Another Source of Credibility, the Limits of Domestication, and Intercultural Contact: John of Plano Carpini’s *Ystoria Mongalorum* Reconsidered

During the Middle Ages, how did one make contact with other peoples and cultures? Moreover, what were the reasons for and drivers of these efforts? How did the person making this contact comprehend what they perceived as unfamiliar and alien and, further, induce this comprehension among others from their own culture? If they recorded what they saw, heard, and did during their contact or encounter with the unfamiliar, how then did they ensure that their writing, for example, a travel text, was perceived as trustworthy? If its credibility was questioned, how did the writer assert and bolster their claims? Did they apply strategies resembling those currently used? Finally, did the notions of fact and fiction apply then as they do now?

Scholarship on medieval travel texts[[1]](#footnote-1) over the last two decades has offered numerous responses to these questions.[[2]](#footnote-2) Within this scholarship, research on a prominent text, *Ystoria Mongalorum* (or *Historia Mongalorum*) written by John of Plano Carpini (or Giovanni di Pian di Carpine in Italian; c. 1180–1252)[[3]](#footnote-3) is the focus of this study.[[4]](#footnote-4) Studies of Carpini’s travel text are informed by a variety of perspectives, key ones being the history of race,[[5]](#footnote-5) the history of relations between the Mongols and the Catholic world,[[6]](#footnote-6) medieval ethnography,[[7]](#footnote-7) precolonial studies,[[8]](#footnote-8) the history of Western ideas about travel,[[9]](#footnote-9) gift giving;[[10]](#footnote-10) and the new diplomatic history.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Does Carpini’s travel text contain a description of the “racial” characteristics of other peoples, given that while traveling, he met people who were unfamiliar and who looked very different to him? With this question in mind, some scholars have embarked on the goal of writing a lengthy history of race. Linda Lomperis’s work exemplifies such scholarship. She points out that the overall aim of Carpini’s *Yistoria Mongalorum* is to offer a description of the customs, practices, laws, and political dispositions of the Mongols, that is to say, a description of the Mongols’ explicitly “racial” characteristics.[[12]](#footnote-12) Lomperis’s view, as can be gleaned from her own explanation, draws on her reading of Robert Bartlett’s definition of race in a premodern and, more specifically, a medieval context. She notes that “race” in the Middle Ages refers to the “customs, language, and laws” of a particular social grouping, which are “the primary badges of ethnicity.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Geraldine Heng, who also deploys the concept of race, endeavors to “point to particular moments and instances of how race is made” in the Middle Ages.[[14]](#footnote-14) She views the arrival of the Mongols at Europe’s doorstep in the thirteenth century as that of “a new alien race,” a “new global race,” or an “alien global race.” She then describes the process whereby Europeans rendered such a race intelligible, termed as the “European racialization of the Mongols.”[[15]](#footnote-15) The instances of such racialization that she finds in Carpini’s text include descriptions of Mongol cannibalism, their strange physical appearance, their rudimentary and peculiar diet, the depiction of Mongols as part human and part horse, the Mongol “war machine,” their pragmatism, and gift soliciting and the Asiatic gift economy, among others.[[16]](#footnote-16) Heng’s perspective is not only an academic one; she also draws on her own memories of race.[[17]](#footnote-17) Specifically, she recalls her experience of “growing up in a Singapore that was undergoing a process of decolonization from the British Empire.” While such an experience and memories could have motivated her research, they could also have constrained her choice of methodologies. This dilemma is also discernible in her study of Carpini’s text, which, as I will later show, reveals both the limitations and usefulness of a perspective of the history of race. Also adopting a perspective on race, Sierra Lomuto aims to challenge the assumption that race and racial bias only began in the modern era.[[18]](#footnote-18) Her more specific objective is to reveal the attempts of Latin Europeans “to produce power from the margins” by constructing the Mongols not only as threatening and anti-Christian but also as physically distinct, barbaric, and inferior.[[19]](#footnote-19) This raises the question of whether the attempt to apply the concept of race to a medieval travel text illuminates how Carpini perceived the Mongols. Scholars have offered no compelling evidence to support their use of such a concept. Specifically, they have not presented a convincing argument that the concept of “race,” which is so familiar within contemporary scholarship, can be deployed unproblematically in a medieval context. Furthermore, we cannot know whether what they call “racialization” is actually racialization and not something else, such as a Christian perspective.

The work of Peter Jackson, an acknowledged authority on the history of relations between the Mongols and the Catholic world, has inspired many scholars. For our purpose, his insights into the Mongols and their religion, their ideology, and the “authority” of medieval Latin travel texts are salient. As Jackson convincingly demonstrates, during the early decades of the conquest era, *Tenggeri* (“Heaven”), the main Mongol deity, was beginning to take on the characteristics of a supreme, omnipotent deity.[[20]](#footnote-20) In his examination of the attitudes of Mongol rulers toward other religions, Jackson points out that the religious “tolerance” of Mongol rulers has been overstated. In reality, various factors influenced their attitudes, notably their political, diplomatic and strategic aspirations.[[21]](#footnote-21) He further argues that the Mongols embraced an ideology of universal dominion whereby the power of their rulers was derived from their good fortune as well as received as a mandate from *Tenggeri*.[[22]](#footnote-22) However, he notes that the ideology of universal dominion should not be assumed to have existed from the outset.[[23]](#footnote-23) In the mid-thirteenth century, the growing Mongol empire and the expansionist Christian West were on a collision course.[[24]](#footnote-24) While discussing the problem of “authority,” Jackson reminds us that the distinction drawn between “factual” geography or “rational” reporting and the genre of marvels can be misleading and anachronistic in the context of medieval travel texts. Rather, it was licit and obligatory for Christians to stand in wonder before God’s Creation.[[25]](#footnote-25) Jackson’s insights provide a foundation for our discussion of related topics.

While some see Carpini’s text as containing instances of race-making, others consider it to be “ethnographical writing,” exemplifying medieval (European) ethnography or ethnographies. Important recent studies that reflect this perspective include the works of Joan-Pau Rubiés and Shirin Khanmohamadi.[[26]](#footnote-26) For the purpose of this study, what is striking is Rubiés’ conclusion that *Ystoria* *Mongalorum* and Le *Devisement dou monde* were two seminal works of medieval ethnography, which remained unchallenged in the Christian West during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[[27]](#footnote-27) Khanmohamadi too has pointed to the long premodern history of ethnographic writing, in which the Middle Ages occupy an important place. This is true even though medieval ethnographers did not use the word “ethnography”; rather, terms such as “descriptio” (description), “itinerarium” (journey), and “travels” feature in their writing.[[28]](#footnote-28) As these works reveal, such a perspective has benefited considerably from earlier studies that adopted an anthropological approach and the like.[[29]](#footnote-29) However, while the merits of this approach have been discussed, an important question arises. Does the attempt to identify “medieval ethnography” in medieval travel texts—for instance, in Carpini’s—raise any problems? At the very least, there is a potential risk of taking texts like Carpini’s out of their proper (i.e., medieval) contexts.

Kim M. Phillips situates her work on “emergent precolonial studies”[[30]](#footnote-30) in sharp contrast to previous scholarship on “medieval Orientalism” or “medieval postcolonialism.” She explains that neither “colonialism” nor “imperialism” describes relations between Latin Christians and Asian peoples before the turn of the sixteenth century. Furthermore, while Orientalist elements have been identified in medieval representations of Islam and Arab cultures, they apply much less to the rest of Asia.[[31]](#footnote-31) Proceeding from this premise, she investigates five aspects of European travel writing focusing on the Mongols. In light of her findings, she identifies the following traits that Carpini attributed to them: the most hardy, ferocious, and belligerent of men; a cruel and untrustworthy enemy and a terrible foe, yet ultimately defeatable.[[32]](#footnote-32) Unlike Heng and others, Phillips avoids using the term “race” in her investigation, explaining her reasons for not doing so.[[33]](#footnote-33) However, her explanation fails to consider adequately the context in which Carpini’s text was produced. This context will be given full consideration in the discussion that follows.

Adopting a historical perspective on Western ideas about travel, Shayne Legassie argues that “a new, enduring view of travel as literate labor,” both “physical and intellectual,” emerged out of the travel writings produced between 1200 and 1500.[[34]](#footnote-34) For this study, two conclusions offered by Legassie merit attention. The first is that the idea of travel as literate labor was a medieval invention which, at its core, was a reinvention of classical ideals—heroism in travel associated with self-discipline and mastery when facing bodily temptation and travail.[[35]](#footnote-35) By reevaluating medieval ideas about travel, Legassie aims to give the Middle Ages their due place in the history of ideas of travel. The other and more important conclusion concerns the relationship between travail and authority. As Legassie shows, in the case of Carpini’s travel text, Carpini appealed to two sources of authority to bolster his credibility: the extreme suffering he endured as a traveler and the evidentiary weight of the official documents he used.[[36]](#footnote-36) Legassie’s insights into the problem of travail authority and credibility also anchor and guide our discussion.

Studies on gift giving have focused on specific travel texts, notably William of Rubruck’s *Itinerarium*[[37]](#footnote-37) as well as Carpini’s work.[[38]](#footnote-38) Adriano Duque’s study on gift giving during Carpini’s expedition to Mongolia examines this topic in the context of diplomatic exchanges. In Duque’s view, for the Mongols, the act of gift giving was part of a submission ritual. Conversely, the act of refusing to give gifts to the Mongol ruler committed by friars like Carpini implied a lack of submission. By acting neither as subjects nor as dominating persons, they challenged Mongolian notions of gift giving and the complex underlying relationship between the East and the West.[[39]](#footnote-39) Duque’s study helps to elucidate the importance of gifts in Carpini’s cross-cultural encounters.

Whereas Duque considers the importance of gift giving in diplomatic exchanges, Jacques Paviot views Carpini as one of the “actors in diplomatic encounters with the Mongols.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Of his conclusions, three deserve particular attention. First, notwithstanding the meaning of the Latin word *nuntius*, which encompasses “envoy” and “ambassador,” medieval mendicant friars like Carpini were only papal envoys and not ambassadors. Second, given the prevailing reality in the West, the only alternative in the eyes of the friars was to travel as missionaries. Lastly, in the premodern world, a “diplomatic system” was nascent in Europe but was not yet apparent in relations between the West and the Mongols.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The abovementioned scholarship on Carpini’s travel text, albeit insightful on many issues, has left some important questions either unattended to or only partially addressed. These questions are as follows. Is any other source of credibility discernable in Carpini’s text apart from the two revealed by Legassie? If yes, is such a source of credibility linked to the ways in which Carpini “transformed”[[42]](#footnote-42) the unfamiliar into the familiar? If so, what kind of relationship was entailed in this transformation? More generally, did it have any impact on his inter- or cross-cultural contact?

This study seeks to answer these questions through a close reading of Carpini’s *Ystoria Mongalorum*. It provides a new interpretation that relates to the following three key issues. The first concerns the ways in which Carpini claimed and bolstered his credibility, focusing on an additional source of credibility apart from the two revealed by Legassie. The second concerns the relationship between it and Carpini’s attempts to transform the unfamiliar into the familiar, namely his efforts at domestication[[43]](#footnote-43) and their limits. The third concerns the relationship between the abovementioned source of credibility and Carpini’s intercultural contact with the Mongols. A central argument made here is that the Christians’ fear of a potential Mongol invasion and an impelling sense of urgency prompted Pope Innocent IV to initiate Carpini’s mission to Mongolia and subsequently endorse his writing of the travel text. Moreover, these factors deeply impacted the ways in which he bolstered its credibility. In this sense, the prevailing sense of urgency could be considered another source of credibility. I further argue that the sense of urgency, the perception of Christianity’s superiority, as well as curiosity strongly influenced Carpini’s efforts to domesticate the Mongols and their limits. However, these points have received little attention in previous studies, informed by the perspective of race. Merely gathering together various issues under the label of “race” obscures the problem rather than illuminating it. Studies adopting the perspective of medieval ethnography have also failed to make the point and risk overstating the historical status of Carpini’s writing as a “medieval ethnography.” Lastly, and at a more general level, I argue that Carpini’s intercultural or cross-cultural encounters were influenced by this sense of urgency and by his perception of the superiority of Christianity.

A Sense of Urgency as a Neglected Source of Credibility

Carpini’s *Ystoria Mongalorum* was written in a context that differed from those in which many other medieval “travel” texts, real and imagined, were produced. The text was written in the 1240s, a decade when the Mongols, a people who were unfamiliar and alien to Latin Christians, arrived at the doorstep of Europe. They were perceived as a threatening and terrible enemy at a time when they were deeply feared throughout Christendom because of the potential threats they posed.[[44]](#footnote-44) It was also a decade that marked the beginning of a period spanning approximately a century of contact with various Asian peoples and cultures and the subsequent production of knowledge about the world beyond medieval Europe, more generally, and about Asia specifically.[[45]](#footnote-45) Such contacts and knowledge production are exemplified by travel texts, notable among which are Rubruck’s *Itinerarium* (*The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*[[46]](#footnote-46)), *Le Devisement dou monde* (*The Description of the World*[[47]](#footnote-47)), and *The* *Book of John Mandeville*. The period and specific texts mentioned here are not our primary concern, but our understanding of the context of Carpini’s mission and writing can be deepened by keeping them in mind.

A prevailing fear of the Mongols prompted a widely felt sense of urgency. For Pope Innocent IV, who instigated Carpini’s mission to Mongolia, the urgent matter at hand was to prepare Latin Christendom against the major threat posed by the Mongols, as described in the prologue to Carpini’s text.[[48]](#footnote-48) In March or April 1245, prompted by this concern, the pope initiated no fewer than three missions to establish contact with the Mongols. Of these missions, Carpini’s was the most celebrated,[[49]](#footnote-49) and its key outcome was *Ystoria Mongalorum*. The pope’s concern is conveyed in the prologue of this text as follows:

Friar John of Plano Carpini, of the Order of Friars Minor, *envoy of the Apostolic See to the Tartars and other nations of the east [sic]* (*sedis apostolice nuntius ad Tartaros et ad nationes alias Orientis*), to all the faithful of Christ to whom this present writing may come. …

When *by command of the Apostolic See* (*ex mandato sedis apostolice*) we went to the Tartars and the other oriental nations, knowing *the desire of the Lord Pope and the venerable Cardinals* (*domini pape ac venerabilium cardinalium voluntatem*), we chose first to make our way to the Tartars, for *we were afraid that in the near future the Church of God would be threatened by danger from that quarter*. … Nevertheless. we did not spare ourselves in order to carry out *the will of God as laid down in the Lord Pope’s mandate*, and be of some service to Christians, that, at all events, having learned the truth about the desire and intention of the Tartars, we could make this known to the Christians. …

… For we had *instructions from the Supreme Pontiff* (*Mandatum … a summo pontifice*) to examine everything and to look at everything carefully, and this we zealously carried out, both I and Friar Benedict the Pole of the same Order, who was our companion in our tribulations and our interpreter [emphasis added].[[50]](#footnote-50)

Evidently, Carpini’s mission to Mongolia—or “the Tartars,” as recorded in the text—was both initiated and recognized by Pope Innocent, adding another dimension to the sense of urgency felt by Carpini’s party. Prior to the initiative, they, like others, feared the Mongols but were not tasked with a specific mission. However, with the inception of the mission, a new set of instructions awaited them, namely to carry out “the Lord Pope’s mandate,” which doubled their sense of urgency.

The sense of urgency did not end there. Carpini imparted it in the prologue and in the text that followed to his readers. What he presented is critical to our discussion of his efforts, as an author, to claim authority. How did he do that? To answer this question, we need to consider the factors that drew his attention to this problem. A reading of the text reveals three such factors or sources of credibility to which he appealed. The first, and in my view the most compelling, is the sense of urgency itself. At the beginning of the prologue, where he explains why he went as the “envoy of the Apostolic See” to the East, Carpini emphasizes the importance of choosing first to make their way to the Mongols. They feared that in the near future, the Church would be threatened by the Mongols. Therefore, to prepare Christians for any sudden attack that they might make, it was necessary to know their desires and intentions through a mission and a consequent report.[[51]](#footnote-51) This was the overall context for the mission and the text, as described by Carpini in the prologue, creating an atmosphere of urgency and seriousness. This atmosphere confirmed the undeniable gravity of the situation. In such a situation, we may ask how credible or trustworthy would the words of an author—himself a Christian, a mendicant friar, and an envoy of the Supreme Pontiff—be to a Christian, when he wrote them with the welfare of Christendom in mind?[[52]](#footnote-52) At the very least, we can reasonably conclude that this could bolster the credibility of his text to a considerable extent. From this perspective, the sense of urgency can be viewed as another source of credibility that Carpini could and did appeal to in addition to the extreme suffering that he endured as a traveler and the official documents that he used.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Clearly, the sense of urgency was not Carpini’s only source of credibility. He also wished to make his readers feel his suffering:

And although we feared we might be killed by the Tartars or other people, or imprisoned for life, or afflicted with hunger, thirst, cold, heat, injuries and exceeding great trials almost beyond our powers of endurance—*all of which, with the exception of death and imprisonment for life, fell to our lot in various ways in a much greater degree than we had conceived beforehand* … [emphasis added].[[54]](#footnote-54)

The description above reveals that Carpini’s party endured extreme suffering during their journey to meet the Tartars. As Legassie shows, suffering is one of the sources of credibility that Carpini appealed to, although here, he only briefly mentions it. However, throughout the text, we find related “evidence”: Carpini mentions his suffering a total of *eighteen times*.[[55]](#footnote-55) Notably, he is not the only author to mention suffering. In *Itinerarium*, the travel text of William of Rubruck, another medieval traveler and friar, we can find descriptions of the author’s suffering, which are similar to, if not greater than, Carpini’s. Rubruck repeatedly mentions his suffering—*forty-two times*—throughout his text.[[56]](#footnote-56) One conclusion emerges from a comparison of these two texts. Legassie’s view on extreme suffering as a source of credibility helps to clarify why Rubruck also emphasized the extreme hardship that he experienced. Legassie’s work clearly offers insights into the relationship between suffering and authority. However, for our purpose, the less discussed relationship between the emphasis on extreme suffering and the sense of urgency is more salient. A closer examination of the prologue can illuminate why the sense of urgency, in general, and Pope Innocent’s, in particular, provides a reasonable explanation for Carpini’s endurance of his suffering. As he notes, his party bore it so that they could “zealously” carry out the pope’s “command,” “mandate,” or “instructions.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Evidently, a sense of urgency lay behind the pope’s requirement that they fulfill the aims of the mission. In addition, his text is made more credible through the relationship that exists between this sense of urgency and his emphasis on suffering. If Carpini’s suffering, or more precisely his description of it, is “worthy of credence,” then his text will correspondingly be worthy of trust. Thus, the above examination has revealed another aspect of the sense of urgency.

To bolster his authority, Carpini also appealed to the evidence provided by “witnesses” encountered during his travels and their “testimony,” with the latter constituting one of the “two sources of credibility” identified by Legassie.[[58]](#footnote-58) On the question of whether a relationship exists between the sense of urgency and his utilization of such “evidence,” he makes the following remark in the prologue:

… you ought to believe all the more confidently inasmuch as *we have either seen everything with our own eyes* (*nos cuncta vel ipsi vidimus oculis nostris*), for during a year and four months and more we traveled about both through the midst of them and in company with them and we were among them, *or we have heard it from Christians who are with them as captives and are, so we believe, to be relied upon* (*vel audivimus a christianis, qui sunt inter eos captivi et, ut credimus, fide dignis*)*.*…

But if for the attention of our readers we write anything which is not known in your parts, you ought not on that account to call us liars, for *we are reporting for you things we ourselves have seen or have heard from others whom we believe to be worthy of credence* (*vobis referimus illa que ipsi vidimus vel ab aliis pro certo audivimus, quos esse credimus fide dignos*)**.** Indeed, it is a very cruel thing that a man should be brought into ill-repute by others on account of the good that he has done [emphasis added].[[59]](#footnote-59)

Here Carpini is clearly emphasizing the credibility of his text. He does so by claiming that what he writes is based on what they have seen themselves and what they have heard from others who are trustworthy in their view. Evidently, the role of Carpini’s party and others mentioned in his claim is similar to that of legal witnesses in the Middle Ages, especially in a court of law.[[60]](#footnote-60) Mindful of this witnessing role, Carpini reiterates *fifty-eight* times that they saw or heard the events described from others during their journey. These reiterations throughout the text fall into three main groups as follows:

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| **Group I: “I/we have seen” and similar expressions:** |
| … the eye-witnesses we came across | MS 181, fol. 279r; Menestò, 229; Dawson, 4 |
| … as we saw with our own eyes | MS 181, fol. 280v; Menestò, 231; Dawson, 6 |
| … as we saw | MS 181, fols. 282v, 291r, 300v; Menestò, 237, 261, 287; Dawson, 9, 23, 40 |
| We also saw that | MS 181, fol. 284v; Menestò, 242; Dawson, 13 |
| W/we saw | MS 181, fols. 286v, 301r; Menestò, 246, 290; Dawson, 15, 41 |
| I have even seen | MS 181, fol. 286v; Menestò, 248; Dawson, 16 |
| We even saw | MS 181, fol. 288v; Menestò, 251; Dawson, 18 |
| … we came across | MS 181, fols. 294v, 312v (twice), 320v (twice), 321r; Menestò, 271, 314 (twice), 331, 332 (twice); Dawson, 29, 58, 59, 70, 71 (twice) |
| This happened recently when we were in … | MS 181, fol. 301r; Menestò, 287; Dawson, 40 |
| I saw | MS 181, fol. 302v (twice); Menestò, 292 (twice); Dawson, 43 (twice) |
| … we have seen with our own eyes | MS 181, fol. 303r; Menestò, 294; Dawson, 44 |
| … we came upon | MS 181, fol. 303r; Menestò, 295; Dawson, 45 |
| … the witnesses we came across | MS 181, fol. 307r; Menestò, 302; Dawson, 50 |
| … the witnesses who came our way | MS 181, fol. 307r; Menestò, 302; Dawson, 50 |
| … we met with | MS 181, fols. 319r, 320v; Menestò, 330 (twice); Dawson, 70 (twice) |
| To avoid any doubt … we will write down the names of those with whom we came into contact there | MS 181, fol. 320v; Menestò, 330; Dawson, 70 |
| … we met | MS 181, fol. 320v (three times); Menestò, 331 (three times); Dawson, 70 (twice), 71 |
| … along with us | MS 181, fol. 320v; Menestò, 332; Dawson, 71 |
| The entire city of … is a witness | MS 181, fol. 320v; Menestò, 332; Dawson, 71 |
| … there are as witnesses … | MS 181, fol. 320v; Menestò, 332; Dawson, 71 |
| Further witnesses | MS 181, fol. 321r; Menestò, 332; Dawson, 71 |
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| **Group II: “we were told” and similar expressions** |
| … they would say | MS 181, fol. 286v; Menestò, 248; Dawson, 16 |
| … we were definitely told at … by … | MS 181, fol. 290v; Menestò, 259; Dawson, 23 |
| … we were told this for a fact | MS 181, fol. 291r; Menestò, 261; Dawson, 23 |
| … we were told with absolute certainty | MS 181, fol. 291r; Menestò, 262; Dawson, 24 |
| … so we were told | MS 181, fols. 291r, 295r, 303r, 313r, 315r, 318v; Menestò, 261, 272, 295, 315, 319, 327; Dawson, 24, 30, 44, 60, 62, 68 |
| … we were told for a fact | MS 181, fol. 295r; Menestò, 273; Dawson, 31 |
| … we were told as a certain truth | MS 181, fol. 295r; Menestò, 273; Dawson, 31 |
| … we were told by … | MS 181, fol. 295r (“a … dicebatur” omitted[[61]](#footnote-61)); Dupuy 686, fol. 11v (“nobis … dicebatur” omitted[[62]](#footnote-62)); Menestò, 274; Dawson, 31 |
| … we were told later that | MS 181, fol. 300v; Menestò, 285; Dawson, 39 |
| … we were told that | MS 181, fols. 302v, 310v; Menestò, 290, 310; Dawson, 42, 56 |
| I heard that | MS 181, fol. 302v; Menestò, 292; Dawson, 43 |
| … as they themselves told us | MS 181, fol. 306v (“dixerunt” omitted[[63]](#footnote-63)); Dupuy 686, fol. 19r; Menestò, 301; Dawson, 49 |
| He told us that | MS 181, fol. 307r; Menestò, 303; Dawson, 51 |
| They told us | MS 181, fols. 308v, 317r; Menestò, 304-305, 324; Dawson, 52, 66 |
| … we were told this definitely | MS 181, fol. 317r; Menestò, 323; Dawson, 65 |
| The Christians of his household also told us that they firmly believed | MS 181, fol. 318v; Menestò, 327; Dawson, 68 |
|  |
| **Group III: “we have seen or heard” and similar expressions** |
| … as we saw with our own eyes and learned from others | MS 181, fol. 284v; Menestò, 242; Dawson, 13 |
| … we have reported merely as men who have seen and heard | MS 181, fol. 306v; Menestò, 302; Dawson, 50 |
| … with truth as [our] guide, we have written everything that we have seen or heard from others who we believe are to be trusted and, as God is [our] witness, we have not knowingly added anything | MS 181, fol. 321r; Menestò, 332; Dawson, 71 |

Source: CCCC MS 181; BnF, Dupuy 686; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*.

Note: The numbers in the column on the right side refer to the pages where the expressions appear. The words “twice” and “three times” indicate that the expressions appear twice and three times, respectively.

While Carpini’s reiterations serve his overall purpose, by no means do they constitute the entire evidence for the credibility of his text. His claim to credibility is also supported by the pope’s letter, which Legassie terms “official documentation,” more generally, and “written testimony,”[[64]](#footnote-64) more specifically. In chapter IX, Carpini states that the chiefs from the camp came to meet them and asked them what their purpose was. Carpini offered the following response:

We answered them saying that we were envoys ofthe Lord Pope, the lord and father of Christians, who was sending us both to the King and Princes and all the Tartars because it was his desire that all Christians should be friends of the Tartars and be at peace with them; moreover [*sic*] he desired that they should be great before God in heaven. For this reason [*sic*] *the Lord Pope* urged them, both through us and by *his letter* (*litteras suas*), to become Christians and to receive the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ, for otherwise they could not be saved.[[65]](#footnote-65)

We handed him *the Lord Pope’s letter* (*litteras domini pape*), but since our paid interpreter whom we had brought from Kiev was not competent to translate *the letter* (*littere*), and there was no one else at hand capable of doing it, it could not be translated [emphasis added].[[66]](#footnote-66)

A letter from the pope, who himself was authoritative, added to the credibility of the travel text. Yet the question remains as to whether Carpini claimed and bolstered his credibility for aims that had nothing to do with his status as an “envoy of the Apostolic See.” In other words, did the sense of urgency that prompted the pope’s initiation of his mission also influence, if not drive, his appeal to the aforementioned “evidence”? Undoubtedly, it did so to a great extent. There are three reasons for this conclusion. First, as Carpini himself states in the prologue, this text is addressed to Christians with their welfare in mind and also to put them on guard against the Tartars. Accordingly, readers “ought to believe” what is written “all the more confidently inasmuch as” they (Carpini and his party) themselves “have either seen everything” or “have heard it from Christians who are with them” and are “to be relied upon.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Three points follow. First, the sense of urgency and Carpini’s appeal to “witnesses” are closely linked. Second, Carpini’s solicitation of his readers’ trust is also based on the pope’s requirement, or in his own words, the “instructions from the Supreme Pontiff to examine everything and to look at everything carefully” and their zealous fulfillment of it.[[68]](#footnote-68) A sense of urgency also underlies these instructions. Third, throughout the text, Carpini reiterates *five* *times* that the Mongols are to rule the whole world.[[69]](#footnote-69) These reiterations convey a fear of the Mongols, and of being subjected by them, and, at the same time, a sense of urgency. In sum, the close link between the sense of urgency and Carpini’s use of the “evidence” is apparent.

Carpini’s claim of credibility assumed particular significance for his readers, influenced as they were by this sense of urgency. However, this point raises the question of whether Carpini, differing from other medieval travelers, ignored those marvels and omitted them from his text or whether he sought to distinguish fact from fiction. What can be observed in his text is only what he considers credible or trustworthy. This is especially apparent in his reference to three instances of “monsters.” In the first instance, the monsters assumed the likeness of women; in the second, they assumed a human shape; and in the third, they assumed a human shape but with only one arm, one hand, and one foot.[[70]](#footnote-70) He emphasizes that his party was told about the monsters as either being “definitely” true or “as a certain fact” or “for a fact.”[[71]](#footnote-71) These references to monsters lay particular emphasis on the aforesaid credibility and not on the currently prevailing fact/fiction dichotomy. This can be easily understood in a medieval context wherein it was licit and obligatory for a traveler to “stand in wonder before God’s Creation,” as Jackson shows.[[72]](#footnote-72)

As we have seen, Carpini appealed to three sources of credibility to bolster his authority as an author: the prevailing sense of urgency, extreme suffering, and two types of evidence during his travels, namely witnesses and official documentation. Furthermore, the close interlinkages of these three sources of credibility have been neglected in previous scholarship. If, however, they added to the credibility of Carpini’s text, what did he write about his travels and how did he comprehend and make his readers comprehend his encounters with the Mongols, an alien people?

A Sense of Urgency, Superiority, and Domestication and Its Limits

For an individual who encountered and desired to know and understand the unfamiliar and alien in the Middle Ages, a strategy of transforming the unfamiliar and alien into the familiar could be effective for achieving that aim. This was especially true for Carpini. Why did Carpini transform the unfamiliar alien Mongols, into the familiar, and how did he do this? The context of urgency conveyed in his text can help us to answer this question, as illustrated in his domestication of the Mongols’ *ritus* (“religion”).[[73]](#footnote-73)

Carpini’s domestication of the Mongols’ religion is mainly discussed in chapters III and IX.[[74]](#footnote-74) In chapter III, the first embodiment of his efforts at domestication can be seen in the title of the chapter, especially in the use of words like *peccata* (“sins”).[[75]](#footnote-75) How should we understand these words? The answer to this question can be found at the outset of the chapter. When speaking of the Mongols’ worship of God, Carpini provides the following description:

They believe in *one God* (*Unum Deum*), 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 … [emphasis added].[[76]](#footnote-76)

Here, Carpini’s wording evokes Latin Christians’ belief in God, but the question that arises is whether he sees the Mongols’ belief as Christian. To answer this question, it is necessary to consider three issues. The first concerns the beliefs of Carpini, as the author, and those of his readers. Certainly, he as well as his readers were Christian. As a mendicant friar, he addressed “all the faithful of Christ.”[[77]](#footnote-77) The second relates to the Mongols’ beliefs. Although Carpini speaks of their belief in “one God,” in reality, they appeared to believe in *Tenggeri* (“Heaven”), a god in heaven, and *Itügen*, an earth or fertility goddess, according to Jackson.[[78]](#footnote-78) Whatever similarities existed between this deity and the Christian “God,”[[79]](#footnote-79) evidently two different religious belief systems existed. How then did Carpini convey the Mongols’ beliefs to his Christian readers? Furthermore, how did he impart an understanding of these beliefs to them, at least to a certain extent? As an author, he had to address these two issues. The third issue concerns the need to carry out “the Lord Pope’s mandate” and to “be of some service to Christians.” In other words, Carpini had to learn “the truth about the desire and intention of the Tartars” and then “make this known to the Christians” to prepare them for “a sudden attack” from the Mongols.[[80]](#footnote-80) Here the role of a sense of urgency in Carpini’s consideration is apparent. Moreover, as an envoy of the pope to the East, and especially to the Tartars, Carpini was impelled to respond to that sense of urgency and address questions of critical importance concerning the Mongols’ desires and attentions and how they could be uncovered.

Carpini faced differences in the beliefs of Latin Christians and Mongols on the one hand and the urgent need for knowledge about the Mongols on the other hand. In this situation, he had to do what was needed. He therefore appealed to whatever he could utilize, namely his own and others’ related preconceptions in any permutation as well as what he witnessed or heard from others about the Mongols during his journey. Reading the text closely, we can conclude from his writing that at least two related sources of knowledge were available to him: knowledge of Christianity—his own and that of others, for example, his companion—and knowledge of the Mongols’ “present emperor,” which he obtained from “the Christians of his household.”[[81]](#footnote-81) Such sources of knowledge, particularly his own and that provided by “the Christians,” are crucial for our understanding of his views on the Mongols’ beliefs. According to the above wording, he did, understandably, at least partly utilize these sources of knowledge. Preconceived knowledge of Christianity, particularly his own belief in one God, provided him with a precondition for transforming the unfamiliar, that is the Mongols’ belief, into the familiar, namely his own and his readers’ faith. Furthermore, his comprehension of the Mongols’ belief, perhaps based on a comparison with Christianity, could have influenced his attempts to Christianize the beliefs of the emperor, in particular, and of the Mongols’ in general, at least to some extent.

Carpini’s domestication or Christianization of the Mongols’ religion was not just confined to their worship of God. Relatedly, he discusses what they believe to be “sins”:

Although they have *no law* *concerning the doing of* *what is right or the avoidance of sin* (*de iusticia facienda vel peccato cavendo nullam … legem*), nevertheless there are certain traditional things, invented by them or their ancestors, which they say are *sins* (*peccata*) … [emphasis added].[[82]](#footnote-82)

Despite his observations of differences in Mongols’ and Christians’ conceptions of sins, Carpini uses the term “sin” or “sins” to refer to those committed by the former. From his use of this term, we can identify a Christian way of thinking. If these acts are viewed as sins, what then would not be considered sins? To this question, Carpini provides a brief but definitive answer:

On the other hand, *to kill* men, *to invade* the countries of other people, *to take* the property of others*in any unlawful way*, *to commit* fornication, *to revile* other men, *to act contrary to the prohibitions and commandments of God* (*contra prohibitiones et Dei precepta*), is considered *no sin* (*nullum peccatum*) by them [emphasis added].[[83]](#footnote-83)

By illustrating various acts considered “no sin” by the Mongols, Carpini makes three distinct but related points. First, while the Mongols consider such acts to be “no sin,” Christians are expected to view them as the reverse. Second, the Mongols’ conception of sins appears very peculiar in the eyes of a Christian for whom they are clearly unacceptable. Third, as a people who hold such views, the Mongols appear threatening. They think it is no sin “to act contrary to the prohibitions and commandments of Gods” particularly “to kill men, to invade the countries of other people,” and “to take the property of others in any unlawful way.” These words could bring to mind for Christians a possible Mongol invasion and thus instill fear of the Mongols in them. Thus, once again, the sense of urgency plays a part in Carpini’s domestication of the Mongols’ view of sins.

In addition to domesticating the Mongols’ conception of sin, Carpini domesticates, albeit partly, their divinations, soothsayings and the like. An example is “a god” whom the Mongols call Utoga(Itoga). They believed that Utoga speaks to them “when they receive an answer from the demons.”[[84]](#footnote-84) To a certain extent, Carpini’s interpretation parallels that of Rubruck concerning a similar issue. Rubruck viewed Mongol soothsayers as “priests” and the chief among them as “a sort of pontiff.”[[85]](#footnote-85) By comparing these perspectives, we can better understand Carpini’s approach to domestication.

As we have seen, all of the above instances relate to the domestication of the collective beliefs of the Mongols. A question arises as to whether there is any one instance at a more particular level. Such an instance can be found in chapter IX, which recounts the domestication of the beliefs of the Mongols’ “present emperor.” Carpini describes the emperor’s beliefs sourced from his “witnesses” in the emperor’s household:

The Christians of his household also told us that they firmly believed that he was about to become*a Christian* (*christianus*), and they have clear evidence of this, for he maintains *Christian clerics* (*clericos christianos*)and provides them with supplies of *Christian things*; in addition [*sic*] he always has *a chapel*(*christianorum capellam*)before his chief tent … [emphasis added].[[86]](#footnote-86)

Terms such as “clerics” and “a chapel” used here are familiar to both Carpini and his readers. His use of these terms also Christianizes the emperor’s belief, albeit only partially. Why then does Carpini present his readers with such a view of the emperor’s beliefs? Despite giving little direct information about his attitudes toward the emperor, Carpini tells us at the beginning of chapter I that they “wish to write an account of the Tartars in such a way that the reader can easily find his way about it.” Accordingly, the account is arranged in chapters, with the last chapter, chapter IX, presenting a discussion of the emperor’s court.[[87]](#footnote-87) In this discussion too, we can discern a sense of urgency.

As the above instances show, a sense of urgency plays a significant role in Carpini’s domestication or Christianization of the Mongols’ religion. However, one other important question remains to be answered: why does he Christianize it, rather than transforming it into any other faith? To answer this question, it is necessary to consider his perception of the superiority of Christianity conveyed by his words. Carpini was a mendicant friar writing in the 1240s when Latin Christendom was extending its spiritual limits by Christianizing other peoples.[[88]](#footnote-88) As a mendicant friar, an envoy of the pope, and an author concerned about the welfare of Christians, Carpini was clearly influenced by his perception of Christianity’s superiority in his attempt to Christianize the Mongols’ religion.

However, Carpini’s Christianization or domestication of the Mongols’ religion had its limits. These limits are discernable in the cases discussed above. In his discussion of the worship of God by the Mongols. after stating that the Mongols believe in one God, Carpini mentions two characteristics peculiar to Christians to his readers. The first is how they worship God with no prayers or praise or any kind of ceremony.[[89]](#footnote-89) The second is that while believing in one God, they also have idols of felt made in the image of men, which they place on either side of the door of their dwelling. They always offer these idols the first milk extracted from every cow and mare, and have also made “an idol to the first emperor.”[[90]](#footnote-90) This last practice of making an idol to the first emperor to a great extent influenced inter- or cross-cultural contact with the Mongols, as noted in the text. Before discussing this issue in more detail in the next section, we identify here an influence exerted through the practice of having idols in the example provided by Carpini. In an encounter with the Mongols, Michael, one of the chief dukes of Russia, refused to obey when told to bow toward the south toward Chingis Chan. As a Christian, he considered it unlawful to bow toward what he perceived as the image of a dead man and refused to comply. After refusing more than once to do so, he was finally beheaded.[[91]](#footnote-91)

The limits of Carpini’s domestication can also be seen in the Mongols’ conception of sins. He uses terms that are familiar to his Christian readers, such as “sin.” However, he provides a long list of examples included under the label “sins,” which appear completely unfamiliar to a Christian.[[92]](#footnote-92) Moreover, what he has to say about acts that the Mongols considered as “no sin” illustrates the limits of his domestication, as the various acts that he describes remind his readers that the Mongols are a people who are radically different from them.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Carpini’s domestication of Mongol divinations, soothsayings, and similar practices was similarly limited. Apart from mentioning the god Itoga, Carpini also describes Mongol practices of purification by fire. He notes that in the eyes of the Mongols, if fire falls from heaven on cattle or men, or if a similar event occurs, those afflicted are considered unclean or unlucky, requiring purification by fire conducted by diviners.[[94]](#footnote-94) This practice was viewed as peculiar by Christians. Like the practice of making an idol of the emperor, this one was also closely linked to the Mongols’ encounters with envoys (including Carpini, as the next section shows), princes or “any person” visiting them. These visitors were obliged to pass between the fires together with the gifts they brought in order to undergo purification.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Thus, the domestication or Christianization of the Mongols’ religion as a whole was limited. This also applied to the domestication of the beliefs of “the present emperor” at a more particular level. As Carpini writes, he was the emperor of the Mongols, a people so different from Latin Christians,[[96]](#footnote-96) and was only *believed to have become* and *was not*, strictly speaking, a Christian

The limits of Carpini’s domestication were also linked to a sense of urgency and his perception of the superiority of Christianity. Some scholars have argued that as a papal envoy on a mission to the East, and specifically to the Mongols, Carpini’s primary aim was to gather information on the Mongols, perceived as a fearsome people, and to make this information known to Christians.[[97]](#footnote-97) Carpini’s writing of his travel text or, as he says the prologue, “reporting”of things they themselves “have seen or heard from others”[[98]](#footnote-98) was undoubtedly driven by his sense of urgency and that of Latin Christendom in general. His consideration of it as a report, and many scholars in their research[[99]](#footnote-99) largely explains why he paid so much attention to topics like “war,” the Mongols’ “battle array,” “arms,” their “cunning in engagements,” “cruelty to captives,” “assault on fortifications,” “the intentions of the Tartars,” “arms and army organizations,” and “the fortification of camps and cities” in his text.[[100]](#footnote-100)

Carpini’s limited domestication or Christianization of the Mongols’ religion in his text was also influenced by his perception of the superiority of Christianity. Although he presented his readers with negative descriptions of the Mongols, he also sometimes presented positive descriptions, noting, for example, their humble lifestyle and endurance.[[101]](#footnote-101) Nevertheless, his perceived religious and moral superiority over the Mongols was evident, especially in his view of what they considered to be “no sin.”[[102]](#footnote-102)

The question that arises is whether Carpini was curious about unfamiliar, alien things such as those previously mentioned. To this question, we would answer that this was indeed the case for various reasons. To give just one example, Carpini states that in the eyes of the Mongols, to act contrary to the prohibitions and commandments of God is no sin.[[103]](#footnote-103) Such a view would surely be peculiar to a Christian accustomed to teachings on “sins.” It would therefore considerably arouse Carpini’s as well as his readers’ curiosity. The peculiar was certainly not the domesticated, especially when it remained together with those domesticated. In this sense, it also contributed to Carpini’s limited domestication. However, it remains to be seen whether there was any relationship between his curiosity and his perception of the superiority of Christianity. Carpini’s Christian background can also be seen to have played a part in his curiosity, which was therefore not “pure” curiosity, strictly speaking.

As an envoy, Carpini would certainly have endeavored to write down what he saw or heard during his journey, but this was only part of his experience. Before writing anything down, he needed to experience the entire journey. It was during that journey that he encountered the alien, more specifically, the Mongols. What then were his encounters, and how did he deal with them?

The Sense of Urgency, Superiority, and Intercultural Contact

Carpini was both a mendicant friar and a papal envoy. When crossing geographical boundaries, he simultaneously crossed linguistic, political, and cultural ones. Consequently, a problem of considerable importance arose in his encounters with an alien people, the Mongols, and in subsequent inter- or cross-cultural communication with them. In many such encounters or contacts described in the text, Carpini’s status either as an envoy, or as a friar, or both, played a significant role.

While he was in the territory of the Mongols, Carpini encountered an alien phenomenon arising from the Mongols’ belief in the purification of everything by fire:

[W]hen *envoys* (*nuntii*) or princes or any persons whatsoever come to them, they are obliged to pass between two fires, together with the gifts they are bringing, in order to be purified, lest perchance they have practised sorcery or brought poison or anything else injurious [emphasis added].[[104]](#footnote-104)

Undoubtedly, Carpini was among those who were required by the Mongols to undergo purification by fire, as he belonged to two of the categories mentioned in the above extract: “envoys” and “any persons.” Was he willing to do this according to the obligatory practice? As Carpini notes in the text, when taken to Bati’s court, his party was told to pass between two fires.[[105]](#footnote-105) Carpini acknowledges that they were highly reluctant to do so. However, ultimately, it is likely that they complied because they were required to do so by the Mongols. By passing between the fires, they would demonstrate that they were not carrying any poison or planning any evil acts against the Mongol lord. Thus, they replied that they would go through the passage to quell any suspicions.[[106]](#footnote-106) Here, the tension between Carpini’s status as a friar and as an envoy can be observed. On the one hand, as a friar, with his Christian faith and belief in the superiority of Christianity, he might have considered the Mongols’ belief in purification by fire to be an inferior or even absurd belief and was unwilling to comply with it. On the other hand, as an envoy, with the pope’s “mandate,” he was obliged to do his best to “carry through the Lord Pope’s command to a successful conclusion.”[[107]](#footnote-107) This meant that if necessary, he should seek common ground between the two sides by not refusing outright to adhere to what the Mongols required them to do. In the grip of this dilemma, the action that Carpini’s party ultimately took confirmed the pope’s praise of them as “prudent and discreet men” and “men remarkable for their religious spirit, comely in their virtue” in one of two papal bulls to the Tartar emperor.[[108]](#footnote-108) We may ask here, what drove Carpini to comply with the Mongols’ requirement. Apart from the abovementioned perception of the superiority of Christianity, the sense of urgency behind the pope’s “command” also drove him.

Carpini and his party made similar decisions when they were asked by the Mongols to offer gifts. This request was repeatedly made during their journey—*ten times* in total, as noted in the text.[[109]](#footnote-109) In one case, Carpini mentions that his party, like other envoys dispatched from other parts of the world to meet with the emperor of the Tartars, was asked for many presents by princes and others of high and lower rank.[[110]](#footnote-110) These requests raised a new problem for him; as a mendicant friar, he espoused the ideal of voluntary poverty and owning no possessions apart from those required to meet basic needs.[[111]](#footnote-111) Furthermore, the pope only provided his party with what they needed to meet their daily expenses and did not equip them with gifts.[[112]](#footnote-112) For the above reasons, it was difficult to satisfy the Mongols’ requirement concerning gift giving. What then did they do? Ultimately, they chose to satisfy this requirement, offering up what had been given to them for their consideration:

… if they have been sent by men of importance, the Tartars are unwilling to receive *a small gift* (*modicum munus*) from them, saying “You come from an important man and you give so little”. And they refuse to accept it and, if the envoys wish for success in their undertaking, they are bound to give *larger gifts* (*maiora*). On that account, we had no choice but to bestow in *gifts* (*muneribus*) a great part of the things given to us by the faithful for our expenses [emphasis added].[[113]](#footnote-113)

As they did when deciding whether to comply with the Mongol requirement of purification by fire, in this case too, they took into consideration the situation that they faced. On many other occasions, of which one in particular merits attention, they acted similarly:

He told us that if we wished to go to them [*sic*] we ought to have valuable gifts to present to them, for they asked for such things with the most pressing importunity, and if they were not given them (as is indeed true) an envoy could not properly fulfill his mission, nay rather he would be held of no account.

We did not wish the business of the Lord Pope and the Church to be hindered on that score, so out of the money which had been given to us as alms to help us on our way so that we should not be in want, we bought some beaver pelts and also the skins of various other animals.[[114]](#footnote-114)

As the above passage shows, they kept their mission in mind in their encounters with the Mongols. At the same time, they recalled what they needed to do, especially in the face of threats to Christendom, posed by the Mongols, in whose territory they were conducting their mission.

Yet, it was not always possible for them to consider the situation in the manner described above because ultimately they had nothing left to give. After giving up all of their possessions, they did not make any further efforts to give gifts. This was especially the case when Emperor *Cuyuc* (also known as Güyük, or Güyüg) received all the envoys after his election. The problem for Carpini’s party was that, unlike other envoys who offered numerous gifts to the emperor, they had nothing left to give when asked if they wished to present any gifts, as they had by then used up all their resources.[[115]](#footnote-115) Notwithstanding Carpini’s brevity in describing this incident, we would posit that the refusal to give gifts to the emperor challenged the Mongolian notion of gift giving. It may also have affected Mongol–European relations in the sense that their refusal influenced the emperor’s attitude toward Christendom.[[116]](#footnote-116) Carpini’s case resembles that of Rubruck. As he wrote in *Itinerarium*, Rubruck was also asked for gifts on many occasions during his journey, and eventually, on his way to meet the great Khan, he too had nothing to offer as gifts.[[117]](#footnote-117)

The considerations of Carpini’s party, effective or not, were not limited to the problem of gift giving. As envoys, they had to go to various places to meet important persons. When led to the *orda* or tent of the chief of Corenza, they were told to genuflect three times on the left knee in front of the door of the dwelling and to be very careful to avoid stepping on the threshold. They were most attentive in following these instructions to avoid being sentenced to death for having knowingly stepped on the threshold of the dwelling of any chief.[[118]](#footnote-118) This situation is similar to the one faced by Rubruck.[[119]](#footnote-119) Like Carpini’s party, Rubruck and his party were warned, but in this case, Rubruck’s colleague was forbidden to enter because he stepped on the threshold.[[120]](#footnote-120) In addition to the above rule, Carpini’s party also heeded others, which the envoys were required to obey. When summoned to meet Bati, the party, after declaring their purpose, sat down on the left side, as all envoys did on their way to meet the emperor, while being directed to remain always on the right side on their way back.[[121]](#footnote-121) When they were summoned to enter Güyük’s tent to be in his presence for the first time since he had become the emperor, following the Mongol rules, they once again entered through a door on the east side. No one would dare enter from the west with the sole exception of the emperor, or, if it was a chief’s tent, the chief.[[122]](#footnote-122) Similarly, Carpini’s party, considering the importance of the mission and the underlying sense of urgency, paid close attention to the situation at hand.

A question arises as to whether they would maintain this attention throughout the journey. According to Carpini’s text, they did not. On the day when the chiefs conducted Güyük’s election, they were invited inside to drink with the Mongols. In this situation, they would likely have initially accepted the drinks to show respect to those who had invited them, and who kept plying them with drinks, until, being unused to them, they could not tolerate any more.[[123]](#footnote-123) Ultimately, they refused to accept any more drinks, but they did so politely. As Carpini notes in the text: “So we gave them to understand that it was disagreeable to us and they left off pressing us.”[[124]](#footnote-124) Unlike the previously mentioned examples, the response of Carpini’s party to the Mongols’ actions, in this case, was relatively more complex.

This kind of reaction, was not, however, evident when they attended Güyük’s enthronement ceremony. While the Mongols were saying prayers and genuflecting toward the south, the members of Carpini’s party were unwilling to genuflect because they were uncertain whether the Mongols were uttering incantations or bending on their knees to God or another.[[125]](#footnote-125) In this situation, Carpini would appear to have acted more like a friar than like an envoy: what drove him would seem to have been his own beliefs and his perception of the superiority of Christianity rather than any other factors.

Nevertheless, they did not forget one crucial instruction, which was to make the pope’s desire and his letter known to the emperor and princes and all the Mongols and to obtain their reply to it. Some of their attempts to do so merit special attention. One was their experience at the first Tartar camp. When they met some armed Tartars who rushed upon them in a horrible manner and asked what kind of men they were, Carpini’s party replied that they were the envoys of the pope, making no attempt to conceal their identity.[[126]](#footnote-126) When the chiefs from the camp came to meet them, they answered these men just as they had replied to the armed Tartars before saying anything more about themselves. Subsequently, they also informed the men of the following points, among others. They told them who the pope was and spoke of his desire that all Christians should be at peace with the Tartars. They further explained why he, through the envoys and his letter, was urging the Tartars to become Christians in order to be saved. He wished to tell the Tartars that he was amazed at the mass slaughter of men, especially that of Christians by them, and urged them to avoid such acts in the future and to do penance for their past deeds. Lastly, they conveyed the pope’s request for a reply in a letter to him to inform him as to what they wanted to do in the future.[[127]](#footnote-127) This communication can be viewed as one of the most significant attempts to achieve their goal as papal envoys. It can also be considered part of the evidence of the impact of the sense of urgency as well as the perceived superiority of Christianity of Carpini’s party.

As noted above, in his letter, the pope urged the Tartars to become Christians. For Carpini’s party, two problems arose. The first was how to hand such a letter to its intended receivers. The second was how to make it understood and, if possible, elicit a reply. During their journey, four of their efforts were of particular importance. The first was handing over the pope’s letter to the chief of Corenza and trying to make it comprehensible to him before presenting it to Bati. The second was the effort to find a competent interpreter to translate it. The third effort was directed at sending a translation of the letter through Bati to Güyük, before his election. The fourth was their endeavor to obtain a reply to the pope’s letter on their return journey.[[128]](#footnote-128) As Carpini states in the text, these efforts were largely fruitful, with the exception of obtaining a translation in the absence of a competent translator. Carpini’s party can be said to have fulfilled their goal; even though Bati did not respond to the pope’s letter, they were able to obtain the emperor’s response.[[129]](#footnote-129)

In declining the emperor’s proposal to send envoys with them, Carpini’s party considered related matters in depth, as did those who were mindful of the welfare of Christians. This is evident from their fears relating to the five cases mentioned in the text. The first was their fear that if the envoys knew about dissensions and wars between the Christians, they might be encouraged to launch attacks. The second fear was that the Mongols’ real purpose could be to spy out the land. The third fear was that they might be killed by arrogant, proud Christians, given the threat posed by the Mongols, which could result in an even greater threat to Christendom. The fourth fear was that a consequence similar to that associated with the third fear could arise as a result of the envoys being taken from Carpini’s party by force. The fifth concern was that being accompanied by the envoys might not serve any real purpose.[[130]](#footnote-130) Evidently, the above five fears were embodied by Carpini’s party both as envoys and, more generally, as Christians.

Conclusion

As we have seen, a close reading of John of Plano Carpini’s *Ystoria Mongalorum* reveals another source of credibility to which Carpini appealed, namely a prevailing sense of urgency. This source was present in addition to the two sources of credibility identified by Legassie, namely the extreme suffering endured by travelers and the official documentation available to them. Moreover, the sense of urgency had a bearing on Carpini’s appeal to the other two sources. More generally, this close reading of Carpini’s text raises an important question. Would a prevailing sense of urgency in medieval Christendom, from where Carpini’s party was dispatched on a mission to the Mongols, support an author’s claim and bolster their authority or the credibility of their writing? This question also applies more broadly to a modern nation-state or even to the entire contemporary world. If the answer is affirmative, how then would it do so?

To understand the alien and unfamiliar culture of the Mongols and to instill this understanding in his readers, Carpini attempted to domesticate them. That is to say, he sought to transform the unfamiliar into the familiar. Accordingly, the Mongols’ religion was to a certain extent domesticated or Christianized. However, this domestication was limited in scope. The sense of urgency, the perceived superiority of Christianity, and Carpini’s curiosity played an important role in what was domesticated as well as what was not. Considering these three factors together, along with domestication and its limits can deepen our understanding of each of them beyond existing views.

When carrying out the pope’s “mandate” concerning the Mongols, Carpini’s party was faced with the challenges of inter- or cross-cultural contact. These challenges are exemplified by the following seven cases described in the text: (1) their acceptance of the ritual of purification by fire; (2) their gift giving in the face of the Mongols’ gift soliciting and their refusal of this norm when they had no presents left to give; (3) their attention to the Mongols’ rules on entering the tent and taking a seat; (4) their initial acceptance of drinking with those inviting them and final refusal of it; (5) their reverse actions when the Mongols genuflected; (6) their efforts to make the pope’s desire known to the Mongols and to have his letter translated and made known to leaders, such as the emperor, and to obtain a reply; and (7) their consideration of five possible scenarios relating to the proposal to dispatch Mongol envoys with them, which could be detrimental to Christians. In all of these cases, a close relationship can be observed between the attitudes of Carpini’s party toward the Mongols and the sense of urgency or the perceived superiority of Christianity, or both. By making this relationship explicit, we can uncover the underlying logic of inter- or cross-cultural contact of Carpini’s party with the Mongols and, more generally, we can provide a case for the study of historical inter- or cross-cultural contact.

In sum, by exploring and addressing the above questions, this study has provided historians and researchers in this and related fields with a new perspective on Carpini’s travel text or report. Moreover, this perspective foregrounds four key issues that have important implications for deepening understanding. The first is the need to situate a text like Carpini’s within its proper historical context. The second relates to the significance of a prevailing sense of urgency for strengthening claims to authority. The third is the underlying logic of attempts to comprehend the unfamiliar and alien. The fourth relates to the logic of inter- or cross-cultural contact.

1. Scholars have used various terms to refer to writings about travel, real or imagined, in the Middle Ages, such as “travel writing,” “travel literature,” “travel account,” “travel narrative,” “travel book,” and “travel text.” For a detailed account on the use of these terms, see, especially, Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Travel Writing as a Genre: Facts, Fictions and the Invention of a Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe,” *Journeys* 1, no. 1 (2000): 5–35, especially 7. See also Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in Medieval Travel Writing, 1245-1510* (Philadelphia, 2014): 50–60 and Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel* (Chicago, 2017): 16–18. Here I prefer to use the term “travel text” for two reasons. First, it is the most general and flexible of the terms in use, and second, its use avoids issues arising from the use of other terms. When referring specifically to John of Plano Carpini’s *Ystoria Mongalorum*, which is the subject of the present study, I also use the term “report,” following a convention used by some scholars. See especially Peter Jackson, “Medieval Christendom’s Encounter with the Alien,” in James Muldoon, ed., *Travelers, Intellectuals, and the World beyond Medieval Europe* (London, 2016): 31–54; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, second edition (London, 2018) (first edition Harlow, 2005); Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2018), especially 287–302; and Antti Ruotsala, “The Mongols in the Eyes of the Thirteenth-Century Papal and Royal Missions to Mongolia and China (c. 1245-1370),” in Timothy May and Michael Hope, eds., *The Mongol World* (London, 2022): 842–852. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The literature on medieval travel texts is too extensive to list here. For examples of the scholarship on the particular travel text under study, namely *Ystoria Mongalorum*, written by John of Plano Carpini, see note 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Both titles, *Ystoria Mongalorum* and *Historia Mongalorum* are used in studies of this text, as are the author’s respective English and Italian names: John of Plano Carpini and Giovanni di Pian di Carpine. Here, I follow the names used in MS 181, fol. 279r, titled “Incipit Ystoria Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus,” housed at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge University, and accessed through Parker Library On the Web: Manuscripts in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, <https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/gg784fk0128> on August 8, 2023. Hereinafter, this manuscript is referred to as CCCC MS 181. *Ystoria Mongalorum* is also the title used in Anastasius van den Wyngaert’s Latin text (see Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana, Volumen I: Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII et XIV* (Quaracchi-Firenze, 1929), “Incipit Ystoria Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus,” 27), and by many prominent scholars. I also follow many scholars in referring to the author as John of Plano Carpini, or simply as Carpini for the sake of convenience. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See, for example, John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven, 2001): 18–23; Linda Lomperis, “Medieval Travel Writing and the Question of Race,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 147–164; Shirin A. Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another’s Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2014): 4, 22, 57, 122; Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in Medieval Travel Writing, 1245-1510*; Anna Czarnowus, “The Mongols, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe: The Mirabilia Tradition in Benedict Pole’s *Historia Tartaroum* and John of Plano Carpini’s *Historia Mongalorum*,” *Literature Compass* 11, no. 7 (2014): 484––495; Jürgen Sarnowsky, *Die Erkundung der Welt: Die großen Entdeckungsreisen von Marco Polo bis Humboldt* (München, 2015), “1 Verlockungen: Die Reichtümer und Wunder Asiens: Nicht nur Marco Polo”; Peter Jackson, “Medieval Christendom’s Encounter with the Alien,” 31–54; Peter Jackson, “The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered,” in James D. Ryan, ed., *The Spiritual Expansion of Medieval Latin Christendom: The Asian Missions* (London, 2016): 297–342; Joan-Pau Rubiés, ed., *Medieval Ethnographies: European Perceptions of the World Beyond* (London, 2016) (first published in Burlington in 2009): 101–102, 110; Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, second edition; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*,287–302; Adriano Duque, chapter 8: “Gift-Giving in the Carpini Expedition to Mongolia (1246–1248 CE),” in M. Piera, ed., *Remapping Travel Narratives (1000–1700): To the East and Back Again* (Leeds, 2018): 187–200; Yikan Zheng, “Entre la Terreur et l’espoir: la construction de l’image du Mongol aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles” (Thèse de Doctorat, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2018), 77–81, 93–95, 106, 118–120; Alvise Andreose, “Viaggiatori e Testi tra Europa ed Estremo Oriente al Tempo di Marco Polo,” in Alvise Andreose, ed., *La Strada per il Catai: Contatti tra Oriente e Occidente al tempo di Marco Polo* (Milano, 2019): 25–46; Sierra Lomuto, “Race and Vulnerability: Mongols in Thirteenth-Century Ethnographic Travel Writing,” in A. E. Zimo, T. D. Vann Sprecher, K. Reyerson, and D. Blumenthal, eds., *Rethinking Medieval Margins and Marginality* (London, 2020): 27–42; Jacques Paviot, chapter 5: “The Mendicant Friars: Actors in Diplomatic Encounters with the Mongols,” in Maurits Ebben and Louis Sicking, eds., *Beyond Ambassadors: Consuls, Missionaries, and Spies in Premodern Diplomacy* (Leiden, 2021): 119–136; and Antti Ruotsala, “The Mongols in the Eyes of the Thirteenth-Century Papal and Royal Missions to Mongolia and China (c. 1245-1370),” 842–852. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, for example, Linda Lomperis, “Medieval Travel Writing and the Question of Race,” 147–164; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 287–302; and Sierra Lomuto, “Race and Vulnerability: Mongols in Thirteenth-Century Ethnographic Travel Writing,” 27–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For the purpose of this discussion, among the key studies applying this perspective are the following texts by Peter Jackson: “Medieval Christendom’s Encounter with the Alien,” 31–54; “The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered,” 297–342; and *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, for instance, Joan-Pau Rubiés, ed., *Medieval Ethnographies: European Perceptions of the World Beyond*, 101–102, 110; and Shirin A. Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another’s Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages*, 4, 22, 57, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in Medieval Travel Writing, 1245-1510*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See especially Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See especially Adriano Duque, chapter 8: “Gift-Giving in the Carpini Expedition to Mongolia (1246–1248 CE),” 187–200. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jacques Paviot, chapter 5: “The Mendicant Friars: Actors in Diplomatic Encounters with the Mongols,” 119–136. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Linda Lomperis, “Medieval Travel Writing and the Question of Race,” 148–149. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Linda Lomperis, “Medieval Travel Writing and the Question of Race,” 163, note 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 287–288. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Heng’s discussion of instances of racialization in Carpini’s text is mainly presented in chapter 6 of *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* titled “World II: The Mongol Empire: Global Race as Absolute Power,” 287–302. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. A. E. Zimo, T. D. Vann Sprecher, K. Reyerson and D. Blumenthal, eds., *Rethinking Medieval Margins and Marginality*, “Introduction,” 3–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Sierra Lomuto, “Race and Vulnerability: Mongols in Thirteenth-Century Ethnographic Travel Writing,” 27–42 and the “Introduction,” 3–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Peter Jackson, “The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered,” 329. See also *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Mōngke, 1253-1255* (hereinafter *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*), trans. Peter Jackson; introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan (London, 1990), “Introduction,” 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, 346–349, especially 348. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See especially Joan-Pau Rubiés, ed., *Medieval Ethnographies: European Perceptions of the World Beyond*, 101–102, 110; and Shirin A. Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another’s Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages*, 4, 22, 57, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Joan-Pau Rubiés, ed., *Medieval Ethnographies: European Perceptions of the World Beyond*, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Shirin A. Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another’s Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See Shirin A. Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another’s Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages*, 149–150, notes 4, 6, and 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in Medieval Travel Writing, 1245-1510*, “Introduction,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in Medieval Travel Writing, 1245-1510*, 15, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in Medieval Travel Writing, 1245-1510*, especially 79–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. For a discussion on Phillips’s avoidance of the term “race” and her underlying rationale, see Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in Medieval Travel Writing, 1245-1510*, 174–175. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*, “Preface,” viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*, “Preface,” viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See, for instance, A.J. Watson, “Mongol Inhospitality, or How to do More with Less? Gift Giving in William of Rubruck’s *Itinerarium*,” *Journal of Medieval History* 37 (2011): 90–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See, for instance, Adriano Duque, chapter 8: “Gift-Giving in the Carpini Expedition to Mongolia (1246–1248 CE), 187–200. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Adriano Duque, chapter 8: “Gift-Giving in the Carpini Expedition to Mongolia (1246–1248 CE*)*,” 187–200, especially 197, 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The title of chapter 5 of Jacques Paviot’s work is “The Mendicant Friars: Actors in Diplomatic Encounters with the Mongols,” 119–136. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Jacques Paviot, chapter 5, especially 130–131, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Here I use Debra Higgs Strickland’s expression; see chapter 2, “Text, Image, and Contradiction in the *Devisement dou monde*,” in S.C. Akbari and A. Iannucci, eds., *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West* (Toronto, 2008): 23–59, especially 32, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Here, following Jacques Le Goff and Sharon Kinoshita, I use “domestication” in its noun and verb forms. Their use, and Strickland’s use of “transformed” appear to be similar. For Le Goff’s use of the term, see Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1980), 195, 199. For Kinoshita’s use, see Sharon Kinoshita, chapter 3: “Marco Polo’s *Le Devisement dou monde* and the Tributary East,” in S.C. Akbari and A. Iannucci, eds., *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West*,60–86. For Strickland’s use, see the above. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See Peter Jackson, chapter 3:“The Mongol Invasions of 1241-4,” in *The Mongols and West*, 65–91; see also Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Jana Valtrová, “Beyond the Horizons of Legends: Traditional Imagery and Direct Experience in Medieval Accounts of Asia,” *Numen*, 57, no. 2 (2010), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Here I use Jackson’s translation of its title; see *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Peter Jackson, introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. This translation is provided by A.C. Moule and Paul Pelliot eds, *Marco Polo: The Description of the World* (London, 1938). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West,* “The Papal Embassies” and “A Buffer against the Mongol Menace,” 92–102. For the prologue to Carpini’s text, see CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, in Giovanni di Pian di Carpine, *Storia dei Mongoli*, edizione critica del testo latino a cura di Enrico Menestò, trad. it. a cura di M.C. Lungarotti, note di P. Daffinà, intr. di L. Petech, studi storico-filologici di C. Leonardi, M.C. Lungarotti, E. Menestò (hereinafter *Ystoria Mongalorum*) (Spoleto, 1989), 227; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (hereinafter *The Mission to Asia*) (London, 1980), “Prologue,” 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West,* 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 227–228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, “Prologue,” 3–4. See Dawson’s English translation. Unless noted otherwise, the English translations are sourced from Dawson’s edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 227–228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, “Prologue,” 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 227–228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, “Prologue,” 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 227–228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, “Prologue,” 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. In CCCC MS 181, fols. 279r (twice), 280v, 294v, 308v (three times), 309r, 310v, 312v (three times), 313r (twice), 313r–314v, 317r, 319r (twice); John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 227, 228, 231, 271, 304, 305, 306, 308, 310, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 323, 324, 329, 330; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 3, 4, 5, 6, 29, 52 (twice), 53, 54, 56, 57, 58, 58 (twice), 59, 60, 61, 66, 69, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See Peter Jackson’s translation of *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*: introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan, 98, 100, 104, 105, 108 (twice), 110 (twice), 112, 119, 128, 135, 140, 141, 165, 166 (three times), 175, 176, 179, 180, 181 (twice), 182, 188 (twice), 201, 204, 207, 217, 227, 239, 250, 251, 254, 256, 257, 260, 261, 265, 269, 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 227–228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, “Prologue,” 3–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, “Prologue,” 3–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*, 66, 69–71. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See CCCC MS 181, fol. 295r and John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 274 and notes 391–394. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Dupuy 686, fol. 11v, [https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10034095x/f13.item](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark%3A/12148/btv1b10034095x/f13.item), accessed August 26, 2023 and John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. See CCCC MS 181, fol. 306v and John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. CCCC MS 181, fol. 309r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 306; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. CCCC MS 181, fol. 310v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 308–309; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, “Prologue,” 3–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, “Prologue,” 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. CCCC MS 181, fols. 292v, 299r–300v, 300v, 303r, 304v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 264, 284–286, 293, 295–296; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 25, 38, 39, 43, 45; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. CCCC MS 181, fols. 290v–291r, 295r (twice); John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 259–260, 273, 273–274; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 23, 30–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. CCCC MS 181, fols. 290v, 295r, 295r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 259, 273, 273–274; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 23, 30–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410*, 348. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. CCCC MS 181, fol. 282v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 235; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. CCCC MS 181, fols. 282v–285r, 318v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 235–244, 327; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, chapter III, 8–14; chapter IX, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. CCCC MS 181, fol. 282v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 235; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. CCCC MS 181, fol. 282v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 236; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 227; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. See Peter Jackson’s translation, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*:(introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan, 21. For the Mongols’ belief in *Tenggeri*, see also Peter Jackson,second edition*, The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410*, especially 34, 47–48, 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Scholars have generally pointed to the monotheistic characteristics of “Tenggeri” and “God” to indicate their similarity. See Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, second edition, 47; and Antti Ruotsala, “The Mongols in the Eyes of the Thirteenth-Century Papal and Royal Missions to Mongolia and China (c. 1245-1370),” 846. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. CCCC MS 181, fol. 318v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 327; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. CCCC MS 181, fol. 283r (“quas dicunt esse peccata” omitted. See John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 239, note 75); John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 239; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. CCCC MS 181, fols. 283r–284v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 240; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. CCCC MS 181, fol. 284v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 240; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana, Volumen I: Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII et XIV*, 298, 300; *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Peter Jackson, introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan, 237, 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. CCCC MS 181, fol. 318v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 327; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 229; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, chapter I, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See, for example, Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, second edition, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. CCCC MS 181, fol. 282v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 236; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. CCCC MS 181, fol. 282v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 236-237; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. CCCC MS 181, fols. 282v–283r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 237–238; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. CCCC MS 181, fol. 283r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 239–240; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. CCCC MS 181, fols. 283r-284v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 240; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. CCCC MS 181, fol. 284v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 241; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. CCCC MS 181, fol. 284v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 241; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. CCCC MS 181, fol. 318v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 327; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See Peter Jackson, “14 Franciscans as Papal and Royal Envoys to the Tartars (1245–1255),” in Michael J. P. Robson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi* (Cambridge, 2012), 236; Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism*, 30–31, 65; James Muldoon, ed., *Travelers, Intellectuals, and the World beyond Medieval Europe* (London, 2016), xvii, xxvii; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, second edition, 363; Sierra Lomuto, “Race and Vulnerability: Mongols in Thirteenth-Century Ethnographic Travel Writing,” 30, 32; and Jacques Paviot, “The Mendicant Friars: Actors in Diplomatic Encounters with the Mongols,” 120, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. CCCC MS 181, fol. 279r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 228; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See especially Peter Jackson, “Medieval Christendom’s Encounter with the Alien,” 31–54; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, second edition; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, especially 287–302; and Antti Ruotsala, “The Mongols in the Eyes of the Thirteenth-Century Papal and Royal Missions to Mongolia and China (c. 1245-1370),” 842–852. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. CCCC MS 181, fols. 296v–299r, 302v–307r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 275–284, 293–302; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, chapters VI and VIII, 32–38, 43–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Antti Ruotsala, “The Mongols in the Eyes of the Thirteenth-Century Papal and Royal Missions to Mongolia and China (c. 1245-1370),” 846. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. For a discussion on perceived superiority, see Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 294; and Antti Ruotsala, “The Mongols in the Eyes of the Thirteenth-Century Papal and Royal Missions to Mongolia and China (c. 1245-1370),” 849. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. CCCC MS 181, fols. 283r–284v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 240; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. CCCC MS 181, fol. 284v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 241; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. CCCC MS 181, fol. 310v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 310; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. CCCC MS 181, fol. 310v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 310; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. CCCC MS 181, fol. 309r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 308; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Carolus Rodenberg, ed., *Epistolae saeculi XIII e regestis pontificum Romanorum selectae* *per G.H. Pertz*, Tomus II (Berlin, 1887), “Ex Innocentii IV Registro,” “102. regi et populo Tartarorum viam agnoscere veritatis,” 72–73, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Digital* (*dMGH*), *Epistolae* [Briefe], <https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_epp_saec_xiii_2/index.htm#page/72/mode/1up>, accessed August 23, 2023; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, “APPENDIX: Two Bulls of Pope Innocent IV Addressed to the Emperor of the Tartars: I,” 74–75. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. See CCCC MS 181, fols. 284v, 293r–294v, 300v, 307r, 309r (twice), 311r, 315r, 316v, 319r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 241, 268, 286, 303, 307, 307-308, 310, 319, 321, 329; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 12, 28, 39, 51, 54 (twice), 56, 62, 64, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. CCCC MS 181, fol. 293r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 268; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. See Peter Jackson, "14 Franciscans as Papal and Royal Envoys to the Tartars (1245–1255)," 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. CCCC MS 181, fol. 309r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 307–308; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. CCCC MS 181, fols. 293r-294v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 268; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. CCCC MS 181, fol. 307r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 303; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. CCCC MS 181, fol. 316v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 321; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. For a discussion on the implications of a refusal to engage in gift giving according to Tartar norms in Carpini’s case, and its possible impact on the Christian–Mongol relations, see chapter 8 of Adriano Duque, “Gift-Giving in the Carpini Expedition to Mongolia (1246–1248 CE),” 187–200, especially 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana, Volumen I: Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII et XIV*, 187–188, 190, 194, 196, 200–201, 217, 313; *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Peter Jackson, introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan, IX, 1 (97); IX, 2 (98); X, 2 (100); X, 4 (101); XII, 4 (105); XIII, 4 (108); XV, 2 (114–115); XV, 4 (116); XX, 3 (135); XXXVII, 3 (255). For a discussion of the case of Rubruck, see A.J. Watson, “Mongol Inhospitality, or How to do More with Less? Gift Giving in William of Rubruck’s *Itinerarium*,” *Journal of Medieval History* 37 (2011): 90–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. CCCC MS 181, fols. 309r–310v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 308; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 54–55. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana, Volumen I: Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII et XIV*, 202, 262, 265, 279; *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Peter Jackson, introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan, XV, 6 (117); XXIX, 28 (193–194), 29 (194), 37 (196); XXX, 8 (212). See also Jackson’s introduction to his English translation of Rubruck’s text: *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan, “Introduction,” 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Peter Jackson, introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan, XXX, 8 (212). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. CCCC MS 181, fol. 311r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 311–312; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. CCCC MS 181, fol. 315r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 321; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. CCCC MS 181, fol. 314v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 318; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. CCCC MS 181, fol. 314v; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 318; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. CCCC MS 181, fol. 315r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 320; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. CCCC MS 181, fols. 308v–309r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 306; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. CCCC MS 181, fol. 309r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 306–307; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 53–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. CCCC MS 181, fols. 310v, 311r, 314v, 319r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 308–309, 311, 317, 329; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 55–56, 61, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. CCCC MS 181, fol. 319r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 329; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. CCCC MS 181, fol. 319r; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, 327–328; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, 68–69. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)