

COMPETING NARRATIVES BETWEEN NOMADIC PEOPLE AND THEIR  
SEDENTARY NEIGHBOURS

**Studia uralo-altaica 53**

**Redigunt**

Katalin Sipőcz

András Róna-Tas

István Zimonyi

# Competing Narratives between Nomadic People and their Sedentary Neighbours

Papers of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Medieval History  
of the Eurasian Steppe  
Nov. 9–12, 2018  
Shanghai University, China

Edited by Chen Hao

Szeged, 2019

This publication was financially supported by the MTA-ELTE-SZTE Silk Road Research Group

© University of Szeged,  
Department of Altaic Studies,  
Department of Finno-Ugrian Philology  
Printed in 2019

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by other means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission in writing of the author or the publisher.

Printed by: Innovariant Ltd., H-6750 Algyó, Ipartelep 4.

ISBN: 978-963-306-708-6 (printed)

ISBN: 978-963-306-714-7 (pdf)

ISSN: 0133 4239

## Contents

István Zimonyi Preface.....	7
Augustí Alemany A Prosopographical Approach to Medieval Eurasian Nomads (II).....	11
Tatiana A. Anikeeva Geography in the Epic Folklore of the Oghuz Turks.....	37
Ákos Bertalan Apatóczy Changes of Ethnonyms in the Sino-Mongol Bilingual Glossaries from the Yuan to the Qing Era.....	45
Chen Hao Competing Narratives: A Comparative Study of Chinese Sources with the Old Turkic Inscriptions.....	59
Edina Dallos A Possible Source of ‘Tengrism’ .....	67
Andrei Denisov Scythia as the Image of a Nomadic Land on Medieval Maps.....	73
Szabolcs Felföldi Personal Hygiene and Bath Culture in the World of the Eurasian Nomads .....	85
Bruno Genito An Archaeology of the Nomadic Groups of the Eurasian Steppes between Europe and Asia. Traditional Viewpoint and New Research Perspectives.....	95
Zsolt Hunyadi Military-religious Orders and the Mongols around the Mid-13 <sup>th</sup> Century.....	111
Éva Kincses-Nagy The Islamization of the Legend of the Turks: The Case of <i>Oghuznāma</i> .....	125
Irina Konovalova Cumania in the System of Trade Routes of Eastern Europe in the 12 <sup>th</sup> Century ...	137
Nikolay N. Kradin Some Aspects of Xiongnu History in Archaeological Perspective .....	149
Valéria Kulcsár – Eszter Istvánovits New Results in the Research on the Hun Age in the Great Hungarian Plain. Some Notes on the Social Stratification of Barbarian Society .....	167

Ma Xiaolin	
The Mongols' <i>tuq</i> 'standard' in Eurasia, 13 <sup>th</sup> –14 <sup>th</sup> Centuries .....	183
Enrico Morano	
Manichaean Sogdian Cosmogonical Texts in Manichaean Script .....	195
Maya Petrova	
On the Methodology of the Reconstruction of the Ways of Nomadic Peoples .....	217
Katalin Pintér-Nagy	
The Tether and the Sling in the Tactics of the Nomadic People .....	223
Alexander V. Podossinov	
Nomads of the Eurasian Steppe and Greeks of the Northern Black Sea Region: Encounter of Two Great Civilisations in Antiquity and Early Middle Ages.....	237
Szabolcs József Polgár	
The Character of the Trade between the Nomads and their Settled Neighbours in Eurasia in the Middle Ages.....	253
Mirko Sardelić	
Images of Eurasian Nomads in European Cultural Imaginary in the Middle Ages .....	265
Dan Shapira	
An Unknown Jewish Community of the Golden Horde .....	281
Jonathan Karam Skaff	
The Tomb of Pugu Yitu (635–678) in Mongolia: Tang-Turkic Diplomacy and Ritual .....	295
Richárd Szántó	
Central Asia in the Cosmography of Anonymus of Ravenna .....	309
Katalin Tolnai – Zsolt Szilágyi – András Harmath	
Khitan Landscapes from a New Perspective. Landscape Archaeology Research in Mongolia.....	317
Kürşat Yıldırım	
Some Opinions on the Role of the Mohe 靺鞨 People in the Cultural and Ethnical Relationships between Tungusic, Turkic and Mongolian Peoples....	327
Ákos Zimonyi	
Did Jordanes Read Hippocrates? The Impact of Climatic Factors on Nomads in the <i>Getica</i> of Jordanes .....	333
István Zimonyi	
The Eastern Magyars of the Muslim Sources in the 10 <sup>th</sup> Century.....	347

# Images of Eurasian Nomads in European Cultural Imaginary in the Middle Ages

Mirko Sardelić\*

Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts

This paper is a contribution to deepening our understanding of the relations between sedentary and nomadic peoples in medieval Europe. It interprets the images of nomads found in the European cultural imagination, particularly in medieval literary sources from areas as far apart as Britain and Constantinople. This imaginary is the product of an accumulated culturally-processed emotional response to newcomers from the Eurasian Steppe who were often perceived as either a severe threat or as powerful military allies. The process of constructing such an image of the Eurasian nomads might seem to be a simple and natural one; however, one must not oversimplify its complexity. The reconstruction of this imagery is a joint effort made by several disciplines. This overview is intended to give the reader a glimpse into the perspectives of imagology, social psychology, cross-cultural history, and the history of emotions.

“Sedentary individuals, groups and whole populations perceived and actually encountered nomads with changing degrees of fear, suspicion, incomprehension, condescension, and romanticism.” (Miggelbrink & al. 2013: 12).

The introduction to this paper is a short reflection of the complex concept of the *cultural imaginary*. The concept is then used to discuss two important issues related to sedentary-nomadic relations in Eurasia. First: how medieval Europe fit Inner Asian nomads into its imaginary, i.e. what were the main images and what was the repository of images based on; and second: what were the emotional associations and connotations of these images?

## The framework

In the process of re-creating the events and the atmosphere of past times one is constantly on slippery ground. It is not only that “the past is a foreign country”.

---

\* I would like to thank the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions (Europe 1100–1800) (project CE110001011), as well as the Project HRZZ 6547 funded by the Croatian Science Foundation (PI Dr Damir Karbić) for supporting my research.

The analysis in this case is an attempt to interpret the past interpretations one culture made of another, a quite different one. Interpreting the sources resembles a forensic investigation: no matter how diligent and observant of the protocols one is, even a marginal note on a newly-found manuscript can shed completely new light onto events. However, until that happens one must work within the existing evidence, so I will outline my basic methodology first.

There are (at least) two possible approaches to giving a short overview of the type I propose to present. One can start chronologically, analysing the images created of the nomadic peoples as they appeared in the European literary sources ranging from Antiquity into the medieval period. In that version one could start with the Scythians, not only because the earliest European historiography (ie. Herodotus) presented them as a quite memorable Other (Hartog 1988). More importantly, this is the image of the ‘nomad’ that was used again and again on numerous occasions: the Huns and the Avars were later identified with the Scythians (Shuvalov 2017). The reason this old Herodotean image of the ‘nomad as Other’ kept being reused is that it allowed people to reduce that which was dangerously Unknown to something that, even if no less threatening, was at least familiar. Sometimes, though, this can create confusion, as in literary sources one may find various (anachronistic) names: the Huns were called Scythians; the Avars and Bulgars were called Huns; while the Magyars were called Scythians, Huns, Avars, and Turks. It is likely that many were more comfortable with the established imagery. After all, as W. Pohl noticed, Synesius of Cyrene stated in about the year 400, when new peoples were crossing the borders of the Empire almost yearly: “There are no new barbarians; the old Scythians are always thinking up new names to deceive the Romans.” (Pohl 2018: 5). Or, as O. Maenchen-Helfen (1973: 7) puts it, the reason for this terminological confusion is a combination of emotionally conditioned *reductio ad notum* with, even more often, a chance for the learned historian to show his erudition.

Alternatively, one could use a cultural framework to analyse the impression created of some Eurasian nomadic peoples (the Huns, Avars, Magyars, and Mongols)<sup>1</sup> as they appeared in European literary sources during the medieval period. Specifically, I wish to use gestalt notion of identity (self and others) contextualised by the notion of the cultural imaginary.

My goal is to analyse the way in which nomadic people were represented in the European cultural imagination, as expressed in the textual sources with the intention of making a contribution to the history of emotions. Nevertheless, since it is not possible to study emotions in isolation from other historical factors, a holistic approach that takes into account theories and histories of culture,

---

<sup>1</sup> As general reading, but also with chapters dedicated to images in the European cultural imagery, for the Huns see: Maenchen-Helfen 1973; Kuosmanen 2013; for Avars: Pohl 2018; Kardaras 2018; for Magyars: Zimonyi 2016; Bácsatyai 2017; Csukovics 2018; for the Mongols: Jackson 2005; all of which contain useful bibliographies.

identities, representation, literary symbolism, and emotions seems a necessary way to deal with the topic. The working method would then be to analyse the cultural context within which the images were created. As Clifford Geertz proposed, building upon Max Weber: “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs.” (Geertz 1973: 5). Alternatively, one could define culture as patterns of historically derived and selected ideas and their embodiment in institutions, practices, and artefacts, that pervasively influence how individuals think, feel, and behave (Ford & Mauss 2015: 1). The importance of institutional context seems even greater in relation to the study of written accounts of emotional states undertaken in an attempt to re-create the atmosphere of medieval Christendom.

The medieval Christian imaginary conception of Eurasian nomads was formed by various constituents that can be analysed using the scheme: text – intertext – context. The text (a historical source) bears the ‘fingerprints’ of the author, and is also determined by the motive and purpose of writing, as well as by the culture out of which it sprang. One also needs to pay special attention to intertextuality because, according to the French imagologist Daniel-Henri Pageaux, the imaginary is the realm used for “storing and the possible re-actualization of bits and pieces, sequences, even whole paragraphs which came or did not come from foreign countries.” (Pageaux 2001).

What does this mean for the case of the imaginary conceptions of Eurasian nomads? It means that medieval authors who described nomads had recourse to a library of ancient texts that had two traditional parts: a classical and a Christian section. These provided a critical pool of references, which then became a base for organising further perceptions. It was possible for a medieval author simply to shake off the dust from a paragraph written by Pliny, Solinus, or Ammianus Marcellinus, and suddenly that paragraph became a relevant part of an account on the Asian region or its inhabitants. In addition, the ancient text’s authority gave an extra value: a stamp of credibility. One of the characteristic features of the use of classical literature is that a later author’s own experience can be credibly augmented with or even fully replaced by unchecked or even incorrect information taken from canonical authors (Merrills 2005: 24). References to Holy Scripture or apocalyptic literature are even more powerful: a single syntagm, a patch can become a ‘hyperlink’ to the Christian imaginary. One of the most powerful instances of these references can be found in the prologue of Roger of Apulia’s *Carmen miserabile*, in which the author, a 13<sup>th</sup>-century Italian cleric, writes that he had spent “a time and one half of time” as a Mongol prisoner of war (Master Roger 2010: 134–135). Roger’s invocation of the book of Daniel (Dan 7.25), the flower of apocalyptic literature, doesn’t give any specific information about how long that captivity actually was, but does speak eloquently of how difficult the experience was for him using the language of Biblical times.

## The cultural imaginary

More than a decade ago, C. Strauss proclaimed in the beginning of her paper that: “Imaginary is becoming common in the place of *culture* and *cultural beliefs, meanings, and models* in anthropology and cultural studies.” (Strauss 2006: 322; cf. Stankiewicz 2016).

The collective imaginary provides a framework for the group’s sense of belonging, brings the members of groups together, provides common structure, boundaries and values. Europe has, for centuries, been an umbrella term for hundreds, and thousands, of spatial collective identities (Saunders 2009; Berger 2009). The extent of ‘our’ identity often depends on who the ‘Other’ is. When ‘zooming out’ to a wide Eurasian continent to discuss the incursions of the Huns, Avars, Magyars, Mongols, Cumans, and the Ottomans on a wider scale, the Danube basin, site of the most intense contact zone (the works of J. Preiser-Kapeller), might be called Europe. Later we might also use the religious identification and call it Christendom.

The imaginary could be described as the framework within which a group acts and thinks about ways of acting; distinguishes ‘good’ from ‘bad’ practices; chooses historical models; and has visions and dreams about the future (Pageaux 2001). The social imaginary, if further simplification is allowed, is that album of mental images<sup>2</sup> that a society has created of itself and others, and more precisely, about itself in relation to others. This dynamic of relation to others is at the centre of what is called ‘identity’, a term rich in meaning and highly contested over the last several decades.

One can distinguish three distinctive characteristics of the imaginary: it is carried in images, stories, and legends; it is shared by a great number of people (possibly the whole society); this immediate common understanding enables common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy (Taylor 2004: 23).

As it is not possible here to attempt to define identity, it might be more appropriate to use an example which is useful when it comes to historical comparisons of relations between sedentary and nomadic, ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’ societies. Päivi Kuosmanen (2013) makes the sharp observation that the image of the Huns created by Ammianus Marcellinus in the 4<sup>th</sup> century perfectly accentuates all the differences between the Romans and the newcomers.<sup>3</sup> Ammianus’ description of the Huns’ unsightly clothes (*pellibus; coriis haedinis*), barbaric conduct (*totum furori incitatissimo tribuentes; hoc expeditum indomitumque hominum genus*), unintelligible way of talking (*flexiloqui et obscuri*), lack of religion (*nullius religionis vel superstitionis*), government (*aguntur autem*

2 These serve as a point of reference: “When people from various countries and cultures meet each other, real experience and mental images compete.” (Beller & Leersen 2007: 7).

3 To Dr Päivi (Collander) Kuosmanen I owe gratitude for the comments and the published and unpublished materials on the topic, in a correspondence in 2012.

*nulla severitate regali*) and character (*per indutias infidi inconstantes*) differs from everything that is related to the Romans (Ammianus Marcellinus 1986: 380–387; book 31.2). In every single detail the image of a Hun's physical and spiritual character is the exact opposite to the idealised Roman citizen who (in respect to the order above), dressed in a linen suit; constantly pursued self-discipline; was articulate in speech and rhetoric; praised gods; and lived in a properly arranged state system with strong moral values (cf. Collander 2008; Isaac 2004: 305–306; also Wiedemann 1986; and Burgersdijk 2016).

Another Roman historian of a previous age, Tacitus, wrote on Germanic tribes in a more positive way than his predecessors. As a direct contrast with the Roman vices of the time, he created a sort of a noble-savage image of the Germanic people. This is the point at which the need to take context into account becomes apparent. When Tacitus wrote his work (late-1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.), the Germanic peoples were in relative subjection or remote over the river Danube, while on the other hand Ammianus wrote about the Huns during a period when they were destroying Roman cities. 'Exotic' people remain in the sphere of the 'interesting' as long as they are at a safe distance: proximity is a critical factor in 'choosing' suitable images from a cultural imaginary.

### The Other and the Enemy

The Other is one who is not in our circle, who does not share our values, our qualities, and, according to Freud, absorbs projections of our flaws. However, when the Other is in a position to make threats to our circle, either through his ideas or with weapons, he stops being the Other and acquires the face of the Enemy. The most common characterisation of the Enemy, from antiquity up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century is as treacherous, warlike, cruel, and remorseless. Of course, when it comes to antagonism, mirroring becomes significant: both sides perceive and describe themselves and the Other in the same way, and the characteristics are stereotyped and repeated almost verbatim by each other about the other. Although not all these stereotypes are images of the enemy, the images of the enemy are all stereotypes, negative ones. All their characteristics are reduced to just a few that are then represented as innate and permanent. To be convincing, the image of the enemy needs to be easily recognisable, threatening, (pseudo-)rationally justified, and emotionally charged (Vuorinen 2012: 5).

As the threat becomes bigger (or closer), the image of the Enemy is intensified and it becomes denigrated and dehumanised, as a part of a defensive mechanism. "A threat to the group's integrity, especially when posed by a group with a different worldview, strikes at the very basis of its members' psychological as well as biological survival." (Frank & Melville 1988: 199). The members of the hostile community are perceived as beasts or demons, having little or no social organisation but high combat skills. However it is developed, the process of

dehumanisation compromises the inhibitions humans have towards killing other humans, and the maintenance of these inhibitions is normally a prerequisite towards peaceful social relations. When we are threatened, we feel the need to circumvent the usual prohibition of killing another human, and we do that by turning that other human into the Enemy, a deformed, sub-human animal who can be killed with impunity. Moreover, fighting these threatening monsters becomes respectable and honourable, even a holy activity (Frank & Melville 1988: 201–202; cf. Vuorinen 2012: 4). Within this logic, the annihilation of an enemy who is defined as evil receives a rational and legitimate base.

### Christian and apocalyptic framework

Since it was mostly men of the Church who wrote the accounts of the (most often violent) contacts between Europeans and nomads, it was unsurprising that the newcomers were first appraised within a Christian worldview. Holy Scripture and the Greco-Roman classical library offered material for initial accounts, as both these traditions in their cultural imaginaries mention the unusual appearance of people of the nations from the East. The fundamental binary opposition of the (European) classical world, in which Greeks and later Romans were contrasted to barbarians was transformed in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages into an equally powerful, but slightly different one: the Christian versus the pagan world. This transition can be clearly seen in a poem by the most famous Christian poet of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, Prudentius: “Yet what is Roman and what is barbarian are as different from each other as the four-footed creature is distinct from the two-footed or the dumb from the speaking; and no less apart are they who loyally obey God's commands from senseless cults and their superstitions.” (Prudentius 1953: 71; verse 816–819). Barbarians and pagans quite swiftly intertwined and became synonyms (Beller & Leersen 2007: 267).

The division between Classical and Christian authors has more of a formal character. As early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Saint Jerome saw Christian humanism as being based on a congruency of pagan (Greco-Roman) and Christian tradition. Therefore, medieval authors had their classical *topoi* intertwined with biblical references (Curtius 2013: 36–37, 72).

Thus, O. Maenchen-Helfen had good reason to explain the lack of interest in the study of the Huns (in the paragraph titled “Demonization”) by stating simply: “The Huns were demonized early.” (Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 2). He supported his argument with several quotations from the contemporary witnesses of the Hun invasion of Europe (Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 2–5). Some of the key written testimonies belong to none less than great Church Fathers Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine.

It is virtually impossible to overemphasise the importance of the apocalyptic scenario in medieval Christian culture. The Second coming of Christ relates to the

Last judgement and the end of the world. It is preceded by an imminent crisis one of the protagonists of which are Biblical peoples of Gog and Magog (cf. Anderson 1932; Cary 1956; also Chekin 1992). St. Ambrose (4<sup>th</sup> c.) identified Gog with the Goths; St. Jerome (4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> cc.) with the Scythians (= Huns); Paulus Orosius (5<sup>th</sup> c.) with the Huns. Many 13<sup>th</sup>-century authors made the same identification of the Mongols (Schmieder 2006; Sardelić 2013).

The literature of the apocalyptic traditions is substantial. It is worth remembering however that the apocalypse can be defined as “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.” (Collins 1979: 9). When we consider this extended understanding of the apocalyptic tradition or discourse, that it is “intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority.” (Collins 1997: 41), its purpose becomes more clear.

Naturally, any foreign people coming violently from the North or the East, having customs differing from those of the Latin Christians, was a candidate for the role of Gog and Magog. Among others, Scythians, Huns, Khazars, Hungarians, and in the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Mongols – usually called Tartars – were all identified with the enclosed nations of Alexander the Great that seemed to have just broken through the Gates (Schmieder 2009: 15). In some way, in a well-exploited *topos*, the hero Alexander the Great retroactively became the protector against – in European view – an incarnated ‘evil’ in the shape of nomadic nations (Cary 1956).

### Denigration and dehumanisation of the Other

Humans are for various reasons preoccupied with their humanness. It can be related to their fear of death or to the problematic nature of their relations with other humans and animals. Some subtle and unconscious forms of dehumanisation (called also *infrahumanisation*) occur daily. Perceiving others as different certainly borders on dehumanisation. Nonetheless, for perceived differences to develop into dehumanisation, theorists argue that the Other must be considered to be an animal or a mere mechanical cog, that is lacking in such fundamental human traits as individuality, warmth and emotion (Bain & al. 2013: 91). On many occasions Western Christendom needed to dehumanise the peoples of the Eurasian steppe, as they had dehumanised other invaders before them. This reaction was understandable because they feared for their very lives. As the bibliography on dehumanisation has grown considerably in the last two decades (see: Bain & al. 2013), it is appropriate to give an image instead.

In the second part of the chapter titled *De peste Tartarorum* (Archdeacon Thomas 2006: §XXXVI), Thomas of Spalato, a contemporary of the Mongols invasion of Hungary and Croatia in 1241/2, represents the Tartars exactly as one

would imagine the depiction of the fiercest enemy. He starts with an episode in which, allegedly, the Ta(r)tars take all the boys that they had captured and then summon their own children to hit them on the head with poles. The adults themselves sat apart and observed the scene with “cruel eyes” (*crudelibus oculis*), laughing and praising those who struck the surest blow or who could crush the brain with a single stroke. Thomas concludes this image with the following observation: “What need I say more? No respect was paid to the female sex, no pity to those of childish years, no mercy for old age. All were butchered in the same pitiless way. They seemed devils rather than human beings.” (Archdeacon Thomas 2006: 272–273). What immediately follows is worth quoting at length:

“When they came to the dwellings of men of religion, the company of clerics would come out to them, dressed in their sacred garments, singing hymns and chants, as if showing due honor to the victors, presenting gifts and offerings to incite mercy towards them. But they, devoid of all pity and human feeling, and despising the practices of religion and mocking their pious simplicity, would draw their swords and cut off their heads without the least pity. Then, pouring into the cloisters, they would plunder everything, setting alight the houses and profaning the churches. They pulled down the altars and scattered the relics, and from the sacred vestments they fashioned ribbons for their wives and concubines.”

If I wished to choose a paragraph from among the extant accounts of the Mongols, the one that is likely to elicit the most negative emotions and incite the reader to fight them most strongly, I would pick this paragraph. In this short text, Thomas manages to give in a very concentrated form a large number of the most dramatic images: at first there is a scene in which children, with the approval of adults, spill the brains of other children. This is followed by the decapitation of clerics who had come to pay respect to the victorious. Compounding this viciousness is that both actions are accompanied by laughter (*corridentibus*) and contempt (*deridentes*). Rhetorically this passage is sophisticated and powerful in its handling of intensifying violence: after the first image one concludes that the Mongols show no mercy towards children, nor respect towards women and the elderly, and the other image reveals that they do not even respect God. It all ends with the desecration of churches, breaking of reliquaries and destruction of various objects that are used exclusively for religious purposes. The Mongols’ sexualisation of holy items makes their utmost disrespect plain enough even to those who do not recognise that the last two sentences are a paraphrase of Pseudo-Methodius’ Apocalypse (Pseudo-Methodius 2012; cf. Dan. 5; cf. Master Roger 2010: 179, 189, esp. 201).

The perception of cruelty (*crudelitas*), especially with respect to the aged and the young, the most vulnerable members of any community, is quite a common stereotype of the Enemy, being the Other who is in position to pose a threat to one’s own community (Sardelić 2017: 501).

## Instincts and epithets

All the characteristics of a threatening Other are reduced to just a few (epithets) which are then represented as innate and permanent. Thus, we find strong similarities in the accounts given of all the nomadic peoples considered here. They are all described as if their (evil) characteristics were 'hard-wired' into them, as if they were innate and in some way connected to their very instincts. The two most frequently cited purported traits are that they are bloodthirsty and impossible to satisfy. A general observation with regard to those living to the north of Byzantium can be found in the advice that Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus gave to his son: "Know therefore that all the tribes of the north have, as it were implanted in them by nature, a ravening greed of money, never satiated (...)" (Constantine Porphyrogenitus 1967: 13).

The same again with the description of Avars. The *Strategicon* of Maurice draws the usual conclusions: "They are very superstitious, treacherous, foul, faithless, possessed by an insatiate desire for riches. They scorn their oath, do not observe agreements, and are not satisfied by gifts. Even before they accept the gift, they are making plans for treachery and betrayal of their agreements." (Maurice 1984: 116; book 11.2).

It is hardly surprising that in the 10<sup>th</sup> century Bishop Liudprand of Cremona recorded his 'ethnocharacterisation' of Hungarians in this manner: "Moreover, the Hungarians, having carried out their scheme, unable to satisfy their evil cravings with so great a massacre of Christians, instead ravaged and totally burned the kingdoms (...)" (Liudprand 2007: 77; Retrib. II, 5: *sed rabiem ut perfidiae satiarent*); "Hungarians, thirsting for slaughter, avid for war" (Liudprand 2007: 76; Retrib. II, 4: *necis sitiens*); "Arnulf summoned to his aid the nation of the Hungarians, greedy, rash, ignorant of almighty God but well versed in every crime, avid only for murder and plunder." (Liudprand 2007: 56).

The invasion of the Mongols in 1241/42 re-actualised some well-known images: "(...) he (Batu) sent out men to burn and kill as their inborn viciousness dictated." (Master Roger 2010: 169: *innata malitia*). Matthew Paris and Simon of Saint Quentin, among many others, presented the Mongols in a particularly original and excessively negative way, for the reasons not beyond reasonable doubt; especially given the fact that the English chronicler did not experience the Mongol invasion in person, while the Dominican friar was an envoy in a diplomatic mission (Sardelić 2017).

These qualities of 'nomadic barbarians' – viciousness, maliciousness, and greediness, were not only 'implanted by nature', i.e. innate but were described as permanent and extreme in their intensity and negativity. These are obvious elements of dehumanisation. Even the expression of physical differences, especially with the addition of personal aesthetics (such as: "the Huns are really ugly in their appearance"), immediately signals to the purpose of those lines.

One needs to constantly bear in mind, nonetheless, that those dehumanising images were not exclusively 'reserved' for the Eurasian nomads, so different in appearance and their way of living, or invading 'barbarians'. On the contrary, one may find them virtually anywhere, for the members of the same cultural circle. In that case, however, the 'addressee' is someone from a different (most often lower) social class. Alternatively, a rival from a familiar culture, as it can be read from the same Liudprand (2007: 247): the name that includes "every baseness, every cowardice, every kind of greed, every promiscuity, every mendacity, indeed every vice" for Liudprand and his compatriots is none other than the Roman name.

### Natural and cultural commonplaces: Food and blood

The reason that ethnographic descriptions always have food somewhere in the very beginning is three-fold. Firstly, we all eat at least once a day, and food has always been an important cultural artefact. Due to its central role in human lives, and the variety both of ingredients and of ways of preparation which is possible, food is a very powerful medium for the display and dissemination of culture and social identity (Feidenreich 2011: 4; cf. Sardelić 2017: 499). Secondly, the information that the Other eats raw meat or similar can potentially be a suitable argument for consigning him to the category of an animal, that is, it can be a way to subject him to dehumanisation. Finally, it is a perfect medium to bring disgust into play. The original forms of disgust are believed to focus on defending the body against infection that might enter through the alimentary canal. Descriptions of food and eating are therefore an excellent instrument to provoke disgust in readers.

Disgust can be divided into physical and sociomoral (Chapman & Anderson 2012). The very act of transforming raw food into a meal, the embodiment of a culture, is an element of cultural identity: orthodox Jews for example would not eat a meal prepared by a member of another culture (Feidenreich 2011). The activation of disgust is therefore related not only to the food the Other consumes, but to the culture this food represents. Sociomoral disgust is related to violations of divinity and/or purity. It is clear that food can cause both kinds of disgust. It can definitely provoke physical disgust, but also holy books have certain rules that must be observed about food, whose violation will cause disgust in believers.

The drinking of blood is a practice that has been independently verified to have existed among the Mongols in extreme situations. In the representations of 13<sup>th</sup>-century authors, however, this practice becomes a powerful image of savagery, by being stripped of the circumstances in which it was practised. In one of his first descriptions of the Tartars, the English chronicler Matthew Paris asserts three times in just a few paragraphs that they drink blood, but never mentions the context. Even more, he portrays the Mongols as bloodthirsty (*satientes*), who

consider blood a delicacy (*pro deliciis bibentes*) (Matthew Paris 1872–1883: IV, 76–77).<sup>4</sup> When there is no blood to drink, he suggests, they drink turbulent, muddy waters (*aquas turbidas vel etiam lutulentas*). This is telling, as if they had a *preference* for the unclean, not just a tolerance of it in necessity. Therefore, Matthew shares this information with the sole purpose of dehumanising the Other.

Drinking blood has had a long history of being a useful stereotype (i.e. a discriminative image). Not only for its power to provoke disgust, but even more from a Christian perspective: Holy Scripture strictly prohibits the practice, starting with Gen. 9:2–4. The reason is later explained thus: “You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood.” (Lev. 17:14).

Speaking of the Hungarians, Bishop Otto of Freising (1868: 233–234) claims that they “eat raw flesh and drink human blood” (*humano quoque sanguine potaretur*). This leads to another very powerful image with huge dehumanising potential: the cannibalism, which has been discussed in scholarship (Guzman 1991; Phillips 2013: 89–99; Sardelić 2017: 503).

## Conclusions

It is crucial to establish, analyse, and understand the cultural framework within which the images of the Other (in this case Eurasian nomads) are created. All of these images have been processed and adapted to fit the cultural views and expectations of perceivers. It is important to distinguish wartime from peacetime images. Those formed in the time of conflict are stereotyped, threatening, and emotionally charged – mostly with fear and both forms of disgust: physical and sociomoral. Needless to say, they are most dehumanising.

The repository of images has been continuously filled with new material, while the old one is being reused or reinterpreted. It consists of different, even contradictory images of certain Others or phenomena. ‘Barbarians’ can be cruel and greedy, and simple and honest at the same time: the situation will dictate which image will be ‘chosen’ and promoted.

Medieval Europe encountered powerful nomadic people such as the Huns, the Avars, the Magyars, and the Mongols (to name but a few), and they perceived them to be threatening. Denigrating and dehumanising imagery was an essential tool created from the pure survival instinct, in the first place. It was used subsequently (within the framework of apocalyptic literature) to provide consolation and hope; and then, equally important, as a mobilizing factor against the Enemy. The enemy had now taken the form of a demon or a wild beast, and was therefore, by all contemporary human and Christian standards, deprived of its right to live.

<sup>4</sup> In general, F. Schmieder (1994: 225–226) sees the accounts of the Mongol dietary practices as a usual *topos*, while P. Jackson argues it is obvious that those descriptions were fully in accord with Pseudo-Methodius’ prophecies (Jackson 2001: 363).

## References

- Ammianus Marcellinus. 1986. *Rerum Gestarum Libri*. III (27–31). English translation by J. C. Rolfe. Cambridge, MA.
- Anderson, A. R. 1932. *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations*. Cambridge, MA.
- Archdeacon Thomas of Split. 2006. *History of the Bishops of Salona and Split*. Karbić, D. & Perić, O. & Sweeney, J. R. (eds.). Budapest.
- Bácsatyai, D. 2017. *A kalandozó hadjáratok nyugati kútfoi* [A critical inquiry into the Latin sources of 10<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian incursions]. Budapest.
- Bain, P. G. & Vaes, J. & Leyens, J.-F. (eds.) 2013. *Humanness and Dehumanization*. New York, London.
- Beller, M. & Leersen, J. T. (eds.) 2007. *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*. Amsterdam, New York.
- Berger, S. 2009. History and forms of collective identity in Europe: Why Europe cannot and should not be built on history. In: Rorato, L. & Saunders, A. (eds.) *The Essence and the Margin. National Identities and Collective Memories in Contemporary European Culture*. Amsterdam, New York: 21–35.
- Burgersdijk, D. 2016. Creating the enemy: Ammianus Marcellinus' double digression on Huns and Alans (Res Gestae 31.2). *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 59(1): 111–132.
- Cary, G. 1956. *The Medieval Alexander*. Cambridge.
- Chapman, H. A. & Anderson, A. K. 2012. Understanding disgust. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1251,1: 62–76.
- Chekin, L. S. 1992. The godless Ishmaelites: the image of the steppe in the eleventh-thirteenth-century Rus. *Russian History* 19(1–4): 9–28.
- Collander, P. 2008. Romans depictions and political perspective on the Huns as "Others" in Late Antiquity. In: *Imagology and cross-cultural encounters in history*. Alenius, K. & Fält, O. K. & Mertaniemi, M. (eds.) Rovaniemi: 71–82.
- Collins J. J. 1979. Introduction: Towards the morphology of a genre. *Semeia* 14: *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. J. J. Collins. Missoula, MT: 1–20.
- Collins J. J. 1997. *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, Cambridge.
- Constantine Porphyrogenitus. 1967. *De Administrando Imperio*. Greek text by G. Moravcsik, English translation by R. J. H. Jenkins. Washington, DC.
- Csukovics, E. 2018. *Hungary and the Hungarians. Western Europe's View in the Middle Ages*. Rome.

- Curtius, E. R. 2013. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Princeton, Oxford.
- Ford, B. Q. & Mauss, I. B. 2015. Culture and emotion regulation. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 3: 1-5.
- Frank, J. D. & Melville, A. Y. 1988. The Image of the Enemy and the process of change. In: *Breakthrough: Emerging New Thinking: Soviet and Western Scholars Issue a Challenge to Build a World Beyond War*. New York, NY: 199-207.
- Freidenreich, D. M. 2011. *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Law*. The University of California Press
- Geertz, C. 1973. *The Interpretations of Culture: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Guzman, G. G. 1991. Reports on Mongol cannibalism in the thirteenth-century Latin sources: oriental fact or western fiction? In: *Discovering New Worlds. Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination*. Westrem, S. D. (ed.) New York: 31-68.
- Hartog, F. 1988. *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*. The University of California Press.
- Isaac, B. 2004. *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton.
- Jackson, P. 2001. Medieval Christendom's encounter with the alien, *Historical Research* 44: 347-369.
- Jackson, P. 2005. *Mongols and the West: 1221-1410*. Routledge.
- Kardaras, G. 2018. *Byzantium and the Avars, 6<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.* Leiden, Boston.
- Kuosmanen, P. 2013. *The Nature of Nomadic Power. Contacts Between the Huns and the Romans During the Fourth and Fifth Centuries*. [PhD Dissertation. University of Turku, Finland].
- Liudprand of Cremona. 2007. *The Complete Works*. Translated by P. Squatriti. Washington, DC.
- Maenchen-Helfen, O. J. 1973. *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.
- Master Roger's Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tatars*. 2010. Translated and annotated by J. M. Bak and M. Rady. Budapest.
- Matthew Paris. 1872-1883. *Chronica Majora*. Luard, H. R. (ed.) 7 vols. London.
- Maurice's Strategikon. Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*. 1984. Translated by G. T. Dennis. Philadelphia.
- Merrills, A. H. 2005. *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge.
- Miggelbrink J. & Habeck J. O. & Mazzullo, N. & Koch, P. (eds.). 2013. *Nomadic and Indigenous Spaces. Productions and Cognitions*. Ashgate Publishing.

- Otto of Freising. 1868. *Chronicon*. In: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores* XX. Wilmans, R. (ed.) Hannover: 83-301.
- Pageaux, D.-H. 2001. From the cultural image to social image. In: Meng, H. (ed.), *The Imagology of Comparative Literature*. Beijing: 118-152. (in Chinese)
- Phillips, K. M. 2013. *Before Orientalism. Asian Peoples and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245-1510*. Philadelphia.
- Pohl, W. 2018. *The Avars: A Steppe Empire in Europe, 567-822*. Ithaka, NY.
- Prudentius 1953. *Contra Symmachi II*. In: *Prudentius*, vol. 2. English translation by H. J. Thomson. Loeb Classical Library.
- Pseudo-Methodius. 2012. *Apocalypse*. Transl. and ed. B. Garstad. Harvard University Press.
- Sardelić M. 2013. The Mongols and Europe in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century: Prophecies and Apocalyptic Scenarios. Andrews, A. R. (ed.) Proceedings of the conference *Prophecy, Divination, Apocalypse: 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Medieval and Renaissance Forum*. Plymouth, NH: 100-112.
- Sardelić, M. 2017. John of Plano Carpini vs Simon of Saint-Quentin: 13<sup>th</sup> -century emotions in the Eurasian steppe. *Golden Horde Review* vol. 5, no. 3: 494-508.
- Saunders, A. 2009. Introduction: Towards a European mode of cultural imaginary? In: Rorato, L. & Saunders, A. (eds.) *The Essence and the Margin. National Identities and Collective Memories in Contemporary European Culture*. Amsterdam-New York: 9-20.
- Schmieder, F. 1994. *Europa und die Fremden. Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. bis in das 15. Jahrhundert*. Sigmaringen.
- Schmieder F. 2006. Christians, Jews, Muslims – and Mongols: Fitting a foreign people into the Western Christian apocalyptic scenario. *Medieval Encounters* 12,2: 274-295.
- Schmieder, F. 2009. Edges of the world – Edges of time. In: *The Edges of the Medieval World*. Jaritz, G. & Kreem, J. (eds.) Budapest.
- Шувалов П. (Shuvalov, P.) 2017. Западные скифы и Скифия в географическом и риторическом пространствах I–VI вв. н. э. In: *Крымская Скифия в системе культурных связей между Востоком и Западом (III в. до н. э. - VII в. н. э.)*. Иванчик, А. И. & Мордвинцева, В. И. (eds.) Симферополь, Москва.
- Stankiewicz, D. 2016. Against imagination: On the ambiguities of a composite concept, *American Anthropologist* 118(4): 796-810.
- Strauss, C. 2006. The imaginary. *Anthropological Theory* 6(3): 322-344.
- Taylor, C. 2004. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham, London.
- Vuorinen, M. 2012. Introduction: Enemy images as inversions of the Self. In: *Enemy Images in War Propaganda*. Cambridge: 1-14.

- Wiedemann, T. E. J. 1986. Between men and beasts: Barbarians in Ammianus Marcellinus. In: Moxon, I. S. & Smart, J. D. & Woodman, A. J. (eds.). *Past Perspectives. Studies in Greek and Roman Historical Writing*. Cambridge: 189-201.
- Zimonyi, I. 2016. *Muslim Sources on the Magyars in the Second Half of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. The Magyar Chapter of the Jāyhānī Tradition*. Boston, Leiden.

