

Notes on the Hungarian expansion East of Carpathians in the mid XIVth century

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Abstract: **Notes on the Hungarian expansion East of Carpathians in the mid XIVth century.** The paper analyzes the historical context of the Hungarian expansion East of Carpathians in the XIVth century, as well as the highly disputed chronology of the Angevines' military campaigns against the Golden Horde. The documentary information available today do not allow, in our view, the identification of big scale military actions, able to settle down and bring an end to the Hungarian-Mongolian conflict. On the contrary, it seems that the rather fortuitous accomplishments of the Angevines' in this area owe more to the temporary restriction of the Mongolian presence in the future territory of Moldavia, which took place in quite specific circumstances.

Key words: Nogai, Louis I, Hungary, Golden Horde, Mongols

By the end of the XIIIth century, only several decades after the Great Mongolian Invasion in Eastern Europe, the Golden Horde undertook a series of actions aimed at gaining a strict control on the foreign policy of the Byzantine Empire, but also at maintaining a careful surveillance of Hungary. Among these, one may note the investiture of the all-powerful general Nogai at Isaccea, where from he would manage to impose his domination on the Lower Danube. Moreover, in a short time Nogai will break up from his subordination to the central authority on the Volga (V. Ciocâltan, 1998, p. 230-240; E. Oberländer-Târnoveanu, 2003; Th. Tănase, 2005), strengthening his control on the outer Carpathian territories and getting decisively involved in the political life of the fully vassal Bulgarian state, but also in that of the Arpadian kingdom.

In the last respect, the Mongol interferences were so strong that Hungary almost shared the fate of the Russian Knyazats. Thus, the defeat of the pro-Mongols faction mostly represented by Cumans by the Hungarian royal army (1282) prompted the aggressive intervention of the Golden Horde in 1285. Although the military success of these actions is still debatable (T. Sălăgean, 2008), they

succeeded nevertheless in reorienting to a great extent the politics of the Hungarian king. In fact, the contemporary documents present the king Ladislas IV *the Cuman* as stating amazingly “that he became friend with the Tatars and became himself a Tatar” (*DIR*, 1952: 299).

The assassination of the king and his replacement with Andrew the IIIrd (1290-1301) will impose, however, a clear switch of the Hungarian kingdom's policy into the direction pointed by Rome. As a predictable reaction in this context, by the end of 1291, Nogai carried a decisive attack ending into an unprecedented enlargement of the Mongol hegemony along the Lower Danube area, reaching to the Iron Gates (Ș. Papacostea, 1993: 125), but also in the installment of *Negru-Vodă* as the *great voivod* South of Carpathians (D. Căprăroiu, 2008). In the opposite direction, the elimination of Nogai in 1299 (V. Spinei, 2012, p. 61) by the Khan Tokta (1291-1312), which as a leader of the Golden Horde could no longer tolerate the rebel propensities of his general, caused the diminution of the Mongol control East of Carpathians, leaving room for the reiteration of the Hungarian crown's demands over the area. The immediate consequences were a temporary

reactivation of the *Cuman Diocese* and especially the *founding* of Moldavia.

Subsequently, under the rule of Khan Özbek (1313-1342), the Golden Horde returned in force in the area. In what the Eastern Carpathian space is concerned, the complete control of the Golden Horde even in the early years of Özbek's presence on the Sarai throne is proven by the letter of Pope Clement V, dated to February 1, 1314 and addressed to "Universis Christi fidelibus, per regnum Hungariae constitutes". In fact, the Pontiff was giving his assurance that he would provide absolution of all sins to those who would die as Catholics, given the context in which "Vos et ecclesiae Romanae fideles aliarum partium, regno Hungariae adiacentium, a Schismaticis, Tartaris, paganis aliisque permixtis infidelium nationibus impugnationes, depopulationes, captivitates, servitutes, ac carceres, et alias diversorum generum poenas et cruciatus multiplices patiamini..." (Hurmuzaki, 1887, p. 574-575).

Other strictly contemporary information emphasizes the fact that at the beginning of the third decade of the XIVth century the entire outer Carpathian space was under the hegemony of the Golden Horde. Thus, according to an autobiographical note of the Serbian Tzar Stephen Dušan, to be found in the opening part of his *Zakonik*, in the army of Tzar Mikhail III Şişman involved at the Velbujd battle (1330) also participated, aside Bulgarians and Byzantines, "Basaraba Ivanko, the father in law of Tzar Alexander [John Alexander, the future Tzar of Bulgaria, 1331-1371], the Black Tatars, which lived in the neighborhood, the Yassy/*Alani* reign, and others ruling together with them" (G. Mihăilă, 1972, p. 274).

What is mentioned here is actually the coalition lead by Tatars which acted in the Carpathian-Balkan space in the interest of their local vassals, but especially in that of the Golden Horde (V. Achim, 2008, p. 275). In connection to the exceptional relevance of these historical circumstances, the reputed researcher V. Ciocîltan states: "The most definite proof that the forces in the Carpathian-Balkan space were integrated into a coherent political-military system is provided by the presence of the «Black Tatars» and *Alani* into this alliance. If the Romanian involvement at Velbujd may be explained as reflecting the specific interests of the Wallachian voivod to take the side of Bulgarians against Serbians, such an argument

cannot be made at all in the case of the other two ethnic groups mentioned: living on the territory of future Moldavia, they simply could not have had their own litigation with the Serbian kingdom. Their involvement in the Balkan conflict, much like the cohesion of the entire aggregate, dominated by the major partners from Argeş and Târnovo, must have been forcefully assured by a superior will, which in the given circumstances could have only been that of the all-powerful Khan Özbek" (V. Ciocîltan, 1998, p. 256).

The very context of the intervention of the Hungarian king, Carol Robert, against Wallachia in the autumn of 1330 provides arguments in favor of such an interpretation. Thus, in his correspondence with the Pontiff, Carol Robert presented his fortuitous success at Severin as "triumphum gloriosum obtentum contra Tartaros" (*DRH*, 1977, p. 44). In fact, the Mongols, as the true 'holders' of the Iron Gates, already controlled by them through their intermediaries in Argeş from 1291 on, gave the Angevine king a painful reply, devastating the Bârsa Country. In this respect, one may invoke the information provided by a document emitted in Alba Iulia, on December, 28, 1335, in which the *Capitulum* of the Transylvanian Church stressed the loyal service to the king of Magister Nicolae Wass the Young at the Hălchiu fortress "with the shedding of his blood and the death of his close relatives and faithful servants" (*DIR*, 1954, p. 366). Although the document do not reveal the identity of king's enemies penetrating into Transylvania in the summer of 1335, we do know it from the Sachsen chronicles, which mention in this particular year the plundering of Bârsa Country and the destruction of the *Orlenburg* fortress by *Tatars* (George Michael Gottlieb von Hermann, 2010, p. 230).

Precisely a decade later, the young and impetuous king, Louis I, the son and follower of Carol Robert, began a Hungarian counter-offensive east of Carpathians, an initiative left to the Székelys on the southern front of the future Moldavia, and to the Maramureş folks of Dragoş in the north-western part. The chronology of the anti-Mongol military actions is, however, deeply controversial (Şt. S. Gorovei, 1997; R. Cârciuamaru, 2009, 2010) and requires therefore a careful scrutiny. This is all the more true as the issue at stake is the very understanding of the circumstances leading to the establishment of the Moldavian *reign*, which initially represented a delegated rule on behalf of the Hungarian crown.

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From our perspective, the definite transfer of Dragoș east of Carpathians has not been occasioned by the successful military campaign led by Andrei Lackfy in 1345, as previously thought (Șt. S. Gorovei, 1997, p. 89-93). On one hand, the chronicle attribute to monk Ioan, rich in chronological details, mentions the date of the military expedition (2-5 February 1345) and the *exclusive* participation of Székelys, together with “a few Hungarians”/ *Siculi cum paucis Hungaris* (*Chronicon Dubnicense*, 1884, p. 151-152). On the other hand, the expedition targeted the territories ruled by Atlamuș, that is, the extreme south of future Moldavia, the crossing of Carpathians taking place most likely through the Oituz pass. In fact, according to the old Hungarian chronicles, the repeated attacks of Székelys forced the Mongols to retreat *ad parte maritimes* (*Chronicon Dubnicense*, 1884, p. 168). It is worth stressing in this context the importance this area gained for the Golden Horde, as Atlamuș, the head of Tatars from the Danube mouths, was the father in law of Khan Geanibek himself (1342-1357). His memory has been preserved in the folk tradition, with Atlamuș becoming the main character of a well-known Romanian ballad mentioning “Alimoș, haiduk from the *Low Country*” (V. Ciocîltan, 1987, p. 351).

Whatever the case, the success of Székelys' incursions has been purely fortuitous and failed in changing the status of the respective territories or in pushing the Tatars out of them. Only in the next year, when the plague epidemics that would bring the death of no less than 30,000 Mongols started, could king Louis have some peace at his borders, a situation which allowed him to leave for Italy in 1347: “[...] Omnibus itaque posthabitis, diligenti cura dispositionis, cepit domnius rex Lodouicus de suo recessu de Hungaria, et de progressu ad Italiam cogitare. Et quod regnum Hungarie taliter post se relinqueret, quatenus in eius absentia queuis hostilitas ipsum regnum inuadere non auderet; maius enim hostilitatis et aduersitatis periculum ipsi regni Hungarie a tartaris et saracenis imminebat. Sed dominus deus eciam cum attemtacione fecit prouentum, quia taliter eos flagellauit, ut ipsorum terrorem timere et formidare non oporteret. Nam anno domini millesimo trecentesimo quadagesimo sexto dominus deus misit pestilenciam in eos, que tantum in eos deseuyt, quod infra paucos menses, ut dicitur, trecentena milia tartarorum prostrauit et consumpsit. Sic igitur domino deo prouidente rex Lodouicus in confinibus regni sui habens pacem

cum hostibus, securitatem cum amicis et cognatis...” (*Chronicon Dubnicense*, 1884, p. 148).

Thus, the anti-Mongol expedition in 1345 has been undertaken exclusively by Székelys, without the king's or Maramureș folk's participation, and it was not followed by any other major expedition or penetration into Northern Moldavia. Not only was that expedition an isolated event, but the peace at the borders has actually been brought by the “divine intervention”, which thinned the number of Mongols.

In fact, in the years 1346-1347, as a consequence of some very favorable circumstances – the Mongols' involvement in the war against Genoa, the concentration of their forces at the Caffa siege and the plague epidemics which spread on that occasion (V. Ciocîltan, 1998: 194-202) –, the territories which escape, temporarily, the Mongol control are those from the Southern extremity of the Carpathian bending. This is proven by Pope's correspondence from 1347, which made public the decision the Pontiff made to reactivate the *Cuman Diocese*, now transformed into *episcopatus Milcovensis*: “[...] Nuper, siquidem, ad audientiam nostram carissimorum in Christo filiorum nostrorum Ludovici, regis, ac Elizabeth, regine Ungarie, illustrium, relatio fidedigna perduxit quod episcopatul Milchouensis, in regno Ungarie, in finibus videlicet Tartarorum, ex institutione ordinatus antiqua, a tempore, quo dicti Tartari potenter dictum regnum seu partes Ungaras, prohdolor, intraverunt, fuit per eos ferales et sevus omnino destructus et ecclesia ipsius episcopatus funditus extirpata...” (*DRH*, 1977, p. 63-65).

This “accomplishment” of the Hungarian crown, emphatically acclaimed, was nevertheless destined to remain a purely chancellery business. In spite of its repeated presence in documentary sources, the Milcovia Diocese failed in entering in the *de facto* possession of its goods (V. Spinei, 1992, p. 316-318; 2007).

Both Pope Clement VI's letter of July 15, 1352 (*VMHH*, 1859: 815-816) and Pope Innocent VI's “collective” letter of November 10, 1354 (*VMHH*, 1860, p. 10-11) represent important sources of information regarding Louis I's anti-Mongol initiatives. A comprehensive view of the letters as well as other historical data show that there were no fulminant military campaigns capable of extending the Angevin rule east of the Carpathians during this time-span either.

The first document shows that, following Louis I's news of the "faithless Tartars" raids, Clement VI accepted his request of using the Hungarian church income in supporting the fight against infidels. Thus, it represented the first clue to Louis I's decision of ending, once and for all, the Mongolian issue at his eastern border: "[...] Sane nuper per dilectum filium Paulum Electum Gurcensem, nuntium tuum ad hoc a te specialiter destinatum, proposito in Consistorio coram nobis, quod perfidi Tartari et infideles alii Regno tuo et terris tibi subiectis confines et contigui Regnum et terras ipsas, necnon habitatores et incolas eorundem invaserunt et invadere moliuntur, pro quorum repulsione magna expansarum profluvia tibi ad hoc necessaria subiisti, et dubitas subire verisimiliter in futurum, pro parte tua per eundem Paulum Electum nobis extitit humiliter supplicatum, ut omnium proventuum ecclesiasticorum Regni et terrarum predictorum ad certum tempus tibi concedere de benignitate apostolica dignareum..." (*VMHH*, 1859, p. 815).

A year later, March 28, 1353, Louis I pursued the same purpose when restating the old privileges of the Braşov merchants, conditioned as follows: „[...] si nostram maiestatem ad partes orientales personalitem exercitum ducere contingat, tunc quilibet eorum iuxta suam facultatem equester vel pedester, propria eorum in pecunia nobiscum proficisci teneantur. Si vero ad partes occidentales personaliter exercitum duxerimus, tunc quinquaginta viros agiles, bene armatos et lanceatos in ipsum exercitum nostrum ex parte communitatis eorum debebunt et tenebuntur destinare.” (*DRH*, 1977a, p. 193).

The quote clearly reveals not only how important the difficult anti-Tartar campaign was, requiring, unlike the western expeditions, all the combat potential of the Braşov merchants, but also the fact that the same campaign had not taken place.

Another year later, those protractions were confirmed once more: in the November 10 1354 document, the Pope demands the preaching in Poland, Hungary and Bohemia of the crusade against the Tartars, the Lithuanians, and other infidels who "kept raiding" (*VMHH*, 1860, p. 10) *for the past three years*. The document raises questions about the information in Matteo Villani's chronicle (*RIS*, 1729, col. 237) on Louis of Anjou's 1354 campaign "in Tartar land". It is not by chance that the famous Hungarian Middle Age historian

István Vásáry challenged these assumptions (2006, p. 17-30).

Thus, the Mongols' activity of all that time brought the papacy to the position of asking the Christian armies for a vast military opposition which had not taken place, due to the Polish "defection". The latter refers to the 1354/1355 *mutual* involvement agreement between Cazimir III and Geanibek. Cazimir III dreaded the increasing strength and aggressiveness of the Teutonic Order in the Baltic areas, thus needing strong political relations with both the Lithuanians and the Tartars. He even accepted tribute payments for his possessions in south-western Russia, same as the Halych knyaz did in the past (V. Spinei, 1992: 323). On the other hand, Geanibek needed an ally in the northern areas, in order to pursue his main interest, the conquest of Tabriz, which he accomplished the following year, thus proving the agreement's utility (V. Ciocîltan, 1998, p. 201).

Louis I must have profoundly disliked their agreement, given his involvement of great risks and expenses in his uncle's conflicts with the Lithuanians and the Tartars (1351/1352), not to mention the acknowledgement of Poland's rights over the Halych Russia during the whole rule of Cazimir (V. Spinei, 1992: 322). Besides, Innocent VI himself would write to Cazimir III to tempestuously condemn his decision of paying tribute to the Tartar khan for a petty political advantage (J. Meyendorff, 198, p. 64).

Due to favorable circumstances, the 1356-1357 Angevin interventions east of the Carpathians accomplished their purpose, although not necessarily through vast military confrontation. Consequently, sometime during the summer of 1357, the Pope congratulated Louis I for "narrowing" the Mongolian troops nearby the Hungarian kingdom: "[...] Idolatras Tartaros ab ipsius Regni tui finibus in mano forti et excelso brachio coangustaus..." (*VMHH*, 1860, p. 33).

The Hungarian initiative and success benefited from a conjectural restriction of the Mongolian power, due to the mobilization of all Golden Horde combat potential in the Transcaucasian campaign, only because the conquest of Tabriz, one of the main political objectives of the Golden Horde khans, turned into what seemed to be an actual obsession for Geanibek (V. Ciocîltan, 1998, p. 201-203).

The Mongolian withdrawal made the areas far from Bugeac such as north-western Moldavia and

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north-eastern Wallachia vulnerable, allowing the Angevin king to control them to all intents and purposes, especially the area between the Carpathians and the Dobrudja Danube; the latter was mentioned as a direct consequence of the successful endeavor in the 1358 document stating the privileges of Braşov merchants: "[...] Noveritis quod nos vobis et vestre universitati de gratia concessimus speciali, ut vos cum vestris mercimoniis et quibuslibet rebus inter Bozam et Prahov, a loco videlicet ubi fluvius Iloncha vocatus in Danobium usque locum ubi fluvius Zereth nominatus similiter in ipsum Danobium cadunt, transire possitis libere et secure, nec vos aliquis in ipso vestro transitu indebite valeat impedire..." (DRH, 1977, p. 72).

Given the aforementioned circumstances, the relocation of the Maramureş nobleman Dragoş east of the Carpathians makes much more sense, as he was the Hungarian king's delegate for ruling the Moldavian territory. The exact date (1358) of this "transfer", as recorded by Giacomo di Pietro Luccari (1605, p. 105) in the first decade of the XVIIth century, is fully justified, as we intend to argue in a future, more elaborate study regarding the compelling historiographical matter that is the founding of the Moldavian state.

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