

## **Giovanni di Plano Carpini and the Representation of Otherness in the First Part of the *Historia Mongalorum***

**Lorenzo Pubblici**

*(Santa Reparata International School of Art)*

This article is the first part of a wider project that aims to reconstruct the perception and the representation of the Mongols in the Western missionaries' accounts of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The first text analyzed is Giovanni di Plano Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum*. Starting from the cultural background of the Franciscans and Dominicans who traveled to Asia in these decades, the investigation wants to highlight how the description of diversity and silence of the sources served to enforce and define the collective identity of the observers.

This article takes into consideration the first four chapters of Giovanni di Plano Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum*, an extraordinarily important account written by the Umbrian Franciscan Friar after his journey to Asia in the years 1245–47. Giovanni's treatise is a masterpiece of Latin Medieval Literature and contains very dry, neutral descriptions as well as personal considerations on Mongol history. The first four chapters, the focus of this article, are the more detached and "external" in relation to the work as a whole. They are a meticulous description of Mongol customs, daily habits, religion, and traditions. This is why I decided to start with the analysis of these chapters before investigating the rest of the text, which are the more political (chapters 5–8) and personal (chapter 9) sections of Giovanni's *Historia*.

Scholars are familiar with both Plano Carpini's account as well as the texts produced by other missionaries who traveled to Asia in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. However, most of the research of these texts has focused on their importance as historical sources. The investigation of the first part of the *Historia Mongalorum* has shown that the Franciscan account is also a unique fount of information on the cultural and mental approach that a man born and raised in 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy had towards steppe nomads. Giovanni's journey was organized by Pope Innocent IV in order to gather as much information as possible on the Mongols, owing to the fact that a few years before they had arrived at the gates of Western "Europe", becoming a tangible threat for Christianity. The Franciscan Friar went far beyond his task. He brought back home the knowledge of peoples, lands, and climate; he established a precedent. Three decades before Marco Polo, Friar Giovanni brought the Orient to the West, broke a mental barrier, and broadened the geographical horizon of Western Christianity by creating cultural categories that were so far unknown. After his journey, the more prepared Western cities like Venice and Genoa would create a commercial system in the Orient and the Papacy launched many other missions and installed dioceses in the Mongol empire. All this happened after Giovanni's experience, and in part it happened because of it. The awareness he brought back from his journey was the key to opening a door which had previously been sealed.

**Keywords:** Giovanni di Plano Carpini, *Historia Mongalorum*, Franciscan Order, Dominican Order, Mendicant Orders, Mongols

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### *The steppe nomads and the theme of identity representation*

The political and social evolution during the industrial and post-industrial era has strongly affected the mental approach that the European West traditionally has clung to when faced with alternative models, which have often been seen with suspicion, superficiality and detachment. Thus, there has been enormous effort by historians to comprehend the interactions between nomadism and sedentary peoples. Research on traditional nomadic societies has often been influenced by a rigid and mechanical adaptation of that model to the geographical environment that was its settlement and at the same time its productive context. Only in recent times, the capabilities of those men to modify the environment where they lived, even if nomads, have been emphasized and have gained historical dignity. This new approach started in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, the publication of a paper in 1938 by the American Sinologist Owen Lattimore [21, p. 1–16] was of great importance. In it, he upended the traditional point of view by giving full recognition and respect to the so-called *barbarians* and to their peculiar social and economic dynamism.

According to a very popular idea in the scientific community of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, nomadic societies of the steppes achieved a high level of adaptation to their environment and therefore these people would inhibit every form of evolution inside those societies (for this debate, see Toynbee [46, esp. p. 55–57]). In fact, we cannot deny the substantial specialization of the nomadic system of life in the Middle Ages, taking into account that envi-

ronmental changes actually occurred between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century in the Central Asian steppes [32, p. 4375–9].

Throughout the centuries, particularly in the first millennium of our era, the steppe nomads were partially assimilated by sedentary civilizations (and vice-versa). It is a complex subject, but we can say here that it also occurred because of the reaction their members had to the natural environment. The over-exploitation of non-suitable land for agriculture, crop rotation periods that were too short, as well as scarce agricultural preparation etc., have forced traditionally and structurally sedentary peoples into nomadism. However, we must note that most of the nomadic societies were actually semi-nomads; furthermore, nomads could not exist without the “outside” sedentary world (on this topic, see the seminal work of A. Khazanov [18]); interactions with other social models were a necessity, not a choice. Exchanges with sedentary civilizations determined the way the nomads represented “otherness” for those travelers or members of an urban mercantile and sedentary society, who came into contact with them, principally after the Mongol conquest of the Western Eurasian continent, since the 1220’s. Sedentary and nomad societies have often been seen in opposition, as two antagonistic models. From this perspective, the numerous accounts of the Western travelers who established contact with the Mongols in the 13<sup>th</sup> century are revealing. The comprehension they had of those peoples is a decisive element to understanding the reaction of Europe to the Mongol invasions. After all, the perception of otherness is always a mirror, where one sees and understands oneself through others. This is true nowadays as well as in the past. The case of the Mendicant Orders sent to the Mongols in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is particularly interesting especially because they were prepared and aware of their missions, but at the same time they were, just like merchants, the product of urban mercantile culture, and therefore completely foreign to the steppe nomads. Moreover, they were men of peace and dialogue. Thus, the perception of a new social context that we can read in the pages written by the Western Christian travelers is an important theme when trying to understand how strong, but at the same time how rarefied, artificial, and dynamic, collective identities were in Medieval Europe.

The creation of collective identities is, especially in our times, a widely debated topic. In particular, between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the relentless growth of nationalism has influenced national historiographies and the concepts of peoples/nations have been studied mechanically, and are often seen as static elements in a dynamic environmental context. They have been presented as having always been there, as a continuity factor in a changing world (see on this Geary [15, p. 31–53] and Pohl [35, p. 16]). On the contrary, ethnic identity is fluid; it is a persistently movable process (for a general picture on the topic, see the illuminating short essay of M. Aime [1]). In the past few decades, and thanks to the cooperation of historians within other disciplines, it has been possible to highlight and correct the methodological limitations and the cultural approach of such a mechanical interpretation. The “axis” of scientific activity has focused on the mutability of the peoples, and the prominence of individuals on collective aggregations. As Francesco Remotti wrote, no society has been able – fortunately – to create and maintain its identity in the form of a compact and unassailable sphere [39, p. 61]. Ethnic identity is subjective and not objective. It has always been and still is an outcome of dynamic processes; therefore it has created and brings in itself, ambiguity. As Walter Pohl has pointed out, ethnicities are a product of history. They are not a constitutive feature of the peoples, but a practice to reproduce constantly [35, p. 17–18].

#### *The historical context and Giovanni di Plano Carpini’s life*

The primary means to create identity through otherness is naming [14, p. 20], and the Western travelers, who met for the first time the steppe nomads, used very generic labels to identify them, inevitably producing a prejudice. In fact, these nomadic groups were much less homogeneous than what one would expect. Furthermore, they were anything but primitive. Aside from the numerous clichéd ideas about nomads, nomadism was, as mentioned above, an extremely specialized adaptation to the environment. It allowed humans to settle in places where it would be otherwise impossible [18, especially p. 19–21; 32, p. 184–185]. Ethnic identity was also a goal for the nomads themselves. They had the objective of creating a common historical memory through tradition (or cultural perpetuation according to the definition of J. Assman [4, p. XII]). The case of the Secret History of the Mongols is, from this point of view, emblematic (see De Rachewiltz [11] and Cleaves [7]). The Western travelers, who had to deal with this ethnic complexity, simplified and used cultural categories that were familiar to them.

One of the most interesting – and better-documented – cases of this, is the journey of the Friar Giovanni di Plano Carpini, who went to Eastern Asia from April 1245 to November 1247, going through modern Poland and Russia [30, p. 35; 2, p. 47]. Plano Carpini was a very experienced diplomat and by all accounts a pleasant man; he knew the countries of Northern Europe, but had no familiarity of Asia. The report he wrote about his journey, the *Historia Mongalorum*, was not the first description of the Mongols drawn by a Latin westerner [19; 9, p. 85–88; 2, p. 46; 43, p. 40], but it is the most comprehensive, meticulous and deliberately detailed portrayal of this people and their homeland, who were still utterly alien to Europe in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. The journey of Plano Carpini was planned in a time of hard clashes between the Holy See and the Empire of Frederick II Hohenstaufen. The Mongols had reached Europe after more than twenty years of uninterrupted military successes. After having sub-

dued Greater Armenia and Persia between 1231 and 1236, the successor of Chinggis Khan (d. 1227), Ögedei (1186–1241) sent a huge army to the West. The successes of this expedition were impressive and the Mongols arrived at the borders of the recently rebuilt Byzantine Empire, before starting a massive military operation against Europe. On 6 December 1240, the Mongol army was at the gates of Kiev. The city was destroyed and pillaged. The Russian princes, except for those from the city of Novgorod, accepted submission to the Mongols. But the Tatar advance did not end in Kiev; in February 1241 Krakow surrendered and soon afterwards all Poland fell under the Mongols. In April, Pest was conquered and the Mongol army arrived at the gates of the Christian West after having subjugated Hungary.

In Europe the fear of the Mongols spread slowly. Frederick II was the first to understand that the Mongols could represent a danger for Europe, but he never acted concretely. Even less the Papacy, heavily involved in the conflict against the Emperor, that was excommunicated and deposed in March 1239. A turning point occurred after the death of Pope Gregory IX (1241) who was succeeded, in June 1243, by the Genoese Sinibaldo Fieschi, who took the name of Innocent IV and sat on the throne of Peter until 1254. The new Pope had to deal with at least three important questions: the long lasting controversy with the Hohenstaufen; the troubled situation in the Holy Land and the “solution against the Tatars” (*remedium contra Tartaros*). Innocent IV did not underestimate the danger represented by the Mongols, so close to Europe, and considered a mission that could in part test the ground for a potential conversion of the Mongols, but most of all, gathered as much information as possible about this enigmatic people, in particular on their military force, their administrative structure, and their plans for Europe. In order to accomplish such a delicate and risky task, the Pontiff relied on the Mendicant orders, whose members were considered highly by the religious authorities.

Innocent IV entrusted three documents to the Mendicants, for three diverse plans: the first *Cum simus super*, was a bull addressed to the Nestorian prelates and recommended they work to achieve a union between Churches and recognize the primacy of Rome; the Pope was available to host a Council for this purpose. The second Papal bull, *Dei patris immensa*, dated 5 March 1245, contained a long discussion on what was Catholicism and explained its fundamental characters. Finally, there was the more political document, the bull *Cum non solum homines*, with which the Pontiff protested against the Mongol harassment of the Christians in the Orient, *ab hominum strage desisterent ac fidei veritatem acciperent* (“for them to stop the massacres and accept the True Faith” [47, p. 163]). The three documents were entrusted in particular to Dominic of Aragon, a Franciscan sent to Syria, Armenia and Constantinople, and to the Dominicans André de Longjumeau and Ascelino of Lombardy. The last two Dominicans arrived to Tabriz, in modern Iran, and gave the bull *Cum simus super* to the Nestorian cleric Simeon Rabban-ata, who had greatly contributed to the spread of Nestorianism in Persia [2, p. 46; 30, p. 34]. The mission was in part successful because they received a letter from Simeon, in which he recognized the authority of the Roman Pope, but rejected any intrusion in internal questions of the Oriental Church [see Pelliot: 29]. After this, the two took different routes: André did not continue the journey, gave the other two documents to the first Mongol official he met and went back to Lyon. Ascelino continued his journey accompanied by another Dominican, Simon of St. Quentin, and arrived at Baiju’s camp, in Karabakh in May 1247. He went back to Lyon in the summer of 1248. The information we know about the journey of Ascelino comes from Simon of St. Quentin’s *Historia Tartarorum*, now preserved incomplete in Vincent of Beauvais *Speculum Historiale* [47; 2, p. 48; 30, p. 34]. Despite some results, the missions of the Mendicant Orders were essentially a failure. On the other hand, Giovanni di Plano Carpini’s legation was a brilliant success. The Franciscan is one of the most interesting and important personalities of his order; his *Historia Mongalorum* represents a source of inestimable value on Medieval Asia and the Mongols. Nevertheless, Giovanni’s prominence as chronicler and traveler is still today not adequately recognized outside the limited scholarly sphere.

A journey to visit the Mongols in the 1240s was a particularly perilous journey and would have been full of unknowns, but after the spectacular advance of the Mongols in the heart of Europe, the Pope deemed it necessary to get as much information as possible on this potential new threat. Only a very capable and prepared group of people, led by an experienced diplomat, could successfully achieve the task. So, who was the man to whom Innocent IV entrusted such a delicate mission?

We don’t know the exact date of birth of Friar Giovanni, but there is a general agreement that he was born in Pian del Carpine, today Magione in the province of Perugia around 1190 [28, p. 24; 25, p. 50]. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Pian del Carpine was an important town in Central Italy, as it served as a crossroads for the pilgrims travelling to Rome from all over Europe. Giovanni belonged to the first generation of the Order, and was one of the first companions of St. Francis. Thus, it is probable that, as F. Pascolini has written, who based his hypotheses on Thomas of Celano’s account, Friar Giovanni joined the Friars Minor around 1215 together with a bunch of erudite [28, p. 33; 25, p. 50].

On 23 May 1221, during the General Chapter of the Franciscan Order, held in St. Maria della Porziuncola, the Franciscans discussed the necessity to promote the missions in Germany. It was an uncertain and perilous mission. The Friars, therefore, were asked to voluntarily participate in the assignment and according to Jordanus de

Jano, 90 of them stood ready to accept the risky task. It was the Minister of the Order of Germany, Caesarius de Spira, who chose the 26 Minors designated to leave to the North [20, p. 7]. Giovanni di Plano Carpini and Friar Barnaba were chosen to go ahead, because the first knew how to preach in Latin and Lombard, and the second spoke German. The plan for the Friars was to go to Trento in order to prepare a place for the companions that would have followed them in order to prepare the places for them and their companions (*ad preparandum sibi et fratribus suis locum*, [20, p. 8]). Giovanni Plano Carpini was more probably considered an expert traveller and a good organizer, since he went with a German Friar who knew the places and the peoples. The mission was well organized: Giovanni could speak Latin to address the learned, but he could speak Lombard too, so he could talk to the commoners, who didn't know Latin [38, p. 26].

By the end of summer 1221 Giovanni was in Trento, from where he would eventually go to Germany by passing through Bolzano, Bressanone and then Vipiteno (see map). The mission arrived in Mittenwald, where they suffered many privations, hunger and thirst. They finally arrived in Augsburg, where the Bishop of the city received them. On 16 October 1221 ("circa festum Galli"), from Augusta, Caesarius de Spira summoned the Friars and assigned them to the provinces of Germany. He sent Giovanni and Barnaba as preachers to Wurzburg (*Praemisit autem fratrem Iohannem de Plano Carpinis et fratrem Barnabam praedicatores in Herbipolim* [20 p. 9]). Then they were in Mainz, Worms, Speyer, Strasbourg and Cologne [20, p. 9; 24, p. 51]. In the first half of 1223, probably March, Albert of Pisa succeeded Caesarius de Spira as General Minister of the Franciscan Order [20, p. 11]. Once they arrived in Germany, he convened the elder Friars to celebrate a Chapter in the church of the Virgin in Speyer, outside the city walls, near the leper hospital (*in nativitate beatae Virginis in Spira extra muros apud leprosos* [20, p. 11]). Friar Giovanni was one of the elder Friars who were at the Chapter and Albert of Pisa nominated him custodian of Saxony.

Friar Giovanni vigorously began his new missionary activity and went to Hildesheim, in Central Germany, with nine companions. From this city, he could better organize the missions, proving once again his diplomatic capabilities. After having listened to Giovanni's sermons, the Bishop allowed the Franciscans to preach and confess in his dioceses, (*predicandi et confessiones in sua diocese audiendi auctoritatem dedit* [20, p. 12]). In the same year 1223 Giovanni sent Friars preaching to Brunswick, Goslar, Magdeburg and Halberstadt [20, p. 12; 24, p. 51]. In August 1224 Giovanni di Plano Carpini was sent to Cologne. He must have done a good job, if we believe the words of a Friar Jordanus when he states that the order in Saxony had increased (*incrementus Saxoniae* [20, p. 12]). Friar James, Custodian of Alsace and a very pious man (*virum gratiosum, mansuetum, modestum et piium*, [20, p. 12]), succeeded Giovanni as Custodian of Saxony. In October, Jordanus de Jano was sent by the Minister of the Franciscan Order Albert of Pisa to Thuringia, precisely to Erfurt in order to expand the Order in that Region. Jordanus brought some Friars with him; Giovanni di Plano Carpini was one of them. In 1225, the Friars moved to the Church of the Holy Spirit in Erfurt, where they remained for six years [20, p. 13].

In 1228, Giovanni di Plano Carpini replaced Friar Simon of England as Minister of the Order in Germany, by decision of the new General Minister of the Franciscan Order, the Florentine Giovanni Parenti [20, p. 16]; [Giovanni Parenti] *fratrem Iohannem de Plano Carpinis ministrum Theoutoniae destinavit*; [25, p. 51–52]). Friar Giovanni then called for a Council to be held in Worms in which the canonization of St. Francis was decided and the missions in Germany were strongly improved. Giovanni sent Friar Simon of England and other companions to Magdeburg. According to Friar Jordanus de Jano, Plano Carpini had become a portly man and could not walk well, so he went around by mule, "following the example of Christ, who was carried by a mule and not a horse" (*exemplo Christi asinantis potius quam equitantis, movebantur*, [20, p. 17]). As Minister of the Order in Germany, Friar Giovanni exercised once again his office with vigor, and obtained important results proving to be the "greater popularizer of the Order" (*Ordinis sui dilatator maximus fuit* [20, p. 17]). He sent Friars to Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, to the Balkan and to Northern Europe. Plano Carpini installed the Order in Lotharingia and earned fame of defender of his Friars like a "mother with her children and hen with her chicks" (*Hic omnes fratres suos velut mater filios et gallina pullos*, [20, p. 17]). Friar Giovanni was Minister of the Order in Germany until 1230, and was succeeded by Friar Simon of England. In the same year 1230, he celebrated his last Chapter as Provincial Minister of the Order. In that same Chapter, Friar Plano Carpini was nominated Minister in Spain, where he remained for two years [20, p. 17]. His experience in Spain was relatively short; in 1232, Friar Giovanni was nominated Minister of Saxony again, where he remained until 1239. The information about Giovanni di Plano Carpini became very scarce from this moment onwards [25, p. 52]. We know that Giovanni was not only a learned, well educated, polyglot and capable man; he was also pleasant and very capable in story telling. According to Salimbene de Adam, Plano Carpini was friendly, spiritual and expert in many things [42, p. 206; also in Menestò: 25, p. 53].

This is the man who left Lyon on 16 April 1245, Easter Sunday, to go to the Mongols. Giovanni di Plano Carpini returned to the French city on November 1247. The results of his journey and the description he drew of his experience are incredible even today, especially if we consider the conditions in which he had to travel and the difficulties he and his companions encountered.

*Otherness in the first part of Plano Carpini's Historia Mongalorum*

There are two principal reasons why I have initially chosen to analyze the first four chapters of Plano Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum*: firstly, this paper is the initial part of a wider project focused on the representation of the steppe nomads, and the Mongols in particular, through the accounts of the 'Western' missionaries of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, I thought it was necessary to divide the vast corpus of data available on this subject. Secondly, I think that Plano Carpini's *Historia* is in fact divided into three parts, and the chapters 1 to 4 belong to the first. The *Historia Mongalorum* is a concentration of many topics and several perspectives. The Franciscan Friar wrote about the Mongols with the meticulousness of the chronicler and the depth of the scholar. He observed customs, politics, history, society, and produced one of the most complete and extraordinary texts of Medieval Latin Literature.

As mentioned above, the first four chapters are different from the next five; they look like the account of an ethnographer, the curious analysis of a man who is getting into close contact with a human context completely alien to his own; these chapters provide a neutral treatment, where autobiography and the history of the Mongols is almost entirely absent. Historical narration enters into Giovanni's account from chapter five. In fact, chapters V–VIII are the truly historical ones, and in them the personal and direct observation leaves the place to the indirect information that Giovanni gathered during his journey. The information he gives is very accurate if we consider the many difficulties he had in finding reliable data on the Mongol history in the places he visited; furthermore, we should take into account the efforts in communicating with peoples that spoke languages that Giovanni could not understand.

Plano Carpini *Historia Mongalorum* was written in two separate moments: the first redaction was realized shortly after his return to Lyon; the second "after we had had some rest" (*postquam habuimus qualecumque otium* [31, p. 333]). On the two redaction of Giovanni's *Historia* see Lungarotti [23, p. 79–92]). Chapter IX was entirely added in the second redaction and it looks like the attempt to reject the accusation that the text – which is, as John himself acknowledges, hard to believe – was a false and exaggerated account. It is in this chapter that Giovanni accurately describes the exhausting journey that he and his companions had to undergo in order to accomplish their mission. When Friar Giovanni left for his voyage, nothing existed in the Mongol empire that could help him and his companions successfully realize this delicate task. Plano Carpini could not count on the organized presence of Westerners – especially Genoese and Venetians – who established their emporia on the Black Sea shores only in the following decades.

In the 1240's the West was very attracted by the mysterious Orient, yet the knowledge of it was very superficial, impregnated with myth. In these years, the Mongol military force was at its peak and nobody knew how the rulers of these people would have reacted to the presence of Western Christians in their empire. It is Giovanni himself who says how difficult the journey was, affirming that he and his companions were afraid of being killed, imprisoned forever (*vel perpetuo captivari*: [31, p. 13–15]), as well as being tormented beyond their strength by any kind of deprivations.

As mentioned above, the journey was unsafe, but the Franciscan Friars had no choice because, as Giovanni writes, they had to help the Christians avoid a huge massacre (*magna stragem in populo christiano* [31, p. 23]). Plano Carpini does not hide his initial concern about the Mongols' intentions regarding the Christians who lived in the land that had just been conquered. In fact, "there was the fear that, because of them [the Mongols], the Church of God was threatened by an imminent and serious danger" (*Timeabus enim ne per eos in proximo Ecclesie Dei periculum immineret* [31, p. 10–13]). Everything about the journey was unknown to our Friar; he is worried not only about the Mongols but he is also afraid to be killed or imprisoned by other peoples for the rest of his life: *ab aliis nationibus timeremus occidi vel perpetuo captivari* [31, p. 227]. Giovanni soon realized that the journey would be even harder than what he and his companions had foreseen. Furthermore, he knew how incredible his account would be, and he turns to the reader writing that he and his companions have personally experienced the things he describes, or have heard about them by Christians imprisoned by the Mongols [31, p. 228]. A few lines later, Giovanni feels it necessary to repeat his appeal, saying that he should not be believed as a false man only because he is telling stories that are hard to believe, because "with no doubt, it is extremely painful to be denigrated by others for what we do good" (*immo est valde crudele ut homo, propter bonum quod facit, ab aliis infametur* [31, p. 228]).

After the prologue, Friar Giovanni dedicates the whole first chapter of his account to the territory of the Mongols: *De terra Tartarorum et situ et qualitate ipsius et dispositione aeris in eadem*. The physical territory where a people reside is a prominent element in the construction and the consolidation of collective identities. It is their container. This is true both for sedentary and nomadic societies. So, not only does Giovanni define the main characteristics of where they live, but also the location and the climate. In 1986 Anthony Smith published a very solid research article on the ethnic origin of nations in which he stated that "when outsiders identify members of the community, they often do so by reference to their territorial 'origins', so that the term 'ethnic' has acquired additional connotations of 'being from the same original home land'" [44, p. 29]. The case of Friar Giovanni and

his *Historia Mongalorum* is, from this point of view, exemplary: Plano Carpini opens his description by saying that he will write about the real facts of Tatar life (*facta Tartarorum* [31, p. 229]), that is why he begins talking about the land where they live. But the Mongols did not live permanently where Giovanni collocates them. The territory that Plano Carpini associated with them was tangible, but the symbiosis between that territory and the Mongols was mostly in his mind, since that was a natural idea for a man like him to make given that he was born and raised in communal Italy. For an external visitor with Giovanni's cultural background, the association between the Mongols and the territory they had conquered was automatic, and obvious. For the Mongols it was not at all. The territory belonged to them as they had conquered it, but they did not belong to it; they had no historical and shared memory tied to it. Their common identity was mostly based on successful warfare, because the nomad armies were a "highly specialized war machine" [33, p. 265] in which the whole society was involved and only war could keep this machine working as a way of effectively recycling their identity.

As mentioned above, Friar Giovanni was a man born and raised in urban mercantile Central Italy. To him, the arid land of the Mongolian steppe looked strange and hostile. And even the Mongols looked different to him. "They look diverse from all other people" (*Forma personarum ab omnibus aliis hominibus est remota* [31, p. 232]). Friar Giovanni begins describing how the Mongols accentuated their differences with the Europeans, which is to say Giovanni's exterior "normality". According to him, the Mongols have a flat nose, the distance between the eyes and the cheeks "is in fact, bigger than other races" [31, p. 232]; the cheeks are very prominent compared to the jaws; the eyes are small with eyelids are raised up to the eyebrows [31, p. 232]. Men are generally short, slim and have small feet; they have a very sparse beard. They cut their hair like clerics, from one ear to the other, but leave them long in the back, like the women, and have braids that they tie behind the ears. Later, Giovanni notes that the Mongols are polygamous and "have as many wives as they can maintain" (*Uxores vero habet unusquisque quot potest tenere* [31, p. 340–341]; we will return on this further on). Very interesting is the description that Plano Carpini gives of their attire [31, p. 341]. Men and women dress the same. They don't use capes, hoods or furs, but tunics made of fabrics typical of the Central Asia countries [8, p. 411–412].

Friar Giovanni was sent to Asia in order to investigate the customs of this very enigmatic people, but even more important was for the Pope and Western Christianity's interest as a whole in understanding how real the rumors were concerning the Mongol invincibility in battle. The fear of a possible attack by the nomad army was strong in the Papal Curia. Because of this, Giovanni is very attentive to collect as much data as he can on the Mongols. The third chapter of his account is therefore on religion. In fact, the Mongols have never been a unitary ethnic group, at least until the more or less coherent contact with other societies and cultures. Plano Carpini always uses the ethnonym "Tartari", but it was nothing more than a label. Tatars were a tribe of the heterogeneous ethnic universe of the Eastern Asian steppes. The word *Tartari* became very popular in 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe because of the easy association between the sound Tatar and the Latin *Tartarus* (Hell).

The notion of being a people was probably weak among the Mongols, at least until the beginning of the conquest campaign. Here, the process of construction of collective identity accelerated and almost immediately divided into many streams. From this point of view, it was very important what we can define as "ethnic space" and "theological/religious space" because religion is one of the most powerful means to build up identity ([39, p. 38]; see also Aime [1] on this). In the case of the Mongols, it is especially evident when the nomad polytheism came into contact with the monotheisms of the Asian and European urban civilizations, particularly Islam and Christianity [16, p. 2–3]. The overlap, even if partial, of the ethnic and theological spaces entailed on the one hand the beginning of a process of consolidation of collective identity and on the other the weakness/acceptance of it. Usually, the greater the integration, the stronger the harshness with which the sources describe "they" in comparison with "us". It is not accidental that the Mongols converted almost always to one of the great monotheistic religions. Instead, we do not have any case of the contrary. The new dominators were unable to impose a hegemonic culture. The model that resisted was that of the majority groups who were less accustomed to being in power. The dominant classes, when made up of Mongol functionaries, often underwent the cultural influence of the areas where they worked and lived. The same happened to the nobility (see on this Publici [36 and 37] and Dashdondong [9]). The Mongols never imposed a forced conversion to their original paganism. Compulsory, and sometimes violent, conversions were imposed when the khans were converted to one of the monotheistic religions: theological and ethnic spaces overlapped, even partially, and the collective identity based on religion became stronger.

Shamanism was not a foundation for rigid collective self-recognition; in contrast, self-recognition based on religion was very important for the subject peoples. Shamanic practice is strongly tied to the natural environment where it was born and flourished. Instead, monotheisms – especially Christianity and Islam, but also Judaism – tended to isolate the beliefs from the unexplainable and unexpected in nature [26, p. 37–40]. This aspect affected Giovanni di Plano Carpini, who is very neutral in describing the Mongol religious practices, especially in the first part of the *Historia Mongalorum*. Yet, we can read in his account the clear perception of being something apart from the Mongols; we comprehend the idea of "otherness" through religion and the system of beliefs that derives from the natural environment. The Mongols have one God, and they believe he is the creator of all things, visible

and invisible ([31, p. 236]: *Unum Deum credunt, quem credunt esse factorem omnium visibilium et invisibilium*). They also believe that their God is, in this world, the “distributor” (*datorem*) of good and evil, but they do not venerate their God with rituals and prayers, although they have idols (*ongghot/ongghon*, see on this Heissig [17, especially p. 6–23] and Morgan [26, p. 38]), made of silk and considered very important. Prominent women are in charge of making those idols and they do it all together. The description of the idols (see on this the excellent explanation on the two redactions of the text by M.C. Lungarotti [23, p. 81–82] is one of those that Giovanni di Plano Carpini enhanced in the second redaction of the *Historia Mongalorum*.

It is not surprising that a Franciscan like Giovanni notes that the Mongols venerated natural elements like the sun, the moon, the fire, the water and the earth, as it was customary for the Turks since the ancient times [16, p. 149]. The Mongols had a vertical idea of supernatural power. There existed a heavenly power (*Tenggri*) superior to all others: all the elements on earth were subject to it [17, p. 47–48]. More unexpected to him must have been the religious tolerance of the Mongols, who “as far as we know” never compelled anybody to renounce their creed [31, p. 238]. Nevertheless, Plano Carpini seems not to believe seriously in the Mongols’ tolerance, when he says that “if they had the domination of the world [...] they would force everyone to bow down to that idol” (*si monarchiam haberent [...] facerent quod omnes isti idolo inclinarent* [31, p. 238]). The Mongols used to make human-looking idols made of felt. They were placed on either side of the tent’s entrance. According to Giovanni, they believed that these idols were the protectors of their flocks and granted them fertility (*credunt esse pecorum custodes, ac eis beneficium lactis et pullorum prestare* [31, p. 236]). Women were in charge of producing these fabric idols. The commanders and the prominent members of Mongol society “always have an *hyrcum* at the center of their tent” (*Duces, millenarii et centenarii hyrcum semper habent in medio stationis* [31, p. 236]. The goat looking idol, *hyrcum*, was worshipped by the Mongols. They produced one of these idols “for the First Emperor” and kept it “in the cart before the camp [...] they offer many gifts, even horses, to this idol” [31, p. 237]. The “First Emperor” of Giovanni is, of course, Chinggis Khan. According to Friar Giovanni, the Mongols “bow before this idol as if it were a God, facing south, and they force all the nobles under their power to do the same” (*Ei etiam ad meridiem tamquam Deo inclinant, et inclinare faciunt aliquos nobiles qui se reddunt eisdem* [31, p. 237]). It is not surprising that Chinggis Khas was represented by the image of a sacred idol. The divine investiture of the “First Emperor as the one who accomplished the will of the Sky Tengri was part of the Mongols’ shared historical memory and stored in the Secret History.

In Christianity and Islam there is – to a different extent – prescription of rituals and creation of neutrality, whereas this element was totally absent in the nomad shamanism. In other words we may say that Plano Carpini takes a picture of the Mongols when they are still culturally “uncontaminated” not yet affected by the peoples they had captured. Furthermore, the cultural ascendancy of the sedentary societies ruled by the Mongols did not correspond to a political hegemony, at least during the early decades of their domination, which are the years of Plano Carpini’s journey. Still in the third chapter, Friar Giovanni feels the necessity to describe the assassination of a certain Andrej of Černigov (“Andreas dux de Chernegloue”) whose identification is still doubtful [13, p. 381–383]. Here, our chronicler’s neutrality staggers and the event must have disturbed him. The Mongols in fact, executed Prince Andrej because they accused him of stealing horses, even though there was no evidence of Andrej’s crime [31, p. 238–239]. Andrej’s younger brother went to Batu in order to prevent retaliations by the Mongols. Batu ordered the boy to marry his brother’s widow (*secundum consuetudinem Tartarorum*), but he proudly refused, affirming that he would have preferred to be killed, rather than go against “his law”; a law that cannot accept such an outrage. Despite the vigorous implorations, the two were obligated to sleep together, “with a peremptory order and without conditions” (*coegerunt eos commisceri, coatione non conditionali sed absoluta* [31, p. 239]).

In this circumstance, Friar Giovanni did not issue any moral judgment and did act scandalized by the forced sexual intercourse. Yet, it is very indicative that he made use of this story in order to introduce the theme of the administration of justice among the Mongols. The Franciscan came originally from a written culture of 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy, and felt the need to say that the Mongols “don’t have any law on the administration of justice or on how to defend from accusations”. Everything is based on the tradition [31, p. 239]. After a long list of cases to corroborate his statements, Plano Carpini gives a less neutral comment when he states that “for them it is neither illicit to kill men nor to invade or usurp the land of others, to seize someone else’s goods in any way even if unjust, to commit adultery, or even to offend other men or go against the prohibitions and God’s commandments” [31, p. 240]. The passage reflects a strong accent of indignation, a moral judgment that is out of character for the chronicler we have read so far. Friar Giovanni seems to be offended not only because he is a man of faith, but also because he is the “product” of a culture where social control is the normality reflecting the Aristotelian system of sins, which would be completely foreign to the Mongol way of thinking. According to W. Heissig shamanism is the religion of past and present, “ideas concerning the future – in the sense of a future life – are foreign to it” [17, p. 11; 24, p. 40]. Plano Carpini confirms this affirmation in the section of the *Historia Mongalorum* dedicated to the eschatological doctrine of the Mongols. Friar Giovanni states that they have no conscience of everlasting life and damnation; they have no notion of divine punishment (see on this the essay of J.P. Roux [41]). Shortly after,

Giovanni writes that the Mongols do not have any conscience of eternal life, nor of damnation. But they believe that after death they will live in a world where flocks will immensely grow, will eat, drink and will do all they do on this earth (*Credunt tamen quod [...] comedant, bibant et alia faciant que in hoc seculo a viventibus hominibus fiunt* [31, p. 240]).

The shamanic practices attracted Plano Carpini's attention as he writes that they believe in prophecy and in predictions; they believed that God spoke to them, that the Sun is the mother of the Moon because the first provides the latter with light. "To make a long story short, they believe that everything is purified by fire" [31, p. 241]. The use of fire as a purification element was a widespread practice among the Turkish nomads and it is not surprising that also the Mongols used it for their rituals [8, p. 416] (on the importance of fire among the Mongols see Heissig [17, p. 5–9; 5, p. 197–198]). In particular, the funerary ritual that Plano Carpini describes shortly after is quite interesting: all the relatives of the deceased and those who live in nearby tents must walk under a cord tied to two lances, through two fires while two women, on two sides spray water and recite magic formulas. Our Friar notes that the Mongols have a strong fear of lightening [17, p. 50–57]. Lighting was terrifying and disconcerting for a people developed in the vastness of the steppe [6, p. 25]. If lightning killed someone, it was necessary to go through the funerary ritual described above, and all the items belonging to the dead were considered as impure (*tamquam immunda ab omnibus respuuntur* [31, p. 244]). And according to Plano Carpini, Chinggis Khan died when struck by lightning (*Post hec ab ictu tonitrui est occisus* [31, p. 265]).

The fourth chapter deals with "good and bad habits, food and customs" (*De moribus bonis et malis, et cibis et consuetudinibus eorum*). Giovanni uses a cultural category familiar to him to title his account from now on. The habits of the Mongols are perceived and represented as bad and good to him, according to his parameters. The collective behavior Giovanni describes positively is curiously the most lacking in the society where he comes from: "The Mongols are devoted to their lords more than any other people in the world both secular or religious", which is to say more than the Christians in Europe, that Giovanni knew very well because of his birth and his pastoral experience. The phrase "secular or religious" is indicative if we take into account the political context in which Plano Carpini's mission was organized especially due to the tension between the Emperor and the Papacy. The troubled relations between the two "suns" of Medieval Europe were impossible to unite and consolidate in case of a Mongol invasion, something that Giovanni believed was not so impossible [31, p. 238]. In fact, at the end of the phrase Giovanni notes that the Mongols hardly betray their lords (*neque de facili mentiuntur eis* [31, p. 245]). In this chapter, Plano Carpini presents a united society, based on a substantial egalitarianism. According to him, the Mongols rarely fight or provoke brawls; there are no marauders or thieves among them and this is why they leave their homes open and their goods unattended.

The society observed by Giovanni is supportive, in which men "rather" respect one another and are "rather" friendly with each other. Even if they don't have enough food, they share it (*et cibaria, quamvis sint apud eos pauca, tamen satis inter se competenter communicant illa* [31, p. 246]). Men and women endure sacrifices and are not envious of each other. They are vulgar and get drunk often, but they never fight except for rare occasions. Women are chaste since "we haven't heard anything about their dishonesty" (*de impudicitia ipsarum aliquid inter eos auditur* [31, p. 246]). Also in this case, it seems that the Franciscan wins over the observer sent by the Pope. The good qualities that Giovanni notes while writing about the customs of the Mongols are probably those he doesn't see anymore, and would like to see, in Italian cities: solidarity, altruism, generosity, physical tolerance, honesty and equality: "Nobody disdains the other, but helps and supports him as much as he can" (*nullius alium spernit, sed iuvat et promovet quantum congrue potest* [31, p. 246]). But after having emphasized the Mongol egalitarianism, Friar Giovanni begins pointing out what he does not like about the Mongols, and the list is very long, longer than the qualities he recorded, since "all their bad habits cannot be summarized in one text as they are too many" [31, p. 247].

The bad qualities that Giovanni mentions are all individual qualities, while the good ones are all plural. The Mongols are arrogant and irascible with foreigners regardless of their social rank; are scornful by nature (*indignantis naturae* [31, p. 247]), deceitful with strangers and "one cannot find any truth in them" (*fere nulla veritas invenitur in eis* [31, p. 247]). Of interest are the "diminishing adverbs" like "enough, rather, almost" that Plano Carpini makes use of. It seems that the Franciscan is not confident in making peremptory judgments. However, shortly after Giovanni cannot restrain his indignation affirming that the Mongols are false: "in the beginning they are complacent people, but then they sting like a scorpion. They are sneaky and fake and if they can, they swindle all with guile" [31, p. 247]. But they are also dirty in their daily habits, when they eat and drink. They exceed with alcohol and get drunk very often, which is "admired among them". They are avid with things, very exigent in asking, determined in keeping and stingy in giving" (here there is a contradiction, as Giovanni affirmed above that they are generous and giving).

The food of the Mongols is repellent for Friar Giovanni. They eat all that can be chewed (*cibi eorum sunt omnia que mandi possunt* [31, p. 248]) and, if necessary, they can eat human flesh. In order to corroborate this strong accusation of anthropophagy, Giovanni reports the case of the Mongol siege "against a city of the Kitai"



[31, p. 248]. Here, he is referring to the Mongol campaign against Northern China, which was at that time under the Chin dynasty (Jurčēt. See De Rachewiltz [11] and Daffinà [8, p. 433]). The military enterprise was very long and expensive, and it ended only in 1234. Research has demonstrated that the Mongols were not anthropophagites, so it is possible that in this passage Plano Carpini confuses the besiegers and the besieged [8, p. 433]. In fact, this is also the version of the Secret History [10, p. 169]:

“When the Altan Qan learned that his Kitat troops had been slain and destroyed, he fled out of Jungdu [Beijing] and entered the city of Namging [Nanjing]. As the remnants of his troops were dying of starvation, they ate human flesh between them”.

Accusations of cannibalism against the Mongols are found also in Matteo Paris' *Chronica Majora*, and in Simon de Saint Quentin's History [24, p. 293–295]. Even if not human flesh, the Mongols only eat meat and in a quantity that “doing so, other people would barely survive” [31, p. 248]. Giovanni seems to be really struck by the Mongols dirtiness: they don't wash the plates where they eat, don't wash the clothes “nor do they let anybody wash them, especially in the period between the beginning and the end of the storm season”.

Another contradiction appears when Plano Carpini reports adultery, writing that “they are obliged to kill the man and the woman caught in the act of fornicating”. Yet in the third chapter Giovanni writes that “for them it is not illicit [...] to commit adultery or offend other men or go against the prohibitions and the commandments of God” (*fornicari [...] nullum peccatum est apud eos* [31, p. 240]). The 13<sup>th</sup> century polygamist Mongol society was most of all a rational answer to a necessity and, as J. Muldoon has written, to certain social conditions [27, p. 259]. The complex relations of clans put women in the condition of being “protected” in case the men prematurely died. Hence, Plano Carpini notes that in the Mongol society the wives “rarely fight with each other”. Women are very important among the Mongols. They do all manual work and are very skillful working leather. Men “don't work, except in making arms and with livestock pastoralism”. Also in this case Friar Giovanni does not judge the Mongols. He just notes an aspect that for him is unusual, but not immoral: “Men do not spend their days in idleness, but rather do exercises with the bow”.

In chapter five, for the first time Plano Carpini turns into a chronicler. Here he deals with the origin of the Tatar Empire and their leaders. The first part is entirely devoted to Chinggis Khan's life and it shows how the Franciscan was well informed about it. It is a reconstruction essentially based on oral sources, provided to Giovanni by direct and indirect testimonies of the Mongol attack on Europe and Central Asia. It is a perfectly new account of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. As well as original is Giovanni additional description of the Mongol army's modus operandi in battle. This is the central topic of Plano Carpini's journey, and the Friar dedicates chapter 6 to it. The next two chapters, 7 and 8, are shorter, but essential to the economy of Plano Carpini's treatise. They are dedicated to the use of power by the Mongols and how to prepare in case of a Mongol attack to Europe.

Chapter 9, on the other hand, is longer and more personal. As mentioned above, Giovanni added this part in the second redaction of the *Historia* and this chapter can be considered the actual *Itinerarium* [22, p. 76].

Giovanni Plano Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum* draws us into a new world, remote from the troubles which were wearing down the European centers of collective power. It is an extraordinarily important source of information on the early Mongol society. Nobody before the Umbrian Franciscan had been able to penetrate so deeply into the Mongol social organization. Nobody before him had been able to establish such a direct and close contact with the Asian nomads, showing sharp analytical and descriptive capabilities. And it was only in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when missions to convert Mongols became numerous. From the first years of the century the Papacy organized a stable network of dioceses there (to deepen this topic see Richard [40]). The Westerners established a structural presence – political, economic and religious – in the Orient when the Mongol military push was exhausted and the vast empire they had built started collapsing into several independent states [30, p. 44–45]. But when Plano Carpini left Lyon, he knew he would have travelled towards the darkness of the unknown. At the time only the echo of Mongol power had reached Europe in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The humble Franciscan Friar accepted a difficult and risky task. He knew that he could lose his life to accomplish the mission. But he was a man of faith, was a Friar of the order of St. Francis, and he had chosen obedience. Friar Giovanni found himself in front of new people that were obscure to him; people with customs and traditions he had never seen in Europe, not even in the North where he worked for so many years.

Giovanni's account marked a fundamental step in the declining of what B. Anderson has defined as “the unselfconscious coherence” of the great religiously imagined communities, “abruptly widening the cultural and geographic horizon and hence also men's conceptions of possible forms of human life” (E. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, quoted by B. Anderson [3, p. 16]). Giovanni's assignment was to share knowledge of the mysterious, terrifying, and apparently invincible Oriental people to the West. Not only did Friar Giovanni survive the journey, but he fixed it on paper. He turned the echoes into knowledge, and in so doing opened the way for those who would travel after him by accepting the challenge to travel East, no more so mysterious now, thanks to Giovanni di Plano Carpini.

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**About the author:** Lorenzo Pubblici – Full Professor of History and Anthropology at Santa Reparata International School of Art (Florence), Department of Humanities and Liberal Arts, and Professor of Eastern European History at Università degli Studi di Firenze (Firenze, Italia); [lpubblici@santareparata.org](mailto:lpubblici@santareparata.org)

### **Иоанн де Плано Карпини и представление «инаковости» в первой части «Истории монгалов»**

**Лоренцо Pubblіци**  
(Международная школа искусств Санта Репарата)

Данная статья представляет собой первую часть более крупного проекта, ставящего перед собой цель реконструкции восприятия и представления монголов в отчетах, составленных западными миссионерами в XIII веке. Первым текстом, анализируемым в рамках этого проекта, является «История монгалов» Иоанна де Плано Карпини. Отталкиваясь от культурного фона францисканцев и доминиканцев, путешествовавших в Азию в эти десятилетия, данное изыскание стремится подчеркнуть, как описание этнокультурных различий и молчание источников служили для усиления и уточнения коллективной идентичности наблюдателей.

В настоящей статье рассматриваются четыре первых главы «Истории монгалов» Иоанна де Плано Карпини – чрезвычайно важного отчета, составленного умбрийским францисканцем по возвращению из его путешествия в Азию 1245–47 гг. Трактат Иоанна представляет собой шедевр латинской средневековой литературы и содержит очень сдержанное, нейтральное описание, как и персональные соображения в отношении монгольской истории. Первые четыре главы, на которых фокусируется данная статья, являются более беспристрастными и «сторонними» в сравнении со всем сочинением в целом. Они представляют тщательное описание монгольских

обычаев, повседневных практик, религии и традиций. По этой причине автор решил начать с анализа этих глав прежде, чем рассматривать последующие части текста «Истории» Иоанна, отличающиеся большей политической (главы 5–8) и персональной (глава 9) окраской.

Исследователям знакомы как отчет Иоанна де Плано Карпини, так и тексты, созданные другими миссионерами, путешествовавшими в Азии в XIII веке. Однако основная часть исследователей этих текстов подчеркивали их важность в качестве исторических источников. Исследование первой части «Истории монгалов» показало, что этот францисканский отчет является также уникальным источником сведений о культурном и ментальном отношении к степным кочевникам, которое проявлял человек, родившийся и выросший в Италии XIII века. Путешествие Иоанна было организовано папой Иннокентием IV с целью собрать как можно больше информации о монголах в связи с тем, что всего лишь за несколько лет до этого они достигли границ Западной «Европы», начав представлять таким образом ощутимую угрозу для христианства. Францисканский брат значительно перевыполнил порученную ему задачу. Он привез назад известия о народах, землях и климате; он создал прецедент. За три десятилетия до Марко Поло брат Иоанн «принес» Восток на Запад, сломал ментальный барьер и расширил географический горизонт западного христианства, создав культурные категории, которые не были до этого известны. После этого путешествия такие западные города, как Генуя и Венеция, оказались лучше подготовлены для создания торговой системы на Востоке, а папство отправило много других миссий и создало епархии в Монгольской империи. Все это произошло на основе опыта Иоанна и отчасти благодаря ему. Сведения, которые он привез назад из своего путешествия, оказались ключом, которым была открыта дверь, оставшаяся до этого запертой.

**Ключевые слова:** Иоанн де Плано Карпини, История монгалов, Орден францисканцев, Орден доминиканцев, монголы

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**Сведения об авторе:** Лоренцо Pubblіци – профессор истории и антропологии, Международная школа искусств Санта Репарата (Флоренция), Кафедра гуманитарных наук и свободных искусств; профессор восточноевропейской истории в университете Флоренции (Firenze, Italia); lpubblici@santareparata.org