SPECIAL MILITARY TACTICS EMPLOYED BY THE MONGOLS DURING THEIR 13-th CENTURY CONQUEST

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UDK 355/359(=012)"12"
355.48(=012)"12"
355.48(4)"12"
94(517)"12"
Pregledni rad
Primljeno: 16.VIII.2023.
Prihvaćeno: 2.XI.2023.

SUMMARY

The paper analyses certain military tactics employed by the Mongolian army, initially led by Genghis Khan and later by his successors. Since their contemporaries, such as Thomas of Spalato and Rogerius of Apulia, described them as barbarians and bloodthirsty conquerors, a view that some historians embraced without question, in recent decades there has been a need to shed new light on such perceptions. This paper will focus on the successful tactics employed by Mongol generals, that is, military leaders, on the battlefield. One reason the Mongols gladly accepted negative descriptions was the element of psychological warfare, which they successfully used against European and other armies. Despite the misconception that the Mongols were unruly and chaotic in battle, a detailed review will provide insights into how and why they fostered such an image. In addition to instilling fear in opponents, resulting in demoralisation and a reduced ability to act on the field, another frequently achieved goal was gaining victory over equal or more numerous opponents by minimising one's own casualties. This is precisely what the Mongol leaders wanted to achieve: to continue the gradual conquest of enemy territory.

Keywords: Mongol invasion, special military tactics, medieval psychological warfare, terror

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Mongol Empire in the 13th century impacted many existing empires and medieval states across both Europe and Asia. Some of them, like the Khwarazmian Empire, were almost obliterated. Others, like the medieval kingdoms of Poland and Hungary, suffered significant defeats on the battlefield, resulting in

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devastation and pillage. The Jin Dynasty, a historical empire located in modern-day China, met its abrupt end in 1234 when the Mongols forced the last emperor of the dynasty to commit suicide. These examples serve as a reminder that the Mongol campaigns had long-lasting effects on medieval states across Eurasia. This paper will focus on a specific aspect of Mongol warfare – their special military tactics and practices employed in open combat. Specifically, it will delve into the use of medieval psychological warfare, focusing on how fear was leveraged to reduce combative readiness and bring disruption into enemy ranks. Additionally, Mongol exploitation of mass killings will also be addressed in one of the chapters. Their shrewd (ab)use of spreading rumours depicting them as a demonic foe sometimes resulted in cities surrendering without resistance. Moreover, the paper will explain several frequently used tactics, like feigned retreat and regicide, providing the reader with historical context as to how and why these strategies were employed by Mongol armies. Lastly, it is essential to highlight that this paper will not address the social and economic aspects of the Mongol invasions or their long-term strategies. Instead, it will focus on several commonly used military tactics on the battlefield.

2. MEDIEVAL PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

2.1 MONGOLS AS BARBARIANS AND "DEMONS"

The Mongolian army confronted Europeans for the first time in the thirteenth century. However, before European warriors faced Mongol horsemen on the open battlefield, a narrative about the distant Mongols or Tartars, as their European contemporaries called them, had already emerged. A particular conception, based on an earlier narrative, was the story about John the Presbyter (Prester John).[1] According to this narrative, John the Presbyter was the lost king of a Christian state somewhere far in the East, and this information mixed with biblical images of Gog and Magog (Sardelić, 2012: 101). Such a Christian ruler could be a valuable ally for European Christians, especially in conflicts with Muslims, but that idyllic image quickly faded (Connell, 1973: 119). The Mongols attacked the borders of Kievan Rus in 1223, and in 1237, they moved towards Poland and Hungary. Therefore, it became evident that this was not a lost Christian ruler but rather an invader who did not share the same religious views as the Europeans.

The Mongols were not the first steppe peoples to encounter Europeans. Before them, there were the Huns, Pechenegs, and Cumans. European literate contemporaries always labeled these steppe peoples as "barbarians", attributing them characteristics such as disobedience, odd customs, and a simple nature.[2] Proof that not only Europeans used the term "barbarians" is also visible in Chinese sources. According

[1] For more information, see De Rachewiltz (1972).

[2] A more detailed discussion of the perception of barbarians in medieval Europe can be found in Jones (1971): 376-407; Discussion of the other/others as a concept within the Western Christendom narrative in Berend (2001).

to some Chinese authors, the nomads (that is, the Mongols) were viewed as selfish, and their repulsive appearance often led the Chinese to refuse to trade with them (Sardelić, 2011: 4). As for the European contemporaries, Matthew Paris referred to the Tatars, his term for the Mongols, as "beasts that look more like monsters than people." Furthermore, Matthew points out that they are "bloodthirsty" and "drink blood" (Richards Luard, 1877: 76-77). Such descriptive images, and the fear they evoke, fit into the narrative of the Mongols as savages and demons who behave nothing like Christians, let alone civilised people.

The same descriptions appear in Thomas of Spalato's work *Historia Salonitana*, where the author describes the episode of the Mongol army's invasion of the Hungarian Kingdom. Thomas described the Mongol invaders as savages in the 39th chapter of his work entitled DE SEVITIA TATARORUM, translated as ON THE CRUELTY OF THE TATARS. The Mongolian leader, who wanted to kill Béla IV, King of Hungary and Croatia, was perceived as "godless, bloodthirsty, cruel and frantic" (Perić et al., 2006: 294-305). His horsemen killed everyone they found in the open, beyond the safety of the city walls. The scenes of carnage terrified the local population and refugees so much that, according to Thomas' testimony, "they fled to safety without even waiting for the children, driven by the fear of death" (Perić et al., 2006: 296-299).

The Mongols are depicted as God's punishment by the medieval Persian author Ata-Malik Juvayni. The episode in which Genghis Khan assumes the role of a sin punisher is described very vividly, probably to leave a lasting impression. To prove that he truly is a messenger from God, Genghis Khan answers:

> O people, know that you have committed great sins, and that the great ones among you have committed these sins. If you ask me what proof I have for these words, I say it is because I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you (Boyle, 1958: 105).

It was a powerful and dramatic speech delivered by a terrifying figure in the pulpit. Genghis Khan successfully rationalised his invasion and destruction of the Khwarazmian Empire using sinful imagology (May, 2018: 32-33). With this ideological image in mind, the conqueror achieved two goals. The first was the rationalisation and legitimisation of the conquered territory within the Empire. The second was to ensure that the conquered inhabitants would not rebel, as doing so would be seen as rebelling against God's will, which is unacceptable from a religious point of view.

2.2 THE USE OF TERROR

The cruelty and massacres described by Rogerius of Apulia and Thomas of Spalato certainly contributed to the spread of the image of the Mongols as a race of savages and heathens. In the middle of the thirteenth century, the image of the Antichrist, a threat to all Christians, reappeared in Europe. Matthew Paris and Ivo of Narbonne use the apocalyptic term to describe foreign invaders (Connell, 1973: 123-124). However, it must be pointed out that the term "Antichrist" was not uniformly associated with the Mongols throughout Europe but was specifically used by these two medieval authors (Connell, 1973: 124; Sardelić, 2011: 6-7). In his work *Carmen Miserabile*, Rogerius of Apulia mentions that the Mongols "ruthlessly beheaded the nobles, citizens, soldiers and canons on a field outside the city," and afterward, "violated the saints' graves, trampled upon the relics with their sinful feet, smashed to pieces the censers, crosses, golden chalices and vessels, and whatever else was designed for the service of the altar" (Bak and Rady, 2010: 200-201). From this description, it is evident why such a military practice of the Mongols could be interpreted as blasphemous and merciless. With the evident damage and the collection of spoils of war, the Mongols clearly wanted to unequivocally demonstrate that they did not hesitate to commit such dishonourable acts against anyone who opposed them.

The Mongol khan and his generals allowed such cruel behaviour against the defeated enemy, and the reasons are visible in the work of John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*,[3] a papal envoy visiting the Great Khan. According to this Italian Franciscan and diplomat, the Mongols do not always fulfil the previously made promises but change them depending on their own needs (Hildinger, 1996: 80, 86-87). Such behaviour stems from the steppe belief in the "heavenly mandate" (*Tenggeri*), which grants the Mongol khan the heavenly right to rule the whole world (Jackson, 2018: 45-46). His goal is to conquer the whole visible world, and in this quest, he may use all available methods. Not every steppe ruler receives this kind of mandate at the beginning of his reign, but only those who are charismatic enough and manage to prove themselves in battle. The shaman may confer the mandate during a ceremony, providing both a blessing and religious significance, but the ruler must confirm it, usually through military means, i.e., through successful expansion (Hildinger, 1996: 30-31). In this light, we can more easily understand the purpose of the Mongol khan. His goal is to conquer the whole world, and all its inhabitants must submit to his rule. His title is confirmed through successful military campaigns. Resistance is not acceptable, often met with immediate punishment following defeat in battle. Scenes of mutilation, murder, rape, arson, and looting serve as a warning to all those who dare to oppose him. Such display of terror and cruel activities in front of witnesses has an essential component: instilling fear, with the aim of subduing the people without a fight (Sardelić, 2011: 15). A similar practice of using fear is mentioned by Thomas of Spalato. To showcase their cruelty, the Mongols dumped

[3] The information about the origins of the Mongols, their customs, and their warfare practices presented in Carpini's *Ystoria Mongalorum* was directly taken from the 1996 publication, translated and edited by Erik Hildinger.

numerous piles of murdered people on the banks of the Danube River (Perić et al., 2006: 278-279). The goal was to demoralise the refugees and the rest of the royal army, which was present in the Hungarian Empire on the other side of the Danube.

Another reason mentioned in Carpini's work is the perception of Mongols as a coherent social group and their negative attitude towards other ethnic groups. Carpini writes that the Mongols are no strangers to killing people, attacking the territory of another ruler, acquiring other people's goods by dishonest means, engaging in harm, fornication, or acting against God's commandments (Hildinger, 1996. 45). Considering the need for expansion based on the heavenly mandate, and given that these sinful actions are not forbidden in Mongolian society when used against other people, it becomes understandable why the friar, hailing from the Christendom background, seems surprised, if not shocked, by the presence of such social practices. Moreover, in that same work, the author mentions that Mongols are extremely disciplined soldiers, obedient to their commanders and superiors, even more so than their European contemporaries. Among them, there are no wars, quarrels, injuries, or murders; each man respects his fellow, and they are friendly to each other. Although food is scarce among them, there is still enough to share (Hildinger, 1996: 50-54). If we take John Carpini's account literally, Mongols value each other much more than foreigners, which includes the nations they attack.[4] Seen in this way, discipline and obedience, as necessary prerequisites for high-quality military organisation, are deeply rooted in Mongol society.

2.3 MASSACRES AND THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Another way of taking revenge against the enemy for prolonged resistance was mass slaughter. The Mongols often committed such slaughter, and many medieval sources report instances of such practice. Thomas of Spalato mentions that the Mongols massacred prisoners after the battle on the Sajó River in 1241. According to him, all prisoners were "slaughtered in the same merciless way" (Perić et al., 2006: 270-273). A more detailed picture of the misfortunes that befell the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Hungary is provided by Rogerius. He states that the number of those killed, that is, those who fled after the defeat of the Hungarian army on the Sajó River, was so great that it cannot be counted, but one thing is certain – the number is huge. Furthermore, the same author presents a chaotic illustration of the landscape: people were killed on the roads for days after the battle, corpses of the dead lay everywhere on the ground, and the whole earth was stained red with blood (Bak and Rady, 2010: 186-189). An image like this provides ac valuable insight into the mindset of a medieval author who recently witnessed defeat and slaughter at the hands of an invading army. The terror is so deeply embedded in

[4] Sardelić points out caution needed in interpreting the statements from the work of John of Plano Carpini, suggesting that the monk may have exaggerated in expressing the virtues of the Mongols, especially when considering his later statement, "It is not possible to list all their bad habits because there are too many", Sardelić (2011): 15.

his expression that everything suggests that the Hungarians suffered a defeat from which recovery, if possible at all, would be difficult.[5]

The reason behind the massacre after the conquest of the city of Nishapur in Persia was revenge. Persian author Juvayni states that the residents offered exceptional resistance, and the fighting around the city walls was fierce (Boyle, 1958: 176-178). In retaliation for the resistance, the Mongol ruler ordered his soldiers to massacre the whole population. As a result, neither cats nor dogs were left alive, and it is estimated that around one hundred thousand people were killed in the region (Sardelić, 2011: 6). Another reason that explains the background of this cruel treatment against the conquered population is mentioned by Saunders in his work "The History of the Mongol Conquests" (1971). The news of committing a massacre and terrorising the local population could force the inhabitants of the neighbouring town to surrender without offering resistance (Saunders 1971: 56). This way, one's own losses are minimised, and the rested army can advance unhindered towards the next military objective. Additionally, there are reports that the Mongols valued submission without armed resistance. The cities of Balāsāghūn, Ūzkand and Barchinlighkent were spared from the slaughter because they did not resist the incoming soldiers (Jackson, 2018: 156). The subjugated population was sometimes recruited, most often as an auxiliary force to the main part of the Mongol army – the cavalry. Such subjugation obviously suited both sides, aiming to reduce losses on both fronts and, consequently, avoid war victims altogether.

Another explanation of the Mongol practice of massacre can be found in the article "The Mongol Campaign in Hungary, 1241–1242: The Archeology and History of Nomadic Conquest and Massacre" (2019). The authors point out that one of the reasons for the slaughter is of a purely practical nature. The goal was:

> … mass population removal or enslavement accompanied by the execution or exile of the elite. This could be either enslavement and removal to the victor's home territory or forced migration to leave the territory vacant as a buffer or for colonization (Gyucha et al., 2019: 1024).

Highlighting this hypothesis, it becomes clear that the Mongol warlords had a practical stimulus for slaughtering the local population. The primary goal was the occupation of the territory, along with the physical removal of the elite, the only segment in Europe capable of raising an army or instigating an uprising against foreign occupiers. I conclude that the massacres were executed strategically and with a clear goal, not sporadically and chaotically.

Another piece of evidence supporting the thesis that the massacres were planned and not carried out spontaneously is the fact that the Mongols spared individuals who could be useful to them in the future. Artisans and craftsmen were spared

[5] For a more detailed discussion on the reasons and consequences of the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241, see Laszlovszky et al. (2018): 419-450; Gyucha et al. (2019): 1021-1066. A reconstructed chronology and a list of mass executions are provided by Sweeney in his article: Sweeney (1982): 181-183.

because the Mongols needed their skills. Moreover, they facilitated the logistics of the military campaign by fulfilling the tasks for their new commanders (Hildinger, 1996: 78, 83). The Mongols forced capable workers to work as slaves, sparing them from slaughter while providing the necessary labour for future endeavours (Guzman, 2010: 123).

3. ELEMENTS: FIRE AND WATER

3.1 FIRE AS A WEAPON

The Mongol invasion was perceived as a terrible act of divine vengeance through the lens of an apocalyptic narrative. Moreover, mass killings were frequent, and medieval authors emphasised that the perpetrators of these terrible crimes evidently enjoyed it (Giffney, 2012: 232-233). The fact that the definition of "conquest" among nomadic societies, such as the Mongols, was significantly different from that of sedentary ones, like Europeans, helps us understand why the medieval inhabitants of Europe so clearly expressed their amazement or disgust (Gyucha et al., 2019: 1023-1028). Without delving deeper into the distinction between warfare and methods of conquest among sedentary and nomadic societies, it is worth noting that the military logistics of nomadic peoples rested on fundamentally different foundations. Hence, there is a different approach to warfare and what is allowed during war times.

The previous chapter stated that the Mongols demonstrated systematic destruction and city razing in the face of resistance. Throughout history, the Mongols were renowned for their strategic use of terrain to gain maximum advantage over their opponents. The ability to repeatedly employ such efficient and manipulative approaches proves the superiority of their military tactics compared to those of medieval Europeans and Asians. One such tactic involved the use of fire and flammable materials during city sieges. The previously mentioned author, John of Plano Carpini, provides a detailed description of the course of the siege:

> They [The Mongols] reduce fortresses in the following manner. If the position of the fortress allows it, they surround it, sometime even fencing it round so that no one can enter or leave. They make a strong attack with engines and arrows… If they cannot capture it in this way they throw Greek fire… If they are still unsuccessful and the city or fort has a river, they dam it or alter its course and submerge the fortress if possible. Should they not be able to do this, they undermine the city and armed men enter it from underground; once inside, some of them start fires to burn the fortress while the rest fight the inhabitants (Dawson, 1955: 37).

The above description shows the various approaches that the Mongols could have employed when besieging a fort or a city, with an alternative option always available if the previous one failed to produce a result. The success of the siege was certainly

facilitated to a certain extent by siege machines,[6] which the Mongols imported from China (Jackson, 2017: 136-138). Another effective siege weapon was Greek fire or *naphta*, as contemporary authors called it. Carpini uses the term *Greek fire* due to its flammability, while Juvayni uses the term *naphta*. The report on Hülegü-khan's campaign in Iran describes a team of 1,000 people, which consisted of 1,000 Chinese catapult operators and naphtha throwers. The naphta throwers used vessels containing flammable liquid,[7] launching the pots over the city walls via a catapult (Jackson, 2017: 136-138). The fire spread rapidly within the walls, causing fiery destruction that had both tangible and psychologically devastating effects on the fort defenders. A similar depiction is given by Juvayni when describing the siege of the city of Bukhara:

> He [Chinggis-Khan] now gave orders for quarters of the town to be set on fire; and since the houses were built entirely of wood, within several days the greater part of the town had been consumed, with the exception of the Friday mosque and some of the palaces, which were built with baked bricks… mangonels were erected, bows bent and stones and arrows discharged… For days they fought in this manner (Boyle, 1958: 106).

This type of destruction by fire put the city under great pressure, with the possibility of being completely engulfed by the flames. The psychological effect should not be underestimated, as it was previously mentioned that the Mongols placed great importance on how they were perceived by their opponents and the defeated. The display of devastating force during the siege had the potential to shatter defenders' morale and discourage those who wished to put up resistance.

Evidence confirming that the Mongols used fire as a means of attack and destruction in the Hungarian Kingdom was found in a recent archaeological excavation. A 2019 publication (Gyucha et al., 2019: 1021-1066) supports the testimony of Rogerius of Apulia, indicating that the fire consumed many inhabitants of the Kingdom, including the burning of churches and bodies of residents in the villages (Bak and Rady, 2010: 170-171, 188-189, 200-201, 216-217). Unearthed human skeletons were raised from the levelled buildings, surrounded by residues of charring beams. Traces of intensive, high-temperature burning were proven in the village of Orosháza-Bónum. At the site of Kiskunmajsa-Jonathermál Kelet, human remains were recovered, frequently burned and highly fragmented in two torched, semi-subterranean houses (Gyucha et al., 2019: 1043-1058). The presented archaeological findings prove that the Mongols engaged in the mass burning of houses in the countryside, intending to compel the population to move towards the neighbouring

[6] Examples of siege machines include the *arcubalist* – a machine composed of three crossbows joined together, capable of firing large arrows, and the *kamān- i gāw* (ox-bow) – a machine with an alleged range of 2500 feet (760 metres).

[7] The pots were filled with a flammable mixture (a combination of sulphur, saltpeter, Aconitine, oil, resin, ground charcoal and wax). They had wicks made of flax or cotton, and bore names such as "tu-yao-ye-chiu" (ball of smoke and fire), in Raphael (2009): 358-359.

city. As the terrified inhabitants fled, they served as "news-bearers" announcing the arrival of the pillaging Mongols, contributing to mass hysteria. The refugees fled to the west and south, seeking safety as far away as possible. For protection, they used any building or natural cover they came across, be it a settlement, a fortified church, a neighbouring fortress or simply a hill or a forest (Sweeney, 1994: 43-45). Fortunately for Rogerius and his contemporaries, the Mongols withdrew from the Kingdom relatively quickly in 1242 and never returned.

3.2 ELEMENT OF WATER: CROSSING RIVERS

The act of damming the river is an important reminder that the Mongols were very innovative when it came to waging war and exploiting environmental potential for their advantage. While most European commanders carefully transferred their troops across the river, considering numerous problems that could arise during the crossing, such as logistical issues, drowning, the need for constructing large bridges, and the risk of surprise attacks, the Mongols showed that rivers could be used as a means of unexpected attack. During the Battle of Mohi against the Hungarian Kingdom, the Mongols suddenly crossed the Sajó River over the bridge, but part of their forces traversed the river via the shallow riverbed (Perić et al., 2006: 262-265). Thus, the Mongols managed to surprise the enemy, suddenly entering the camp and overwhelming them. The outcome was disorder in the Hungarian ranks, a chaos outbreak in their military camp and ultimately, defeat.

The success of a campaign in medieval Russia was enhanced by exploiting frozen river crossings. Mongol soldiers crossed the great rivers of Russia using temporary ice sheets that were safe enough to transport large numbers of cavalry troops (Martin, 1943: 50). Another detail that demonstrates the thorough preparation of Mongol raiders is the inclusion of a leather bag closed with a thong as part of their military equipment. This bag helped keep their clothes dry when crossing the river (Martin, 1943: 53).

The Mongols launched an attack on Poland in the 1240/1241 campaign by exploiting the freezing of the Vistula River. After advancing to the other side, the Mongol army defeated the Poles at Chmielnik, continuing their march towards Kraków. They came across a ruined bridge over the Odra River, but they also managed to cross by using an improvised bridge made of boats (Saunders, 1971: 85). Consequently, they thwarted the enemy's attempt to stop the military advance and continued their onslaught towards Wrocław. Soon after, in April of the same year, the Mongols defeated the army of Henry II and redirected their army towards Hungary and Moravia (Jackson, 2018: 63).

4. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION ON THE FIELD

4.1 FEIGNED RETREAT

Perhaps the most famous military tactic used by the Mongols is the feigned retreat. A detailed description can be found in Carpini's *Ystoria Mongalorum*, and it serves as a suitable explanation of why Mongolian horsemen inflicted heavy casualties on European knights:

> The Mongols, unlike the knights, had been taught to retreat as a tactical move and as they did so they drew the knights into a line separated from the infantry. The Mongols then swept to either side of the knights who were strung out, and showered them with arrows from their powerful composite bows. Other Mongols lay in ambush, prepared to meet the knights as they fell into the trap. Where the Mongols found the knights' armor effective against their arrows they simply shot horses. The dismounted knights were then easy prey for the Mongols who ran them down with lance or saber with little danger to themselves (Hildinger, 1996: 11).

This tactic proved effective since both the Polish and the Hungarians fell for the trap. Additionally, sometimes the Mongol enemy became disorganised during the pursuit, complicating their situation on the battlefield. As soon as the Mongols became aware that the enemy was disoriented or disorganised, they turned around at a certain spot. A swift Mongol attack ensued, targeting the enemy's extended column along its flanks, resulting in severe losses (Hildinger, 1996: 26). Carpini points out that this kind of trap is fatal since it is plain and, therefore, easily overlooked by the European knights. As a further instruction for future European conflicts with the Mongols, Carpini suggests that if the Mongols retreat, "our men should still not pursue and in turn become separated" because this is a clever tactic aimed at dividing and destroying enemy military formations (Hildinger, 1996: 91).

Chasing the opponent on the battlefield was a common medieval practice and it proved to be a major issue for European kings and commanders when combating foreign cavalry. The steppe tactic of a feigned retreat inflicted heavy losses since the Mongols intentionally drew enemy knights into a line separated from their infantry. This way, they became easy targets for the Mongols, who then swept in on either side of the knights, who were strung out, showering them with arrows from their powerful composite bows. Additionally, this was not the only problem that could occur on the battlefield for European knights. Dismounted or disorganised knights could become easy prey, whether they were singled out of regular positions or lured into woods for an ambush. Mongol horsemen would sometimes simulate fleeing the battlefield, leading enemy soldiers to chase after them, only to be ambushed by another detachment and inflict heavy casualties (Martin, 1943: 73).

4.2 AMBUSH

Ambush was also a commonly used military tactic employed by many armies throughout history. Mongol horse archers would lure the opponent in and then shoot a huge number of arrows, thus disabling whole detachments of the enemy in a very short time. Misjudging the actual number of Mongols, often tactically positioned and hidden in hilly and wooded terrain, turned into a Mongol advantage. A quick and hasty attack on the Mongols, where self-confidence in one's own military potential resulted in catastrophic losses, proved to be one of the favourite tricks used on the battlefield (Martin, 1943: 74).

On the other hand, the Mongols did not always use the same tricks on the battlefield but surveyed the areas in advance, or sometimes spotted changes on the battlefield during the clash, so they acted accordingly. Carpini sheds some light on the Mongols' recognition of potential danger and their reaction after drawing their enemies into an ambush:

> If their enemies follow them to this trap, the Tartars circle around them and wound and kill them. If the Tartars see that the enemy is very numerous, they sometimes turn away for a day or two and invade and despoil a different area and kill men and destroy and lay waste the country. If they find they cannot do this, they sometimes retreat for ten or twelve days and stay in a safe place until their adversaries' army disbands and then they secretly come and depopulate the entire country. The Tartars are the most clever in war, because they have been at war for more than forty years with other people (Hildinger, 1996: 77).

The medieval author notes the Mongols' recognition of a rightful assessment of the situation on the battlefield and their reluctance when confronting an overwhelming enemy. This way, they reduced their losses beforehand by not rushing into a battle. Instead, they used their cavalry to pillage the lands they passed through, procuring both spoils of war and fodder for their horses. Their offence became a defence, exhausting the enemy with a long march until they gave up the chase.

4.3 REGICIDE [8]

After the defeat at the Battle of Legnica, the High Duke of Poland, Henry II, was executed. The Mongols decapitated him and paraded with his head on a spear. By using the severed head of a nobleman to instil fear in the bodies of the surrounding populace, the Mongols once again effectively used psychological warfare (Jackson, 2018: 63). Yet, there was another reason to kill the High Duke of Poland. One of the favourite Mongol tactics, and a very effective one, was the capture or assassination of the ruler. Capturing the ruler left a strong impression on his subjects and

[8] I would like to thank my colleague Jack Wilson from the *Central European University*, who highlighted numerous examples of regicide attempts by the Mongol army, emphasising that the longlasting hunt for Béla IV, King of Hungary and Croatia, was not an exception.

had a direct consequence on the future conquest of his kingdom. The king could not lead or coordinate his own army or the soldiers who survived the battle, which initially prevented a counterattack. A few examples will be used to illustrate the pattern of regicide.

The Mongols attempted to execute Béla IV, King of Hungary and Croatia, on several occasions. They first tried to capture or kill him at the Battle of the Sajó River in 1241. Although his army was defeated, both the king and his brother Coloman, Duke of Slavonia, successfully escaped to the south (Perić et al., 2006: 272-273). Unfortunately, Duke Coloman died of his wounds and was buried in Čazma, but his brother, the king, successfully evaded any attempt at capture by the Mongols. He fled from fort to fort, each time successfully outrunning the invaders.[9] Only after the departure of the Mongols in 1242 did the king return to the capital and begin the restoration of the Kingdom. By keeping the king constantly on the run, the possibility of regrouping the army and forming resistance against the invader became unmanageable. The result, evident from this episode, was the failure of the Kingdom to properly coordinate its defences, allowing the Mongol army to advance in all directions without disturbance. Looting, pillaging, and sporadic attacks by the invaders could take place unhindered since there was no adequate response in the form of Hungarian military force after the defeat at the Sajó River in 1241.[10] The policy of executing the elite (rulers, but also counts and nobles who could lead an army in armed resistance against the Mongol armed forces) bore fruit and enabled a rapid advance towards the south (Gyucha et al., 2019: 1024).

Another example is an episode related to the ruler of the Khwarazmian Empire. Genghis Khan sent his two generals with the aim of capturing Shah Muhammad II after the Shah resolutely refused the demands of the Mongols, killing the envoys of the Great Khan. Genghis Khan decided to plan a major military campaign that would show what happens to those who dare to offend the Great Khan. Parallel to the advance of the army, the main goal of Generals Jebe and Subotai was to capture the unyielding shah (Hautala, 2015: 8). A detailed description of the hunt for the king and the expedition of the military detachment is provided by Juvayni (Boyle, 1958: 142-149). The author makes several interesting observations. Firstly, the two generals separated during the chase. In some areas, they passed peacefully, without destroying cities, while in others, they looted and caused damage. In the latter areas, they tried to subdue the cities later – marking them beforehand for a future siege, should the need arise.

Secondly, a similar hunt was undertaken for Shah Muhammad's son, Jalal al-Din Mingburnu, when he took the mantle after his father's death. After defeating two

[9] The reconstruction of the roads and routes used by the Mongols during their presence in Slavonia and Dalmatia can be found in Sophoulis (2015.): 251-278; Soldo (1968.): 371-388; Tatár (2012.): 334-342.

[10] The alleged conflicts between the Frankopans and the Mongol army are contested by Josip Ante Soldo and Nada Klaić, claiming that the documents, supposedly issued by Béla IV, were in fact forgeries aimed at expanding the influence and territory of the Frankopans: Soldo (1968.): 379-383; Klaić (1959.): 15-63.

smaller Mongol armies (Battle of Parwan, 1221), Genghis Khan basically mobilised the entirety of the Mongol army to pursue Mingburnu, catching him on the Indus (Jackson, 1990: 45-54). Jalal al-Din fled to India after the battle and was pursued by the Mongols for some time before they lost him. He later reappeared in north-western Iran, and the Mongols would again return and hound him to his death around 1231 (Jackson: 2003: 32-34).

The third example of regicide is found in China, at the time of the decline of the Jin Dynasty. During the final war of the Jin Dynasty, the Emperor, Aizong of Jin, was pursued by Subotai from his capital Kaifeng. The emperor fled to Caizhou, a city alongside the border with the Song Dynasty, his rival dynasty. The Mongols managed to penetrate the walls and enter the city. Avoiding falling alive into their hands, Emperor Aizong committed suicide (Pow and Liao, 2018: 61-62). This suicide officially marked the end of the Jin Dynasty in China.

Taking into account all the previously mentioned examples, as well as several others,[11] I conclude that attempting to capture or execute the monarch was more of a rule than an exception when it comes to Mongol warfare practices. This policy emerged from the experiences of Genghis Khan during his wars in Mongolia. Although Genghis Khan was defeated in battle, his enemy failed to capture him, focusing instead on pillaging his camp or looting. In the disarray following the battle, the Great Khan managed to escape, ensuring the possibility of revenge and the gathering of a military force for a counterattack.[12] Having seen firsthand how losing one's head in battle could result in a fatal blow to the military organisation, he learned from his mistakes and did not leave that possibility as an option to his opponents. The result was both the emergence of new and improvement of old war tactics, as well as their successful application in practice.

5. CONCLUSION

All the aforementioned tactics were successfully used by the Mongols during their military expansion, showcasing the ingenuity of the khans and generals in action. While Genghis Khan's ability to unite all the Mongolian tribes and fulfill his heavenly mandate could be highlighted from a religious point of view, I believe that his ability to learn and develop military tactics is extremely important. Particularly noteworthy is his ability to implement these tactics after facing defeats. On multiple occasions, even when captured, he managed to survive and reassemble the Mongol army to fight for him once again. The ability to adapt is present in all nomadic peoples, and

[11] There are other examples of attempts to capture or execute a ruler: the hunt for Kuchlug, Prince of the Naiman; Bachman, a Qipchaq-Olberli leader who sought to organise a Qipchaq resistance; Yuri II Vesvolodovich, the Grand Prince of Vladimir; the suicide of Zhao Bing, the last emperor of the Southern Song Dynasty.

[12] An example of Genghis Khan's capture and his successful escape, while becoming a prisoner of the Tayichiud tribe, is described in the medieval source *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Onon, 2005.:71-75).

it was precisely this openness to new ways of living and warfare that brought the Mongols to the level of terrifying opponents. They evolved from steppe "savages" with whom the Chinese did not want to trade into a military force that overthrew ruling dynasties in China.

I would also like to highlight the difference between nomadic and sedentary warfare. The *gradual conquest theory* suggests that the Mongols used valuable information collected from neighbouring empires, occupied nations, and their own scouts, and that they did not go to war recklessly and at any cost (Laszlovsky et al., 2018: 436-437). The reasons explaining the success of the Mongol army and their superiority over their contemporaries are still being supplemented, despite the formidable amount of literature that has been published. "How," "when," and "under what conditions to attack" were essential to the success of a military campaign, and the Mongols exploited and encouraged rumours of extreme cruelty, which sometimes resulted in capturing fortified cities with little or no resistance. The full exploitation of military potential, the active use of the psychology of fear and the constant, rapid advance of the cavalry promoted Genghis Khan from being one of the leaders of thirteen Mongolian tribes to the title of the Great Khan, the ruler of the largest contiguous land empire in history. His tactics were also used by his successors, expanding the empire further. Reports of the cruelty of the Mongols arouse the interest of scholars and, at the same time, shock people today, just as was the case with 13th-century contemporaries Rogerius of Apulia and Thomas of Spalato.

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POSEBNE VOJNE TAKTIKE MONGOLA TIJEKOM OSVAJANJA U 13. STOLJEĆU

Domagoj Smojver

SAŽETAK

U radu se analiziraju pojedine vojne taktike mongolske vojske predvođene prvotno Džingis-kanom, ali i njegovim nasljednicima. Pošto su ih tadašnji suvremenici opisivali kao barbare i krvoločne osvajače (Toma Arhiđakon i Rogerije iz Apulije), a takav su narativ bespogovorno preuzeli pojedini povjesničari, u posljednjim se desetljećima pojavila potreba bacanja novog svjetla na takvu percepciju. Ovaj će se rad fokusirati na uspješne mongolske taktike koje su generali, odnosno vojskovođe primjenjivali na bojnom polju. Jedan od razloga zašto su Mongoli rado prihvaćali takve negativne opise bio je element psihološkog ratovanja, koji su uspješno koristili protiv europskih, ali i drugih vojski. Unatoč krivo percipiranim doživljajima kako su Mongoli bili neukrotivi i kaotični na bojnom polju, detaljan pregled dat će nam uvid kako su i zašto prihvaćali takvu sliku. Osim ulijevanja straha kod protivnika, što je rezultiralo demoralizacijom i smanjenom mogućnosti djelovanja na terenu, cilj takvog djelovanja često je bio uspješno ostvaren – pobjeda nad istobrojnim ili brojnijim protivnikom uz reduciranje vlastitih žrtava. A upravo to su mongolski vođe htjeli ostvariti, kako bi nastavili politiku zauzimanja neprijateljskog teritorija i napredovanja.

Ključne riječi: invazija Mongola, specijalna vojna taktika, srednjovjekovno psihološko ratovanje, teror