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 induce this comprehension among others from their own culture or civilization? If they recorded what they saw, heard, and did during their contact or encounter with the unfamiliar across geographical, political, and cultural boundaries, how then did they ensure that their writing – a travel text, for example – was perceived as credible or trustworthy? If its credibility was questioned, how did the writer assert and bolster their claims? Do the strategies applied then resemble those that are applied today? Finally, did the notions of fact and fiction apply then as they do now?

There have been numerous responses to these questions evidenced in the scholarship on medieval travel texts[[1]](#footnote-1) over the last two decades or thereabouts.[[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 on 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 as a traveler, 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 is an example of 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 reception of Robert Bartlett’s definition of race in a premodern and, more specifically, a medieval context. Accordingly, 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” and interprets the process whereby Europeans rendered intelligible such a race as one of “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.” Such an experience and memories might inspire one’s research, but they might also have some negative impact on his/her choice of methodologies. This can be discerned from her work on Carpini’s text, namely that the limitations, apart from the usefulness, of the perspective of the history of race are evident, as we shall see later in this essay. Sharing with Heng the perspective of race, Sierra Lomuto too aims to challenge the assumption that race and racial bias only began in the modern era.[[18]](#footnote-18) But her more specific effort is to reveal the attempts of Latin Europeans “to produce power from the margins” by constructing the Mongols not only as threatening and anti-Christians, but also as physically distinct, barbaric, and inferior.[[19]](#footnote-19) Does the attempt to apply the concept of race to a medieval travel text help illuminate how Carpini sees the Mongols? At least in the aforesaid research scholars have offered no compelling evidence for their use of such a concept, namely that they have not convincingly argued that to use “race,” a concept so familiar to us, in a medieval context is unproblematic and that what they call “racialization” is really racialization and not others—for example, a kind of perception principally from a Christian perspective.

An authority on the history of the relations between the Mongols and Catholic world, Peter Jackson’s study can be said to be a source of inspiration to many scholars. Yet for our purpose the most relevant of his findings are his insights into the problems of, respectively, the Mongols and religion, their own ideology, and the “authority” of medieval Latin travel texts. As Jackson convincingly demonstrates, during the early decades of the conquest era, *Tenggeri* (“Heaven”), the main deity that the Mongols believed in, was beginning to take on the characteristics of a supreme and omnipotent deity.[[20]](#footnote-20) As to the attitudes of Mongol rulers towards religions, he points out that the “tolerance” of Mongol rulers in religious matters has been overstated; in fact, their attitudes were the product of various factors especially their political, diplomatic and strategic purposes.[[21]](#footnote-21) He further argues that in relation to what they believed in, the Mongols embraced an ideology of universal dominion whereby Mongol rulers ruled both in the strength of their good fortune and by virtue of a mandate from *Tenggeri*,[[22]](#footnote-22) and that with the ideology of universal dominion which should not be assumed as the Mongols’ goal at the very outset,[[23]](#footnote-23) the growing Mongol empire and the expansionist Christian West were on a collision course in the mid-thirteenth century.[[24]](#footnote-24) When discussing the problem of “authority,” he reminds us that so far as a medieval travel text is concerned, the distinction between “factual” geography or “rational” reporting and the genre of marvels can be misleading and anachronistic, namely that in fact it was licit and obligatory for Christians to stand in wonder before God’s Creation.[[25]](#footnote-25) Jackson’s insights lay a foundation for our discussion of related topics.

While some see Carpini’s text as containing instances of race-making, others consider it an “ethnographical writing,” exemplifying “medieval (European) ethnography/ethnographies.” Among important recent studies in this perspective are Joan-Pau Rubiés’s and Shirin Khanmohamadi’s work.[[26]](#footnote-26) For us the most relevant conclusion Rubiés draws from his work is that the *Ystoria* *Mongalorum* and the *Divisament dou Monde* were two peaks of medieval ethnography, and this remained unchallenged by any writing in the Christian West in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[[27]](#footnote-27) Besides him, Khanmohamadi shows that ethnographic writing has a long premodern history, in which the Middle Ages occupy an important place, although the medieval ethnographers did not use terms like “ethnography” but instead used “descriptio” (description), “itinerarium” (journey), “travels” and so on.[[28]](#footnote-28) As can be seen from their work, such a perspective has benefited much from earlier studies that take an anthropological approach and the like.[[29]](#footnote-29) But is there any problem with the attempt to identify “medieval ethnography” in medieval travel texts—for instance, in Carpini’s—apart from its merits? At least, when doing that one might run the risk of taking the texts like Carpini’s out of their proper (i.e., medieval) contexts.

In stark contrast to previous scholarship on “medieval Orientalism” or “medieval postcolonialism,” Kim M. Phillips aims at her “emergent precolonial studies.”[[30]](#footnote-30) For this her explanation is that “colonialism” or “imperialism” does not describe relations between Latin Christians and Asian peoples before the turn of the sixteenth century, and that 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, after investigating five aspects of European travel writing on the Mongols, points out that the traits John attributed to them are as follows: 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 utilizing the term “race” in her investigation and provides an explanation for it.[[33]](#footnote-33) Her explanation, however, fails to consider the proper context in which Carpini’s text was produced. Such a context will be taken into account as fully as possible in our discussion.

From the perspective of the history of western ideas about travel, Shayne Legassie argues that out of the travel writing between 1200 and 1500 emerged “a new, enduring view of travel as literate labor,” both “physical and intellectual.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Based upon this, Legassie reaches two important conclusions for our purpose. One is that the idea of travel as literate labor was a medieval invention which, at its core, a reinvention of classical ideals—heroism in travel associated with self-discipline/mastery when facing bodily temptation and travail.[[35]](#footnote-35) By reevaluating the medieval ideas about travel, Legassie aims to give the Middle Ages their due place in the history of the ideas of travel. The other—and the more important—conclusion is about the relationship between travail and authority. As Legassie shows, in the case of Carpini’s travel text, in order to bolster his credibility, Carpini appealed to two sources of authority: 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 and authority/credibility have also laid a foundation for our discussion and inspire us to advance it in that direction.

While there have appeared studies on the particular travel text, William of Rubruck’s *Itinerarium*, in the perspective of gift-giving,[[37]](#footnote-37) there have been those on Carpini’s text.[[38]](#footnote-38) Adriano Duque’s work is one among those. Duque’s work on gift-giving during Carpini’s expedition to Mongolia is conducted within the context of diplomatic exchange. In Duque’s view, to the Mongols the act of gift-giving was part of a submission ritual; by contrast, the act of refusing to give gifts to the Mongol ruler implied that the friars like Carpini acknowledged a lack of submission and then acted as neither subjects nor dominating persons, thereby challenging the Mongolian notions of gift-giving and behind them the complex relationship between East and West.[[39]](#footnote-39) Duque’s examination contributes to our understanding of the importance of gifts in Carpini’s cross-cultural encounters. While Duque considers the importance of gift-giving in diplomatic exchange, Jacques Paviot views Carpini as one of the “actors in diplomatic encounters with the Mongols.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Of Paviot’s findings three deserve our special attention. First, in spite of the dual meaning of the Latin word *nuntius*, “envoy” or “ambassador,” medieval mendicant friars like Carpini remained only papal envoys, not ambassadors. Second, given the reality of the contemporary West, the only alternative in the eyes of the friars was to go as missionaries. And third, in the premodern world, a “diplomatic system” was nascent in Europe, but lacking between the West and the Mongols.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The above-mentioned scholarship on Carpini’s travel text, albeit insightful on many issues, has still left some important questions either not properly appreciated or even unnoticed and thus regretfully unaddressed. These questions are: is there any other source of credibility discernable from Carpini’s text, apart from the two revealed by Legassie? If the answer is the affirmative, then whether such a source of credibility had something to do with the ways in which Carpini “transformed”[[42]](#footnote-42)the unfamiliar into the familiar? If so, what kind of relationship was that? More generally, did it have any impact on his inter- or cross-cultural contact?

This study seeks to address these questions through a close reading of Carpini’s *Ystoria Mongalorum*. It provides a new interpretation of the following three main issues. First, the ways in which Carpini claims and bolsters his credibility, especially one more source of credibility in addition to the two revealed by Legassie. Second, the relationship between it and Carpini’s attempts to transform the unfamiliar into the familiar, namely his domestication[[43]](#footnote-43) and its limits. And third, the relationship between the aforesaid source of credibility and Carpini’s intercultural contact with the Mongols. One of its central arguments is that the Christians’ fear of the Mongols’ potential invasion, or their sense of urgency, not merely prompted the Pope Innocent IV to initiate Carpini’s mission to Mongolia and then his writing of the travel text, but also deeply impacted the ways in which he bolstered its credibility. In this sense, the sense of urgency can be considered another source of credibility. It argues, moreover, that the sense of urgency and the superiority of Christianity as well as curiosity had a deep impact on Carpini’s domestication of the Mongols and its limits. To this point, however, previous research in the perspective of race pays little attention. That they gather various issues under the label “race” does not illuminate but obscures the problem. The perspective of medieval ethnography, too, fails to make the point, thereby risking overstating the status of Carpini’s writing as a “medieval ethnography” in history. Lastly, and on a more general level, it argues that such a sense of urgency and the superiority of Christianity influenced Carpini’s inter- or cross-cultural contacts.

The Sense of Urgency: A Neglected Source of Credibility

Carpini’s *Ystoria Mongalorum* was written in a context that was different from those within which many other medieval “travel” texts, real and imagined, were produced. The text was written in the 1240s, the decade when the Mongols, a people new and alien to Latin Christians, arrived at the doorstep of Europe, and appeared as a threatening, terrible enemy when Christendom had a strong fear of possible threats posed by them.[[44]](#footnote-44) It was also a decade that marked the beginning of a period, spanning approximately one century, of various contacts with Asian peoples and cultures and then the production of knowledge on Asia (and certainly on the world beyond medieval Europe more generally).[[45]](#footnote-45) Such contacts and/or knowledge production were exemplified by those “travel” texts like Rubruck’s *Itinerarium* (*The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*[[46]](#footnote-46)), the *Le Devisament dou monde* (*The Description of the World*[[47]](#footnote-47)), and *The* *Book of John Mandeville*, to mention only the better known. The period and texts mentioned here are not our primary concern, but mindful of them we can better understand the proper context for Carpini’s mission and writing.

A widespread fear of the Mongols prompted a widespread sense of urgency. For Pope Innocent IV, who instigated Carpini’s mission to Mongolia, as can be seen from the “Prologue” to Carpini’s text, what was urgent was to prepare Latin Christendom for the great threat from the Mongols.[[48]](#footnote-48) Impelled by such a consideration, in March or April 1245 the pope initiated no fewer than three missions to the Mongols, of which the most celebrated was Carpini’s.[[49]](#footnote-49) Of his mission one important product was the *Ystoria Mongalorum*. Innocent’s concern is reflected in the Prologue to this text:

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* (*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. (My emphasis)[[50]](#footnote-50)

Apparently, Carpini’s mission to Mongolia—or “to the Tartars,” as written here—was both initiated and recognized by Innocent. Innocent’s initiation and recognition of it added a new dimension to the sense of urgency of Carpini’s party: prior to the initiative, they were among those who feared the Mongols, but with no mission as mentioned here; after that, however, a new thing awaited them—to carry out “the Lord Pope’s mandate.” In this sense, their sense of urgency doubled.

The sense of urgency did not end here. By writing such a prologue and such a text more generally, Carpini presented his readers with the very sense. What he presented is of particular importance to our discussion of one of his efforts as an author to claim his authority. How did he do that? To answer this question, we need to consider what factors drew his attention to such a problem. Reading the text, we can find in it three such factors or three sources of credibility he appealed to. The first, and in my view the foremost, is the very sense of urgency. At the beginning of the Prologue, where he explains why he himself went as the “envoy of the Apostolic See” to the east, Carpini stresses the importance of choosing first to make their way to the Mongols: they were afraid that in the near future the Church would be threatened by the Mongols; in order to prepare the Christians for any sudden attack made by them, it was necessary to know their desire and intention through a mission and a writing on it.[[51]](#footnote-51) This was the overall situation for the mission and the writing that Carpini shows in the Prologue. From this emerges an atmosphere of urgency and seriousness. Such an atmosphere means that the seriousness of the situation could not be denied. So, in such a situation, how credible or trustworthy would be to a Christian the words of an author, himself a Christian, a mendicant friar, and an envoy of the Supreme Pontiff, when he wrote them with the welfare of Christendom in mind?[[52]](#footnote-52) At least, we can safely say that this could bolster to a great extent the credibility of his text. In this sense, the sense of urgency can be viewed as, in addition to the extreme suffering a traveler endured and the written official documents he used,[[53]](#footnote-53) another source of credibility he could and did appeal to.

Of course, the sense of urgency was not the only source of credibility for Carpini. In addition to making the reader feel his suffering, he tells that

… 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* … (My emphasis)[[54]](#footnote-54)

As written above, Carpini’s party endured the extreme suffering during their journey to the Tartars. As Legassie shows, such a kind of suffering is one of the sources of credibility Carpini appealed to. But here he only gives a few words about that. Can we find more about it? Throughout the text, we can easily find much related “evidence”: Carpini mentions his suffering roughly *eighteen times* altogether.[[55]](#footnote-55) It should be noted that his mention of suffering is not an isolated case. In the travel text of another medieval traveler and friar, William of Rubruck’s *Itinerarium*, mention is also made of the author’s suffering similar to, if not greater than, Carpini’s. Rubruck too mentions his suffering many times—roughly *forty-two times* throughout his text.[[56]](#footnote-56) With the two authors compared, one conclusion can be reached: Legassie’s view about the extreme suffering as a source of credibility helps explain why Rubruck also places an emphasis on the extreme hardship he experienced. On the relationship between suffering and authority Legassie’s work is no doubt insightful, yet here what is more important for us is the less discussed problem: the relationship between the emphasis on the extreme suffering and the sense of urgency. Having a look at the Prologue, we can better understand why the sense of urgency in general and Innocent’s in particular can be said to provide a good explanation for Carpini’s suffering: as he himself says, they endured it to “zealously” carry out the pope’s “command,” “mandate,” or “instructions.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Obviously, behind the pope’s requirement did exist a sense of urgency. In addition, the relationship between the very sense and the emphasis on suffering helps make more credible the text: if Carpini’s suffering, or more precisely the description of it, is “worthy of credence,” then his text will thus be worthy of greater trust. Through such an examination, we have revealed another aspect of the question of the sense of urgency.

To bolster his authority, Carpini also appealed to the evidence provided by both his travel-related “witnesses” and “testimony,” the latter constituting one of the “two sources of credibility” pointed out by Legassie.[[58]](#footnote-58) Whether there is any relationship between the sense of urgency and his utilization of such “evidence”? In the Prologue, he writes:

… 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 travelled 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. (My emphasis)[[59]](#footnote-59)

Here Carpini’s emphasis on the credibility of his text is evident. The way in which he stresses it is by claiming that what he writes is based upon what they themselves have seen and what they have heard from others they believe to be worthy of trust. As written here, the role of Carpini’s party and others in his claim is similar to the role that legal witnesses in the Middle Ages especially in the law court played.[[60]](#footnote-60) Mindful of this claim, Carpini reiterates approximately *fifty-eight* times that they saw or heard from others those during their journey. Throughout the text his reiteration falls into three main groups as follows:

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| **Group I: “I/we have seen” and the like:** |
| 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 the like** |
| 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 the like** |
| 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 guide, we have written everything that we have seen or heard from others who we believe are to be trusted and, as God is 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 on the right-hand side refer to the pages where the expressions appear. The words “twice” and “three times” mean that the expressions appear twice and three times respectively.

What Carpini reiterates of course serves his overall purpose, but it is by no means the whole evidence for the credibility of his text. In fact, his claim to credibility is too supported by the pope’s letter—what Legassie terms “official documentation” in general and “written testimony” in particular.[[64]](#footnote-64) In Chapter IX, where he mentions that the chief men from the camp came to meet them and asked them what was their purpose, Carpini says:

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 he desired that they should be great before God in heaven. For this reason *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. (My emphasis)[[66]](#footnote-66)

Needless to say, a letter from the pope, who himself was authoritative, added to the credibility of the travel text. Yet the question remains: whether Carpini claimed and bolstered his credibility merely 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 did not drive, his appeal to the aforementioned “evidence”? Undoubtedly, it did, to a great extent. The reasons for our answer are threefold. First, as Carpini himself says in the Prologue, they write to the Christians both with their welfare in mind and to put them on guard against the Tartars. Because of this, the reader “ought to believe” what they write “all the more confidently inasmuch as” they themselves “have either seen everything” or “have heard it from Christians who are with them” and are “to be relied upon.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Clearly, here exists a close link between the sense of urgency and Carpini’s appeal to the “witnesses.” Second, Carpini’s request for his readers’ trust is too 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 fulfilment of it.[[68]](#footnote-68) Behind the pope’s requirement, too, was the sense of urgency. Third, throughout the text, Carpini reiterates *five* *times* that the Mongols are to rule the whole world.[[69]](#footnote-69) From his reiteration do emerge a fear of the Mongols—a fear of being subjected by them, for example—and at the same time a sense of urgency. Altogether, the close link between the sense of urgency and Carpini’s use of the “evidence” is obvious.

Influenced by such a sense, Carpini’s claim to the credibility of his text was of special significance to his readers. But did this mean that Carpini paid no attention to those marvels and made no mention of them in his text, in contrast to other medieval travelers, or did he make a distinction between the factual and the fictional? From his text what can be observed is what he considers credible or trustworthy, not otherwise. This is especially true for his mention of “monsters” in three cases: first, the monsters who had the likeness of women; second, those who had a human shape; and third, those who too had a human shape, but with only one arm with a hand and one foot.[[70]](#footnote-70) When mentioning monsters, he in the meantime emphasizes that his party were told so either “definitely” or “as a certain fact” or “for a fact.”[[71]](#footnote-71) His mention of monsters in this way clearly lays particular stress on the aforesaid credibility and not on the fact/fiction dichotomy, as we often insist on today. This can easily be comprehended in a medieval context within which 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 not two but three sources of credibility altogether to bolster his authority as an author: the sense of urgency, the extreme suffering, and the two types of travel-related evidence, namely the witnesses and the official written documentation, respectively. Furthermore, the three sources of credibility are closely interlinked, which, however, has been neglected in previous scholarship. If the three added to the credibility of Carpini’s text, then what did he write about his travel and how did he comprehend and make his readers comprehend his encounters with the alien people, the Mongols?

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

For one who came into contact with the unfamiliar, alien in the Middle Ages but who wanted to know and better understand them, to transform the unfamiliar, alien into the familiar might be a good choice to achieve that aim. This was especially true for Carpini. Why did Carpini transform the unfamiliar, alien, the Mongols, into the familiar? And how? In his text, we can discern a background that helps answer these two questions: the above-mentioned sense of urgency. Taking as example Carpini’s domestication of the Mongols’ *ritus* (“religion”)[[73]](#footnote-73), we can understand that.

Carpini’s domestication of the Mongols’ religion is included mainly in Chapters III and IX.[[74]](#footnote-74) In Chapter III, the first embodiment of his domestication worthy of mention is the heading he gives to the chapter, in particular the words like *peccata* (“sins”) it contains.[[75]](#footnote-75) How to understand these words? At the outset of the chapter, we can find the answer. When speaking of the Mongols’ worship of God, he writes as follows:

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 … (My emphasis)[[76]](#footnote-76)

Carpini’s wording here is reminiscent of Latin Christians’ belief in God. Whether he sees the Mongols’ belief as Christian? To answer this question, it is necessary to take into consideration three factors. The first is the belief of Carpini the author and that of his readers. Certainly, both his own and his readers’ were Christian, because he himself was a mendicant friar and was writing “to all the faithful of Christ.”[[77]](#footnote-77) The second is the Mongols’ belief. Although Carpini speaks of theirs as belief in “one God,” in reality they appeared to believe in *Tenggeri* (“Heaven”), a god in heaven, together with *Itügen*, an earth- or fertility-goddess, according to Jackson.[[78]](#footnote-78) Whatever the similarity between it and the Christian “God,”[[79]](#footnote-79) they were two different religious beliefs. So how did Carpini tell his Christian readers such a kind of belief? And how did he make them understand it, at least to some extent? These were two questions facing him as an author. The third is the need to carry out “the Lord Pope’s mandate” and to “be of some service to Christians,” that is to say, to learn “the truth about the desire and intention of the Tartars” and then “make this known to the Christins,” in order to prepare them for “a sudden attack” from the Mongols.[[80]](#footnote-80) Here the role that the sense of urgency plays in Carpini’s consideration is apparent. Then what were the desire and intention of the Mongols? How to know them? These two questions were of great importance to Carpini. As an envoy of the pope to the east especially to the Tartars, he was impelled to respond to that need and to answer the questions.

In the face of the difference between Latin Christians’ and the Mongols’ beliefs on the one hand, and in the face of the urgent need for a knowledge of the Mongols on the other, Carpini did need to, and could only, appeal to what he could utilize, which is to say the related preconceptions both of his own and of others, or any mixture of these, and what he saw or heard from others about the Mongols during his journey. Reading the text, we can conclude that the related sources of knowledge available to him include at least two: a knowledge of Christianity both of his own and of others—his companion, for instance; and that of the Mongols’ “present Emperor” he heard from “the Christians of his household,” as he writes.[[81]](#footnote-81) Such sources of knowledge particularly his own and that provided by “the Christians” are crucial for our understanding of his view on the Mongols’ belief: according to the above wording, he did utilize, at least partly, these sources of knowledge. This can easily be understood: a preconceived knowledge of Christianity particularly his own belief in one God provided him with a precondition for transforming the unfamiliar, the Mongols’ belief, into the familiar, his own and his readers’ faith; and his comprehension of the Mongols’ belief, perhaps based upon a comparison between it and Christianity, might influence his Christianization of the emperor’s belief and the Mongols’ in general, at least to some extent.

Carpini’s domestication or Christianization of the Mongols’ religion is not confined to their worship of God. In relation to it, he continues to discuss what they believe to be “sins.” Part of his discussion runs like this:

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*) … (My emphasis)[[82]](#footnote-82)

Even though he observes the difference between the sins as seen by the Mongols and those in the eyes of Christians, Carpini uses the expressions “sin” and “sins” to refer to what the Mongols commit. From such a kind of use we can identify a Christian way of thinking. If these are viewed as sins, then what is/are not? To this the following words give a short yet clear 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. (My emphasis)[[83]](#footnote-83)

By exemplifying various acts considered “no sin” by the Mongols, Carpini in fact makes three different but related points. First, while the Mongols consider those acts no sin, the Christians are expected to see them as quite the opposite. Second, the Mongols’ view of sins looks very peculiar in the eyes of a Christian, because it is obviously unacceptable in Christianity. Third, as a people that holds such a view, the Mongols seem threatening, for they think it 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,” which might remind the Christians of a possible Mongol invasion and thus make them have a fear of the Mongols. Again, the sense of urgency plays a part in his domestication of the Mongols’ view of sins.

In addition to their view of sins, Carpini domesticates, albeit partly, the Mongols’ divinations, soothsayings and the like. Of this one example is that he views as “a god” what the Mongols call *Utoga* (“Itoga”), whom they believe to speak to them “when they receive an answer from the demons.”[[84]](#footnote-84) Carpini’s view to some degree parallels and is complemented by Rubruck’s of the similar issue. As Rubruck sees, the Mongols’ soothsayers are their “priests” and a chief of them “a sort of pontiff.”[[85]](#footnote-85) By comparing them, we have a better understanding of Carpini’s domestication here.

As we have seen, all the instances discussed above are of the domestication of the belief of the Mongols as a whole. Is there any one on a more particular level? In Chapter IX, we find that there is. It is about the domestication of the belief of the Mongols’ “present Emperor.” Carpini tells the emperor’s belief through his “witnesses” in the emperor’s household:

The Christians of his household also told us that they firmly believed 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 he always has *a chapel*(*christianorum capellam*)before his chief tent … (My emphasis)[[86]](#footnote-86)

No doubt, the expressions such as “clerics” and “a chapel” used here are also those familiar to both Carpini and his readers. By using them, the emperor’s belief is also Christianized, though only to a certain degree. Why does Carpini present the reader with such a view of the emperor’s belief? Despite giving little direct information about his attitudes towards 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,” so they will arrange it in chapters, and that what the last chapter, Chapter IX, discusses includes the court of the emperor.[[87]](#footnote-87) In what he tells, we can discern a sense of urgency as well.

As shown above, the sense of urgency plays a significant role in Carpini’s domestication or Christianization of the Mongols’ religion. But here one other question deserves to be answered: why does he Christianize it, rather than transforming it into any other faiths? To answer this question, it is necessary to consider the superiority of Christianity reflected in his words. Carpini was a mendicant friar who wrote in the 1240s, when Latin Christendom was extending its spiritual limits by Christianizing other peoples.[[88]](#footnote-88) A mendicant friar, an envoy of the pope, and an author who was mindful of the welfare of the Christians, Carpini’s Christianization of the Mongols’ religion can be safely said to be influenced by his own superiority of Christianity.

His Christianization or domestication of the Mongols’ religion, however, has its limits. They are discernable from the cases we have examined above. In the case of the Mongols’ worship of God, he, after saying that the Mongols believe in one God, tells his readers two things peculiar to a Christian. One is the way in which they worship God: they worship Him with no prayers or praises or any kind of ceremony.[[89]](#footnote-89) The other is that they, while believing in one God, have idols of felt made in the image of man, put them on each side of the door of the dwelling, always offer to them the first milk of every cow and mare, and have made “an idol to the first Emperor.”[[90]](#footnote-90) This last phenomenon, the making of an idol to the first emperor, to a great extent influenced one’s inter- or cross-cultural contact with the Mongols, as said in the text. Before our more detailed discussion of this in the next section, here we can and do identify an influence exerted by the practice of having idols in the example Carpini provides: in his encounter with the Mongols, Michael, one of the chief dukes of Russia, when told to bow towards the south to Chingis Chan, the image of a dead man in his eyes, saw it as unlawful for a Christian to do that and refused it, and, because of this, was finally beheaded.[[91]](#footnote-91)

The limits of Carpini’s domestication can also be seen in the Mongols’ view of sins. Of course, he does use those terms familiar to his Christian readers like “sin” and “sins.” Yet under the label “sins,” he gives a long list of the examples of them which look so unfamiliar to a Christian.[[92]](#footnote-92) As to those that the Mongols consider “no sin,” what he says too offers an example of his limited domestication, because the various acts he exemplifies for it remind the reader that the Mongols are a people so different from them.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Also limited is his domestication of the Mongols’ divinations, soothsayings and similar practices. In addition to the god *Itoga*, Carpini mentions their way of purifying things—purification by fire. As he says, in the eyes of the Mongols, if fire falls from heaven on cattle or men or any similar thing befalls them, they consider them unclean or unlucky and then necessary to be purified by fire by their diviners.[[94]](#footnote-94) Such a practice was obviously peculiar to a Christian. Like the practice of making an idol to the emperor, this one had much to do with the Mongols’ encounters with envoys (of course including Carpini, as we shall see in the next section), princes or “any person” visiting them: they were obliged to pass between the fires together with the gifts they brought in order to be purified.[[95]](#footnote-95)

as we have seen, the domestication or Christianization of the religion of the Mongols as a whole is limited. So is the domestication of the belief of “the present Emperor” on a more particular level, for, as Carpini writes, he was only *believed to become*, and strictly speaking *was* *not*, a Christian and actually the Emperor of the Mongols, a people so different from Latin Christians.[[96]](#footnote-96)

The limits of Carpini’s domestication were, too, influenced by the aforementioned sense of urgency and superiority of Christianity. Suffice it to say as follows. As an envoy of the pope to the east particularly to the Mongols, what Carpini mainly wanted to do was, in some scholars’ view, to gather information on the Mongols, a fearsome people, and to make it known to the Christians.[[97]](#footnote-97) Carpini’s writing of his travel text or, to use his own words in the Prologue, “reporting”things they themselves “have seen or heard from others,”[[98]](#footnote-98) was undoubtedly driven by his own sense of urgency and that of Latin Christendom in general. His own consideration of it as a report, and many scholars’ in their research,[[99]](#footnote-99) helps explain to a great extent why he pays so much attention to the topics like “war,” the Mongols’ “battle array,” “arms,” “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 the text.[[100]](#footnote-100) As part of his text, Carpini’s limited domestication or Christianization of the Mongols’ religion was also influenced by his superiority of Christianity. Although he sometimes presented the reader with a positive (though as well as negative) description of the Mongols (e.g., their humble lifestyle and endurance),[[101]](#footnote-101) his religious and moral superiority over the Mongols was evident, especially in his view of what the Mongols consider “no sin.”[[102]](#footnote-102)

Whether Carpini was curious about the unfamiliar, alien things like the above-mentioned? To this we have reasons to give the answer that he was. Just to give one example: as he says, in the eyes of the Mongols, to act contrary to the prohibitions and commandments of God is no sin;[[103]](#footnote-103) this would surely be peculiar to a Christian used to those teachings on “sins,” thereby arousing a lot of curiosity about that, both Carpini’s and the reader’s. 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. But is there any relationship between the curiosity and his superiority of Christianity? Here it suffices to say that as a Christian, Carpini’s curiosity can be said to be also Christian, which is to say what a Christian had, not pure curiosity in a strict sense.

An envoy, Carpini would certainly endeavor to write down what he saw or heard during his journey. But this was only part of his experience: before writing that down, he did need to and actually experience the whole journey. It was during the journey that his encounters with the alien more specifically the Mongols occurred. So what 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 at the same time crossed linguistical, political, and cultural ones. From this arose a problem of considerable importance: his encounters with the alien people, the Mongols, and then his inter- or cross-cultural communication with them. In many of such encounters or contacts described in the text, Carpini’s status as either an envoy or a friar or both played a significant role.

When he was in the territory of the Mongols, Carpini encountered one of the alien things: the Mongols’ belief in purification of everything by fire. According to it,

when *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. (My emphasis)[[104]](#footnote-104)

Undoubtedly, Carpini was one among those who were obliged to be purified by fire, since he was certainly both one of the “envoys” and of “any persons” mentioned here. Was he willing to do that? Whether he did it according to the obligation? As said in the text, when taken to Bati’s court, Carpini’s party were told to pass between two fires.[[105]](#footnote-105) This was a thing, Carpini acknowledged, they were really unwilling to do. Yet, finally, they probably did it, because to the Mongols’ requirement—that they would have to pass between the fires in order to show that they were not planning to do any evil to the Mongol lord or happened to be carrying poison—they replied that they would go through so as not to be suspected of such things.[[106]](#footnote-106) Here, we can observe the tension between Carpini’ status as a friar and an envoy: on the one hand, he, the friar, with his own Christian faith and superiority of Christianity might consider the Mongols’ belief in purification by fire inferior and/or even absurd, and was unwilling to act according to it; on the other, he, the envoy, with the pope’s “mandate,” needed to try his hard to “carry through the Lord Pope’s command to a successful conclusion,”[[107]](#footnote-107) and, if necessary, to find the common ground of the two sides by not totally refusing what the Mongols required them to do. It was between such a tension that what Carpini’s party finally did confirmed the pope’s praise of those mentioned in one of his papal bulls addressed to the Emperor of the Tartars: “prudent and discreet men” and “men remarkable for their religious spirit, comely in their virtue.”[[108]](#footnote-108) What drove him to do that? Apart from the above-said superiority of Christianity, the sense of urgency that drove the pope’s “command” did drive him as well.

Their decisions like this were also made when they were asked by the Mongols to give gifts. This occurred many times during their journey—totally *ten times*, as described in the text.[[109]](#footnote-109) Among them one case was that Carpini mentions that the envoys sent from other parts of the world to the Emperor of the Tartars were asked for many presents both by the princes and others of high and lower rank, which also applied to his party.[[110]](#footnote-110) This caused a new problem for him: he was a mendicant friar, espousing the ideal of the friars, namely that of voluntary poverty and possessing nothing but those for basic needs;[[111]](#footnote-111) in addition, the pope sent his party no presents except those for their daily expenses; [[112]](#footnote-112) both of these made it difficult to satisfy the requirement of the Mongols. What would they do? Ultimately, they obviously chose to satisfy their requirement. For this they gave their own 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. (My emphasis)[[113]](#footnote-113)

Like their consideration in the case of the Mongols’ belief in purification by fire, here they took into consideration the real situation once again. On many other occasions, such a kind of consideration can be found as well, of which one significant example deserves to be given:

He told us that if we wished to go to them 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 fulfil 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 shown here, they bore in mind their mission in their encounters with the Mongols and at the same time remembered what they needed to do especially when Christendom, from which they were dispatched, was facing possible threats from the Mongols, in whose territory they were carrying out their mission.

Yet, they were not always able to consider the situation as said above, both because finally they had nothing to give and perhaps because they, after using up all of their things, did not make efforts any more to give gifts. It was especially so when *Cuyuc* (Güyük, or Güyüg) the emperor, after he was elected, received all the envoys. Here the problem for Carpini’s party was that unlike other envoys who gave so many gifts to the emperor, they, when asked if they wished to present any gifts, had by then used up everything and thus had nothing to give.[[115]](#footnote-115) Despite a short description given by Carpini, we have reasons to think that the refusal of giving gifts to the emperor in fact challenged the Mongolian notion of gift-giving and perhaps the Mongol-European relations in the sense that the refusal also influenced the emperor’s attitude towards Christendom.[[116]](#footnote-116) Carpini’s case bore a resemblance to Rubruck’s. As written in the *Itinerarium*, Rubruck also had experiences of being asked for gifts many times during his journey, and finally, on his road to the great khan, had nothing to give as gifts.[[117]](#footnote-117)

Effective or not, the consideration of Carpini’s party was not limited to the problem of gift-giving. As envoys, they had to go somewhere to meet some important persons. When led to the *orda* or tent of the chief of Corenza and told to genuflect three times on the left knee before the door of the dwelling and to pay great attention not to step on the threshold of the door, they were most careful about that, this time in order not to be sentenced to death because of knowingly treading on the threshold of the dwelling of any chief.[[118]](#footnote-118) This situation had a similarity with Rubruck’s.[[119]](#footnote-119) For Rubruck, his party not merely were warned as Carpini’s party, but also did face the problem that his colleague was not allowed to go because of treading on the threshold.[[120]](#footnote-120) In addition to the above rule, Carpini’s party also paid attention to others that envoys needed to obey. When summoned to meet Bati, his party, after having declared their purpose, sat down on the left, as all envoys did on the way to the emperor, and, in contrast to that, were always placed on the right on their way back.[[121]](#footnote-121) When they were for the first time summoned to enter the tent of Güyük in his presence since he had been made Emperor, they once again, following the rule of the Mongols, entered by a door on the east side, for no one 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, prompted by the mission and behind it their sense of urgency, gave much attention to the real situation.

Whether they would act like this throughout the journey? According to the text, of course not. On the day when the chiefs conducted the election for Güyük, they were invited inside to drink with the Mongols. Facing this, initially they probably showed their respect to those who invited them, because those kept on playing them with drinks to such an extent that they could possibly not stand it and were not used to it.[[123]](#footnote-123) Yet finally, they refused it, but politely. This is evidenced by such words 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 what they did mentioned in the above examples, the reaction of Carpini’s party here to the Mongols’ deeds was relatively more complex.

Such a kind of reaction, however, did not occur in their encounter with the ceremony for the enthronement of Güyük. While the Mongols were saying prayers and genuflecting towards the south, Carpini’s party were unwilling to genuflect because they were uncertain whether the Mongols were uttering incantations or bending the knee to God or another.[[125]](#footnote-125) Here among them Carpini seemed to act more like a friar than an envoy: what drove him seemed to be his own belief and behind it his superiority of Christianity, not other factors.

Even so, they did not forget one most important thing: to make the pope’s desire and his letter known to the King and princes and all the Mongols and to have their reply to it. In this direction, some of their attempts merit our special attention. One was their encounter with 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 chief men from the camp came to meet them, they, before telling the men more about themselves, answered the men as they replied to the armed Tartars. Yet, after that, they also made known to the men the following things, among others: who was the pope; his desire that all Christians should be at peace with the Tartars; why he, through the envoys and his letter, urged the Tartars to become Christians in order to be saved; his aim to tell the Tartars that he was amazed at the great slaughter of men especially of Christians by them and to urge them to avoid such things in the future and to do penance for their past deeds, and finally to ask for a reply in a letter to him to tell what they wanted to do in the future.[[127]](#footnote-127) This can really be seen as one of the most significant attempts to achieve their goal as papal envoys. In the meantime, it can also be regard as part of the evidence for the impact of both the sense of urgency and the superiority of Christianity of Carpini’s party.

As mentioned above, the pope urged the Tartars to become Christians through his letter. Then, for Carpini’s party, two questions to be considered were: how to hand such a letter to its intended receivers? And how to make it understood and, if possible, have a reply? During their journey, four of their efforts were of special importance: to hand the pope’s letter to the chief of Corenza and to try to make him understand it; before presenting it to Bati, to make an effort to find a competent interpreter to translate it; prior to the election of Güyük, to send its translation to him through Bati; and on their return journey, to endeavor to have the pope’ letter replied.[[128]](#footnote-128) As said in the text, in general all of these but the first (because of no competent translator and therefore no translation of it) were fruitful. Even in the last effort, Carpini’s party can be said to have fulfilled their goal, for despite no answer provided by Bati to the pope’s letter, there was the emperor’s.[[129]](#footnote-129)

As to their refusal of the emperor’s proposal to send envoys with them, Carpini’s party in fact considered related matters really as did those who were mindful of the welfare of the Christians. This is evident from their fear of the five cases mentioned in the text: the first is that they were afraid if the envoys knew the dissensions and wars between the Christians, they might be encouraged to make attacks; the second that the real purpose of them might be to spy out the land; the third that they might be killed by arrogant and proud Christians and therefore, given the threat posed by the Mongols, might cause a greater one to Christendom; the fourth that a consequence similar to what is mentioned in the third might be caused by taking the envoys from Carpini’s party by force; and the fifth that the coming of them might serve no good purpose.[[130]](#footnote-130) Evidently, the above five cases embodied the concern of Carpini’s party both as envoys and, more generally, as Christians.

Conclusion

As we have seen, to have a close reading of John of Plano Carpini’s *Ystoria Mongalorum* offers us an opportunity to reveal another source of credibility that Carpini appealed to, namely a widespread sense of urgency, in addition to the two sources of credibility pointed out by Legassie, the extreme suffering a traveler endured and the official written documentation he used. Moreover, such a sense of urgency did influence Carpini’s appeal to the other two sources. Such a close reading, on a more general level, prompts us to raise the question of whether a widespread sense of urgency among a community like medieval Christendom, from which Carpini’s party were dispatched to the Mongols, a nation-state in the modern era, or even the whole world today will help one claim and bolster his/her authority or the credibility of what he/she says or writes, and how it will if the answer is the affirmative.

In order to understand, and make his readers understand, the alien, unfamiliar culture of the Mongols, Carpini attempted to domesticate them, that is to say to transform the unfamiliar into the familiar. Because of this the Mongols’ religion was to a certain extent domesticated or Christianized. But his domestication was limited. It was in both what was domesticated and what was not that the sense of urgency, the superiority of Christianity, and in relation to it his curiosity played an important part. Bearing this in mind, we can deepen our understanding of all of them—the sense, the superiority, the curiosity, and the domestication and its limits. Such an understanding goes beyond existing views of them all.

When carrying out the pope’s “mandate” among the Mongols, Carpini’s party were facing the problem of inter- or cross-cultural contact. This was exemplified by the following seven cases: their acceptance of the ritual of purification by fire; their gift-giving in the face of the Mongols’ gift-soliciting and their refusal of it when they had no presents to give; their attention to the Mongols’ rules concerning entering the tent and seat-taking; their initial acceptance of drinking with those inviting them and final refusal of it; they did the opposite while the Mongols genuflected; their efforts to make the pope’s desire known to the Mongols and his letter translated and then known to those such as the emperor and replied by him; and their consideration of five cases in which the Mongol envoys proposed to be sent might be harmful to the Christians. In all of these cases existed a close relationship between the attitudes of Carpini’s party towards the Mongols and the above-mentioned sense of urgency or superiority of Christianity or both. By making explicit such a kind of relationship, we can reveal the underlying logic of the inter- or cross-cultural contact of Carpini’s party with the Mongols and, more generally, provide a case for the study of inter- or cross-cultural contacts in history.

In sum, by addressing the above questions, we provide the historian, and researchers in this and other related fields more generally, with a new perspective on Carpini’s travel text or report. Moreover, it has important implications for our understanding of the following four issues: first, the need to place a text like Carpini’s within its proper historical context; second, the significance of a widespread sense of urgency to one’s claim to his/her authority; third, the underlying logic of one’s attempts to comprehend the unfamiliar, alien; and fourth, that of one’s inter- or cross-cultural contacts.

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, issue 1 (2000): 5–35, notably page 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 and London, 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 to the specific travel text by John of Plano Carpini titled *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 and New York, 2016): 31–54; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, second edition (London and New York, 2018) (first edition Harlow, 2005); Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge and New York, 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 and New York, 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 on this text, as are the respective English and Italian names of the author: John of Plano Carpini and Giovanni di Pian di Carpine. Here, I follow the use of names 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 other prominent scholars.. I also follow many scholars in referring to the author as John of Plano Carpini and 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 and London, 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 and New York, 2016): 297–342; Joan-Pau Rubiés, ed., *Medieval Ethnographies: European Perceptions of the World Beyond* (London and New York, 2016) (first published in Burlington, 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 and New York, 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: World II: The Mongol Empire: Global Race as Absolute Power” in *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 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* (hereafter *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, note 4 and 150, note 6. [↑](#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 Phillips’s avoidance of the use of the term “race” and her explanation for it, 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. Jacques Paviot, “Chapter 5: The Mendicant Friars: Actors in Diplomatic Encounters with the Mongols,” 119-136, see the title of the chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Jacques Paviot, “Chapter 5: The Mendicant Friars: Actors in Diplomatic Encounters with the Mongols,” 119-136, especially 130-131, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Here I use Debra Higgs Strickland’s expression, see Debra Higgs Strickland, “2 Text, Image, and Contradiction in the *Devisement dou monde*,” in S.C. Akbari and A. Iannucci, eds., with the assistance of John Tulk, *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London, 2008): 23-59, especially 32, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Here I use the term as Jacques Le Goff and Sharon Kinoshita use it, either in its noun or verb form. Their use, and Strickland’s use of “transformed,” is done generally in a similar manner, I think. For Le Goff’s use, see Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London, 1980), 195, 199. For Kinoshita’s use, see Sharon Kinoshita, “3 Marco Polo’s *Le Devisement dou monde* and the Tributary East,” in S.C. Akbari and A. Iannucci, eds., with the assistance of John Tulk, *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West*,60-86. For Strickland’s use, see above. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West,* “3 The Mongol Invasions of 1241-4,” 65-91; and 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. Here I follow the translation by A.C. Moule and Paul Pelliot, see 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 (hereafter *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* (hereafter *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. Here I use the English translation edited by Dawson. Unless otherwise noted, the English translations are 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. See 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, 228, 231, 271, 304, 305, 306, 308, 310, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 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, 60-61, 66, 69, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Peter Jackson, introduction, notes and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan, 98, 100, 104-105, 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 note “391-4.” [↑](#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, 284-285, 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, 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, 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 *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Peter Jackson, introduction, notes and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan, 21. For the Mongols’ belief in *Tenggeri*, see also Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, second edition, 34, 47-48, 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Generally speaking, the similarity drawn by scholars between “Tenggeri” and “God” is their monotheistic characteristics. 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 and New York, 2012), 236; Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism*, 30-31, 65; James Muldoon, ed., *Travelers, Intellectuals, and the World beyond Medieval Europe* (London and New York, 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*, pp. 275-284, 293-302; Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mission to Asia*, Chapters VI and VIII, pp. 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 such a kind of 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 the influence of the refusal of gift-giving in Carpini’s case over the Mongolian notion of gift-giving and its possible impact on the Christian-Mongol relations, see Adriano Duque, “Chapter 8: 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, 188, 190, 190, 194, 196, 200-201, 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 particular discussion of Rubruck’s case, 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, 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*, trans. Peter Jackson, 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)