetian version of the original Franco-Italian text. This version was commissioned with future missions to the non-Christian world in mind. It was the version Columbus acquired after his second voyage.

Chapter Four examines the voyages of Zheng He as seen in the account made by the latter's scribe and translator Ma Huan. It focuses on the impressions that these fifteenth-century Chinese had of the distant lands and people they encountered in Southeast Asian and the Indian Ocean. In the interval between Marco Polo and Zheng He, some Western missionary efforts such as that of John of Marignolli had taken place, but these had been the last substantial Latin Christian contact with the Far East since the middle of the fourteenth century.[14] This was because communication between China and Europe had dwindled when the Mongol rulers were expelled from China in the late fourteenth century and the postal roads fell into disuse. Communication with the outside world by the Yuan's successors, the Ming, tended now to be carried out by sea rather than by land, and their

[14] John of Marignolli, 'Recollections of Travel in the East, by John de' Marignolli, Papal Legate to the Court of the Great Khan, and afterwards Bishop of Bisignano', in Henry Yule (ed.), *Cathay and the Way Thither* (London, 1913-1916), vol ii, pp. 335 – 394.

destinations were referred to generally as 'the countries of the Western Oceans'. In this context, the 'west' did not primarily refer to the Latin world described by Rabban Sawma. Instead, it referred to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. Zheng He's Ming explorations of the 'Western Oceans' are fruitful for analyzing fifteenth-century Chinese attitudes towards people living in these regions, but these should not be regarded as what we normally think of as 'the West'.

Since no primary sources written by Zheng He have been preserved, the discussion of Chinese perceptions of the people of the 'Western Oceans' will focus on the travelogue *Yingya shenglan* 瀛涯胜览 written by Ma Huan, Zheng He's interpreter, in the edition annotated by Wan Ming 万明. This source will be used in conjunction with official imperial records, since to understand the Ming's views of the distant people and culture in the fifteenth century requires an analysis of Emperor Yongle's sense of his superiority over the others.[15] The Emperor, whose official activities are chronicled in the *Ming Shilu* 明实录, was the decision maker of policies concerning relationships with other polities. Studying the official history of the Emperor's reign enables a comparison between official court views of the foreign people to the west with the views held by Ma Huan the individual, who actually journeyed to the 'Western Oceans'.

Chapter Five examines Columbus's perceptions of the world he encountered on his four voyages to the New World. It analyzes his attempt to reconcile what he encountered on his travels with his own preconceptions of what he would find. Because he was expecting to find the East as described in the *The Travels of Marco Polo*, his preconceptions were of the East. Hence he fits the East-West perceptions of difference examined here. However, what he actually found was the New World, which inaugurated the Western 'Age of Discovery'. This gives him an important relevance for another important topic – the contrast from the modern perspective between Zheng He's voyages, which ended after 28 years and did not blossom into further large-scale maritime activity, and Columbus's voyages which did, and gave the West a crucial lead in the race for supremacy leading up to the 19th century. The chapter first reviews the scholarship which has been done on Columbus in China. This scholarship sheds light on the way in which Columbus is perceived in China, the differences Chinese scholars see between Zheng He, his near contemporary counterpart, and Columbus, and offers room to see how differently modern Eastern and Western scholars see things from each other.

[15] *Ming Shilu* is the authorized official account of each emperor's reign, including all imperial orders given.

In order to probe the image of the East that Columbus had in his mind, and the various ways he tried to reconcile it with what he saw, this chapter will examine the views of the East that were available to him, particularly those in the *Travels*, which shaped attitudes towards his journey and created the expectation that he would find the Mongol Empire and Cathay (China). Because the focus in this book is on how the various travellers viewed the peoples they encountered, the chapter ends by examining how Columbus's assumptions about the East affected his perception of the native people he found in the Caribbean. Columbus's expectation of finding the East pervades his logbooks and illustrates the convoluted lengths to which this traveller went to fit his experiences of a distant land into his worldview and expectations.

The primary sources used for Columbus's chapter are the *Repertorium Columbianum*, especially the volumes containing Columbus' travelogue and the correspondence between the Old World and the New, and Pipino's *De Consuetudinibus*, the Latin version of the *Travels of Marco Polo* mentioned earlier.

CHAPTER ONE

WESTERN CHRISTIANS WHO VISITED THE MONGOLS

This chapter examines two travellers who introduced Europeans to the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century, John of Pian de Carpini and William of Rubruck. They were both Franciscan friars,[1] and they both provided accounts of the Mongols of the Eurasian steppe, which Charles Beazley called 'the Mongol Orient'.[2] The historian Bertold Spuler valued these two accounts highly, because they recorded their direct observations of the Mongols. He regarded them as even more important than the various Islamic sources, and than the account in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, because these Western travellers offered more incisive analysis than the others.[3] To Antti Ruotsala and Peter Jackson, these accounts are the earliest European encounters with the Mongols outside the battlefield.[4]

This chapter aims to contribute to the scholarship of encounter, focusing primarily on the way in which the friars viewed a people very different from themselves, the Mongols. Carpini's view was indelibly shaped by the recent Mongol conquests in Eastern Europe. He thus regarded the Mongols first and foremost as a military threat. Rubruck was less preoccupied by the military dimension and more open to the people themselves. Their travel accounts reflect these two genuine encounters between Westerners and the Mongols.

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[1] In the early thirteenth century, international Christian orders of monks 'employed the Latin rite' and 'looked to Rome for guidance and direction'. The Franciscan Order, founded with the support of Innocent III, was one of these, and both Carpini and Rubruck were Franciscans. See Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (Harlow, 2005), pp. 8-10.

[2] Charles Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography, Vol. III, A History of Exploration and Geographical Science from the Middle of the Thirteenth to the Early Years of the Fifteenth Century* (c. A.D. 1260-1420) (Oxford, 1906), p. 17.

[3] Bertold Spuler, *History of the Mongols*, trans. Helga and Stuart Drummond (London, 1972), p. 4.

[4] Antti Ruotsala, *Europeans and Mongols, in the Middle of the Thirteenth Century* (Helsinki, 2001), pp. 40-128; P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, pp. 136-142.

The two Franciscans examined in this chapter shared similar backgrounds and outlooks. Yet despite their commonalities, their accounts differ substantially, each stamped with the individual mission, interests, personality and experience of its author. For both of these travellers, the 'east' and the 'west' had the same meaning. They were aware that China lay even further eastward, neither of them reached it, they just got to 'the Mongol Orient'.[5] The 'west' they referred to was the Latin West, or Western Europe, which to them meant Christendom, with its sedentary, urban civilization.[6] However, 'the Mongol Orient' was so large that they had different experiences of the inhabitants of the Mongol camps, and met a wide range of individuals from different societies. Carpini spent his time with Christian captives - Russians and Hungarians, while Rubruck associated with Nestorians and Armenians.[7] Because his account was written against the backdrop of intense intercultural violence, Carpini viewed the Mongols as rapacious enemies, nomadic warriors, and bloodthirsty killers, who were slaughtering Christians in Eastern and Central Europe, and who the Pope and European monarchs feared might invade and destroy the Latin West. Rubruck's account, on the other hand, describes the fine-grained details of an encounter between different cultures, religions, traditions, and societies. What they noticed and commented upon, and how they saw the people they encountered are the subject of this chapter. Carpini will be treated first and then Rubruck, followed by a comparison of the two.

John of Pian de Carpini as Papal Representative (1245-1247)

Originally from Perugia in present-day Italy, John of Pian de Carpini, like William of Rubruck, was a Franciscan friar from the 'Latin West', that is, the Roman Catholic West, which recognized the supremacy of the Pope and

[5] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', in Christopher. Dawson (ed.), and with an introduction, *The Mongol Mission, narratives and letters of the Franciscan missionaries in Mongolia and China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries translated by a nun of Stanbrook Abbey* (London, 1955), pp. 3, 5; William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck, His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke,1253-1255*, trans. Peter Jackson (Indianapolis, 2009), pp. 86, 122, 161, 200, 202.

[6] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', p. 44. William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, p. 205.

[7] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', p. 66; William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, pp. 174, 187, 197 -199, 206, 211-214.

regarded the Eastern Orthodox Church as schismatics, as it did Eastern Christian communities like the Nestorians, Jacobites and Copts. This section of the chapter discusses first how Carpini came to be sent as Papal Ambassador to the Mongols, and then his impressions of the Mongols as recorded in his travel account. Finally, it presents an assessment of his views of the Mongols he encountered.

Due to their geographical separation from, and lack of up-to-date information about Central Asia, Western Europeans had very little knowledge of the Mongols in the early thirteenth century. They had heard about the campaigns against the Islamic world in the 1220s, but were not entirely clear who these conquerors were. They even entertained various fantastic theories about them.[8] It was not until the late 1230s that Friar Julian of Hungary, who had acted as an emissary for King Bela IV and traveled into Mongol territory as far as the Ural region, outlined the Mongol menace to Latin Christians, providing accurate information about this pagan people.[9] Friar Julian's reports did not arouse the attention of the Latin monarchs right away, however, as the Mongols seemed too distant to be a concern for them. Even in 1238, when representatives of the Nizari Ismai'li community, better known as the 'Assassins' from the Near East, arrived unexpectedly in France with proposals for a joint effort against the Mongol threat, pleading for help from the Christian powers, the Christian rulers, not realizing the gravity of the situation, showed little sympathy for them. Bishop of Winchester Peter des Roches said simply, 'Let us leave these dogs to devour one another, that they may all be consumed, and perish; and we, when we proceed against the enemies of Christ who remain, will slay them, and cleanse the face of the earth, so that all the world will be subject to the one Catholic church, and there will be one shepherd and one fold.'[10]

The subsequent Mongol assaults on Poland, Moravia and Hungary in 1241-1242, however, were a rude awakening for the Latin West. The Mongols scored a series of bloody victories there, and it was greatly feared that they would extend their invasion further to the Latin West. With Eastern and Central Europe trampled by this unknown enemy, Western Christians were suddenly eager for knowledge about them, where they came from, what they were up to and how to stop them. Fearing a similar fate for Western Europe, Pope Innocent IV wished to appoint an emissary to stop the Mongols from slaughtering Christians and other people and to convert

[8] P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 59.
[9] David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford, 2007), p. 155.
[10] Christopher Dawson, 'Introduction', *The Mongol Mission*, p. xiv.

them to Christianity. He also wanted to send the emissary to the eastern churches.[11]

The Pope entrusted Carpini with this mission, on which the latter embarked in April 1245. Carpini had been a provincial minister since 1228, first in Germany, then in Spain and later in Saxony. These posts gave him diplomatic experience and made him an acute observer of political affairs. Pope Innocent IV considered Carpini and his companion, Lawrence of Portugal, 'Men proved by years of regular observance and well versed in Holy Scripture', and thus well qualified to act as the Curia's representative in the East.[12] The Pope also aimed to discover the Mongols' military secrets. As the historian David Morgan expressed it, Carpini's main purpose was to 'spy out the land'.[13] Carpini himself wrote, 'We had instructions from the Supreme Pontiff to examine everything and to look at everything carefully'.[14]

Unsurprisingly, Carpini failed to accomplish his primary objectives of preventing the Mongols from further conquest and converting them to Christianity, but his efforts to unite Russian and Latin churches seem to have been fruitful.[15] He also fulfilled another aim of the journey: to compile a substantial amount of information about the Mongols. He wrote up his account in Latin on his return, under the title *Historia Mongolorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus* (A History of the Mongols, whom we call Tartars). The work is divided into sections on their lands, climate, manners, religion, character, history, policies and tactics, with a view to explaining to the Pope and Western rulers how they could best counter the Mongol threat. It is one of the most important sources we have about the Mongol world at the time. In what follows, the contents of Carpini's account will be discussed in two sections: Carpini's Warnings about the Mongol Threat, and Carpini on the Positive Qualities of the Mongols.

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[11] Carpini, 'Prologue' to 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', in C. Dawson (ed.), *The Mongol Mission*, p. 3; d'Ohsson, *History of the Mongols by d'Ohsson,* translated from the French by Feng Chengjun (2 vols. Shanghai, 2001), vol. 1, pp. 226-7; Henry Yule (ed. and trans.), *Cathy and the Way thither* (2 vols. London, 1913-1916), vol. 1, pp. cxxi-cxxii.

[12] C. Dawson, 'Introduction', in C. Dawson (ed.), *The Mongol Mission*, p. xv; Carpini, pp. 3, 70.

[13] D. Morgan, *The Mongols*, p. 22.

[14] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', in C. Dawson (ed.), *The Mongol Mission*, p. 4.

[15] Ibid., p.70.

Carpini's Warnings about the Mongol Threat

While Carpini's official mission was the driving force behind his observations of the Mongols, his own personality and experience, as well as his religious affiliation, shaped his view of the nomadic warriors. His account makes clear that he found the Mongols to be pagan nomads who had the ambition of conquering the world. Thus his investigation confirmed the suspicion of the Pope and others that the Latin West was under threat from the Mongols. For the most part, Carpini's picture of the Mongol invaders is remarkably objective, and as we shall see in the next section, he had some positive things to say about them. Because of the nature of his mission to find out how the West could counter the military threat, his main interest was in knowing how the Mongols made war. However, he also observed many other aspects of their life, including the nature of Mongol society – at the levels of both nobles and commoners. It is hardly surprising that he was particularly critical of the rulers, princes and their generals (*noyans*), since they were conquerors of Eastern Europe and potential enemies of the Christian West. Carpini described the Mongols as covetous, crafty, treacherous, bloodthirsty, and ambitious – noting that their aim was to conquer the whole world. For example, Carpini wrote,

> They are full of slyness and deceit, and if they can, they get round everyone by their cunning. They are men who are dirty in the way they take food and drink and do other things. Any evil they intend to do to others they conceal in a wonderful way so that the latter can take no precautions nor devise anything to offset their cunning. (…) They consider the slaughter of other people as nothing.[16]

One senses there is more in this scathing attack than just disgust at their unclean way of eating and drinking. It also reveals Carpini's anger at the Mongols for the havoc they had wreaked in Hungary and Poland. In the final sentence, he accuses the Mongols of having a disregard for humanity; in fact, he called their humanity into question. A key aim behind his account was to warn the Pope that 'they (the Mongols) are preparing to make war on us'.[17] His conviction of this danger was based both on what he saw and heard, and on his own analysis of the root cause of their external expansion. Having spent more than two-and-a-half years on their journey to the Mongols, Carpini and his associates saw with their own eyes how dire the situation was. He also heard the stories of the Christians who had been taken

[16] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', p. 16.
[17] Ibid., p. 44.

prisoner by the Mongols. The party also had the opportunity to attend the ceremony for Güyük Khan's enthronement in 1246, five years after the death of his father Ogodei; Carpini himself had an interview with this new ruler. After the interview, Güyük composed a letter to the Pope. When Carpini reported the completion of his task to the pontiff in the autumn of 1247, and presented his written account to him, he also delivered this letter from Güyük. The letter threatened the Pope with destruction, claiming that he had the power of God on his side. It demanded that the Pope submit to Güyük in person, declaring: 'In the power of God, all lands, from the rising of the sun to its setting, have been made subject to us. (…) If you act contrary to it, what do we know? God knows.'[18] This was in effect a Mongol imperial edict ordering the Pope to surrender. Carpini was convinced that Güyük and his princely commanders and *noyans*, were planning to invade Christian Europe again, and that unless the Pope and all Christian rulers came to submit to him, they would target the Latin Church and all the Western states, subjugating all Christians as they had in Eastern Europe.

Although it seemed as if the wave of conquests had stopped for a time, Carpini learned that this was only temporary. It was the news of the death of Ögödei Khan that had made the Mongol troops withdraw after their conquests in Eastern Europe. As the historian Christopher Dawson observes, their withdrawal was caused by the struggle among the various contenders for power over the newly conquered territories, particularly by Güyük, Buri and Batu.[19] Carpini stressed in his account that the Church of God was still in danger from the Mongols, who were sure to launch new campaigns of conquest. He wrote, 'It is the intention of the Tartars to bring the whole world into subjection if they can and (...) on this point they have received a command from Chinggis Khan'.[20] For this reason, he devoted himself to analyzing Mongol war tactics and military discipline. He not only wished to warn the Latin West of their prowess, but also to offer the European powers some practicable and effective means to resist the Mongols in the future, should they have to.

What Europe most feared about the Mongols at the time was the military superiority of their teeming hordes of warriors with their 'extensive herds of horses'.[21] Based on his close observation of their military tactics, discipline and organization, as well as their way of life, Carpini explained their superiority in practical terms. He hoped that by imparting knowledge of these military tactics he could help Europeans defend themselves in the

[18] P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 47.
[19] C. Dawson, 'Introduction', p. xiv.
[20] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', pp. 43-4.
[21] P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 71.

event of an attack. His account describes how Chinggis Khan had unified the Mongol tribes north of the Gobi Desert, how the Mongols waged war, what arms they used, how they behaved in war, how they treated their captives, how they assaulted forts and cities, and how they deceived their enemies into defeat or surrender. On this latter point, Carpini singled out three of their deceptive techniques for attention: the feint, where they appear to retreat but in fact induced the enemy to follow them into a place of ambush; the use of illusion to make their force seem bigger and more threatening than it really was; and the use of empty promises to entice the enemy away from their strongholds and persuade them to give up. Carpini also noted the Mongols' ability to maintain the large size of their armies by incorporating troops from the subjugated lands.

Part of their strategic genius involved the deployment of advance guards sent ahead of the main army as scouts to obtain intelligence about the enemy. Until Carpini's report, Western Christians had not known about this practice. The Persian historian and official Ala al-Din Ata Malik Juvaini mentions it as a key to their success in Poland and Hungary in 1241, noting that this practice was even more important than their strength in numbers. Ahead of launching this attack, Batu had dispatched his brother Ciban with ten thousand soldiers to discover details about the enemy, such as their numbers, strengths, weaknesses and weaponry. After a week of reconnaissance, Ciban returned with information that enabled Batu to win his victory.[22] J. J. Saunders notes that Chinggis Khan had even obtained information about the mental condition of the enemy soldiers.[23] Carpini advised that European armies do the same, sending out scouts ahead of time, partly to warn the Western powers of any Mongol advance, but also to gain intelligence about the opposing army, and to frustrate enemy reconnaissance missions.[24]

In addition to the use of such military tactics, Carpini noted that the Mongol troops were far more disciplined than European forces. Their strict discipline rested on fear of punishment; any soldiers who shrank from duty or failed to take part in a military campaign were simply killed. They had to show solidarity with each other, as well, and if a warrior was encircled by the enemy, any warriors who failed to go to his defense were slain.[25]

Carpini also cited the Mongol army's tightly organized centralized power and flexibility. He noted that their armies were organized according to a decimal system, with the basic unit of warriors consisting of ten men, ten of

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[22] Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror, translated from the text of Mirza Muhammad Qazvini*, trans. J. A. Boyle (2 vols Manchester, 1958), vol. 1, p. 270.
[23] J. J. Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquest* (London, 1971), p. 65.
[24] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', p. 47.
[25] Ibid., p. 33.

these units combining into a squadron of a hundred men, ten squadrons forming a regiment of a thousand, and ten regiments forming a *tumen* of ten thousand troops. Each of these units had a leader reporting to the next higher level. The commander at the highest point had absolute power. Carpini's ability as an observer is also evident in his description of the way in which the Mongols' nomadic way of life prepared them for war better than the Europeans. He wrote, 'Their children begin as soon as they are two or three years old to ride and manage horses and to gallop on them, and they are given bows to suit their stature and are taught to shoot'. [26]

Carpini's record is supported by Chinese source materials. Peng Daya offers descriptions of the Mongol children training in riding and shooting.[27] Even in times of peace, while tending their flocks, they practiced hunting, archery and military skills. Zhao Gong 赵珙 commented that the Mongols practically grew up on horseback, honing skills that enabled them to move quickly and easily across the steppe.[28] According to the *Secret History* of *the Mongols*, Chinggis Khan ordered his army not to hoard the wealth captured from their enemies, but to divide the war spoils among all the warriors. In battle, if they were beaten back to the starting point, they had to charge the enemy's front line again, or else they would be slain. [29]

Carpini not only observed what the Mongols did, but also offered suggestions of certain policies that he felt the Europeans should follow in order to defend themselves. The key policy he advocated was European unity. In his view, no country could defeat the Mongol aggressors single-handedly. Deeply concerned about the ability of the Latin West to counter the Mongol threat, and hoping to help craft an informed and united European effort, he wrote, 'In my opinion, there is no province able to resist them by itself unless God fight on its side'.

He repeatedly urged the Christian kingdoms to be of one mind, and to conduct combined military operations. He also urged them to attack the Mongols first rather than waiting until they are attacked. Carpini said, 'if

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[26] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', pp. 18, 26, 46.

[27] Peng Daya 彭大雅 (A Southern Song envoy who traveled to the Mongols), 'Heida shilue' 黑鞑事略 (A Sketch of the Black Tatars), in Luo Zhenyu (ed.), *Luo Xuetang xiansheng quanji sibian* 罗雪堂先生全集四编 (20 vols. Taibei, 1973), vol. 12, pp. 5619-5647.

[28] Zhao Gong 赵珙 (A Southern Song envoy who traveled to the Mongols), *Mengda beilu* 蒙鞑备录 (Memorandum on the Mongol Tatars) written in 1221, (Beijing, 1936), p. 10.

[29] *The Secret History of the Mongols*: *a Mongolian epic chronicle of the thirteenth century*, trans. with a historical and philological commentary by Igor de Rachewiltz (2 vols, Leiden, 2004), vol. 1, p.76.

Christians wish to save themselves, their country and Christendom, then ought kings, princes, barons and rulers of countries to assemble together and by common consent send men to fight against the Tartars before they begin to spread over the land'.[30]

Despite Carpini's intelligence and keen observation of the Mongols, he was not able to communicate with them on a deep level. For this reason, there were some gaps in his understanding of the Mongols. For instance, he did not grasp – and thus did not mention – the religious dimension behind the Mongol concept of a world empire. As Spuler points out, Mongol expansion was explained internally as obedience to the sky god, *Tenggeri*, who granted them the power to conquer the world. Chinggis Khan and his successors regarded themselves as 'instruments' of *Tenggeri* in their conquests.[31]

In modern terms we would describe the Mongols' religion as a kind of Shamanism, still practiced by ethnic communities in northern China. It is based on animism, where everything on earth has a living soul, and plants, objects and natural things such as the weather, forests and mountains are all governed by deities. The Mongol supreme god *Tenggeri* ruled at the top of the supernatural hierarchy.[32] This system of belief underpinned the khans' idea of themselves and their world-conquering destiny, which they thought was decreed by heaven. Later on Rubruck faced with the same difficulty. He made repeated efforts to understand Mongol religion, but as he repeatedly lamented, his translator proved useless. He himself had no way of communicating, although he tried very hard to learn Mongolian. Having no language in common, he could only report what he saw, which inevitably led to misunderstandings.

Misunderstanding their theology, Carpini saw the Mongols' reference to *Tenggeri* as a point of affinity with between their religion and his own. Early in his travels, he says: 'They believe in one God, and they believe that He is the maker of all things visible, and invisible; and that it is He who is the giver of the good things of this world as well as the hardships'. One might almost mistake him as the Christian God. However, Carpini pointed out that this god is worshipped in a different way from Christian practices: 'they do

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[30] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', pp. 45-6.

[31] B. Spuler, *The Mongols in History*, p. 8.

[32] Chen Gaohua 陈高华, Zhang Fan 张帆, Liu Xiao 刘晓, *Yuandai wenhua shi* 元代文化史 (Cultural History of Yuan China) (Guangdong, 2009), p. 86; Zhang Qizhi 张岂之 et al. (eds.), *Zhongguo lishi yuan ming qing juan* 中国历史(元明清卷) (History of China: Volume of Yuan, Ming and Qing) (Beijing, 2001), p.28; P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 44; D. Morgan, *The Mongols*, pp. 37-8.

not, however, worship Him with prayers or praises or any kind of ceremony'.[33] He also describes their fetishes ('idols') and shamans.

Another insight Carpini lacked is that conquest, or at least raiding, was an essential part of the Mongol way of life, due to the harsh environment in which they lived and the particularities of the Mongol economy. This point has been made by the Chinese scholar Xiao Qiqing 萧启庆, a Chinese historian who has contributed significantly to our understanding of the Mongols. Xiao notes that the comfortable material life of sedentary peoples tends to be the envy of nomadic ethnic groups. He explains that when Chinggis Khan and his successors engaged in plundering wealth and resources beyond the steppe, this was not only the only way for them to survive, but also the only way they could hold onto their power. As Xiao says, they had to maintain the existence of the supra-tribal polity (*yeke Mongghol ulus*) of the steppe, and this could only be done by external expansion. Continuously waging wars against wealthy nations was the only way to preserve their great power from disintegration.[34] Peter Jackson confirms that the Mongols had to raid in order to survive, and that Chinggis Khan's aim in doing so was to maintain the solidity of the *yeke Mongghol ulus*.[35] However, as time went on, the Mongols were increasingly motivated by the desire to conquer territories.

Although he did not thoroughly grasp these two dimensions, religious and economic, of the Mongol's continuing drive for conquest, Carpini concluded that the Mongols were an aggressive, dangerous enemy, poised on the verge of attacking Europe.

Carpini on the Positive Qualities of the Mongols

It is remarkable that despite his fear of these dangerous foes, as indicated in the prologue, Carpini does not cast them in an entirely negative light.[36] He is objective enough to note some positive qualities. Moreover, his positive comments extended beyond admiration for the Mongols' military strategy, discipline and organization, which were directly relevant to his Papal mission. His personal experience of the Mongol camps made it possible for him to notice certain personal qualities of ordinary Mongols. Among his direct observations of their behavior and common character

[33] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', p. 9.
[34] Xiao Qiqing, *Nei Beiguo er wai Zhongguo* 内北国而外中国 (Favor Northland While Discriminate against the Middle Kingdom) (Beijing, 2007), pp. 5-6.
[35] P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, pp. 32, 46.
[36] Carpini, 'Prologue' to 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', p. 3.

traits, he pointed out a number of good qualities, characterizing them as simple, long-suffering and extremely faithful to their rulers, and even pointing out that they had more of these qualities than of other people.

Many of the qualities he admired were consistent with his Western Christian values. First, he found the Mongol people obedient and loyal to their rulers and their superiors. He noted that they had great respect and awe for their superiors and were even willing to die for them if necessary. Second, Carpini praised their generosity and lack of covetousness. Their society worked like a big family, he said. There was no theft or crime, and they did not lock their doors. Third, Carpini discussed their courtesy and respect for each other. Rather than being divided by mutual jealousies, they comforted each other with kind words. Although they were sometimes short of necessities, they were generous in helping each other. They were also generous when they held banquets in each other's honor. He noted also that the Mongols were physically and able to survive difficult conditions. They were hardworking: the women were busy from morning to night, milking cows and doing all kinds of housework, while the men were engaged in milking mares and brewing *comos* in times of peace. When they were ordered out to fight, they rode their horses tenaciously across long distances, despite the hardships of extreme heat and bitter cold. As for the women, Carpini praised them as chaste and undefiled. They did not complain about their living conditions, and were always optimistic about life. Even if they had nothing to eat or drink for days, they still remained hopeful about the future. Carpini noted that the Mongols never talked to their superiors in a dishonest way in order to gain an advantage; they never had noisy or violent fights among themselves; and they did not hurt or kill one another.[37]

One positive quality that particularly struck Carpini was that despite their simple, poor way of life, the common people observed a severe moral code. Under the influence of Chinggis Khan's great *yasa*, or law code, they appeared to live in harmony among each other. In addition to appreciating it for its own sake, Carpini saw this social harmony, coupled with complete loyalty to their sovereign, as key factors in their military success. He also noted that this quality was distinctly lacking in Europe. While the Mongols had been overrunning Central and Eastern Europe, the Latin West was embroiled in fierce papal-imperial rivalry for supremacy. Pope Gregory IX had launched a crusade against Frederick II of Sicily for oppressing the Church and obstructing papal policy, and after being excommunicated by Gregory, Frederick was in the midst of responding with a counterattack. The latter had even complained that the Pope's crusade against him had

[37] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', pp. 14-5.

encouraged the Mongols to attack Christendom.[38] Without taking Frederick's side, Carpini agreed that Christians should not be distracted by fighting amongst themselves while such a grave threat was looming. One of the conclusions of Carpini's report was that the Mongols had much greater group cohesion than Christendom, and that such conflicts and violence as those in Europe might weaken the region if faced with a Mongol attack.

Despite being repulsed by what he saw as their outlandish ways, their arrogance toward non-Mongols, and their random slaughter of innocent people, Carpini did not allow his aversion to interfere with his careful observations of their way of life: the land, the people and the natural conditions in which they lived. After living among them for a time, Carpini began to understand the Mongols on a deeper level than most Europeans. His understanding was also enhanced by the information he received from Christian captives, especially Russians and Hungarians, who helped him to gain 'a thorough knowledge of everything'.[39] He could now explain how the Mongols had gone from being an obscure group of nomads in a remote corner of the Greater Xing'an Mountains to becoming masters of a powerful Mongol Empire stretching across Eurasia, and he understood in part the reasons behind their expansion. He began to see them as individuals, to understand the challenges of their way of life, and see the complexities behind the European stereotype of bloodthirsty barbarian hordes. It is striking that he was willing to appreciate the Mongols as human beings with their own culture, which he tried to understand. Some of Carpini's accounts of the common Mongols' good character are consistent with the Chinese scholar-official Ye Ziqi's 叶子奇 (1327-1390) comment on the Mongols' personal qualities.[40]

Of course there were limitations to Carpini's understanding of what he saw because of language and social barriers, and because he was there for only a short time. He did not understand the larger economic explanation for their periodic raiding and violence, for instance. Of course he had an agenda, to protect the Latin West from danger, and much of his travel

[38] C. Dawson, 'Introduction', p. xiv.

[39] Carpini, 'History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini', p. 66; Gregory Guzman is skeptical about the reliability of the information he received from these captives because of their difficult situation and eagerness to urge the Pope, through these Christian missionaries, to launch a military campaign against the Mongols so they could win back their freedom. See his 'European Captives and Craftsmen among the Mongols, 1231-1255', *The Historian*, 72.1 (2010), 122-50, p. 149.

[40] Ye Ziqi 叶子奇, *Caomuzi* 草木子 1516, printed in *Yuan Ming shiliao biji congkan* 元明史料笔记丛刊 (Collection of Yuan and Ming Sources) (Beijing, 1959, repr. 1997), p. 47.