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**THE CRISES OF MEDIEVAL SOCIETY:
THE MONGOL INVASION IN EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE****

The Mongol invasion between 1240 and 1242 is one of the best known events of the Middle Ages, in fact, to an extent that it has lost its original meaning and became a synonym of general devastation, too. The actual analysis does not intend to treat the events of the military campaign, but rather the road to the disaster as well as the economic and social consequences of the shocking event: i.e. the circumstances of the evolution and the overcoming of the crisis. As the Mongol invasion of 1240–1242 had an effect on a number of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, both the reason for the crisis and the overcoming of the catastrophe differed considerably.

The destroyed territory

The campaign launched by the Mongols in autumn 1240 had an effect on the southern regions of the Kievan Rus': they managed to, conquer Kiev on the 6th December 1240¹, after a long siege to the city. After these a branch of the Mongol army got to the Carpathian Basin following the plundering of Halych–Volhynia, Little Poland and Silesia. Another aisle got to Hungary through the traits of the Carpathians. When they evacuated, they looted the Bulgarian territories along the Lower Danube. The decisive battles happened on 9 April 1241 (Liegnitz / Legnica), then on 11 April in Hungary (close to the river Sajó) whereas the Bulgarian region was hit and plundered in spring 1242².

When discussing the Mongol devastation the circumstance cannot be ignored that in the case of the Rus' this was not the first attack but in the previous years (1237–1238, 1239) the northern areas had to suffer a similarly concentrated attack and they ha to count with some form of the Mongol presence for centuries. The plundering of

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¹ Полное собрание русских летописей [ПСРЛ]. – Т. XXV. Воскресенская летопись. – Москва, 2004. – С. 131.

² ПСРЛ. – Т. II. Ипатьевская летопись. – Москва, 1998. – Стб. 784-794; *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum [SRH]. – I-II / Ed. Szentpétery Emericus. – Budapestini 1937-1938. here: I. 467-468; Ioannis Dlugossii Annale seu Crocincae incliti Regni Poloniae Libri XII. – Liber septimus (1241-1294). – Varsaviae, 1975; Fennell John. The Crisis of the Medieval Russia (1200-1304) – London, 1983 [1995]; Хрусталеv Д. Г. Русь: от нашествия до „ига”. 30-40-ые гг. XIII в. – Санкт-Петербург, 2004.; A tatárjárás emlékezete [The Memory of the Mongol Invasion to Hungary] / Ed. Katona Tamás. – Budapest, 1981 (edition of sources); *Almási Tibor. A 13. század története. – Budapest, 2000.; Bitwa Legnicka. Historia i tradycja / Pod red. Wacława Korty. – Wrocław-Warszawa 1994; Kłoczowski Jerzy. Historia Polski do końca XV wieku. – Lublin, 2000.; Fine John V. A. The Late Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest. – Ann Arbor, 1994 [2006.] – P.154-156.**

Little Poland and Silesia did not have an affect on other Polish-populated territories, yet in the case of Little Poland we can witness a series of Mongol campaigns³. The same holds true of the Bulgarian area, which was consequently demolished. Here the Mongol invasions repeated for centuries as well.⁴ In the case of the Hungary the looting was concentrated: it came from many directions simultaneously, still, it did not effect the entire kingdom. The territories, which suffered the invasion, the Mongol presence after the combats of 1241–1242 deepened the disaster. This is why the abbot of Niederaltaich, Henry could write in 1241 the following: “In this year Hungary, which had existed for three hundred years, was destroyed by the army of the Mongols”⁵.

The kind of crises

The first question is what the reasons for the crisis were, which ensured the success of the Mongols. Putting this question is even more justified as neither for Hungary, nor for the Kievan Rus’ not the Mongols were the first, whom they encountered as a people from the steppe. The ward against the Nomadic tribes with horses had traditions in both realms as they evolved the successful defence tactics, too. In the Kievan Rus’ it was the Petchenegs and then the Cumans against whom the system of mounds between the rivers was erected called “zmyevy valy”⁶ and from the mid-12th century on the smaller Nomadic peoples (e.g. Torks) served the grand prince a auxiliary military people.⁷ The system of mounds of Hungary and the auxiliary military peoples defended the eastern frontiers, too – indeed, successfully, down to the appearance of the Mongols⁸.

1. The first crisis has military character: In the Rus’ disposed of an army, which comprised the military potentials of the entire Rus’ only under the rule of Yaroslav the Wise and Vladimir Monomakh⁹. Yet even in their cases the remark of the going to war “of all the Rus’” can be deemed an overestimation of the chroniclers. The circumstances of the disintegration as well as the weak cohesion among the regions of the Rus’ renders it fully unrealistic to count with the army of “all the Rus’” – a mistake committed by some researchers. A similar situation could be found in the

³ *Kłoczowski J.* Op. cit. – S. 39-40.; *Szczur Stanisław.* Historia Polski. Średniowiecze. – Kraków, 2002. – S.296; *Irgang Winfried.* Der Beginn der staatlichen Zersplitterung Schlesiens (1248-1251) // *Irgang Winfried.* Schleisen im Mittelalter. Siedlung – Kirche – Urkunden. Ausgewählte Aufsätze. Hrsg. von Kersken, Norbert und Warmbrunn, Jürgen. – Marburg, 2007. – S.55-63.

⁴ *Fine John V. A.* Op. cit. – P.154-156.; *Font Márta.* Dinasztia, hatalom, egyház. Régiók formálódása Európa közepén 900-1453. [Dynasty, power, church. The Making of Regions in the Middle of Europa between 900-1453]. – Pécs, 2009. – Old.44.

⁵ See: Magyarország története. I/2. (MT) főszerk. Székely György. – Budapest, 1984. – 1436 l. (The mentioned chapter is written by Kristó Gyula)

⁶ *Кучера М. П.* Змиевы валы Среднего Поднепровья. – Киев, 1987.

⁷ E.g. ПСРЛ. – Т.II. – Стб. 236, 421-426.

⁸ *Göckenjan Hansgerd.* Hilfsvölker und Grenzwächter im mittelalterlichen Ungarn. – Wiesbaden, 1972; *Font Márta.* Im Spannungsfeld der christlichen Grossmächte. Mittel- und Osteuropa im 10-12. Jahrhundert. – Herne, 2008. – S.198-202.

⁹ *Franklin Simon, Shepard Johanthan.* The Emergence of Rus’ 750-1200. – London, 1996. – P.313-317.

southern Polish territory and in Bulgaria, too¹⁰. In Hungary the system of counties based on the overweight of royal estates as it was established in the 11th century basically collapsed in the first half of the 13th century, due to the larger-scale giving away of the royal estates¹¹.

2. Behind the military crisis one can detect a political and social one. The political crisis became evident in the disintegration, which could fundamentally traced back to the lack of the former unified structure (in the Rus', in Polish and Bulgarian territories) whereas in Hungary the reason was the collapse of the former governmental structure (royal counties). As for the social crisis it can be especially found in Hungary inasmuch the landed strata strengthened and became more and more individualistic¹².

3. The Mongol invasion first of all meant a demographic catastrophe, the extent of which is difficult to estimate as data of the number of population are overwhelmingly based on the relations of narrative sources. The latter are rather subjective in character inasmuch their relations are based on the direct experiences of the horrors witnessed personally. Examples from the Rus' are the narrations of the annals (*Slovo o pogibeli russkoj zemli* – about the destroyal of the land of the Rus')¹³ or in Hungary the Lamenting Song (*Carmen miserabile*) of the canon Rogerius. Rogerius spent months in the custody of the Mongols and was a witness of the looting of the area around of Nagyvárad¹⁴. In the case of the narrative sources written later, such as the Jan Długosz Chronicle from the late 15th century about the battle of Legnica¹⁵, we cannot even speak of direct pieces of information. Furthermore, there are a lot of examples which show that the expression “many” is very often a synonym for unrealistic numbers of many ten or even many hundred thousands, so it is a medieval topos.

Regarding the numbers of the diplomas the sources material is the best in Hungary: one can register the disappearance of the entire settlements after Mongol invasion.¹⁶ This did not effect all the territories of the kingdom to the same extent. Györffy György, collecting data for the historical geography of the Hungary under the Árpád dynasty made the following remarks:¹⁷

Counties, regions	the percentage of lost villages
Between the rivers Danube and Tisza, in south: counties Bács and Bodrog	45 %
Between the rivers Danube and Tisza, in the middle of country	80 %
The central region of Transiszia: county Békés	50 %

¹⁰ *Sodnomyň Colmon, Cenoma Enchcimag*. Podbój Polski przez wojska Batu-chana // *Bitwa Legnicka* – 1994. – S.84-89; *Fine John V. A.* Op. cit. – P.154-156.

¹¹ See e.g.: *Almásı Tibor*. Op. cit. – Old. 34-40; *Font Márta*. A középkori Magyar Királyság. Az Árpád-házi királyok kora (970-1301) // *Magyarország története*. Főszerk. Romsics Ignác. – Budapest, 2007. – Old.129-147.

¹² *Fennell John*. Op. cit. ; *Szczur Stanisław*. Op. cit. – S. 257-315; *Almásı Tibor*. Op. cit. – Old. 45-78; *Font Márta*. A középkori Magyar Királyság. – Old. 129-147.

¹³ *Памятники литературы Древней Руси*. XII-XIII вв. – Москва, 1981.

¹⁴ *Rogerius*. *Carmen miserabile* // *SRH*. – T. II. – P. 551-588.

¹⁵ *Długosz J.* – Lib. VII. – P.17-26.

¹⁶ *Györffy György*. *Az Árpád-kori Magyarország történeti földrajza*. – I-III. – Budapest, 1987. – IV. – Budapest, 1998.

¹⁷ *Györffy György*. *Magyarország népessége a honfoglalástól a 14. század közepéig* // *Magyarország történeti demográfiája*. Szerk. Kovachich József. – Budapest, 1963. – Old. 45-62

The northern region of Transtisia: county Bihar	20 %
The southern region of Transtisia: counties Csanád, Csongrád	75 %
Transdanubia: plain or hilly area	15 %
Transdanubia: mountaneous region with forests	under 10 %
Upper Hungary (mountains)	under 10 %

In the 1960s, counting with an average György Györffy used these date as a basis and estimated the deaths of 50 per cent of the population. Also, he presupposed a very high total population of about 2 million people. Now we know that in the years around 1240 the population of Medieval Hungary could not amount to more than 1.2 – 1.3 million. One must count with the differences in population density: from the very beginning Transdanubia has more less inhabitants, with the population of the region between the rivers Danube and Tisza as well as of the area of Transtisia was scarce, which makes the counting of Jenő Szűcs more probable: 15 to 20 per cent¹⁸.

Years	number of population
1240	1,20 – 1,35 million
1242	1,02 – 1,22 million
1300	1,40 – 1,60 million

region	density of population before 1240
Transdanubia	10–16 persons per square km
The Great Hungarian Plain	3– 6 persons per square km
Upper Hungary	5–10 persons per square km

The consequences of the invasion

In Hungary:

1. The Mongol invasion was followed by a famine, after all in summer 1242 the sowing failed and in 1243 plague of locusts devastated. Even the Royal Hungarian Chancery related of a general devastation (*generalis destructio*) and spoke of depopulation (*regnum depopulatum*)¹⁹. The demographic data of the late 13th century, however, furnish evidence that the compensation for the loss in lives happened fairly quickly.

2. This happened partly with the invitation of settlers backed by the king. This served the strengthening of the military and the defence potential. In the centre of the country the Cumans²⁰, along the Lower Danube the Chivalric Order of Saint John were awarded lands²¹. Also, the Szepes region (Scepus, Zips) was populated in the north²². The latter, however, only partly meant the rise in the number of warriors, the

¹⁸ Szűcs Jenő. Az utolsó Árpádok. – Budapest, 1993. – Old. 3-6.

¹⁹ Szűcs Jenő. Op. cit. – Old. 4. ; Almási Tibor. Op. cit. – Old. 96.

²⁰ See: Kun László emlékezete. Szerk. Kristó Gyula. Szegedi középkortörténeti könyvtár 5. – Szeged, 1994. – Old.128-141.; Berend Nora. At the Gate of Christendo,. Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary c. 1000 – c. 1300.– Cambridge, 2001. – P.87-93.

²¹ Hunyadi Zsolt. The Hospitaller int he Kingdom of Hungary: Commanderies, Personnel and a Particular Activity up to c. 1400. // The Crusades and the Military Orders / Ed. by Hunyadi Zsolt and Laszlovszky József. – Budapest, 2001. – P. 253-268. here: 256.

²² Szűcs Jenő. Op. cit. – Old. 45-49.; Kristó Gyula. Nem magyar népek a középkori Magyarorszá-

new settlers were mainly mine-workers or agricultural labourers on the estates of private owners²³.

3. The uneven population density explains to us the large-scale migration which characterized the second half of the 13th century: the peasantry of different legal status of the Transdanubian royal and ecclesiastical lands often escaped (there are evidences of this) and they appeared on the uninhabited or sparsely populated areas of the Great Hungarian Plain as serfs enjoying extended rights. Here we have to do with the rise in the number of secular landowners and their elastic policy of organizing settlements by safeguarding privileges. This phenomenon cannot neglect, either, that some escaped the Mongols, returned but did not rebuild the destroyed village, instead, they erected a new settlements in the neighbourhood²⁴.

4. The lack of working force of the second half of the 13th century led to a migration process the further consequences of which were the changes of the agrarian structure (the achievement of a status for serfs safeguarding for them free movement), new agricultural technology, e. g. the heavy plough and the beginning of production by the peasants themselves²⁵.

5. The royal policy keeping an eye on the defence of the protection of the kingdom led to some governmental changes, the elite was more involved into the decisions of the ruler. Also, the picture of the settlements of the country changed due to the support of building stone fortresses²⁶.

In Poland:

1. The population of Poland at the end of the 13th century is estimated 2 to 2.5 million. We have not enough evidence to set the extent of the destruction of the Mongols invasion.

2. In Silezia and Little Poland the expansion of German settlers continued, true, of which we have no demographic data but it can be measured by the extent of urbanization and the growth in the number of villages enjoying German legal status. Diplomas are a help in this respect²⁷.

In the Kievan Rus':

1. As for the population number of the Kievan Rus' there are only estimations and indirect data for creating hypotheses. The entire territory of the Rus' can be estimated about 1.2 million square kilometres, ranging from the Carpathians to the river Neva and the mouth of the river Oka²⁸. If we count with the highest estimate of population, 7.5 (Vernadsky), the density population is very low: 0.2 per square

gon. – Budapest, 2003. – Old.144-148.

²³ *Szűcs Jenő*. Op. cit. – Old.16-19, 33-74.

²⁴ *Szűcs Jenő*. Op. cit. – Old. 155-177.

²⁵ *Szűcs Jenő*. Op. cit. – Old. 177-186.

²⁶ *Fügedi Erik*. Vár és társadalom a 13-14. századi Magyarországon. – Budapest, 1977; *Szűcs Jenő*. Op. cit. – Old. 27-33.

²⁷ *Kłoczowski Jerzy*. Op. cit. – S. 3-35, 39-40. ; *Irgang Winfried*. Auswirkungen es Mongoleneinfalls auf sie Siedlungsentwicklung in Schlesien // *Irgang Winfried*. Schleisen im Mittelalter. – P. 30-47.

²⁸ Generally about the territory and population of Kievan Rus' see: *Font Márta*. Kijevi Rusz 1000-1204 // *Kelet-Európa és a Balkán 1000-1800*. [Eastern Europe and the Balkans] / Ed. Sashalmi Endre. – Pécs, 2007. – Old.164-174; *Fennell John*. Op. cit. – P. 85.

kilometres²⁹. Tcherepnin counted with a lower number of 4.5 – 5.3 million, which means an even more sparsely populated area³⁰. However, we know that the population was basically concentrated on the central settlements and their neighbourhood, the density was uneven. The destruction of the Mongol invasion in winter must have been graver for the inhabitants who had gone to the central settlements than in Hungary where the mountains and marshes provided a refuge in spring and summer, and the few existing stone fortresses served as a protection. The chance of escape, however, cannot be excluded here either. We have evidences of people of Halych who were refugees in Hungary³¹. Life became normal again in the region of Vladimir-Suzdal³², which is also an indication of the return of refugees.

2. In the case of the Kievan Rus' the campaign of 1240 had as a consequence that the former centre of the Rus' got under total Mongol rule which holds true of the lands, too, which were the most fertile ones. The migration from the territories under Mongol rule (following in the tradition of the migration in north-eastern direction) to the North–East was a setback in agricultural technology, the husbandry based on clearing came into the foreground again, due to problems of fodder cattle grazing was pushed back³³. All in all, because of the climatic situation the former know-how regarding agriculture was lost. The exploitation of the goods provided by forests became significant (furs, wax, honey), which in the long run maintained extensive agriculture with smaller yields, the signs of which could be discerned as soon as the late 13th century, its long duration, however, only became evident in the 14th – 15th centuries.

3. Finally, one has to mention the circumstance, which is not only the consequence of the military campaign of 1240. Namely that the political independence of the earlier Kievan Rus' stopped to exist³⁴. Certainly, with the exception of Novgorod which city is an exception in the sense, too, that it remained unaffected by Mongol attacks, which cannot be claimed of regions, which came under Lithuanian rule³⁵.

To conclude:

The consequences of the destruction caused by the Mongols varied considerably. There is not possible determine the dimension of casualties because we have no evidences about the population before. The indirect information point out, not only the campaign but also the presence of Mongols led to reduction of population. After

²⁹ Vernadsky George. Kievan Russia. – New Haven, 1948. – P.102-105.

³⁰ Черепнин Л. В. Формирование крестьянства на Руси / Л. В. Черепнин // История крестьянства в Европе. – Т.1. – Москва, 1985. – С.314-349. here: С.314.

³¹ See: Maladik Ruthenus // Hazai Okmánytár I-VIII. szerk. Nagy Imre. – Győr – Budapest, 1865-1891. here: VII. 83.; *Font Márta*. Árpád-házi királyok és Rurikida fejedelmek [Kings of Dynasty of Árpáds and Princes of Dynasty of Rurikids] / M. Font // Szegei középkortörténeti könyvtár 21. – Szeged 2005. – Old.105.

³² Fennell John. Op. cit. – P. 97.

³³ Heller Klaus. Russische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte. Ie Kiever und die Moskauer Periode. – Darmstadt, 1987. – P.136-142.

³⁴ *Font Márta*. Oroszország, Ukrajna, Rusz. [Russia, Ukraine, Rus'] – Budapest, 1998. – Old.114-122.

³⁵ *Font Márta*. Ukrajna középkori gyökerei. [The Medieval Roots of Ukraine] // *Font Márta, Varga Beáta*. Ukrajna története[A History of Ukraine]. – Szeged, 2006. – Old. 7-104. here: 90-104.

the Mongols left the region, the refugees came back, it was general situation in whole region. In Poland and Hungary increased the number of immigrants from Germany, which started at the beginning of 13th century. Its result was the development of the cities and enlargement of a new agricultural technology. In case of Hungary was more significant the strengthening of defence of borders through the settlement of Cumans, the foundation of new houses of Hospitallers, and supporting of building the new stone-castles. The Eastern part of Hungary was undermanned which led to the significance mobility from Western to Eastern. Its result was the rapid enlargement of the new agricultural technology and the free status among the peasants. In former Kievan Rus' the direction of migration were the North Eastern and Western region, which were not without the influence of Mongols, too. In North Eastern region the climatic conditions did not stimulate the development of agriculture, in contrary there was a setback to the former extensive technology.



1. East Central Europe in the thirteenth century

Font, Márta: Árpád-házi királyok és Rurikida fejedelmek. Szeged 2005. 305.



2. The defending of the borders by different groups of warriors

Font, Márta: Im Spannungsfeld der christlichen Grossmächte. Herne 2008. Tafel N° 11.



3. The Tartars attack against the Rus' in 1239

Хрусталеv, Д. Г.: Русь: от нашествия до «ига» 30-40 гг. XII вв. СПб. 2004. 169.

The Tartars attack against the Rus' in 1240



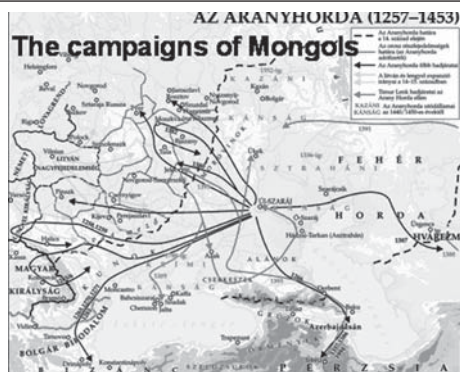
4. The Tartars attack against the Rus' in 1240

Хрусталеv, Д. Г.: Русь: от нашествия до «ига» 30-40 гг. XII вв. СПб. 2004. 192.



5. The Tartars attack against the Hungarian Kingdom in 1241-1242

Font, Márta (ed.): *Dinasztia, hatalom, egyház*. Pécs 2009. 502.



6. The Tartars campaigns in Eastern Europe from the middle of 13th century to the middle of 15th century
 Font, Márta (ed.): *Dinasztia, hatalom, egyház*. Pécs 2009. 510.

Марта Фонт. КРИЗА У СЕРЕДНЬОВІЧНОМУ СУСПІЛЬСТВІ: МОНГОЛЬСЬКЕ ВТОРГНЕННЯ У СХІДНУ ТА ЦЕНТРАЛЬНУ ЄВРОПУ.