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Sensing Empire:

Sensing Mongol Imperialism in Medieval Contact Literatures (1206–1368)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Misho Sarah Ishikawa

2023

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2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Sensing Empire:

Sensing Mongol Imperialism in Medieval Contact Literatures (1206–1368)

by

Misho Sarah Ishikawa

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles 2023

Professor Christine N. Chism, Chair

Sensing Empire assembles a new literary history of the Mongol empire (1206–1368) by exposing the epistemological intersections between disparate cultural productions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Stemming from an interest in medieval philosophies of mind and cultural phenomenology, the dissertation explores how Mongol imperialism formed and reformed notions of self and the world across Middle English, Latin, and Classical Chinese "contact" literatures. Through a methodology that centers the perceptive body as the locus for cross-cultural encounter, *Sensing Empire* demonstrates the intimacy of the Mongol empire as a medieval global network. This work challenges Eurocentric approaches to medieval studies as it contributes to the burgeoning fields of medieval affect studies, premodern critical race studies, and the Global Middle Ages.

The dissertation of Misho Sarah Ishikawa is approved.

Matthew N. Fisher

Sarah Tindal Kareem

Zrinka Stahuljak

Christine N. Chism, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2023

DEDICATION

For my parents, Helene and Yukinori Ishikawa.

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VITA

EDUCATION

2021 C.Phil – English, University of California, Los Angeles
2019 M.A. – English, University of California, Los Angeles
2010 B.A. – English, Vassar College

AWARDS

2022 *New Medieval Literatures* Scholars of Colour Essay Prize for "Obscured by Smoke: Eyewitness Testimonies of the 1241–1242 Mongol Invasions"

PUBLICATIONS

2024 Ishikawa, Misho. Forthcoming. "Obscured by Smoke: Eyewitness Testimonies of the 1241–1242 Mongol Invasions." *New Medieval Literatures* 24 (2024).

2024 Ishikawa, Misho. Forthcoming. "Traumatic Eloquence: Voice as Posttraumatic Strategy in *The Injustice to Dou E.*" *Exemplaria,* special edition, "Rethinking Trauma (and Theory) in Premodern Literature." Edited by Matthew Aiello and Siobhain Bly Calkin.

2023 Ishikawa, Misho. Forthcoming. "Portraits of a Confucian Patriarch: Sinicizing Genghis Khan in the fourteenth-century *Yuanshi* and present-day Inner Mongolia." *Exemplaria,* special edition, "Theorizing Gender, Patriarchy, and Liberation: Imani Perry's *Vexy Thing* and Medieval Studies." Edited by Holly Crocker and Carissa Harris.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2023 "Lingering Death: Staging Mongol Conquest in *The Injustice to Dou E*"
2023 MLA Annual Convention

2022 "'A voys was herd': Transformative Sound in *House of Fame* and the M*an of Law's Tale*"
Biennial New Chaucer Society Congress, New Chaucer Society

2022 "A Darkness: (Failed) Vision in Eyewitness Accounts of the 1241–1242 Mongol Invasions"
International Congress on Medieval Studies, Medieval Institute

2022 "Bloody fists, worn knuckles: the politics of touch in the *Secret History of the Mongols*"
Sewanee Medieval Colloquium, The University of the South

2020 "'Ant Ich me seolf smell of The': Smelly Signs in Christian and Daoist Hagiography" [CANCELED, covid-19]
International Congress on Medieval Studies, Medieval Institute

2019 "Visible Thoughts: The Spontaneous Gesture and Imaging Identity in *Pearl*"
International Congress on Medieval Studies, Medieval Institute

2019 "Spontaneous Gestures in *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*"
International Conference on Middle English, University of Florence

2018 "'Withouten Vice of Silable': Sounding Cross-Cultural Encounter in *The Squire's Tale*"
International Congress on Medieval Studies, Medieval Institute

INTRODUCTION[1]

> Our relationship with the world is a sensible life: an uninterrupted production of sensible realities made of sensations, odors and images. All that we create and all that we produce is made of sensible matters—beyond our own words, it is the tissue of the things in which we realize our will, our intelligence, our most violent desires and most disparate imaginations. The world is not simply extension; neither it is a collection of objects, and it cannot be reduced to an abstract possibility of existence. *To be in the world* means, before anything else, to be within the sensible, to move within it, to make and unmake it without interruption.
>
> -Emanuele Coccia, *Sensible Life*

> Once introduced, the notion of sensation distorts any analysis of perception.
>
> -Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

The Mongol conquests changed the world. This assertion, while simple, has yet to be fully addressed by literary scholars of the European Middle Ages.[2] Rather than treat the Mongol empire as a peripheral event in the Middle Ages, *Sensing Empire* attends to the intimacies—the felt reality—of empire to demonstrate how Mongol imperialism introduced new ways of thinking

[1] A note regarding romanization: Throughout the dissertation I romanize Classical Chinese names, text titles, and terms according to the Pinyin system. For Japanese I use the Hepburn system. For the spelling of Mongolian names and words, I follow the romanization used by Igor de Rachewiltz and Urunge Onon; however, I spell the title "khan" according to its more conventional romanization (as opposed to "qan").

[2] Coming from a background and training in English departments, I identify scholars working in medieval literature as the primary audience for my work. However, the study of medieval literature is densely associated with medieval Europe within the academe, while other literatures get relegated to "area studies." If the field is truly committed to the global turn, it cannot continue to center Europe; otherwise, it risks furth entrenching existing perspectives and approaches—only insidiously repackaged as the "Global Middle Ages." My dissertation aims to unravel the association between "medieval literature" and Europe—or at least, begin to unravel this association—by approaching the Mongol empire from a multifocal perspective. That said, I am not alone in this project, nor do I wish to dismiss the excellent, groundbreaking studies that are already working to redefine the field. Please see: Jamie Friedman, "Making Whiteness Matter: The King of Tars," *postmedieval* 6 (2015): 52–63; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Shirin Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's World: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Margaret Kim, "Globalizing Imperium: Thirteenth-Century Perspectives on the Mongols," *Literature Compass* 11 (2014): 472–483; Sharon Kinoshita, "Reorientations: The Worlding of Marco Polo," in *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages*, eds. J.M. Ganim and S.A. Legassie (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Sierra Lomuto, "The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330)," *Exemplaria* 31.3 (2019): 171–192; Leila K. Norako, "The Mongols of Middle English Literature," in *Negotiating Boundaries in Medieval Literature and Culture,* eds. Valerie B. Johnson and Kara L. McShane (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2022); Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

about "globality"[3] in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Drawing from the work of globalism scholars like Sanjay Krishnan and Geraldine Heng, I argue that the Mongol imperialism produced a *dynamic* form of globalism; that is, to borrow Heng's phrasing, Mongol imperialism produced forces that "push[ed] toward the formation of larger scales of relation" across the regions and peoples it encountered.[4] I approach these larger scales of relation through the lens of cultural phenomenology, which takes as its premise a dual consideration of embodiment: the body as a cultural-historical phenomenon and cultural-historical forces as bodily phenomena.[5] Through a diverse archive of medieval contact literatures, *Sensing Empire* studies the effects of the Mongol empire through phenomenological disturbance—the perceived transformations of body and world attributed to Mongol imperialism. Across this archive, macrocosmic change is persistently encountered, interpolated, and comprehended through microcosmic attention to the senses as worlding mechanisms. The perceptive body thus emerges as a contested border-space, a frequent site for political and epistemological crisis. The present study advocates an approach to medieval globality that is predicated on intimacy. Body and world are mutually interpenetrated by the senses; and the border-space of the body is constituted by both feeling and being felt.

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[3] A word regarding terminology: I identify *Sensing Empire* as a "Global Middle Ages" project. However, like many scholars working in the field, I readily acknowledge the limitations of its basic terminology. Both "global" and "Middle Ages" are terms that seem to counterproductively privilege Europe. Indeed, the terms "medieval" and "Middle Ages" were inventions of the West as part of an effort to mythologize parts of premodern European history. In regard to the insufficiencies of the term "global," Alex West has compelling argued in favor of adopting a hemispheric approach to a Global Middle Ages framework, positing that "the interconnectedness of Afro-Eurasia before the Columbian Exchanges necessitates an overarching periodization under which rubric research on these connections can be pursued" (Alex West, "The Hemispheric Middle Ages – Part 1," https://indomedieval.medium.com/the-hemispheric-middle-ages-part-i-173779f237f6). Speaking directly to the discourses shaped by this mythologizing within the Western academe, I use the "Global Middle Ages" as an umbrella term to encompass the more specific, but heterogeneous, temporalities and regions of the project.

[4] Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 16.

[5] Thomas Csordas, "Embodiment and Cultural Phenomenology," in *Perspectives on Embodiment,* eds. Gail Weiss and Honi Fern Haber, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 144.

Chinggis Khan, a scion of the ruling Kiyat-Borjigin Mongol clan, conquered the major tribal confederations of the Inner Asian steppe in 1206, incorporating the powerful Tayichiud, Tatar, Naiman, and Kereit tribes within the newly declared Yeke Mongγol Ulus ("The Great Mongol Empire"). Although it was not the first nomadic steppe empire to emerge in the Middle Ages, the Mongol empire (1206–1368) is distinct from its predecessors in two notable ways. First, its size. As it is often remarked, the Mongol empire remains the largest contiguous land empire in human history, spanning across much of the Eurasian steppe, Central Asia, and China, and extending as far as present-day Iran as well as parts of South and Southeast Asia. Second, the empire successfully held nomadic tribal confederations as well as sedentary states. This second distinction marks the empire as particularly relevant to scholars of the Global Middle Ages, because it demonstrates the insufficiency of pairing nomadism and sedentarism as diametrically opposed systems.[6] As Naomi Standen and Monica White have observed, stereotypical, othering depictions of nomadism is pervasive within the Western academe, and is particularly prevalent among historians.[7] Writing about the persistence of this imagined dichotomy, Munzoul Assal argues that the dichotomy itself "is without a doubt the result of conflict conditions in which identity boundaries of different sorts are stressed and manipulated by various actors. In other words, conflict conditions that sharpen identification leads scholars to construct analytical tools based on false premises."[8] Taking Assal's point into account, *Sensing Empire* attempts to isolate the very places where "identity boundaries of different sorts are stressed" in order to better

[6] As a corrective to the tendency to flatten nomadic/sedentary relationships into a binary, Naomi Standen and Monica White turn to mobility itself as a cross-cultural category of analysis: Naomi Standen and Monica White, "Structural Mobilities in the Global Middle Ages," *Past & Present* 238.13 (2018), 158–189.

[7] Standen and White, "Structural Mobilities in the Global Middle Ages," 158.

[8] Munzoul Assal, "The Relationship Between Nomadic and Sedentary People in Sudan in the Context of State Policies and Internationalization," *Nomadic Peoples* 13.1 (2009), 155.

understand the nuanced relationship between empire and identity. That is, the present study attempts to show how cultural borders were (re)constituted in response to Mongol imperialism.

By attending to the hyper subjective—the identity boundaries borne from conflict—I hope to, counterintuitively, offer a more neutral view of the dynamic forms of relation triggered by the Mongol empire. This approach evokes longstanding methodologies in environmental biology. In 1934, the biologist Jakob von Uexküll first applied the German term *umwelt* (environment) to species-specific perceptual systems. "All animal subjects," he writes, "from the simplest to the most complex, are inserted into their environments to the same degree of perfection. The simple animal has a simple environment; the multiform animal has an environment just as richly articulated as it is."[9] To understand the "real" world, the world as biospheric network, the biologist must gain understanding of the *umwelten* themselves. Uexküll's most famous example—and the one later taken up by Giorgio Agamben[10]—is that of the tick. Unlike humans, the tick can exist without eating for eighteen years. Thus, Uexküll argues:

> Our human time consists of a series of moments, i.e., the shortest segments of time which the world exhibits no changes. A human moment lasts one-eighteenth of a second. … But time stands still in the tick's waiting period not just for hours but for years, and it starts again only when the signal "butyric acid" [blood] awakens the tick to renewed activity. … Time, which frames all events, seemed to us to be the only objectively consistent factor, compared to the variegated changes of its contents, but now we see that the subject controls the time of its environment. While we said before, 'There can be no living subject without time," now we shall have to say, "Without a living subject, there can be no time."[11]

All *umwelten* are defined by their living subjects; perception forms the basis of an organism's perceptual world while an organism's actions constitute its "effector world"—the interactions

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[9] Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans,* trans. Joseph D. O'Neil (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 50.

[10] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal,* trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 46.

[11] Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans,* 52.

between these two worlds "form a closed unit, the Umwelt."[12] Therefore, an organism's *umwelt* is best apprehended by examining the relationship between perception and effect—as in the tick's ability to distinguish the smell of butyric acid from the vast array of other potential stimuli. Humanists, particularly those working in semiotics, psychology, and cultural ecology, have found purchase in the way that Uexküll's work highlights meaning as the mutual relation between perception and perspective.[13]

Throughout the dissertation I attempt to identify what the Mongols "meant" in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Mongol empire can be understood as a global *event* precisely because it disturbed the seemingly closed units of pre-existing cultural Umwelts (such as Latin Christendom). According to Alain Badiou, the pure event is the "opening of an epoch," a break in logic that transforms "the relations between the possible and the impossible."[14] The event challenges truth-beliefs through an apostolic discourse, a discourse of previously "impossible" declarations. Events are discursive, they are announced; they come into being through language and signs—through perspective. Across my archive of study, the Mongol empire is largely announced as an event through a series of "impossible" disturbances between perception and meaning. For instance, the first chapter of *Sensing Empire* explores the curious absence of the Mongol body as an object of sight in Latinate eyewitness testimonies to the 1242–1242 Mongol invasions of Central Europe. To put it more simply, the Mongol empire disrupted the illusion of a closed unit human Umwelt. Similar to how the tick denaturalizes human understandings of time, the Mongol empire denaturalized hierarchized understandings of the

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[12] Uexküll, 6.

[13] Jytte Bang, "Nothingness and the Human Umwelt: A Cultural–Ecological Approach to Meaning," *Integrative Psychology and Behavioral Science* 43.4 (2009), 379.

[14] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism,* trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 45.

world order. The Mongol invaders of Europe could not be "seen" within the Latin Christian Umwelt without breeching the integrity of the Umwelt as a closed unit.[15]

To illustrate how the Mongols disrupt the culturally determined coherence between perception and perspective within my archive**,** I turn to a moment from William of Rubruck's *Itinerarium*. William of Rubruck (ca. 1220–1298), a Flemish Franciscan friar, was sent as a missionary by King Louis IX of France to the court of Möngke Khan in 1253. William arrived in Karakorum, the capital of the empire, in 1254, where he remained for several months. At the end of his final conference with Möngke Khan, William asks the *khagan*—the Mongol "khan of khans" and ruler of the empire—for permission to return to the Mongol court for the purpose of preaching Christianity. Reporting directly to the king of France, William recalls how Möngke paused, sitting "for a long while as if in thought."[16] Although eager to reason his case, William, at the behest of his interpreter, remains silent as he waits for Möngke to respond. The silence troubles William, but as narrator he lingers within the moment. He names the silence, gives it dimension, and by doing so the *longo interuallo* becomes a tangible space within the text.[17] Here, within the silence, Möngke is disturbingly inscrutable. William cannot know his mind, cannot even know if Möngke is thinking anything at all (*qui cogitans*). What William can do however, is describe how he feels within the discomfiting space of Möngke's silence: *sollicitus,* concerned,

[15] While useful as a methodological starting point, Uexküll's theories have limited utility in their application to human societies and cultures. Some of the Umwelts that make up this study function as closed units, true Umwelts according to Uexküll's terms. However, the idea of a "closed" human Umwelt is not universal. Mongol Tengrism, for instance, had an inclusive view of different religions. All religious practitioners, regardless of sect, were understood to ultimately be in service of the same universal cosmology. Within Imperial China, as I discuss in chapter three, "Chinese" identity was conceived of as a harmonious balance subject to flux.

[16] *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck,* trans. Peter Jackson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2009), 293. All subsequent page citations will appear in text.

[17] Tunc ipse tacuit & sedit longo intervallo qui cogitans. Transcribed from: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 066A (105r).

anxious, apprehensive.[18] Tellingly, William uses the adjective *sollicitus* over the adverbial form of the word, *sollicitius.* Rather than use *sollicitius* to describe the process of waiting (the verb *expectabam*), William uses *sollicitus* to describe how he feels within the wait, the space of the unknown. William attempts to inscribe the unknown first by naming it (*interuallo*), and then by feeling it (*sollicitus*). The gesture is a dual one, both linguistic and embodied. William attempts to understand Möngke's silence—to bring it into being—by inscribing it through feeling language; but the silence, a literal absence of language, lacks sense and therefore cannot be encountered by William as an experience. As long as Möngke is silent William cannot do anything but *attempt* to name, to sense, the unnamable.

William's efforts to feel the silence constructs the kind of frontier spaces that motivates the present study. Möngke's silence stages the unknown, which William then attempts to know through sensation. William's anxiety, the *sollicitus* he feels, transforms the silence into a border space. This border, like all such places, is porous and cross-directional. Rather than assert a radical dualism between known and unknown, William's sense-border implies a commingling of various bodies and propositions. Even as William articulates the silence, he is consumed by it—to sense silence one must become silent. William's *sollicitus* reflects an awareness that without speech he too is a body. Bodies eat and are eaten—this is their operational model, and this is what William senses in the silence.[19] Möngke's eventual response suggests that he intentionally meets William as *only* a material body. William writes, "At last he said, 'You have a long journey ahead: recruit your strength with food, so that you may reach your country in good health.' And he served me with drink" (239). By speaking of food, Möngke cuts into William's body with new

[18] Ego autem expectabam sollicitus quid responderet tandem dixit. Transcribed from: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 066A (105r).

[19] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* trans. Constantin V. Boundas (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), 23.

meaning. To speak of William as an eating body carries with it the threat of absorption. The border destabilizes the structures that define William's understanding of the world. Within it he is remade from a mouthpiece, the embodiment of an Umwelt's self-declarations, into a non-speaking body. William concludes his report by indicating that force will likely be the only way to assert Christendom as the dominant world order. Because the Mongols listen without feeling—they are not moved by speech—William recommends that no "friar make any further journeys to the Tartars" (278). Instead, he asserts "with confidence that if our peasants—to say nothing of kings and knights—were willing to travel in the way the Tartar princes move and to be content with a similar diet, they could conquer the whole world" (278). The border has changed William, it has penetrated the surface of his ideations and entered into his body. Eat, he has learned, or be eaten.

Project Scope and Methodology: Combinative Case Studies

The Mongol empire featured a diverse and complex network of borders. Roughly, the empire itself was divided into four main territories: the Ilkhanate (established after the Mongols conquered the Persian Khwarezmia empire); the Yuan dynasty in China (the primary seat of the empire); the Chagatai Khanate (which controlled the Central Asian steppe); and the Golden Horde (which held parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe). The khanates were heterogeneous—linguistically, culturally, religiously—and resist any broad synthesis. An attempt to encapsulate all of the empire's many centers would be beyond the scope of a single project; instead, *Sensing Empire* is loosely organized around the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). I center the Yuan for three primary reasons. First, Kublai Khan's relocation of the Mongol capital from Karakorum to Dadu (present-day Beijing) corresponded with the development of a new imperial

ideology: a formal Mandate from Heaven (*tian ming* 天命). Kublai thus envisions himself, along with the Mongol Empire, in cosmic terms. I am interested in considering the reverberations of Kublai's re-conceived empire; for instance, how the mandate was used to systematically introduce Tibetan Buddhism into China. Second, Mongol-ruled China was extremely cosmopolitan. Kublai and his successor Toghon Temür greatly encouraged foreign travel and trade. For Europeans, the stabilization of trade routes under the *Pax Mongolica* enabled safe and (relatively) easy travel to China. Finally, a Yuan-centered study addresses a lacuna in Western scholarship of the Global Middle Ages: China's role as a cosmopolitan center in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Although the Yuan dynasty functions as a kind of center throughout the dissertation, I hope to avoid ratifying binary accounts of difference through an archive that challenges the fixity of its borders. Texts from England, Central Europe, and Japan "stretch" the Mongol Yuan to the furthest East-West locations of the hemisphere, staging encounters that transform the periphery into sites of potential empire. Conversely, both the *Secret History of the Mongols* and the Chinese *Yuanshi* 元史 (*History of Yuan*)—albeit with different motivations—attempt to suture together Mongol and Chinese dynastic history. This project, shared by both Mongol and Chinese historiographers, indicates that the world-building produced by Mongol conquest must be stabilized through careful genealogical (re)tracing. Finally, the Yuan vernacular texts of my archive similarly taxonomize Mongol change by reimagining China's distant past as its origin. Taken as a whole, my archive examines how the Mongol Yuan dynasty restructured understandings of the world. Because this process of apprehension is repeated across literary traditions, I believe it provides opportunities for new and productive comparative analysis. In the same way that Sharon Kinoshita envisions literary study of the medieval Mediterranean as a

"device for remapping traditional disciplinary divides,"[20] I consider the Mongol polity—and the Yuan dynasty in particular—as a way to displace traditional categories of analysis regarding pre-modern encounters between "East" and "West."

With the Yuan dynasty as a loose nexus, *Sensing Empire* considers how dynamic relationships across cultural groups interact with epistemological formations. I approach the diverse texts of my archive with the same question: how do they imagine the relationship between the intelligible mind and the external world? Though broad, this question directly addresses the relationship between cross-cultural contact and structures of knowing. Looking at how concepts of self and world respond to *feeling* encounters with the Mongols, the dissertation is organized around sense-borders; the mechanism by which the intelligible mind is made aware of the world.[21] Indeed, imagined processes of intelligibility are by no means a radical approach to questions regarding "persons" in the Middle Ages. In the Latin tradition, the presence of an eternal soul is often accounted for through theories of cognition.[22] Notably—as Christine Van Dyke observes—not only does Aquinas argue that the body is "integrally involved with the cognitive process," but that the soul is actualized through the acquisition of external objects through the senses.[23] I do not plan to offer new analyses of the medieval philosophies I touch

[20] Sharon Kinoshita, "Medieval Mediterranean Literature," *PMLA* 124.2 (2009), 602.

[21] The intelligible mind is a dynamic concept across my study, functioning as a stand-in for various different cultural formations of a "self" or "persons" (e.g., racial, ethnic, religious, etc.). The reason being that the cognizing mind was frequently used across various medieval philosophies as a unit by which to explain larger, universal categories such as soul or being. These larger categories are instrumental to understanding how cultural identities (like "Christian," or "foreign") are composed.

[22] For a targeted discussion on the problem of the Christian rational soul in relation to hylomorphic traditions see: Richard C. Dales, *The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). Writing about debates contemporaneous to my archive, Dales' study is of particular relevance because he traces broad trends in how Christian epistemologies and phenomenologies were being reshaped in the thirteenth century.

[23] Christine Van Dyke, "I See Dead People: Disembodied Souls and Aquinas's Two-Person Problem," in *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy,* ed. Robert Pasnau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29.

upon in the dissertation; rather, I hope to explicate processes of actualization. The literatures I study repeatedly return to fundamental questions of knowledge structures in response to a shifting world order. Just as Aquinas turned to the perceptive body in order to construct an argument about the soul, my archive consistently uses the senses as a way to make cognizant both "self" and world in light of new forms of global power relations.

Shirin Khanmohamadi's book on medieval travel writing, *In Light of Another's World: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages,* enacts a methodology that I would like to use as a jumping off point for my own research. Broadly, Khanmohamadi argues that early European ethnographic writers develop an aesthetic multifocality that puts Latin Christian beliefs into conversation with unfamiliar world views, languages and customs.[24] Khanmohamadi traces how these texts develop what she calls a "dialogic poetics" based around a persistent feature: the narrator's "uncanny ability to see and write from the perspective of the others whom they mean to describe."[25] By attuning to the multifocal, the dialogic, Khanmohamadi explores cross-cultural contact as nuanced and non-binary. Ultimately, Khanmohamadi links multifocality to medieval discourses of representation, concluding that for medieval Europeans "reality" is "neither simple nor simple to apprehend."[26] To support this claim, she draws from three theoretical frameworks: postcolonial medieval studies, the study of pre-modern affect, and medieval theories of optics. Despite drawing together a number of complex theoretical frameworks, Khanmohamadi's theory of early ethnographic is writing is elegant and easily testable. The project I propose is similarly

[24] Khanmohamadi identifies the texts of her archive as "ethnographic" in that they belong to a discourse of observed manners and customs. This broad definition of genre allows Khanmohamadi to correct the exclusion of the Crusades as sources of ethnographic production.

[25] Shirin Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's World: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 2.

[26] Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's World,* 53.

dialogic; I link an aesthetic pattern (the aestheticization of sensoria) to formations of "reality" in conversation with the unfamiliar. Moreover, my dissertation attempts to join modern critical theory with medieval theories of the senses. My goal in the following archival justification is to demonstrate how, when taken holistically, the texts I study put different medieval systems of epistemology in conversation with one another. The archive does not support a totalizing theory of sense, difference, and change; instead, what unifies these diverse texts is a pattern of intimate worlding. The primary border of the Mongol empire is repeatedly located in proximity to the feeling body.

Khanmohamadi's concept of multifocality resonates with calls among scholars working in the Global Middle Ages for "combinative" projects. Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen have modeled the efficacy of a combinative approach, "which combines rather than formally compares case studies, and which sets the local and the global in dynamic conversation."[27] As editors for a special issue of *Past & Present* organized around defining the Global Middle Ages, Holmes and Standen explain that a combinative methodology allows its practitioners to "retain the specificity which is such an important part of historical method, but which is often lost in overarching approaches to world history, and then to leverage localized and detailed cases to offer pointers towards global phenomena."[28] Ultimately, "The combination of examples that are thematically cognate but which do not necessarily match precisely in terms of time, place or formal characteristics, allows us to follow threads which can help us discern features of the Global Middle Ages from insider positions."[29] The juxtaposition of cognate case studies helps

[27] Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, "Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages," *Past & Present* 238.13 (2018), 3.

[28] Holmes and Standen, "Introduction," 23.

[29] Holmes and Standen, 24.

avoid approaching premodern globality through fixed narratives that often perpetuate Eurocentric bias (for example, Hegel's description of China and India as atemporal, non-historical states). *Sensing Empire* adopts a combinative methodology in order to better discern and understand the contours of Mongol imperialism as a global event. The dissertation is organized into three primary "cognate" case studies (with additional case studies featured in the coda and the conclusion). By combining these studies together, I open the topic of Mongol imperialism to a new category of analysis: sensation.

Into Sensation: Generating the Sensible

In *Sensible Life,* the French philosopher Emanuele Coccia revisits the problem of the sensible in phenomenology. As Coccia explains, "Things need to *become* perceivable: not because they are hidden or unknowable but because they become perceivable only through a certain process (and not simply thanks to the fact of their existence). They become perceivable only outside themselves, but this becoming occurs before they enter into the human sensory system."[30] Consider, for example, the mug that sits on my desk. Looking at the mug, I can see that it is blue—and yet I cannot say that I have experienced "blueness."[31] To qualify the mug as blue I must already have a sense of "blue" as a category distinct from other colors. The color blue, therefore, cannot be a pure experience as it requires an overlaying body of knowledge to be discernable as such. And if I were to place the mug against the lens of my eye (ouch), I would no longer be able to see it, meaning that the mug itself is not an *essentially* visible object.[32] Coccia's

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[30] Emanuele Coccia, *Sensible Life,* trans. Scott Alan Stuart (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 11.

[31] Here I simplify an example from Maurice Merleau-Ponty used in the *Phenomenology of Perception.* Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1981), 3.

[32] Coccia, *Sensible Life,* 11.

discussion of the sensible builds off of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's definition of sensation as a theory that "builds up all knowledge out of determinate qualities, offers us objects purged of all ambiguity, pure and absolute, the ideal rather than the real themes of knowledge: in short, it is compatible only with the lately developed superstructure of consciousness."[33] For Merleau-Ponty, sensation is a kind of scientific paradigm that gives the world meaning.[34] Holding sensation as the basis for knowledge is problematic because it elides the gap between the real and the sensible, thereby naturalizing sensation as an objective experience of the world. To address this problem, Coccia suggests that "it is only by observing *how* [sensibles] generate themselves that one can define what they are."[35] As with Uexküll's environment biology, this form of observation is directed toward a more neutral, nuanced understanding of the world's subject-relativity. Attention to the *how* reveals the very cultural formations that empiricism masks.[36]

Sensing Empire explores *how* contemporaneous texts from England, Central Europe, Inner Asia, and China generate Mongol imperialism into an experience (sensation). Each of the dissertation's case study attune to the processes by which the Mongols become sensible. By making the Mongol empire into a sensation, the texts of my archive render it cognizable within preexisting, and culturally determined, structures of knowledge. While cultural phenomenology is still a developing field, I have found that sense studies offers a useful model for this kind of cultural analysis. Broadly, sense studies is motivated by the idea that the human sensorium—the entire apparatus by which we experience and understand our environment—is both a perceptual

[33] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 11.

[34] Merleau-Ponty, 13.

[35] Coccia, 13. Coccia takes it for granted that *images* make up the sensible life; and while Coccia does not reduce his idea of the "image" to the purely visual, I have modified his statement with the more inclusive word "sensible." I alter *image* to *sensible* as a small corrective to the privileging of sight in Western phenomenological traditions.

[36] Merleau-Ponty, 23.

and a cultural system. Human perception is, at least in part, a social phenomenon—one that organizes sense data into coherent narratives about self, other, and world. This sensory order is never neutral; instead, the sociality of sensation is inextricable from its cultural context. It has a history, a politics. To offer a brief modern example, George Orwell demonstrates how sense and ideology can become imbricated in his 1937 sociological work, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. In describing the English class system, Orwell articulates why class bias is so difficult to overcome:

> Here you come to the real secret of class distinctions in the West—the real reason why a European of bourgeois upbringing, even when he calls himself a Communist, cannot without a hard effort think of a working man as his equal. It is summed up in four frightful words … *The lower classes smell*.
>
> That was what we [as children] were taught--*the lower classes smell*. And here, obviously, you are at an impassable barrier. For no feeling of like or dislike is quite so fundamental as a physical feeling.[37]

In the passage given above, Orwell clearly illustrates how the senses can naturalize ideology through bodily experience. Here, smell—a physical process—is imbued with social value and meaning. Class interests construct an ideology around smell that is designed to regulate, maintain, and enforce social hierarchies. Ultimately, this olfactory sense ideology helps reify class distinctions into an "impassable barrier." As an example, Orwell mentions his childhood disgust over the "mysterious difference" between the smell of his own sweat and that of a servant.[38] Attention to sense, therefore, can help explicate how social structures like class, race, and gender become tangible. Bodies, by this measure, function as a kind of frontier space—a space where ideology manifests as a physical border.

Sensing Empire builds from this premise by adopting sense perception as a category of analysis for better understanding the dynamic forms of relation between empire's agents,

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[37] George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Secker & Warburg [1959] 1965), 129.

[38] Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier,* 130.

subjects, and witnesses. The Mongol imperial project introduced new or altered ways of Being-in-the-world by penetrating seemingly "impassable" sense barriers. The Mongol empire provided new *sensations* that exposed the constructed nature of seemingly "impassable barriers." By doing so, the Mongol empire also exposed the gaps between preestablished understandings of the relationship between the sensible and reality. Coccia and Merleau-Ponty—and, indeed, Uexküll—identify the sensible as a philosophical problem because of how closely intertwined the perceptual apparatus is with *umwelten,* "species"-specific (rather, culture-specific) perceptions of the world. Put simply, Mongol imperialism—as a new sensible experience—challenged the stability of preexisting realities. This dissertation focuses on the processes by which the Mongols *became* sensations. The case studies that make up the dissertation demonstrate how new experiences of globality—via direct and indirect contact with the Mongols—challenged (and in some cases transformed) existing ways of thinking about the world. Each chapter considers a different group of texts in relation to a specific sense—each sense functioning as a frontier, a border-space. Across my archive, the senses are used to narrativize new formations of "self" and world in response to shifting global power relations.

There are two brief caveats that I would like to address before offering a short summary of the dissertation's chapters. First, physiologically, the senses do not function in isolation; rather, they work alongside one another to make up a matrix of experience. However, I limit my discussion of intersensoriality as it distracts from how the individual senses are narrativized *to make sense of* the Mongol empire. My second caveat is that sense experience is not wholly synonymous with sense ideology. There are, of course, infinite subtle variations in *how* bodies perceive that do not accord with maintaining or accommodating the dominant social organization. But because *Sensing Empire* is primarily interested in mapping cultural change, I

narrow my focus to literary representations of experience—fertile ground, as Orwell suggests, for a kind of didactic enculturation.

Archival Justification and Chapter Summaries

Following the lead of Sharon Kinoshita, I find that, "A word is in order here on disciplinary location and training."[39] In 2009 Kinoshita was writing on the development of medieval Mediterranean literatures as a new field of study. She acknowledged that as a new field, medieval Mediterranean literary study cannot avoid being shaped by limitations. Similar limitations apply to my examination of the literatures that circulate within and around the Mongol empire. As with early inquiries into medieval Mediterranean literatures, studies into those of the Mongol polity must be partially directed by training. My disciplinary home is within the English department and my research is partially shaped by the languages that I have access to—Middle English, Latin, and Classical Chinese. While my approach is admittedly shaped by language facility, I have attempted to organize the diversity of my archive in such a way that it is sensitive to the project's motivating questions. The following summaries of my archive attempt to justify its scope and explain its internal logic.

I begin my archival justification with England and (Middle) English, the region furthest removed from the Mongol Empire. In the context of pre-modern global networks, medieval English literatures offer interesting case studies because of their peripheral status. Occupying one of Christendom's most western edges, the Latinate West comes to imagine England as a pole set against the increasingly dense associations of the Mongols with "East." (This, I believe, partially explains why Mandeville is designated as an English knight in *Mandeville's Travels*). In

[39] Kinoshita, "Medieval Mediterranean Literature," 602.

millenarian visions of the Mongol empire—Roger Bacon's *Opus majus,* for example—this polarity works to redraw the borders of Christendom so that what was peripheral (England) eventually comes to occupy its center. The rise of the Mongol Empire can thus be seen as an occasion for imagining medieval England as an emerging global "center." By attending to how the Mongols were used to remap Christendom in medieval English literatures, my dissertation addresses a gap in the scholarship around early formations of English nationalism, which has traditionally limited consideration of England's global relations to the crusades.[40] Thus, I hope to align my project with Sierra Lomuto's recent work on how the racial formation of the Mongol figure in Middle English romance is directly related to an English colonial fantasy. Lomuto's 2019 article asserts the development of a Mongol race formation in England as "an organizing force through which the world is seen and apprehended."[41] Crucially, this new world view is intimately linked with an imagined remapping of England's polarity as a center: a potential western empire to balance those of the east. Representations of Mongols become dense loci of English national meaning.

Texts from Central Europe and Japan likewise offer interesting case studies for examining the sensation of Mongol imperialism in the context of direct military combat. When the Mongols first invaded Central Europe (1241–1242), the Latinate West—embroiled in its own series of regional conflicts—was almost entirely unprepared. The sudden, shocking incursion of a foreign power in Europe fundamentally shifted European perception of Christendom's integrity. As I explore in chapter one, the Mongol invasions of Europe resulted in paradigmatic shifts in

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[40] For instance, the essays in Kathy Lavezzo's edited collection on the medieval English "nation" consider the role of the Crusades, but not the Mongols. See: Kathy Lavezzo, ed., *Imagining a Medieval Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[41] Sierra Lomuto, "The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330)," *Exemplaria* 31.3 (2019), 174.

thinking about the world. For instance, the millenarian response to the Mongols, which maintained that the Mongols were harbingers of the imminent apocalypse. Japan too had direct conflict with the Mongols. When rumors of Japan's supposed wealth piqued the interest of Kublai Khan, he authorized two failed invasion attempts—the first in 1274 and the second in 1281. These defeats of Mongol Yuan forces carried—and continue to carry—huge implications. Notably, Japan became one of the only regions to successfully repel a Mongol invasion, and thereby set a firm limit to Mongol imperial expansion. In terms of global resonance this limit is all the more striking when compared, for instance, the millenarian treatment of the Mongols in Europe. Within Japan the Mongol defeats radically reshaped vision of self and nation. In his 1274 letter to the Japanese emperor, Kublai makes the obliquely menacing claim that is wise to treat all people within the four seas as "a single family" (*yi jia zhi* 一家之).[42] However, the empire's subsequent defeats led to a strong sense of Japanese exceptionalism. Buddhist monks in Japan began to use the term *kamikaze* ("divine wind") to describe spiritual and military exceptionalism as constitutive to Japanese national identity. During the waning campaigns of WWII—more than 500 years after the Mongol invasions—Japan named its special attack unit *kamikaze*. My Japanese archive focuses on the eye-witness testimony of Takezaki Suenaga 竹崎

[42] In *Le Divesement* Marco Polo includes two passages on Kubilai Khan's engagement with "the island of Cipangu." Here Polo contextualizes the 1274 and 1281 attacks in terms of Japan's perceived wealth. After describing the "gold beyond measure" and "pearls in abundance" to be found on the Japanese islands, he goes on to state: "I tell you that because the island's great wealth was told to the Great Khan, Qubilai, who is currently reigning, said that he wanted to take it" (Marco Polo, *The Description of the World,* trans. Sharon Kinoshita [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2016], 144). Polo parallels the "great wealth" of Japan with Kubilai's reign as the "Great Khan," seemingly naturalizing Mongol imperial expansion. Kubilai Khan precedes his attack of Japan with a diplomatic letter to the emperor that couches Mongol conquest in similar terms. Although he makes no mention of riches, Kubilai Khan describes Mongol imperialism as natural: "We, the Great Mongolian Empire, have received the Mandate of Heaven and have become master of the universe. Therefore, innumerable states in far-off lands have longed to form ties with us" (translation quoted from: John Whitney Hall, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, volume 3 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 132). The letter's logic is clear, there are no truly independent states. Kubilai Khan—ordained by Heaven as "master of the universe"—has *already* conquered the world; he has already conquered Japan.

季長 (1246–1314), who fought in both the 1274 and 1281 battles. Suenaga's text formulates a Japanese "I" that attempts to synthesize fractured political systems into a new Zen warrior ethos. Remarkably, Suenaga does not demonize the Mongol invaders as foreign others; instead, he prioritizes reimagining a world cosmology that excludes them altogether.

Contemporaneous texts from England and Japan pull at and reshape the borders of the Yuan dynasty. At the heart of my project, however, are texts produced from within Mongol Yuan China. The first of these texts that I study is the *Secret History of the Mongols,* the official Mongol historiography of the empire's formation. Because Middle Mongol did not use a writing system, the *Secret History* is one of the only extant representations of the empire by the Mongols. The perspective of the text is an important one to consider as I actively try to avoid deploying "Mongols" as a simple heuristic for difference in the Middle Ages. Moreover, the *Secret History* further complicates binary considerations of borders. It was composed in two parts: the first after Chinggis Khan's death (likely as an oral history), and the second during Kublai Khan's reign. I am fascinated by the relationship between these two parts and read the latter as reflective of adapting imperial ideologies. The *Secret History* is a text about empire produced by the empire itself; and yet it is neither a homogenous nor homogenizing text. The text does not imagine the Mongols—or, for that matter, the Mongol empire—as static. Beginning with Chinggis Khan's unification of the diverse nomadic tribes of the Inner Asian steppe, the text resists developing a singular "national" identity. The project of empire-building is one of flux, where the human world constantly emerges through adaptation and processes of cultural absorption. Tentatively I posit that *The Secret History* marks the only pure event of my archive, its many border crossings remake categories of impossible and possible to form the basis for a new epoch, a new becoming.

The final cluster of texts that make up my archive also approach the Mongol Yuan dynasty from "within"—though from different perspectives. Commissioned by the Ming court and completed in 1370, the Chinese *Yuanshi* 元史 is the official court history of the Yuan dynasty. The historiography was compiled under the guidance of the historian Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381) and worked to formally recognize the foreign-led dynasty as part of Imperial China's history. The move to make this history continuous with the Yuan dynasty reflects, I argue, a Neo-Confucian worldview that establishes certain key figures of Mongol historiography as *already* Chinese. In addition to parts of the *Yuanshi,* my Chinese archive also includes Yuan-era vernacular literatures. Whereas the *Yuanshi* concretizes the Yuan dynasty as part of Imperial Chinese history, the vernacular texts produced during Mongol reign deploy an embodied form of political dissent that I refer to as "indigestion," a process that expels the offending element (made foreign by its inability to harmonize with the body). Thus, despite differing techniques, both the *Yuanshi* and the Yuan vernacular texts attempt to incorporate the Mongol empire into conceptions of *Chinese* identity.

I approach the diverse texts of my archive with the same question: how do they imagine the relationship between the intelligible mind and the external world? Though broad, this question directly addresses the relationship between cross-cultural contact and structures of knowing. Looking at how concepts of self and world respond to *feeling* encounters with the Mongols, my dissertation is organized around sense-borders; the mechanism by which the intelligible mind is made aware of the world. Each chapter considers a different group of texts in relation to a specific sense. I treat each sense as a frontier, a border-space that negotiates encounter. My archive consistently uses the senses as a way to make cognizant both "self" and world in light of new forms of global power relations.

Chapters one and two examine representations of the Mongol empire from the Latinate West. Chapter one, "Occluded Sight and Epistemological Crisis in Eyewitness Narratives of the 1241–1242 Mongol Invasions," examines a group of understudied texts—central European accounts of Batu Khan's invasions of Poland and Hungary. I approach these texts through the framework of medieval Latin optical science to explain why the Mongols repeatedly disappear from the eyewitness narratives of the invasions. Ultimately, I argue that failed vision allegorizes how the invasions ruptured a Latin Christian cosmology. Chapter two, "'A voys was herd': The Border Politics of Sound in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and *Squire's Tale*," considers how Geoffrey Chaucer uses a Boethian theory of sound to disrupt English fantasies of a Christian-Mongol alliance in the late fourteenth century. Here, I suggest that Chaucer's "oriental" romances parody medieval ethnographic writing to caution nascent ideas about an English empire. The two chapters are linked by a larger narrative that considers the European literary imagination represents the Mongols in response to shifting geopolitical interests.

Chapter two is followed by the interlude, "Haptic Imperialism I: The *Secret History*." The interlude marks a pivot within the dissertation by a) moving away from Latinate Europe and b) directly engaging with the Mongols' own conception of empire and globality. I find "touch" to be a particularly useful approach in bridging the Mongols' self-conception of empire with others' felt experiences of empire because of the dual nature of hapticity (Husserl's "double sense," the simultaneous feelings of touching and being touched). In this way, touch challenges dichotomous accounts of the empire's borders (inside and outside, self and other, body and world). Moreover, attention to *Secret History's* hapticity in the context of a transcultural study challenges Western sense hierarchies, which have historically privileged sight and sound as the most noble of the senses. This project is particularly exigent because of the way the so-called "lesser" senses—

taste, smell, and touch—have been used to calcify racial taxonomies. Touch, in the *Secret History*, functions as a sophisticated, transcultural apparatus for governance—and to highlight it as such works against biases that associate touch with baseness. The interlude reads the *Secret History of the Mongols* in relation to two major events: Chinggis Khan's death and Kublai Khan's conquest and reunification of the Chinese dynasties. I posit that the *Secret History* develops two distinct imperial models to alternately justify Chinggis Khan's unification of the nomadic steppe tribes and Kublai Khan's sinification. Both models are predicated on differing epistemologies of touch.

Chapter three, "Haptic Imperialism II: Gender and Embodied Politics in the *Yuanshi*," considers how the Chinese *Yuanshi* (*History of Yuan*) revises Mongol historiography in order to retrace a genealogy of Chinese Imperial history that accommodates the Yuan as a Chinese dynasty. By linking the *Yuanshi*—and its revisions to the *Secret History*—with the long tradition of Chinese historiography, the chapter asserts two primary arguments. First, that Chinese Imperial historiography has used the Inner Asian tribal confederations as a heuristic for defining Chinese identity and empire since the Han dynasty 漢 (202 BCE–220 CE). Second, I posit that, as part of this tradition, the text reimagines the Yuan in terms of "touching"—and not touching—the gendered body of the Neo-Confucian chaste wife ideal. The chapter concludes with a coda exploring the resonances between touch in Chinese historiography and taste/smell in Yuan-era vernacular texts. The third chapter and coda are joined by their focus on how Mongol imperialism changed as it came into collision with the Chinese dynasties. Finally, the conclusion to the dissertation adds two more brief case studies that explore representations of the Mongol empire through medieval theories of the cognitive "sense" (the imagination in medieval Europe

and the sixth cognitive sense in Buddhism). The first of these studies looks at the interaction between the Mongol empire and Prester John legends, while the second turns to Suenaga's text.

Sensing Empire presents its case studies in a combinative manner and it is important to note that the studies themselves were selected, in part, to *avoid* direct comparison. The case studies that make up this dissertation are cognates, thematically linked by a shared vested interest in bringing Mongol imperialism into sensation. In response to the Eurocentrism that has overdetermined medieval literary studies, *Sensing Empire* attempts to understand Mongol globality from a transcultural perspective. Recently, scholars working in comparative philosophy and cultural anthropology have used phenomenology to not only challenge ideas of Eurocentric universality, but also to challenge hierarchized binary oppositions (such as East and West; mind and body; premodern and modern) in the Western academe.[43] Hwa Yol Jung, for instance, draws from both Western and Chinese phenomenological traditions to advance the idea of "transversality"—a postmodern global imaginary—as a corrective to Eurocentric universality.[44] In a similar vein, Kwok-Ying Lau expands upon Edmund Husserl's observations regarding the "double sensation" of touch (the sensation of feeling and being felt when my right hand touches my left) to argue that a cultural understanding of flesh can promote a non-hierarchical, intercultural understanding of philosophy.[45] *Sensing Empire* builds off of this approach to intercultural understanding, using the senses as a way to transverse various cultural group while maintaining cultural and historical specificity. Sharing the aims of Jung and Lau, I use a combinative methodology to resist staging premodern encounters between Europe and Asia in

[43] See chapter two in: Hwa Yol Jung, *Transversal Rationality and Intercultural Texts: Essays in Phenomenology and Comparative Philosophy* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011).

[44] Jung, *Transversal Rationality and Intercultural Texts,* xii.

[45] See chapter ten in: Kwok-Ying Lau, *Phenomenology and Intercultural Understanding: Toward a New Cultural Flesh* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland, 2016).

terms traditional categories of analysis that reinforce difference between “East” and “West” as binary. This binary is insidious, itself acting as an “impassable barrier” with troubling ideological assumptions about Western selfhood in opposition with Eastern otherness. As a corrective, *Sensing Empire* embraces cross-cultural contact as a reciprocal and open-ended process of change.

CHAPTER ONE

Occluded Sight and Epistemological Crisis in Eyewitness Narratives of the 1241–1242 Mongol Invasions

In the spring of 1242, after nearly a year of occupying the Danubian plains, Batu Khan abruptly withdrew his forces from central Europe. Latin chronicles from the period express both horror and dismay around the Mongols' mysterious departure**.** Ivo of Narbonne relates how the sudden retreat caused "greater fear in the minds of those who witnessed it" than the initial attacks[1]; while a German annalist bluntly concludes that "only God himself knows" the reason for it.[2] Amidst this backdrop of fear and uncertainty, Pope Innocent IV appointed John of Plano Carpini to lead a diplomatic mission to the court of the Great Khan with the hope of finding some "remedy against the Tartars."[3] John embarked on the journey in 1245, passing first through the conquered Kievan Rus' principalities before reaching Güyük Khan's court near Karakorum. When John returned to Lyon in 1247, his advice to the pope was unequivocal: the Mongols intended "to bring the whole world into subjection" and Latin Europe must prepare.[4]

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[1] The only extant copy of Ivo's letter to the archbishop of Bordeaux is attested recorded in Matthew Paris's *Chronica majora.* Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora,* 1243: "Qui ut subito aderant, sic et aberant repentini; unde magis omnes hoc videntes reddunt formidantes" (Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, volume IV, ed., Henry Richards Luard [London: Longman & Co., 1877], 273-74). My translation.

[2] "Annales Scheftlarienses Maiores A. 1236-1240," ed. Georg Pertz, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Hanover, 1861), 17: 341. My translation.

[3] This was the phrase used for Innocent IV's agenda at First Council of Lyon in June of 1245. John was one of several missions entrusted to deliver pontifical letters to Mongol khans, Ayyubid sultans, and Nestorian Church leaders.

[4] Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century*, trans. a nun of Stanbrook Abbey (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 43. English translations of the *Ystoria* are taken from Dawson's edition unless otherwise noted. John of Plano Carpini, cap. VIII: Intentio Tartarorum est sibi subicere totum mundum si possunt (Anastasius van den Wyngaert, ed., *Sinica Franciscana,* volume 1: *Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum saec. XIII et XIV* [Florence, Italy: The College of Saint Bonaventure at Quaracchi, 1929], 93). All Latin citations of the *Ystoria* are taken from Wyngaert's edition.

The *Ystoria Mongalorum* compiles John's observations into a lengthy ethnographic report that covers a range of topics, including Mongol funeral rites, clothing construction, and a historiographic account of Chinggis Khan's unification of the Mongolian steppe. But because John concludes that "the Tartars never make peace except with those who submit to them," the *Ystoria* most closely attends to Mongol military tactics.[5] Throughout his minute depictions of Mongol warfare, John of Plano Carpini twice repeats how the Mongol military is divided "into groups under captains of a thousand, a hundred, and ten, and 'darkness'—that is, ten thousand."[6] This description is, for the most part, accurate. While the Mongol army was indeed arranged by decimalization, John's description seems to confuse the Old Turkic and Mongolian word *tumen* (ten thousand) for *duman* (obscured by smoke). The error is a telling one. Each time John discusses the Mongol decimalization system, he is careful to translate *tumen/duman* twice; once as "darkness," using the Latin *tenebras,* and once as "ten thousand." By providing two translations for the same word, the text insists that both meanings are significant. A ten thousand-troop unit, then, is always *also* a "darkness." Given in the accusative case, *tenebras* further evokes the transitive verb from which it is derived. Darkness holds within it the active verb to darken. All these semantic slides test the limit of ethnographic "sight." A group of ten thousand is a darkness that darkens, it actively obscures the ability to see. In addition to its linguistic play, John's mistranslation carries a material resonance. Following the battle of Legnica (the first of the 1241–1242 invasions), eyewitness reports describe an unfamiliar—and confounding—tactic of Mongol warfare, the deployment of noxious black smoke to incapacitate

[5] Dawson, *The Mongol Mission,* 38. John of Plano Carpini, cap. VII: Sciendum quod cum nullis hominibus faciunt pacem nisi subdantur eis, quia, it dictum est supra, a Chingischan habent mandatum ut cunctas sibi si possunt subiciant nationes (Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana,* 84).

[6] Ibid., 32. John of Plano Carpini, cap. V: Statuit etiam quod per millenarios et centarious et decanos et tenebras, id est decem milia, debeat eorum exercitus ordinari (Wyngaert, 92).

enemy combatants and mask troop movement. Polish chronicles remark with horror how the Mongols hid within this "witchcraft" to enclose the Christian troops within their ranks while remaining unseen.[7] John's use of "darkness" evokes real battle experience that attests to how the Mongol war machine disrupts modes of perception. Thus, the *Ystoria* articulates a growing fear within the Latinate West: the peculiar invisibility of the Mongol threat.

Within the Latinate tradition, medieval discourses of the senses typically correlate sight with *illumination*—with knowing. Although theories of vision diverge throughout the Middle Ages, most maintain a central thematic link between sight and knowing; namely, that sight has the capacity to apprehend both natural and spiritual meaning. Sight thus functions as an element of anthroposemiosis, a world-building mechanism that knits the biosphere to cultural understandings. But if sight is constitutive to the known world, what happens when vision fails? The present chapter approaches this question in relation to a "world-ending" event, the 1241–1242 Mongol invasions of central Europe.[8] Examining documentary evidence through the lens of medieval optical science, I argue that Latin accounts of the invasions develop a persistent leitmotiv around moments of failed sight. Through a reading of Roger Bacon's epistemological theory of optics, I trace how formations of self and world are (de)constructed in eyewitness narratives of the 1241–1242 invasions.

Chapter one appears in four parts. First, I outline a theory of world-building sight in Roger Bacon's *Opus majus.* Second, I examine how terrifying blindness becomes domesticated

[7] See: Jan Długosz, *The Annals of Jan Długosz: An English Abridgement,* trans. Maurice Michael (West Sussex: IM Publications, 1997), 180.

[8] Having identified the Danubian plain as a strategic entry-point into central Europe, Batu Khan led his forces into Poland and Hungary in 1241. One wing of Batu's army defeated the Polish forces at Legnica on April 9, 1241; two days later, the other wing defeated the Hungarian army at Mohi. The Hungarian king, Béla IV, was forced to flee the region, leaving Batu with full control of the plain. However, Batu—perhaps anticipating issues of succession—issued a general withdrawal of his forces following Ögödei's death in March of 1242.

through witnessed martyrdom in the *Hedwig Codex.* Next, I turn to the eyewitness accounts from Roger of Torre Maggiore and Thomas of Split, tracing how vision repeatedly fails within these narratives just at the moment when the Mongol forces should be apprehended. Here, shock and violence trigger epistemological crises. Vision fails because the very presence of the Mongols cannot be made coextensive with European understandings of the world. Finally, I conclude with a study of how Matthew Paris reaffirms a Christian cosmology by "revealing" the Mongols in the *Chronica majora.* Throughout the chapter I advocate for an approach to pre-modern globality that is predicated on intimacy. According to this model, body and world are interpenetrated by the senses. The perceptive body thus emerges as a contested border space, the frequent site of epistemological crisis. Bridging the recent affective and global "turns" in medieval studies, the 1241–1242 invasions serve as a case study for understanding how the perceptive body becomes a crucial border-space in response to the global phenomenon of the Mongol empire.

Roger Bacon's Optical Theory: World-building by "Rational Sight"

John of Plano Carpini's *Ystoria Mongalorum* illustrates the primacy of sight in Latin accounts of Mongol warfare. Sight also functions as a particularly instructive heuristic for understanding cross-cultural encounter in the thirteenth century—a period during which new access to the Arabic Aristotelian tradition allowed Latinate writers to assimilate non-Christian learning into Christian theology. Medieval western philosophy can largely be characterized under the conceptual heading of Christian Platonism through the end of the twelfth century.[9] However, the growing prominence of scholasticism—with its emphasis on dialectic reasoning—and new Latin

[9] Augustine, Boethius, and Dionysus are foundational thinkers in regard to the development of Christian Platonism. For an overview, see: Alexander J. B. Hampton and John Peter Kenney, editors, *Christian Platonism: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

translations of Arabic texts led to increasing emphasis on Aristotelian natural philosophy as the rational foundation for faith in the thirteenth century.[10] While some of Aristotle's writings had been studied continuously throughout the Middle Ages, these were largely limited to his treatises on logic.[11] The majority of Aristotle's works, which notably include his "scientific" texts like *De anima*, only became widely accessible through thirteenth-century Latin translations of Aristotle and his Arabic commentators. Rega Wood contextualizes the impact of these translations as the introduction, and wide dissemination, of a new "scientific" paradigm.[12] Although the distinctions between Christian Platonism and Aristotelian natural philosophy are varied and diverse, the rift centers around ontological characterizations of the cosmos. Unlike Augustine, Aristotelian theologians shifted away from an understanding of God as having a direct causal relationship with all of creation (e.g., the idea that any motion or change in objects have an immediate cause in God) and toward, as Edward Grant puts it, "an interpretation of the world that assumed that natural objects were capable of acting upon each other directly."[13] God imbues nature with its own causal powers, thereby allowing objects to act upon one another as generators. These "laws of nature" could then be studied in order to better understand God. Citing non-traditional

[10] George Weiland offers a slightly different argument to explain the shift from Christian Platonism to Aristotelianism. Weiland emphasizes the practical importance of the Aristotelian doctrine of sciences at a time when the medieval university was crystallizing as an institution. According to this model, there are indeed *different* sciences (plural) that are largely self-sufficient. "The opposite," Weiland writes, "is true of Platonism. Here there is a tendency to dissolve such differences in favor of an absolute position, so that theology as a distinct speculative discipline really becomes superfluous" (Weiland 77). For the full argument see: George Weiland, "Plato or Aristotle—a Real Alternative in Medieval Philosophy?," in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy* volume 17, edited by John F. Wippel (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987).

[11] Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 10.

[12] Rega Wood, "The Influence of Arabic Aristelianism on Scholastic Natural Philosophy: Projectile Motion, the Place of the Universe, and Elemental Composition," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* edited by Robert Pasnau and Christine Van Dyke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 248.

[13] Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

theologians like William of Conches, Grant partially attributes the potency of Aristotelian natural philosophy to the "new spirit of inquiry" that assigns secondary causes to nature.[14] "Nature, or the cosmos," Grant writes, "was an entity to be studied in order to better understand God's creation."[15] Aristotelian natural philosophy thereby provided the structural foundation to such pursuits.

Competing theories of vision crystallize the confrontation between Christian Platonism and Aristotelian natural philosophy in the thirteenth century. The Neoplatonic theories of extramission held that vision was made possible by the radiation of species from the eye to the object of sight. In this context the Latin word *species* (form, appearance) roughly refers to "the force by which one thing caused an effect in another."[16] Robert Pasnau explains that the three standard types of species—species *in medio,* sensible species, and intelligible species—were thought "to be generated by the object and multiplied through the medium and the percipient" forming a causal chain of species that "linked object and percipient."[17] In keeping with the Christian Platonic understanding of God as the first cause, Latin defenders of extramission—including Augustine, Adelard of Bath, and William of Conches—resisted the idea that objects could generate their own causal effects. Conversely, intromissionists (namely, Alhazen, Avicenna, and Averroes) argued that vision resulted from the radiation of species from the object of sight to the eye. Holly Crocker distills the extramissive/intromissive debate down to a question over how power is distributed across the field of visual relations. Extramissive vision

[14] Grant, The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages, 21.

[15] Grant, 22.

[16] Amanda Power, *Roger Bacon and the Defense of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 103.

[17] Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages*, 14–15.

invests the viewer with active agency; whereas intromissive sight considers the viewer passively impressed upon by the emitted species of a sighted object.[18] The optical science forwarded by the English Franciscan Roger Bacon is indicative of how Aristotelian natural philosophy began to shift Christian Platonic thought.

Roger Bacon emerges as a key figure in the second half of the thirteenth century for his conciliatory optical science, which attempts to unify extramissive and intromissive theories into a single model for vision. As David Lindberg explains, Bacon "was deeply convinced of the unity of all human knowledge (on account of its divine source) and saw his particular contribution as one of synthesis."[19] Although Bacon was not the first to offer a hybrid model—Grosseteste, for instance, was clearly an influence for Bacon—his extremely comprehensive collation of extramissive and intromissive theories became the predominant approach to vision until Johannes Kepler introduced the idea of the retinal image in the seventeenth century.[20] Bacon develops this synthesized optical theory in the expansive *Opus majus,* presented to Pope Clement IV in 1267. The basic principles of his theory are drawn from Alhazen's adaption of Aristotelian intromission. According to Alhazen, every point on a visible object emits species in all directions, forming a pyramid of radiation that reaches its apex across the surface of the eye.[21] Bacon adds that vision is not solely a receptive power. Vision exerts its own agential force, for the species of the eye "changes the medium and ennobles it, and renders it analogous to vision,

[18] Holly Crocker, *Chaucer's Visions of Manhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 18–19.

[19] David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 112.

[20] David C. Lindberg, "Roger Bacon on Light, Vision, and the Universal Emanation of Force," in *Roger Bacon and the Sciences: commemorative essays,* edited by Jeremiah Hackett, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 265.

[21] Lindberg, *Theories of Vision,* 109.

and so prepares the passage of the species itself of the visible object."[22] The species generated by visible objects—e.g., species of light and species of color—can only be *seen* through the transformative emanations of the eye. Vision performs "the act of seeing by its own force" (471). Thus, Bacon acculturates intromission to a Christian context. The following section attunes to this acculturation process (*translatio studii*), tracing how Bacon knits the visual power to exertions of the will to form what I term *rational sight*.

Bacon's synthesized model of vision has a kind of muscularity to it: the physical processes of sight require exertion. Mechanically, vision differs in this way from the other senses. Bacon asserts that touch, taste (a type of touch), sound, and smell operate by means of the—largely passive—perception of real tactile, sonorous, and odorous bodies. The ears, for instance, cannot close themselves to block a tremor, "which causes the air to vibrate to the ear, and produces a real sound in it."[23] They are always open to the reception of sound. Similarly, the skin cannot stop from feeling the heat of a fire; nor can the nose alone stop its perception of a smelly vapor. Sound, heat, and smell can directly "touch" the ears, skin, and nose respectively. Unlike sight, the other senses are always open to the unmediated reception of real objects. Vision is different because it requires distance from the perceived object in order to function. Real objects are not seen by coming into direct contact with the eyes; rather, "vision must perform the

[22] Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon,* volume 2, trans. Robert Belle Burke (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), 471. Subsequent citations will appear in text for ease of reference. English translations are from Burke unless otherwise noted. Roger Bacon, *Opus majus,* Perspectivae Pars Prima: Dist. VII, cap. IV: "Unde oportet quod juventur et excitentur per speciem oculi, quae incedat in loco pyramidis visualis, et alteret medium ac nobilitet, et reddat ipsum proportionale visui, et sic praeparet incessum specie ipsius rei visibilis, et insuper eam nobilitet, ut omnino sit conformis et proportionalis nobilitati corporis animati, quod est oculus" (Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus*, ed. John Henry Bridges [London: Clarendon Press, 1897], 52). All subsequent Latin references come from this edition.

[23] Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon,* trans. Robert Belle Burke (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), 2: 476. English translations are from Burke's translation. All subsequent citations in this section will appear in text for ease of reference.

act of seeing by its own force” (471).[24] Sight is active, it is performed by force. For this reason, it would seem, “the eye needs the means of closing furnished by the eyelids, in order that it may not work continuously” (447). Bacon does not devote much consideration to how, and why, the eyes become exhausted by sight.

Bacon offers two brief explanations: first, the eyes become “fatigued” by strong impressions; and second, when the distance between the eye and the object of sight is great, the “nerve is fatigued from the strain, and the act of seeing at all or at least distinctly is interrupted” (540–541). These explanations emphasize the dynamic relationship between seer and object.[25] The seer’s force of sight renders the object “analogous to vision,” it transforms the object into a *sight* (471). Making objects legible to sight, or rather making them *known* to sight, is a vulnerable process. Once transformed, the sighted object can then alter vision by overworking the eyes. Eyestrain—caused by the quality of a sight’s impression—interrupts the performance of seeing.[26] Vision has the power to make objects into sights, and once transformed these sighted objects have the power to unmake vision. The effects of seeing (sights) threaten sight itself. Of course excessive sound can destroy hearing, just as excessive heat can destroy any feeling in the skin. Sight differs, because it is not a passive form of perception. If not for the eyelids the eyes would indeed “work continuously,” but the eyelids can always close. Sight can always be stopped. The seer, therefore, has choice: the eyelids can remain open or they can close. Keeping one’s eyelids open, choosing to see, thus resembles an act of will.

[24] Et ideo oportet quod visus faciat operationem videndi per suam virtutem (52).

[25] For a general overview on the topic, see: David C. Lindberg’s chapter in *Roger Bacon and the Sciences* (Hackett 1997).

[26] See: Burke, trans., *The Opus Majus*, 540-41.

Bacon's optical science implies that the force of sight is a force of will, which raises the question: how free is the decision to see, to keep one's eyes open? Here I distinguish between automated regulation of the eyes (like blinking) and elective looking. One may, for example, choose to stare directly at the sun even as the sight "overworks" the eyes. To emphasize this unique property of sight, Bacon offers the following counterexample: sound, when loud, "suddenly confuses the hearing and destroys it"—regardless of whether or not the listener desires to hear the sound in the first place (475). Conversely, the looker can always choose to look away if the sun is too bright. This ability to assess different sights and decide whether or not to keep looking at them touches upon the complicated relationship between assessment (or rather, reason), the will, and free choice in the later Middle Ages. The medieval Latin tradition that treats the will (*voluntas*) as a distinct power of the soul develops in the thirteenth century alongside debates around cognition, moral psychology, and ethics.[27] By the 1270s, conceptions of the will had largely coalesced into two competing theories.[28] The Dominican Thomist school held that reason—the intellect—directs the actions of the will by identifying its aims (intellectualism).[29] Conversely, the Franciscans argued that the will is an active power that can freely judge the objects presented to it by reason before acting upon them (voluntarism).[30] Thus, as J. B. Korolec summarizes, it is the will, not the intellect, that serves as "the seat of freedom

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[27] Tobias Hoffman, "Intellectualism and Voluntarism" in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy,* edited by Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 414.

[28] What follows is a very brief glossing of highly technical debates. Before the second half of the thirteenth century, "freedom of will" was not explicitly discussed by Latin thinkers.

[29] J. B. Korolec, "Free Will and Free Choice," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100-1600,* edited by Norman Kretzmann, et al., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 635.

[30] Korolec, "Free Will and Free Choice," 636.

and autonomy."[31] The 1277 condemnations deemed the Thomist school unorthodox, thereby solidifying the dominance of the voluntarist position. Despite a determinist commitment to the influence of celestial forces, Bacon, himself a Franciscan, maintains that "man can change as he wills, because in contingent things there is a choice" (405–406). Elaborating upon this point, he adds: "God has not imposed necessity on human actions, although he has known from eternity how a contingent matter must terminate, and there is freedom of human will" (406). Such a formulation weds the intellect to experiential knowledge, while distancing the will from material reality.[32] Korolec notes that Matthew of Aquasparta and Henry of Ghent establish the superiority of the will by linking the intellect to worldly knowledge. The intellect is inferior to the will because its object is truth. The intellect requires embodiment, the ability to know and apprehend the world (truth) by means of experience. Alternatively, the object of the will is goodness, which transcends material conditions.[33]

As an active power, the will is only informed by—rather than caused to move—the body's apprehension. In this way the will is independent of the intellect, independent of embodied knowledge. Ultimately then, the idea that freedom belongs to human will is buttressed by one of the foundational themes of medieval Christian theology: that there is an ontological hierarchy between body and soul (and, ultimately, God). The immortal soul is superior to the corporeal body over which it governs; and, if the soul is indeed superior to the body, then it cannot be the case that the soul passively receives sensory perceptions. Augustine explores this dynamic in *De musica,* arguing that sense perception is the soul's awareness of how external

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[31] Korolec, 637.

[32] As in the following example: I might know from experience that eating dairy results in (undesirable) digestive distress; and yet, I may still decide to eat ice cream.

[33] Korolec, 636–7.

objects arouse the passions of the body (6.9–10).[34] The soul recognizes external objects as interacting with the body either in difficulty or in harmony and then produces feeling. As David Lindberg puts it, this model holds that "the soul is the causal agent in sensory acts."[35] Lindberg suggests that Bacon adapts this premise to explain his theory of extramission, where the emitted species of the eye ennoble the species of the visible object in order to prepare the corporal body for the sensation of sight.[36] The species of the eye, its causal force, is what enables the action of sight. However, Lindberg does not address how Bacon's adaptation of the Augustinian soul/body ontology grapples with nonhuman animal perception. If some human vision results from an exertion of will—a causal force of the soul—then it must be distinguishable from animal sight in order to apprehend spiritual knowledge.

Bacon's answer to this dilemma lies in his conception of the soul. The *Opus majus,* like most thirteenth-century Latin philosophical texts, uses Aristotelian psychology to differentiate between the souls of human and nonhuman animals. Aristotle claims that the soul has three distinct faculties (nutritive, perceptive, rational); and that these faculties form a teleological explanation for plant, animal, and human life. In *De anima* he explains that the nutritive soul, responsible for nourishment and generation, "is the first and most widely shared potentiality of the soul, the one that makes all living things alive" (ii 4, 415a25).[37] While all life possesses the nutritive faculty of the soul, this is the only faculty that plants possess. The perceptive (sensitive)

[34] Robert Catesby Taliaferro, trans., "On Music," in *The Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine* volume IV, (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 335–337.

[35] Lindberg, "Roger Bacon on Light, Vision, and the Universal Emanation of Force," 264.

[36] Lindberg, 264.

[37] Aristotle, *Selections,* trans. Terrence Irwin and Gail Fine, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), 184.

soul belongs to all animal life, for all animals at minimum possess the sense of touch.[38] Finally, the rational soul is the human ability to think and suppose, it is the ability to understand both actualities and theoreticals.[39] Aristotle is particularly interested in the rational soul because of what is at stake in the discussion: the definition of human (*qua* human) life. Within the Latin tradition, the idea that humanity is defined by its unique ability to reason was standard by the later Middle Ages. Aquinas, for one, asserts in the *Summa contra gentiles* that humanity is "really nothing other than the rational soul" (*anima rationalis*).[40] As a general rule, Bacon's optical treatise indicates that sight is caused by the perceptive soul. However, by suggesting that there is free choice in looking, Bacon uniquely links sight to the activity of the rational soul—the soul that can think and judge. A nocturnal animal, for example, might look up at the stars to navigate, while a human might look up at the stars to abstractly assess their beauty. Informed, perhaps, by some cultural knowledge or understanding, this human stargazer might see the stars as manifestations of heavenly splendor. In such a case, looking becomes an intentional aesthetic practice, where objects are first comprehended by the senses and then evaluated by the

[38] Aristotle's definition of perception hinges upon the differentiation of form from matter. He describes perception as the interaction between perceiver and particular perceptible objects, where the perceiver is altered by the object. Perception affects the perceiver by making it "like the object" (see: *De anima* ii 5, 417a–418a). Perceivers always have the potential to "made like," and perception is the process of *acquiring* the qualities of an object through the senses (*De anima* ii 5, 418a). While a sunny afternoon may similarly warm an exposed rock and a sunbathing lizard, only the lizard feels the heat because only the lizard has the potential to receive "perceptible forms without the matter" (*De anima,* ii 12, 424a20).

[39] The above is a broad summary of Aristotle's treatment of the intellect (*nous*) in *De anima* (iii 4–5). Here, Aristotle describes the intellect as analogous to perception, in that thought occurs when the intellect receives intelligible forms (the objects of thought). But while perception pertains to particulars, knowledge pertains to universals. Throughout his chapters on the mind, Aristotle remains uncharacteristically obscure while also making claims that seemingly problematize his model of hylomorphism. Thus, Aristotle's theory of mind is a topic of much critical debate. For some recent and cogent accounts, see: S. F. Kislev (2020); Fred Miller Jr. (2012); and Vasilis Politis (2001).

[40] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, lib. iv, c. 81, ed. Leonina xv (1930), 253. Et secundum hoc, humanitas non est aliud realiter quam anima rationalis.

intellect.[41] Thereby, unlike the sight of other nonhuman animals, human vision has the capacity to be caused by the rational soul, of which the will is a part.

Throughout his technical discussion of vision, Bacon generally notes the *sui generis* status of sight without much commentary. However, he concludes the treatise by contextualizing optical science in relation to its "ineffable usefulness in regard to divine truth" (576).[42] Here Bacon offers his clearest articulation of the will as a cause for human sight, claiming that spiritual "vision" requires "the exercise and agreement of our free will are required together with the grace of God to the end that we may see and secure the state of salvation" (578).[43] Natural and spiritual sight are analogous— they are both conscious exertions of force and will that strive toward knowledge production. Indeed, Bacon states that any observations about sight as a natural phenomenon "must be serviceable" to both "natural and spiritual meaning" (576). Divine truth orders the world; therefore, knowledge of the world (its "science and temporal matters") is a means for apprehending knowledge of God (576).[44] Vision, as a natural phenomenon, can—or rather, must—be studied in the pursuit for spiritual meaning. Structurally then, the study of any natural phenomenon should similarly result in the dual elucidation of worldly and divine truths.

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[41] Although anachronistic, Immanuel Kant's theory of aesthetics is useful in further explaining the process described above. In the *Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant bolsters his conception of aesthetic judgement with a theory of mind that claims, "[o]bjects are *given* to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us *intuitions;* they are *thought* through the understanding, and from the understanding arise *concepts*" (§1, B33). Here, the three tiers of cognition—sensibility, intuition, and conceptualization—closely correspond with the distinctions between the perceptive and rational soul in Aristotelian psychology. The perceptive soul processes sense-data by "intuition" (Bacon uses the example of a sheep fleeing from the sight of a wolf, even if the sheep has never seen a wolf before). The rational soul then develops knowledge (concepts) from sense-derived intuition. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965).

[42] Volo nunc in fine innuere quomodo hace scientia habet ineffabilem utilitatem respectu sapientiae divinae (159).

[43] Nam motus liberi arbitrii et consensus requiritur cum gratia Dei ad hoc ut videamus et consequamar statum salutis (161).

[44] Et primo considerandum est, quod cum hace scientia res naturales certificat, ut planum est per ea quae dicta sunt, et per consequens liquet quod cateras scientias elucidate et declarant, necesse est quod haec scientia sit utilis divinae veritati, propter hoc quod illa requirit notitiam scientiarum et rerum hujus mundi (159).

But for Bacon "nothing is more necessary for the natural and spiritual meaning than definite knowledge of [optical] science," precisely because human sight actively coordinates between the rational soul and the material world (576).[45] George Molland thus concludes that Bacon's optical science provides "a paradigm use of the communication of action."[46] Purposive human sight—in other words, *rational* sight—is an action that communicates between forces of mind, world, and God; it is an action that speaks.

Rational sight is an action that narrativizes experience within the intersecting spheres of natural and spiritual truths. This understanding of human sight aligns with what John Deely calls a semiotic web, a network of relations that constitute "the reality of all that is experienced, but suchwise as to ensure that that reality cannot be divided in a final way into what is and what is not independent of cognition."[47] Reality is a narrative shaped by purposive entanglements of body, mind, and physical environment. And because Bacon imagines this reality as species-specific (uniquely formed by the rational soul), it can be understood as an Umwelt, a "model world" organized around specific interests and needs.[48] The term "Umwelt" is helpful in exposing how culture becomes caught up in the narrativization of experience.[49] Deely argues that human Umwelts develop through social interactions mediated by language (i.e., culture), which

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[45] et ideo nihil magis necessarium est sensui naturali et spirituali, sicut hujus scientiae certitudo (160).

[46] George Molland, "Roger Bacon and the Hermetic Tradition in Medieval Science," *Vivarium* 31.1 (1993), 155.

[47] John Deely, *The Human Use of Signs, or: Elements of Anthroposemiosis,* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 7.

[48] Deely, *The Human Use of Signs,* 42.

[49] The term "Umwelt" comes from biologist Jakob von Uexküll's theory of animal life-worlds as distinct perceived realities. For example: the tick is eyeless, but has skin that is sensitive to light. Light stimuli *are* tactile stimuli, which means that visual and tactile sites coincide within the tick's environment. See: Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning,* trans. Joseph D. O'Neil, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

opens the possibility for worlds that are not tied to the immediacy of physical stimuli.[50] Extrapolating from Deely's anthroposemiosis, I posit that rational sight functions precisely as this kind of world-building system within the *Opus majus*. The "rational" component of rational sight extends the physical environment into a realm of socio-cultural signification, the realm of the divine. Attuned to both natural and spiritual truth, Bacon's understanding of human sight articulates an Umwelt that is coextensive with religious doctrine. The Umwelt that emerges in Bacon's text is a reality where the spiritual is knit into tangible experience. As an act of communication, rational sight organizes different types of information into a unified and coherent story about the world. Rational sight is constitutive to the Umwelt of thirteenth-century Christendom; therefore, any sight that challenged the narrative unity of this world should be recognized as a potential rend in the very fabric of reality. By 1240 this much was clear: the Mongol empire was one such "sight."

Eyewitnesses to Truth: Visual Narratives of the 1241–1242 Invasions into Poland

Part of the reason that the 1241–1242 Mongol invasions registered so powerfully as a deconstructive sight is because they seemed to occur suddenly, and without warning. Despite the rapid conquest and expansion of the Mongol empire in the first three decades of the thirteenth century, much of Europe disregarded the new power as a direct threat to the continent. The consequences of this inattention, however, would soon prove to be disastrous. The Mongol defeat of the northern Chinese Jin dynasty in 1234 provided an opportunity for the empire to assess its potential for westward expansion. Following the momentous victory against the Jin,

[50] Deely, 44.

Ögödei Khan called a *kuriltai* to discuss both the political and martial affairs of the empire.[51] At the 1235 *kuriltai* general Sübedei argued that the western edge of the empire was its most vulnerable point, and urged for a campaign that would first conquer the area around the western steppe before pushing further into Europe.[52] The assembly appointed Batu, a son of Jochi and a grandson of Chinggis, to lead the effort. Together Sübedei and Batu invaded the territories of the Kipchak Turks and the Bulghars in 1236. The pair then advanced against all of the major Rus' principalities; ultimately, their forces sacked Kiev, the center of the Rus' civilization, in 1240.[53] By this time Sübedei had already identified Hungary as a strategic entry-point into central Europe, likely because its terrain could support the pasturing of the army's herds.[54] Sübedei next proposed a two-pronged approach: they would split into two, with a smaller force of 20,000 going to Poland and the bulk crossing over the Carpathian Mountains into Hungary. In Poland the Mongols won a decisive victory against the Christian army led by Duke Henry II of Silesia, which was alleged to include a large contingent of Teutonic Knights alongside smaller numbers of Knights Templar and French Hospitallers. The Battle of Liegnitz (Legnica) resulted in a staggering loss for Henry II's forces.[55] Henry II was himself killed and beheaded during the fray.

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[51] The *kuriltai* was a compulsory assembly that drew together the political elite of the empire in order to give legitimacy to major political and/or martial decisions (e.g., the election of a new khan). See: Florence Hodous, "The Quriltai as a Legal Institution in the Mongol Empire," *Central Asiatic Journal* 56 (2012/2013): 87–102.

[52] Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East: From Genghis Khan to Khubilai Khan,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 89.

[53] Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests in World History,* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 47.

[54] David Morgan, *The Mongols,* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986), 139; Peter Jackson also suggests some political enmity between the Mongols and King Béla IV may have served as a motivating factor in targeting Hungary. In 1239 Béla allowed asylum to roughly 40,000 Cuman refugees fleeing from the Mongols (on the condition of baptism). Moreover, Batu sent a letter to Béla claiming that the king had killed Mongol envoys on numerous occasions. See: Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West: 1221–1410,* second edition, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 60–61.

[55] Although the Europeans outnumbered the Mongols by about 10,000, the Mongol use of smokescreens and archers was highly effective against both the European cavalry and infantry.

After the battle, the Mongols broke up into smaller raiding parties that tore through the Polish countryside before departing to meet the larger host in Hungary.

Meanwhile, both Sübedei and Batu continued on toward Hungary. Leading the bulk of the army, Sübedei and Batu met King Béla IV's army on April 11, 1241 at Mohi—just two days after the Battle of Liegnitz. The clash was devastating, with nearly 60,000 Hungarian casualties. Béla IV was lucky enough to escape the fray, but was forced to flee the region. Béla's absence allowed Batu to conquer Hungary east and north of the Danube, giving him full control of the Danubian plain. Although Pope Gregory IX soon declared that those who took the cross in defense of Hungary would receive the same privileges as crusaders of the Holy Land, the schism between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire kept military assistance from arriving.[56] During the ensuing year, somewhere between 50 to 80 percent of the Hungarian plains settlements would be destroyed by the Mongols.[57] In other parts of the kingdom, a combination of warfare, famine, and epidemic led to the deaths of nearly a quarter of the population. However, Batu—perhaps anticipating issues of succession—issued a general withdrawal of his forces following Ögödei's death in March of 1242.[58] The Mongols left, Béla IV returned; and yet, the kingdom was irrevocably changed by the invasions. In addition to the catastrophic destruction and population loss, Béla IV instituted immediate changes that would radically restructure political

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[56] Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West: 1221–1410,* second edition, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 65.

[57] László Makkai, "Transformation into a Western-Type State, 1196–1301" in *A History of Hungary,* eds., Peter F. Sugar, et al., (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), 27.

[58] There is much critical debate around *why* Batu Khan issued a withdrawal from central Europe in 1242. Denis Sinor (1972), for one, has proffered the idea that the Danubian plains were unable to accommodate the Mongol army's horses; elsewhere, David Morgan (1986) names Ögödei's death as a likely cause; and more recently, Peter Jackson (2005) firmly asserts that Batu withdrew because his mission had solely been to punish Hungary for rebuffing diplomatic measures.

and social life in Hungary.[59] The invasions fundamentally altered the "world" of Hungarian experience and life, the resonances of which can be found as a blinding "darkness" in Polish narratives of the Mongol attacks.

Despite reports of Batu's advances against the Rus' principalities—and his purported interest in Hungary[60]—the Latin West was unprepared for direct conflict with the Mongols. At the time these reports began to circulate, many of the major European powers were embroiled in politically destabilizing conflicts. In 1239 Gregory IX excommunicated Emperor Frederick II, thereby intensifying the schism between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. Urged on by the pope, rebellions in Lombardy and in southern Italy occupied much of Frederick II's attention and manpower. Moreover, his control over Jerusalem was significantly weakened when the Ayyubid sultan organized an attack and brief occupation of the city. Meanwhile in central Europe, King Béla IV held uneasy control over the Hungarian nobility, and the Polish duchies had splintered into competing factions. Amidst this noise, the Mongol threat was drowned out.[61] The first attacks against Poland in 1241 were, therefore, all the more shocking.[62] Jan Długosz, a fifteenth-century cleric and Polish historiographer, describes the invasions as a test of God**.**

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[59] When the Mongols withdrew, Béla IV quickly implemented a series of sweeping military and social reforms. The Mongols were widely anticipated to return, so Béla focused on modernizing the kingdom's fortifications. He heavily invested in the construction of new stone fortresses, thereby introducing the castle domain to Hungary—an entirely new state structure. For more information regarding these reforms, see László Makkai's chapter in *A History of Hungary* (1990).

[60] Jackson, The Mongols and the West, 61.

[61] Pope Gregory IX, Frederick II, and Béla IV all ignored early warnings of a Mongol attack. For a general overview of the political climate at the time of the initial Mongol invasions into Central Europe, see: Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West: 1221–1410,* second edition, (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[62] Although members of the Piast family had subdivided the Polish duchies by the thirteenth century, my use of "Poland" here reflect two important historical notes: first, that the concept of a politically unified Polish state remained in play (despite feuding factions); and two, that "Poland" was recognized by the Holy See as an ecclesiastical province. In the broader context of Christendom, the Polish duchies did not appear partitioned. For more see chapter 5 of Oscar Halecki's *A History of Poland* (1943).

Długosz proclaims that God, incensed "by the manifold sins of the Poles," sent to them "the savagery and fury of the heathen" in the form of the Mongol invaders.[63] Distracted by sin—in his 1240 entry Długosz notes that "whole country is appalled" by the machinations of Duke Conrad of Masovia—the Polish people were unprepared to meet God's wrath.[64] Although Długosz's historiography post-dates both the Battle of Liegnitz and the Mongol empire itself, his account offers insight into how medieval Polish chroniclers imagined the 1241 battle in relation to Poland's place within the larger Christian world.[65] While he accounts for the presence of the Mongols in Poland as an act of God, Długosz contradicts this earlier sentiment by framing the Battle of Liegnitz as an attack *against* the pious Christian and Christianity more broadly. After narrating the death of Duke Henry II, Długosz adds that during the battle "a number of the Polish nobility and gentry find honourable martyrdom in defence of their Faith."[66] Taken as a whole then, Długosz amplifies the stakes of the battle beyond the punishment of Polish sin—and indeed beyond Poland. By invading Poland the Mongols threatened "their Faith," the very fabric of a Christian cosmology.

The Battle of Legnica is similarly recorded in the *Hedwig Codex*, a fourteenth-century illuminated manuscript that depicts the *Legenda major* and the *Legenda minor* of Saint Hedwig of Silesia—Duke Henry II's mother. Commissioned in 1353 by Duke Ludwig I of Legnica and Breig (Brzeg), Hedwig's great- great- grandson, the codex is of particular interest because it is

[63] Jan Długosz, *The Annals of Jan Długosz: An English Abridgement,* trans. Maurice Michael, (West Sussex: IM Publications, 1997), 177.

[64] Długosz, The Annals of Jan Długosz, 176.

[65] Długosz's *Annales* offers the most complete extant narrative of the 1241–1242 Mongol invasions told from a Polish perspective.

[66] Długosz, 180.

likely the earliest illuminated manuscript of the saint's life.[67] Jeffrey Hamburger argues that these illustrations powerfully contribute to the manuscript's "'reality effect' by providing the illusion of eye-witness testimony" to Hedwig's works, and by giving her a "canonical form."[68] In that they are seen, the illustrations add material verity to the text.[69] Extending this argument, I turn to a series of illuminations within the codex that link the Battle of Legnica to the project of codifying Hedwig's 1267 canonization. While the majority of illustrations within the *Hedwig Codex* show Hedwig as the central actor, the notable exception are three narrative scenes (*historiae*) from the Battle of Legnica. The three half-page drawings show: the battle; Henry II's death and beheading; and the Mongol attack against the Legnica Castle, while bearing Henry II's head on a pike. Without Hedwig's presence, the illustrations seem to give outsized attention to the battle and its immediate aftermath. But like the codex's larger interest in presenting "a ceremonious copy of the saint's canonization dossier"[70] they entangle notions of faith and state, ultimately suggesting that the Mongol invasions require careful (re)consideration as they threatened to upend both. The codex presents the Battle of Legnica as a direct contest to a Polish-Christian Umwelt while simultaneously offering its resolution: the "honorable martyrdom" of Henry II and his knights. Imaging the battle in the context of Hedwig's canonization exposes a

[67] Jeffrey Hamburger, "Representations of Reading - Reading Representations: The Female Reader from the *Hedwig Codex* to Châtillon's *Léopoldine au Livre d'Heures,*" in Gabriela Signori, ed., *Die lesende Frau,* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 187.

[68] Hamburger, "Representations of Reading - Reading Representations," 188.

[69] Hamburger's argument about the *Hedwig Codex* abuts issues of iconoclasm in medieval theories of art and image. Carolyn Walker Bynum (2011) points toward two philosophical trends that work to resolve the issue of the icon: first, Neoplatonist mystics (and some scholastics) understood all matter as ontologically linked to God; and second, Thomas Aquinas crystallized the Aristotelian position by distinguishing *dulia* (veneration to images as useful signifiers of the transcendent) from *latria* (adoration of God). See, for instance: Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011).

[70] Hamburger, 188.

relationship between seeing (eyewitness testimony) and resolving the world-breaking rupture posed by the Mongol invasions.

Cynthia Hahn discusses medieval pictorial hagiography in relation to a central *topos* of martyrdom: that a martyr's death bears witness to faith.[71] The broken body of a martyr functions as a form of revelation, an attestation of divine truth. Given this premise, it is unsurprising that violence figured as a primary visual motif for piety in the later Middle Ages. But as Carolyn Walker Bynum has argued, "the blood that spilled across European piety also accused, calling for vindication of, as well as empathy with, Christ."[72] Images of a martyr's Passion implicate the viewer in a kind of dual vision; at once accusatory and revelatory. The *Hedwig Codex* illuminations of the Battle of Legnica evoke this double vision through a program of wounding in the second image of the three-scene sequence. This central and climactic scene is dense and frenetic. A cluster of Mongol soldiers press from the left of the frame toward its center, where Henry II and four attending knights make their final stand. Drawn at a larger scale than the rest of the illustration, this encounter is visually composed of three simultaneous moments of wounding, all dramatically accentuated by bright-red slashes of blood. The bloodiest and most dramatic of these wounds belongs to Henry II, whose limp body is shown slumped over his horse as an enlarged Mongol figure plunges a sword into his side.[73] This same figure is simultaneously

[71] Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 60–63.

[72] Carolyn Walker Bynum, "Violent Imagery in Late Medieval Piety," *GHI Bulletin* 30 (2002), 31.

[73] Henry is shown wounded on his left side, just below the breast. The placement of this wound—coupled with his collapsed posture and the long arcs of blood that leap from the gash—evokes conventional medieval depictions of Christ's side wound. Henry's wound mirrors the injury to Christ's right side; still, the reference would likely have been legible to a fourteenth-century viewer of the Hedwig Codex. Vibeke Olson discusses how the "Holy Side Wound" increasingly became an abstracted point of contemplation in the later Middle Ages, often signifying "the transition between secular space (the here and now of the beholder) and sacred space (salvation and life-everlasting)." Henry's gaping wound works similarly within the illustration, marking the liminal space where life, death, and salvation converge. However, the "here and now" implicated in Henry's wound is, primarily, historical. In the cramped and crowded scene, full of broken bodies, Henry's wound is not given much space for the viewer's

attacked from behind by one of Henry's knights. With gobs of blood oozing from his neck, the illustration makes clear that the unnamed Mongol and Henry die together. The synchronous deaths of Henry and his attacker literalize the revelatory/accusatory dynamic of a martyr's Passion. Henry's death unambiguously bears witness to his faith within the scene, as two marginal images of his soul's ascension to heaven make this revelation explicit. Conversely, the Mongol's death is concretized as both accusation and vindication by a drawing of his soul being carried to hell. Revelation and accusation are shown in tandem, rendering the Mongol as Henry's anti-Christian corollary. Thus, the illumination creates an overt visual narrative that conjoins Henry's exemplary faith to the Mongol's extraordinary "violation of God."[74] The illumination's visual narrative of these two deaths seems to be original. Not only is it discontinuous from the text of Hedwig's *vita,* it is also unsubstantiated by other accounts of the battle. As an invention of the illuminator, the parallel deaths of Henry and the Mongol mark a moment where the illustration visualizes what Stephen Nichols calls the "textual unconscious" of a manuscript.[75] By portraying what is absent from the written text—in this case, the Mongol's death—the image points toward "a place of resistance to meanings" in the verbal narrative.[76] Because Henry II was never canonized, the visual narrative shows what the verbal narrative cannot truthfully speak—

prolonged contemplation. This is especially evident when compared with how Christ's wound became "the main focus of the devotional image" in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, to the point where the wound was often depicted as entirely separate from Christ's physical body. As a mere shadow of Christ's wound, Henry's injury performs a lesser transition. Instead of emphasizing the viewer's relationship with the divine, the illumination seems more invested in linking a particular historical secular space (the Battle of Legnica) to the sacred one of salvation. See: Vibeke Olson, "The Wound in Christ's Side as a Performative Space," *in Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, edited by Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 315.

[74] Walker Bynum, "Violent Imagery in Late Medieval Piety," 31.

[75] Stephen G. Nichols, "The Image as Textual Unconscious: Medieval Manuscripts," *L'Esprit Créateur* 29.1 (1989), 13.

[76] Nichols, "The Image as Textual Unconscious: Medieval Manuscripts," 13–14.

that he died a literal martyr's death. Therefore, the image exposes truths that are inaccessible to language.

There is, however, a third wound in the illumination that disrupts any binary (revelatory/accusatory) interpretation of Henry's death. This third wound, this third death, appears just behind Henry's figure. Here, a mostly obscured Mongol soldier extends an arm overhead, stabbing another of Henry's attending knights through the eye-slit of his helm. Marked by a small spray of blood, the wound is death by hyperbolic blinding. The blinding is significant as this knight is best positioned to witness Henry's death according to the scene's formal arrangement; and yet, he cannot**.** Considering once again the dynamic relationship between sight and sighted object in the later Middle Ages, the sight of Henry's death (his wound) corresponds with the immediate unmaking of vision. While the illumination makes literal the double-vision of a martyr's passion for the viewer, it curiously negates diegetic sight. Physiological sight, it would seem, fails in response to the Mongol's world-breaking victory against Henry II and his Christian forces.[77] To see material reality as a manifestation of faith has the power to overwhelm vision, to destroy it. Roger Bacon arrives at a similar conclusion in the *Opus majus,* asserting that human sense perception is unable "to bear the sensible presence of the Lord."[78] He claims that experiences of faith (*sensing* faith) cannot be sustained, and instead "give way to a flood of tears."[79] The third wound of the illumination presents an inverse scenario. Here, the sensible presence of "evil" cannot be perceived by the would-be witness; only, in place of tears he weeps

[77] Whereas Długosz describes Henry II's attending knights as Polish nobles, the *Hedwig Codex* reflects the reality that his army included Christian knights from beyond the Polish principalities (one, for instance, bears the white cross of the Knights Hospitaller).

[78] Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus,* trans. Robert Belle Burke (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), 2: 821.

[79] Bacon, *Opus Majus,* 2: 822.

blood. Experiencing the Mongols—to *see* them—thus becomes an inversion of divine experience.

Together the three wounds form a knot, a place where, in the words of Geraldine Heng, "the pressure of an investment speaks itself—a moment of becoming visible."[80] The illumination from the *Hedwig Codex* makes visible a desire to resolve Henry's death as that of a martyr; but as Heng contends, such knots also trouble the "fantasy of textual closure and command."[81] The third wound, the blinding wound, undoes the resolution offered by the deaths of Henry and his Mongol assailant. Although Henry II might be immediately avenged by the tit-for-tat battle justice shown in the illumination, an imbalance remains between the forces of faith and the forces against faith. As a result, the knight's blinding leaves the codex viewer as the privileged witness to both the revelatory and accusatory forms of sight. The visual narrative of the image cannot be resolved without the viewer's gaze; the viewer stands in witness, observing what Henry cannot.

The image makes this visual program more explicit through a nonlinear representation of time, collapsing three distinct events into a single image. The viewer's sense of chronologically can only be garnered by counterintuitively following the action clockwise from the center of the illustration. The first temporal beat, then, is the moment of Henry II's death, which occupies the middle of the drawing. Next is his beheading, shown in the bottom left-hand corner of the frame. Third is his ascension into Heaven, which appears at the top right corner. Beneath a Mongol standard, just left of center, an interstitial moment occurs as an angel carries the soul of Henry II in its arms. Time thus unfurls and spirals out from the dense center of the scene, eliciting the

[80] Geraldine Heng, "Feminine Knots and the Other *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,*" *PMLA* 106.3 (1991), 503.

[81] Heng, "Feminine Knots and the Other *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,*" 500.

viewer to pause and experience the image twice (all at once, then chronologically). The nonlinear arrangement arrests the real-time experience of the viewer, mirroring the image's rupture of sequential time. The viewer experiences time similarly to the image's diegetic experience of time, at once ruptured and salvational. This arrangement strongly evokes the non-progressive temporality of the divine, rendering the relationship between death and salvation as a closed loop. The image, therefore, conveys a "reality effect" that makes tangible a Christian cosmology: the viewer becomes eye-witness to a break in reality (Henry II's impossible defeat) that is always-already resolved by faith. Henry's death—and the battle itself—is resolved through visualizing the invisible world of the divine. Thus, both natural and spiritual sights are simultaneously depicted. By incorporating the viewer's real (i.e., non-representation) vision into its program (as eye-witness), the illustration manifests the experience of *rational* sight. As Roger Bacon suggests, rational sight organizes sense data within the broader (cultural) framework of spiritual truth. Through its materialization of rational sight, the *Hedwig Codex* offers a narrative resolution to the reality-bending event of the Battle of Legnica. The image simultaneously depicts Henry's death (a "natural" sight) and his ascension (a spiritual sight), implicating the viewer as a witness to both. Taken as a whole, the drawing enacts a moment of perfect, knowledge-producing vision. The reality rend of Henry's death is fixed by a non-literal narrative of martyrdom. A century later Długosz would echo this same resolution—Henry II's forces died as martyrs, extraordinary exemplars of faith.

When Vision Fails: The Eyewitness Accounts of Roger of Torre Maggiore and Thomas of Split

As with the *Hedwig Codex,* Hungarian sources of the 1241–1242 Mongol invasions stress the role of the eyewitness in their narrations of the attacks. But unlike the fourteenth-century Polish manuscript, Hungarian narratives of the invasions do not attempt to "picture" the Mongols as a natural/spiritual sight that can restore disruptions to their Umwelt. The difference can partially be attributed to the historical proximity of extant Hungarian sources to the invasions. Two narrative accounts of the 1241–1242 invasions into Hungary survive: an autobiographical epistle from Roger of Torre Maggiore and a compiled history of the attacks from Thomas of Split. Written in the years following Batu Khan's withdrawal from Central Europe, the two texts narrate the experience of violent contact with the Mongol invaders from the perspective of those within the Hungarian kingdom. Conversely, the *Hedwig Codex* was commissioned ahead of the centennial anniversary of Hedwig's 1267 canonization and aims to knit her sainthood to the dynastic rule of the Piast family (of which Ludwig I was a part).[82] Whereas the codex resolves the Battle of Liegnitz by fixing it within a long history of Piast exemplarity, the accounts from Roger and Thomas offer no such solution. These two accounts approach the Mongol invasions as an immediate and ongoing crisis. If the *Hedwig Codex* performs perfect rational sight, then it is telling that the more contemporaneous texts consistently depict the invasions through representations of disordered vision. Most notably, the Mongols themselves are never *seen* within these narrative accounts. Persistently, the Mongols are made absent in their descriptions of the invasions; and as a result, failed sight emerges as a central theme of the encounter.

[82] This timing is significant. Following the initial Mongol invasions—and subsequent incursions in 1259 and 1287—the Polish duchies became increasingly fragmented under the dynastic rule of the Piast family. At the beginning of the fourteenth century Władyslaw I Łokietek (c. 1260–1333) sought to restore the state, an effort that culminated in his coronation in 1320. Poland's reunification was further strengthened under the reign of his son Casimir III, except for the fact that Casimir had no legal male heir—a vulnerability that the king himself recognized with great concern. See: Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland,* volume 1, revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982; 2005), 83.

At the time of the invasions, the Italian-born Roger of Torre Maggiore was archdeacon of Nagyvárad (Oradea) in the eastern part of the Hungarian kingdom. Following Batu Khan's victory against King Béla IV at Mohi, the Mongol armies focused on sacking Hungary's eastern cities before moving westward. Most of these cities, particularly east of the Danube, were protected only by earthen walls—not stone fortresses—that did little to stop the onslaught of Mongol attacks.[83] Nagyvárad quickly fell; but Roger survived the attack by fleeing into the nearby woods. Like many other Hungarian refugees, he was then forced to keep moving in order to evade Mongol roving parties. Eventually Roger was captured by a Hungarian who joined the Mongols and "had already become a Tatar in deeds."[84] As a prisoner Roger traveled with the main part of the Mongol army until 1242, when the confusion of Batu's withdrawal presented an opportunity for him to escape. Sometime before 1244 Roger composed an epistle that has since come to be known as the *Carmen miserabile.*[85] Likely intended for wide circulation, the *Carmen miserabile* promises to record "the truth about [the Mongols'] life, behavior and battling," through the narration of Roger's firsthand experience.[86] Whereas the *Hedwig Codex* narrates the 1241–1242 Mongol invasions through the lens of hagiography, Roger ostensibly does so through the lens of cultural observation. Through an ethnographic framework the *Carmen miserabile*

[83] Jackson, The Mongols and the West: 1241–1410, 64.

[84] János M. Bak and Martyn Rady, eds. and trans., *Anonymus and Master Roger* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 211; ditioni cuiusdam Hungari facti, ut dixi, operibus Tartari me submisi (210). All citations (both English and Latin) come from this edition unless otherwise noted. While little documentary evidence remains regarding Hungarians who decided to join with the Mongols, John of Plano Carpini notes that some were present at the court of the Great Khan as translators.

[85] The letter is extant only in a 1488 print edition, where it is erroneously addressed to "Bishop John of Pest." János Bak and Martyn Rady explain that the manuscript exemplar likely used the initials I and P for the addressee, as Pest had no bishopric. Bak and Rady offer Giacomo di Pecorari, bishop of Palestrina, as the person likely referenced by theses initials. See the introduction in: János M. Bak and Martyn Rady, eds., "Master Roger's Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tartars," in *Anonymus and Master Roger,* eds. János M. Bak et al., (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010).

[86] Bak and Rady, "Master Roger's Epistle," 135.

attempts to circumscribe the Mongol invaders as object for study. However, this project is repeatedly thwarted by the fact that the Hungarian-Mongol contact zone is by no means a neutral one. The Mongols have violently entered Hungary in order to subjugate the kingdom. As a result, the *Carmen miserabile* is often in conflict with its purported aims; instead of recording observations, the epistle ultimately narrates the experience of being observed.

The *Carmen miserabile* opens with a justification of the text. Anticipating that his narrative will be met with disbelief, Roger stresses that many of the events detailed in the letter happened "beneath my gaze" (*meo subiacuerunt aspectui*).[87] By linking veracity to the act of looking (*aspectus*), the letter immediately establishes the eyewitness as a crucial interlocutor of truth. Unlike the visual program of the *Hedwig Codex* however, Roger's epistle does not place the reader in this position. Instead, the *Carmen miserabile* begins by distinguishing Roger as the witness whose gaze is instrumental to understanding. Early use of first-person pronouns aids in this distinction by eliding Roger's actual experience with the narrative relation of that experience. The text, in other words, seems to assert itself as an empirical record undisturbed by authorial intervention; hence, Roger's disclaimer that the matter has not been taken up "in order to denounce or dishonor anyone," but simply to "instruct."[88] To present "the truth" about the Mongols, Roger must inform his audience through a kind of mimesis. For the audience to see that which occurred "beneath my gaze"—to see *as* Roger saw—is crucial, "*so they that read may understand*, who understand believe, who believe observe, and who observe perceive that the

[87] Bak and Rady, 132. Here I use Bak and Rady's Latin edition of the text to translate the line slightly differently from the editors' English version in order to emphasize *aspectui* as a verb.

[88] Ibid., 135; Quia non ad deprehensionem cuiquam vel derogationem, sed ad instructionem id potius examinavi (134).

days of perdition are near, and that the times are running towards the end."[89] To understand (*intelligere*), to believe (*credere*), to observe[90] (*tenere*), to perceive (*percipere*); the letter strings together verbs associated with both mind and body to underscore how the text ultimately facilitates comprehension through the senses. The use of *tenere* is especially evocative of this semantic scheme, as its primary meaning is "to hold" or "to grasp." The *Carmen miserabile* thereby evokes the Aristotelian semiotic tradition, which dominated medieval semiotics throughout the thirteenth century. Building upon the belief that all mental processes begin with the senses, this model, as Stephen Read summarizes, holds that "words signify concepts, which are likenesses of things in the world."[91] The millenarian rhetoric of the passage is uncharacteristic of the rest of the *Carmen miserabile,* but works here to emphasize the stakes of "truthfully" signifying the Mongols. As the letter later details, the Hungarians—to their own great detriment—disregarded similar information about the Mongols coming from the Rus' principalities in the months leading up to the invasion.[92]

The *Carmen miserabile* begins by affirming a paradigm that inextricably binds conceptual understanding to empirical observation.[93] Sight—specifically *Roger's* sight—thereby

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[89] Ibid., 135 (emphasis original); ut *legentes intelligant* et intelligentes credant, credentes teneant et tenentes percipiant, quod prope sunt dies perditionis et tempora properant ad non esse (134).

[90] Here I follow Bak and Rady in translating the verb *tenere* as "observe," as a means of distinguishing it more clearly from *intelligere.*

[91] Stephen Read, "Concepts and Meaning in Medieval Philosophy," in *Intentionality, Cognition, and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy,* ed. Gyula Klima (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2015), 15.

[92] Bak and Rady, eds., 157.

[93] This is a paradigm that is also characteristic of late medieval ethnographic writing. Although not yet concretized as a distinct genre, medieval European ethnographic writing began to develop in the twelfth century alongside growing territorial expansion, trade, and crusading expeditions. The Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century occasioned new demands for ethnographic detail, particularly as various European powers began to consider potential alliances with the khaganate following the 1241–1242 invasions. But as Shirin Khanmohamadi (2014) explains, late medieval ethnographic texts are identifiable through a shared language of intent: a text's stated interest in observing the manners and customs of an observed people. The *Carmen miserabile* explicitly uses such language, promising to describe the Mongols' way of life as well as their customs (*vita et ipsorum moribus*). For more on

takes on new function within the text. Instead of approaching sight through the lines of inquiry already discussed in this chapter, the letter primarily figures sight, to borrow a phrase from Zrinka Stahuljak, as a technology of transmission.[94] By sharing Roger's experiences, the *Carmen miserabile* transmits encounter with the Mongols to a network that extends beyond the immediate zone of conflict. The impetus to transmit experience beyond the conflict zone holds real-world urgency. Referencing again the initial dismissive attitude adopted by the Hungarians toward a Mongol attack, Roger describes how most of the nobility thought that "any such calamity would only hit some in particular and not all in general."[95] The invasion and subsequent occupation of the kingdom quickly proved otherwise. The urgency of the *Carmen miserabile* is later echoed in John of Plano Carpini's mission report, as it is "the intention of the Tartars to bring the whole world into subjugation if they can."[96] Both the *Carmen miserabile* and John of Plano Carpini's report consider it likely, if not inevitable, that the Mongols will once again return to Europe. Composed amidst the looming threat of a future invasion, Roger's epistle transmits experience to a potentially skeptical audience so that they too may know the realities of Mongol warfare. The *Carmen miserabile* disseminates experience in order to safely multiply the contact

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medieval ethnography and empiricism see: Felipe Fernández-Armesto, "Medieval Ethnography," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 13.3 (1982): 275–286; Joan-Pau Rubiés, ed., *Medieval Ethnographies: European Perceptions of the World Beyond,* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2009); Shirin Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

[94] Zrinka Stahuljak, "Medieval Fixers: Politics of Interpreting in Western Historiography," in *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics, Politics, Theory,* eds. Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 149.

[95] Bak and Rady, 181; credentes plagam huiusmodi particularem quibusdem et non omnibus generalem (180).

[96] Dawson, *The Mongol Mission,* 43; Intentio Tartarorum est sibi subicere totum mundum si possunt (Wyngaert, 93).

zone as a warning across Christendom. In this sense, the epistle shares much in common with the aims of travel writing in the later Middle Ages.[97]

Geraldine Heng has shown how medieval travel narratives work to inscribe the world within familiar frameworks of home; thus, "an external reality—huge and amorphous, disorderly, chaotic, in motion—is brought home and managed by being rendered internal, and possessed internally, first within the manuscript environment of a purported travelogue, and then within the mind of a listening, reading audience."[98] The mission reports of John of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck, John of Monte Corvino, and Odoric of Pordenone align with the project Heng describes. For instance, Odoric narrates how he followed his stay at the Yuan court by traveling into the lands of Prester John, the remote Christian king of medieval legend. Here Odoric moves to incorporate the Mongol empire into Christendom, noting that Prester John "by standing compact always receives to wife the Great Khan's daughter."[99] Through an imagined Mongol-Christian alliance in the furthest reaches of Christendom, Odoric begins to "bring home" the foreign Mongols as traditional Christian allies. The utility and pleasures of such texts, however, are dependent on a visible process of retrieval that maintains cultural difference and geographic distance even as they become internally inscribed. Travel narratives partially operate by drawing

[97] The *Carmen miserabile* predates many of the ethnographically-inflected medieval travel narratives. Scholars of medieval ethnographic writing typically attribute the mission report of John of Plano Carpini as one of the earliest examples of this form of travel narratives. I draw the comparison between Roger's text and these later writings only to reveal a shared understanding of the relationship between Latin Christendom and the rest of the world.

[98] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 247.

[99] "The Travels of Friar Odoric," in Christopher Dawson, ed., The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century, translated by a nun of Stanbrook Abbey (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 246. Marco Polo notes the same, claiming that the Mongol khaganate have always married their daughters to those of Prester John's lineage. But whereas *Le Devisement* highlights conflict between the Mongols and Prester John, Odoric presents the two kingdoms as completely harmonious.

attention to the contrast "between the sedentary audience at home and the roving eye of the narrative as it travels around the world at large."[100] Heng's optical metaphors allude to the empirical paradigms of late medieval travel writing and ethnography: to see is to know. And sight requires distance. Roger Bacon calls distance the second condition of sight (the first being light), explaining that "every sense acts by external transmission, that is, by emitting from itself its own force into the medium, so that the sensible species is returned more fitted to the sense, and receives a nobler essence from the species of the sense, so that it may be more conformed to the sense."[101] Modeling Bacon's optics at a macro scale, medieval travel writing is empowered by distance. The "roving eye" of a travelogue transmits the sedentary gaze of its audience, so that the world "is returned more fitted to the sense." The *Carmen miserabile* however, inverts the directionality of travel narrative's intromissive sight. The foreign Mongols have not been "brought home" by a personified traveler's reassuring narrative circumscription, but have entered by means of their own volition—their own "advance and progress" (*ingressus et processus*). The effect is one of disorientation: home, made strange through the transformative "extramissions" of the outside world. Instead of envisioning the external world, the *Carmen miserabile* makes home a site/sight for foreign eyes.[102]

According to Heng, travel narratives allow for the "inspection close-up" of the wider world "from a vantage point of domestic fixity"[103]; but, for Roger and his fellow refugees, the invasions upend the very idea of domestic fixity. Roger describes how he was forced to "seek

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[100] Heng, Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy, 247.

[101] Bacon, *Opus Majus,* 2: 474.

[102] Shirin Khanmohamadi (2014) makes a similar part, broadly arguing that early European ethnographic writers develop an aesthetic multifocality—a "dialogic poetics" that repeatedly imagines the perspective of those they mean to describe.

[103] Heng, 247.

caves, excavate pits, or find hollow trees to have shelter, while the Tatars, like hounds tracking rabbits and boars, rushed through the thick of the thorn bushes, the shadows of the groves, the depths of the waters and the heart of the wasteland."[104] After this period of flight, Roger narrates how the Mongols remade Hungarian life in reflection of their own laws and customs. He describes how the plains villages began to repopulate when the Mongols sent out word that those who submitted to their rule would come to no harm. Once "every village chose its king from among the Tartars at its will," the Mongols sent bailiffs to "render justice and supply [the people] with useful horses, animals, weapons, presents and clothing."[105] Roger bitterly enumerates that this system of "justice and supply" only functioned by forcibly dismantling pre-existing social bonds. These seemingly fixed bonds were remade into disposable commodities through the compulsory exchange of Hungarian women for the lives of their fathers, husbands, brothers, and for animal livestock. According to Roger, the Mongols—and their Cuman allies—took pleasure in *seeing* Hungarian men forced to barter their female family members:

> The Tartars and Cumans stood alongside us, saw those being killed and were glad insofar that fathers by means of their daughters, husbands by means of their wives, and brothers by means of their pretty sisters purchased their own life. Those [women], according to the [Tartar's] pleasure, were spared and became compensation to them; for they would debauch the wife or daughter in sight of the husband or father.[106]

Here the active Mongol gaze draws pleasure from watching how the structures foundational to Hungarian domestic life (family ties and marriage) are violently reshaped under occupation. The

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[104] Bak and Rady, 207; Oportebat me invenire cavernas vel foveas facere vel arbores querere perforatas, in quibus me possem recipere, cum illi densita- tem veprium, opaca nemorum, aquarum profunda, intima solitudinum tanquam canes lepores et apros investigantes percurrere videbantur (206).

[105] Ibid., 209; et qualibet villa elegit sibi regem de Tartaris, quem optavit (208); balimos, qui iustitiam facerent et eis equos, animalia, arma, exennia et vestimenta utilia procurarent (208).

[106] Bak and Rady, eds., 208. Stabant nobiscum Tartari et Comani simul, videbant quamplurimi et gaudebant, letabantur quod patres per filias, mariti per uxores, fratres per sorores pulcras vitam redimebant illas ad ibitum eorum conservantes et pro qudam illis fiebat solatio, ut in conspectu patris vel mariti uxor vel filia stuprabatur. Translation my own.

watching Mongols are only glad *insofar* that the Hungarians are forced to break their social bonds. Furthermore, the Mongols seem to take pleasure in then *showing* the Hungarians the sight of their own domestic unmaking. In other words, they force the Hungarians to see what they see: Hungarian society broken and remade to reflect their own foreign interests. I do not mean to infer that the Mongols used sight to exert control over the people they conquered; nor do I wish to minimize the realities[107] of Mongol warfare. Instead, I hope only to note how the *Carmen miserabile* links exertions of power with exertions of sight. In terms of narrative representation, Roger expresses the horrifying conditions of conquest as the horror of being seen for the pleasure of foreign eyes—the horror of being made into an object of sight.

Heng's treatment of medieval travel narratives also helps clarify a curious feature of the *Carmen miserabile*, the fact that the Mongols themselves are *unseeable* within the text. Despite his clear declaration of intent, Roger does not record much ethnographic detail.[108] The text is graphic and visceral in its depictions of violence; and yet, it offers no description of the people committing the violence. In stark contrast with other contemporary reports of the Mongols' "life, behavior and battling," the *Carmern miserabile* makes no effort to represent them in relation to sensory experience. The epistle offers no account of their dress, their weaponry, their language—it offers no account of their bodies at all. Nor does it attempt to individuate the Mongols from

[107] Although extant European sources consistently describe the 1241–1242 in terms of massacre, historians have questioned the scope of Mongol violence. However, the massacres described in the *Carmen miserabile* have recently been substantiated by archaeological evidence from Orosháza-Bónum, a village located in the southwest of the Great Hungarian Plain. Human skeletal remains—diverse in both sex and age—indicate a Mongol surprise attack on the community, resulting in the mass slaughter of civilians. See: Attila Gyucha, Wayne Lee, and Zoltán Rósza, "The Mongol Campaign in Hungary, 1241–1242: The Archaeology and History of Nomadic Conquest and Massacre," *The Journal of Military History* 83 (2019): 1021–1066.

[108] Roger does provide some specific information about the Mongol tactics used in Hungary. He lists the names of the principal military leaders; describes incidents where the Mongol forces deployed feints to trick enemy combatants (a common Mongol military tactic); traces, in broad strokes, the general movement of the Mongol army within the region; and details specific acts of violence (such as mutilating the faces of beautiful women). I more so mean to point out that the *Carmen miserabile* is notably scant of sensory detail—e.g., what the Mongols wore, their voices/language, their weapons, their food and drink, etc.

one another. Throughout the *Carmen miserabile* Roger almost exclusively refers to the invaders as an undifferentiated whole (the *Tartari*). He does not narrate any interactions with an individual, and only makes passing references to the army's "great leader" (*magni principis*).[109] Even when captured and imprisoned, the only "Tartar" that speaks is Roger's Hungarian captor. No single body is responsible for any particular action; rather, discrete actions are always performed by the "Tartars" as a mass. As a result, the Mongols are strangely disembodied in the text, a "darkness" observable only in the devastation they wreak. When Roger learns that the Mongols have taken the village of Tămaşda, for instance, he writes that the *Tartari* "all those whom they did not keep alive were beheaded by the sword with horrendous cruelty."[110] Although Roger marks the Mongols as the subjects of the sentence (using the plural *Tartari*), the syntax emphasizes a singular sword (*gladio*) as the acting agent of violence. The sword is more materially present than the bodies that wield it. The Mongols are only visible in the text by their effects.

If (ethnographic) sight requires distance, it would seem that the Mongols have come too close. The space necessary for travelogue's world-inscribing power has been collapsed. Indeed, proximity seems to destroy the normal functions of Roger's vision. Once captured and forced to travel alongside the Mongol army, Roger declares that from then on "death was always before the eyes of my body and mind."[111] After his capture, Roger witnesses acts of massacre (physical death) that work to diminish his capacity for rational sight, sight motivated by acts of his own will. With his own death a seeming inevitability, Roger sees what he imagines the Mongols see:

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[109] Bak and Rady, 218.

[110] Bak and Rady, 204. Bak and Rady, 204; Post hec statim invaluere rumores, quod dictum pontem Thome Theutonicorum villam in aurora Tartari occupaverunt et, quos tenere noluerant, horrenda crudelitas acerbitatis gladio dire iugulavit (203).

[111] Ibid., 210; mortem semper pre corde preque oculis habebant (209).

the subjugated Hungarians as objects to meet their own interests. The Mongols see the Hungarians as reflections of their will, which Roger can only explain as a kind of madness for destruction: “Oh the pain, oh the immense cruelty and madness of this savage nation!”[112] The use here of *rabies* conveys violent disorder. Although the Mongols *willfully* see the Hungarians as objects to satisfy their passions, the epistle describes this will as “madness.” The will of the Mongols, by Roger’s estimation, is not rational, but mad; therefore, such willful sight appears as another inversion/perversion of the structures that make up the Latinate Umwelt. Rather than employ rational sight in the service of better knowing the divine, the Mongols use irrational sight as justification to pursue their blasphemous pleasures. Kept in extreme proximity, Roger is unable to see the Mongols. With his vision disrupted, he sees as the Mongols do—his own death; the death of domestic fixity; the death of Hungary. For this reason, then, the *Carmen miserabile* implores its audience to do what its narrator cannot: to understand (*intelligere*), to believe (*credere*), to observe (*tenere*), and to perceive (*percipere*).

Like Roger of Torre Maggiore, Thomas of Split (ca. 1200–1268) recorded a narrative history of the 1241-1242 Mongol invasions into central Europe within a few years of Batu Khan’s withdrawal. Thomas, however, was spared from the violence that Roger experienced firsthand. At the time of the invasions the Croatian city of Split was a nominal vassal state of the Hungarian kingdom. Split, located along the Croatian coast, sits beyond the plains-region that occupied the primary strategic interests of Batu and Sübedei; and as a result, the city was not made subject to a Mongol siege. Still, offshoots of the Mongol army ravaged the Croatian countryside in pursuit of Béla IV following his retreat from the battlefield at Mohi. In March of

[112] Ibid.; O dolor, o crudelitas et rabies immanis populi immensa! (211).

1242 Mongol forces arrived outside Split; however, they quickly traveled northward toward the island city of Traù where Béla was rumored to be hiding. As a result, the city of Split was largely spared from any direct attack.[113] With the city preserved displaced Hungarian survivors arrived in droves, including Queen Maria and a host of noblewomen widowed after the Mongols' initial attack against the kingdom. James Ross Sweeney has shown that Thomas, serving as the city's archdeacon at the time, likely came into direct contact with some of these refugees[114]—contact that would inform his narrative of the invasions in his longer history of the Church organizations in Salona and Split, the *Historia Pontificum Salonitanorum atque Spalatensium.*

The *Historia* is unique among contemporaneous European accounts of the Mongol invasions for its compilation of eyewitness testimony, as opposed to written report. Thomas *hears* (*audire potui*) about the nature and habits (*natura et habitu*) of the Mongols directly from "those who have more diligently sought out the matter."[115] James Ross Sweeney distinguishes Thomas' oral sources from "textual borrowings" in order to support a claim about factual reliability; ultimately, he concludes that "the general attitude Thomas displays toward the Mongols must have been shared by his informants and contemporaries."[116] In other words, the *Historia* more closely captures the *feeling* of encounter than a text like Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale,* which primarily draws from written sources to describe the Mongols. Sweeney's attention to mood (the "general attitude" expressed in the text) suggests that the

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[113] James Ross Sweeney, "Thomas of Spalato and the Mongols: A Thirteenth-Century Dalmatian View of Mongol Customs," *Florilegium* 4 (1982), 163.

[114] Sweeney, "Thomas of Spalato and the Mongols," 160.

[115] Damir Karbić et al., eds. and trans., *History of the Bishops of Salona and Split* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 280; prout ab his audire potui, qui rem curiosius indagarunt, pauca narrabo (279). All citations (both English and Latin) come from this edition unless otherwise noted.

[116] Sweeney, 160.

Historia, like the *Carmen miserabile,* garners textual authority by linking knowledge with direct experience, with feeling. The *Historia* still privileges the eyewitness, only in aggregate. Whereas the *Carmen miserabile* stresses both the intimacy and the immediacy of Roger's firsthand experience, the *Historia* presents the feeling of encounter as a constitutive part of historiographic writing. And yet, the *Historia* does not adopt a millenarian approach to the invasions. Much like the *Carmen miserabile,* the *Historia* strives to suppress the appearance of the Mongols within its narrative of the invasions. Rendered only notionally visible, the Mongols are a nonentity within the text, their absence rebounding the feeling of encounter inward. The *Historia* resists depicting the Mongols as anti-Christian agents, and ultimately reveals that the true threat to Christendom is an insular one.

The *Historia,* like the *Carmen miserabile,* attempts to picture the Mongols as part of an aesthetic pattern of erasure. Thomas, somewhat paradoxically, uses physical description to confine and limit the Mongols within his narrative. Thus, he produces the following caricature: "Their appearance presents an intensely terrifying sight: their legs are short, but their chests are huge; their faces are broad, and their skin white; their cheeks are beardless, and their noses hooked; and their small eyes are set far apart."[117] Before he even begins, Thomas immediately qualifies his description as "intensely terrifying," thereby casting otherwise neutral physical characteristics as legible social signs. In medieval Europe the practice of "reading" bodies gained momentum in the thirteenth century; a trend facilitated by expanded access to the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secreta secretorum* and its physiognomic treatise.[118] Debra Higgs Strickland, in her

[117] Karbić, 282; Terrificum valde exhibent faciei aspectum, breves habent tibias, sed vasta pectora, lata est facies et cutis alba, imberbis gena et naris adunca, breves oculi spatio longiori disiuncti (281).

[118] The *Secreta Secretorum* is (erroneously) styled as a series of letters written by Aristotle to Alexander the Great. The text offers advice on topics primarily related to governance and medicine, but also includes a short a treatise on the pseudo-science of physiognomy. Alongside many of Aristotle's genuine works, the *Secreta secretorum* was first translated into Latin in the twelfth century. The text, extant in numerous vernacular manuscripts, was both widely

work on depictions of monstrosity in medieval art, has argued that physiognomy is a semiotic system through which concepts of moral disposition are knit to the human body as physical signs.[119] Thomas paints a "terrifying sight" by deploying recognizable signs of evil. In particular, the hooked nose (*naris adunca*) characterization registers as a strong sign of the Mongols' "terrifying" difference. Strickland notes how the hooked nose held potent associations with demonic faces throughout the Middle Ages, consistently functioning as a general sign of evil.[120] Similarly, the exaggerated contrast between the Mongols' reportedly short legs and huge chests registers as a distortion of the idealized human form; which, as outlined in the *Secreta secretorum*, corresponds bodily "evenness" with mental "goodness."[121] Various versions of the *Secreta secretorum* also specifically correspond short legs with lechery; broad chests with both hardiness and dull wittedness; white faces (as opposed to red, yellow, or black) with lust; and small eyes with smallness of heart.[122] The composite sketch Thomas offers—small eyes, hooked noses, broad chests, short legs—visualizes a symbolic field, a network of ideas, *about* the Mongols.[123] Thomas, therefore, produces a body that is only notionally visible. By deploying

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transmitted and seriously studied as part of Aristotelian natural philosophy and experimental science. Notably, Roger Bacon completed his own edition of the book sometime before 1257.

[119] Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 38.

[120] Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art,* 77-78. Art historians interested in the development of religious/racial caricature have shown how medieval iconography link hooked noses with notions of "evil." See: Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages,* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1993); Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography,* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

[121] Robert Steele, *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum* (London: Early English Text Society, 1898), 117.

[122] See: Robert Steele, *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum* (London: Early English Text Society, 1898).

[123] The process of giving body to a concept closely resembles contemporary theories of racial formation as described in Sierra Lomuto's work on the Middle English *King of Tars*. Lomuto has shown how Mark Jerng's arguments around the "salience of race" productively exposes how, and why, English writers formulated racial difference as

physiognomic stereotypes, Thomas occludes "seeing" the Mongols outside of his conceptual framework. Furthermore, the ready availability of these physiognomic signs works to map the image of the Mongol body onto other, more familiar, icons of "terrifying" alterity. The *Historia* paints the new Mongol threat with the same familiar face. As a result, the Mongol invaders become readily known to the text's audience while remaining curiously absent from the text itself.

The conjured Mongol body of the *Historia* materializes a conceptual understanding of Christian/Mongol difference. Thomas strengthens this understanding by similarly materializing Mongol sight as fundamentally different from rational, Christian sight. He does so through a remarkable narrative addition to the *Historia*: a scene that imagines Batu Khan speaking to his troops just before the Battle of Mohi. Batu's speech marks a dramatic shift in perspective within the *Historia* and is the only time the text not only grants the Mongols specific material presence but also a point of view. Roger, despite his extensive firsthand contact, makes no similar attempt to approximate the perspective of his captors. It is perhaps unsurprising then that Batu is introduced to the text via an act of looking. The *Historia* explains that just as the Hungarian troops were making camp on route to confront the invading Mongol forces Batu, "the elder of the two leaders of the Tatar host, ascended a hill to spy out carefully the disposition of the whole army."[124] Emboldened by what he sees, Batu goes back to rouse his troops. "We can be confident, comrades," he declares, "for although there is a great host of this enemy, they have allowed themselves to take poor counsel, and will thus not be able to escape our hands. For I

part of a fantasy of empire. See: Sierra Lomuto, "The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330)," *Exemplaria* 31.3 (2019): 171–192.

[124] Karbić, 263; Tunc Bath, maior dux Tartarei exercitus, in quendam collem conscendens, speculatus est diligenter omnem dispositionem exercitus (262).

have seen them like sheep without a shepherd, enclosed within the narrowest of folds."[125] From here the narrative quickly pivots, returning once more to focus on the Hungarians. With such little space afforded to the Mongols' perspective, the inclusion of this short speech pointedly reveals *how* Batu Khan sees the Hungarian host to the text's audience. Overlooking the enemy camp, Batu sees the Hungarians as vulnerable to attack. In the language of his own analogy, Batu sees these "sheep without a shepherd" through the eyes of a wolf. The sheep/wolf analogy is one that recurs throughout Thomas's chapters on the invasions. Later when a small Mongol host arrives at Split in search of Béla IV, Thomas describes how the Hungarian refugees became "dazed" and "wandered to and fro like sheep in a sheepfold trying to evade the jaws of the wolf" (267).[126] Once again, the Hungarians are likened to exposed sheep, the Mongols to a predatory wolf. Batu's speech is troublingly echoed by the behavior of the Hungarian refugees. Having been seen as sheep has made the Hungarians sheep-like, and therefore vulnerable to the "wolf." Thomas notes with some alarm that the Hungarians, "seeing that they were surrounded on every side by bands of the enemy, lost all sense and reason" (267). Worse still, "None would take counsel with his fellow, each one was concerned only for himself, and none could take thought for general salvation" (267). The Hungarians are entirely unmade by the reminder of having been already seen, losing their reason, their ethics, and ultimately their faith. Roger similarly describes the evacuative power of the Mongol gaze in the *Carmen miserabile*. In both accounts of the invasions, the experience of being beholden by the Mongols is transformative.

[125] Ibid., 263; «Bono animo nos esse oportet, o sotii, quia licet magna sit multitudo gentis istius, tamen quia improvido reguntur consilio, non poterunt effugere manus nostras. Vidi enim eos quasi gregem sine pastore in quodam artissimo stabulo interclusos» (262).

[126] Ibid., 267; ed tanto malo attoniti ibant circumquaque, velud oves in stabulo luporum morsus evadere perquirentes (266).

The *Historia* accounts for the transformative power of the Mongol gaze by representing sight as a zero-sum practice. This understanding of sight hinges upon the polysemy of the sheep/wolf analogy. Batu Khan's speech focuses on identifying how he sees the Hungarians in order to pose his wolfish sight as the binary correlate of rational sight. His speech, to put it another way, stages wolf-sight in opposition with rational (i.e., Christian) sight. The performance not only informs Thomas's audience that rational sight and wolf-sight are different but goes a step further to assert that the two modes of seeing are entirely incompatible. The *Historia* uses Batu to "speak" the Hungarian/Mongol difference. Although Batu addresses his "comrades" in-arms, the text makes no attempt to account for the reception of Batu's speech among his own people. This formal decision suggests that Thomas's audience is the actual intended audience of the speech. This impression is strengthened by Batu's obvious (though improbable) reference to Matthew 9: 36 and Mark 6: 34. In both passages Christ, overlooking a crowd, likens the people he sees to sheep without a shepherd; but instead of having compassion for the sheep-like hordes, Batu sees the Hungarians as the wolf does: defenseless. By mirroring Christ's language, Batu's speech triggers an immediate moment of recognition for the text's presumed audience: "sheep" are either protected by the Shepherd[127] or they are vulnerable to attack. The sight of sheep, in this case, functions as a binary heuristic for determining in/out groups within a Latin-Christian cultural framework. The seer can either cognize sheep as objects for compassionate protection; or, as food for slaughter. To gaze upon sheep compassionately is to see as Christ does, and to gaze upon sheep greedily is to see in a manner opposed to Christ. Batu's material presence in the *Historia* dramatizes how the processes of sight ratify a Christ/anti-Christ binary. In other words,

[127] Thomas explains that, prior to the invasions, the Hungarians were particularly vulnerable spiritual sheep, for "the land of Hungary is fertile and abundant in all good things, this presented her sons with the occasion to immoderately take pleasure in the many delights she supplied." Overindulgence has weakened the Hungarians' spiritual foothold, distancing the country from Christ's protection, exposing it to calamity.

Batu performs a moment of *irrational* sight—sight motivated by the appetites of the sensitive soul, not the will—within the text. The *Historia* uses Batu Khan to stage a moment of polarization. If rational sight is constitutive to the Latinate Umwelt (e.g., to see the "sheep" as Christ does), then irrational sight is an oppositional—and potentially destructive—mode of looking (e.g., to see as the wolf does). The readily legible allusions to Matthew 9 and Mark 6 in Batu's speech encourage the audience to hold Christ (rational sight) and Batu (irrational sight) in direct contrast. We, the text's presumed Latin-Christian audience, are made aware of how Batu sees differently from *us*—how he sees "sensitively" instead of rationally.

The Aristotelian tradition treats the sensitive soul as a system of innate abilities that coordinates an animate organism's vital functions with sense-perception (i.e., the material world). Whereas humans alone possess the rational soul, all other animal life possesses the sensitive soul. Throughout the *Historia,* Thomas repeatedly represents the Mongols in terms of the sensitive soul. Frequently he describes the Mongols as locusts, pestilent "men without scruples who roamed the world fighting not to win a kingdom but simply from greed for plunder."[128] Motivated "simply" by the pursuit of material pleasure (plunder), the Mongols are depicted as moving through the world unthinkingly. Thomas ascribes them no strategy, no political aim. Indeed, he seems to position the Mongols as uniquely outside the realm of sociopolitical life. The *Historia* states that "they do not adhere to the Christian, Saracen or Hebrew religion, and so no integrity is found in them, and they observe no faith of oaths. Against the custom of all peoples they neither receive nor send embassies either about war or about

[128] Karbić, 259; qui non pro regnandi cupiditate sed pro predarum aviditate per mundum pugnando discurrunt (258).

peace."[129] Thomas defines the Mongols as a people that have rejected the constraints of human culture. United solely by a common greed, they are without faith and ethics; without law (the observance of oaths); and without custom. Having bucked the structures that, according to Thomas, make up rational life, the Mongols are only moved by the wants of the sensitive soul. They, like nonhuman animals, are governed by Nature alone. Batu's wolfish gaze gives evidence to the idea that the Mongols are not rational agents but are instead a kind of anti-cultural force. Considering again the transformative power of Batu's gaze, the Mongol threat is not limited to physical violence. After having been made into a sight (sheep-for-slaughter) by the Mongols, the Hungarian refugees that Thomas encounters all abandon their reason, their social responsibility, and their salvation when made aware of their ongoing status as "sheep."

By categorizing the Mongols as irrational seers, the *Historia* limits Mongol agency to the pursuits and pleasures of the sensitive soul. Without the governing structures of politics, law, and religion—without, in other words, Thomas's markers for human culture—the text classes the Mongols as belonging to the natural world. Strikingly, the text builds upon this distinction to ultimately reframe the invasions as a kind of natural disaster. After Batu's speech, and after the Hungarians' devastating loss at Mohi, the *Historia* uses metaphorical expressions to recode the battle and its aftermath as natural events. The Mongol-as-natural-disaster calibration reaches a climax when the text narrates how Mongol troops pursued the Hungarian soldiers, even in retreat. Although Thomas notes how they "cut down" the fleeing men, the attackers strangely disappear from the moment: "The dead fell to the right and left; like leaves in winter, the slain bodies of these miserable men were strewn along the whole route; blood poured forth like

[129] Ibid., 283; Preterea nec christiana, nec ebrea, nec saracenica se lege constringunt et ideo nulla veritas reperitur in ipsis, nullius iuramenti fidem observant. Et contra morem omnium gentium nec de bello nec de pace legationem recipiunt aut mittunt (282).

torrents of rain. The miserable country, stained by the blood of its sons, was dyed red throughout its length and breadth."[130] The passage notably deviates from Thomas's typical style, becoming uncharacteristically figurative as it describes the aftermath of the battle. Similarly observing that Thomas adopts "great literary flourish" whenever describing specific Mongol military engagements, Sweeny argues that such narrative moments imagine the invaders as monstrous.[131] To push back on this reading slightly, I suggest that Thomas adopts this "literary" flourish to emphasize the Mongol invasions as a non-agential (at least on the human level) natural disaster. As in the *Carmen miserabile,* Thomas represents Mongol violence as disembodied. The hands that fell the bodies, that cause blood to pour forth, are once again rendered invisible. Instead, the vivid imagery of the passage registers mass death as environmental change: bodies fall like leaves, blood like rain.

Thomas's poetics suppress the Mongols as causal agents at Mohi. Using *cadere* in the active voice, Thomas insinuates that the dead *fall* (*cadere*), they are not felled; yet neither do they fall as agents of their own change. Unlike the Christian martyrdom depicted in the *Hedwig Codex,* the *Historia* does not represent the slain as dying in defense of their faith. Instead, their bodies fall as leaves do: inanimate and without visible cause, marking little more than seasonal change. In reference to his work with Mark Turner on poetic metaphor, George Lakoff explains that overwhelmingly "events (like death) are understood in terms of actions by some agent (like reaping)."[132]And while Lakoff and Turner primarily focus on modern sources, their findings

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[130] As translated and quoted in: James Ross Sweeney, "Thomas of Spalato and the Mongols: A Thirteenth-Century Dalmatian View of Mongol Customs," *Florilegium* 4 (1982), 163; Cadebant a dextris et a sinistris ybernalium foliorum instar, iacebant per totam viam miserorum prostrata cadavera, fluebat sanguis more torrentis fluvii (Karbić, 269).

[131] Sweeny, 163.

[132] George Lakoff, "Contemporary theory of metaphor" in *Metaphor and Thought* second edition, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 231–232.

resonate with medieval representations for death. Chaucer, notably, bases the *Pardoner's Tale* around a morphological pun on the Death-as-agent convention. When the Pardoner's three rioters vow to "sleen this false traytour Deeth" they mistake conventional metaphor (Death as a personified agent) for factual statement.[133] Paul Binski makes a similar argument about the conventional ways in which death is represented in medieval visual culture. Underscoring how Christian doctrine makes death an unknowable experience (as opposed to a mortal process), Binski states that there is an "odd cause and effect in medieval art which showed death in the world—in various forms of personification, usually as a corpse—literally as the cause of itself."[134] Lakoff, Turner, and Binski all observe how personification works to represent death as an effect, the result of some cause (even if that cause is death itself). Conversely, Thomas's use of metaphor resists assigning an agent to the action of killing. Death, in this case, is still understood as an event (the effect of an action)—only, without a clear agent. Natural phenomena replace the momentarily absented bodies of the invaders, collapsing any clear distinction between the two. Just as the cause of falling leaves or flowing water is invisible and abstract, so too become the Mongols. The passage does, however, include a moment of personification. Thomas concludes his poetic passage on the Battle of Mohi by ascribing personhood to the blood-soaked landscape. Hungary, that "unhappy country," is personified, "stained with the blood of her sons."[135]

The *Historia* deemphasizes both the Mongols as agents and the Hungarians as Christian martyrs, suggesting that the 1241-1242 invasions had no rational cause. By personifying

[133] *The Riverside Chaucer,* Larry Benson, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), line 699.

[134] Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 70.

[135] Karbić, 269; nfelix patria filiorum infecta cruore longe lateque rubebat (268).

Hungary, the text intimates that the kingdom itself—as opposed to “her sons”—has caused its own destruction. As Thomas explains, “Because the land of Hungary is fertile and abundant in all good things this presented her sons with the occasion to immoderately take pleasure in the many delights she supplied.”[136] The Christian sons of Hungary are not innately disposed to immoderate excess; rather, they have been seduced by their environment to abandon more wholesome pursuits for “the enticements of the flesh.” [137] Thomas adds that these indolent men spent their days “in elaborate banquets and effeminate frivolities,” which had softened their minds to the point where they “were unable to think of the sounds of war.”[138] Their later deaths would come to embody the ephemerality of worldly pleasure; for, the green leaves of summer must inevitably fall by winter. Earthly delights had distracted the people of Hungary from attending to what is eternal, the realm of the divine. Here the text also embeds a political critique by implying that King Béla IV was one such “son” of Hungary. Having long ignored the Mongols as a potential threat to his kingdom, Béla IV was only roused to action by the loud protests of “those of sounder mind”—and by then it was too late.[139] Modeling the sins of his people, Béla’s poor leadership results in the eventual occupation of Hungary. And yet inaction, the product of sinful indulgence, performs no agential act. Once again, the *Historia* elides the direct cause for the deaths at Mohi.

It is not until the conclusion of his invasion narrative that Thomas finally attributes a cause to the slayings in Hungary. As the *Historia* explains, the Mongols’ “pestilential barbarity”

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[136] Ibid., 254; Etenim terra Hungarica omnibus bonis locuplex et fecunda causam prestabat suis filiis ex rerum copia immoderatis delitiis delectari (253).

[137] Ibid., 255; carnalibus gaudentes illecebris (254).

[138] Ibid., 257; Tota dies exquisitis conviviis aut mollibus expendebatur iocis (256), non de bellorum strepitu cogitare poterant (256).

[139] Ibid.

was only one of three calamities that befell the Hungarians between the years of 1241 and 1243.[140] The sword, famine, and wild beasts—*ferro, fame, fera*—each scourged the kingdom during this period, all with equal devastation so that "the people of Hungary were no less afflicted" by any one event.[141] Motivated simply by the animal appetites of the sensitive soul, the Mongols' appearance within the *Historia* ("like locusts") is equated to other non-agential, natural disasters.[142] The sword, famine, and wild beasts each decimate the Hungarian population during a three-year span of time, descending upon the kingdom like plagues. Thus, in a counterintuitive way, the Mongols are cast by the *Historia* as a retributive force of God. Having already established the discrete kingdom of Hungary as worthy of indictment, Thomas concludes that "by God's judgement [the people] paid no little price for the sins that they had committed."[143] The Mongols pose no abstract threat to Christendom, they are merely avatars for God's judgement. By absenting the Mongols from its account of the 1241-1242 invasions, the *Historia* makes visible the true threat to Christendom—loss of faith.

Illuminating Sight: English Visualizations of the Mongols

Despite their emphasis on ethnographic observation and experiential study, the eyewitness narratives of the 1241–1242 Mongol invasions stop short of visualizing the Mongols. The Mongols are thus repeatedly represented as a sight that cannot be seen. However, if proximity is blinding then it stands to reason that distance can be illuminating. This is the position adopted by

[140] Ibid., 304; pestilens immanitas Tatarorum (303).

[141] Ibid., 305; ut non minus credatur hec acerba lues inedie gentem Ungaricam devastasse, quam pestilens immanitas Tatarorum (304).

[142] Ibid., 265; qui locustarum more paulatim ebulliebant de terra (264).

[143] Ibid., 305; flagellatum ex divino iudicio penam suorum expendit non mediocriter peccatorum (304).

Matthew Paris, the English Benedictine monk and chronicler, who wrote extensively about the Mongols in his monumental historiographic work, the *Chronica majora*. Matthew discusses the Mongols early, identifying the 1237–1240 conquests of eastern Europe and the Caucasus as portending a future threat to Christendom. By 1250, the *Chronica* would come to name the Mongol invasions as the most significant event of the century. Matthew's close and sustained attention to the Mongols was unusual among European chroniclers. J. J. Saunders, for instance, has remarked with some surprise how "the Englishman who never saw a Mongol in his life" offers a more robust account of the 1241–1242 invasions than most of his continental contemporaries.[144] I argue that it is precisely this distance—the space between Matthew and firsthand encounter, the space between England and central Europe—that informs how and why the *Chronica* narrates the invasions. In contrast with the eyewitness narratives from Roger of Torre Maggiore and Thomas of Split, Matthew repeatedly attempts to materialize the Mongols within the *Chronica.* Whereas proximity is blinding for both Roger and Thomas, Matthew strains to render the Mongols visible, to make them "real" for an audience far removed from the conflict zone. Picturing the Mongols becomes an integral part of Matthew's historiographic project. The *Chronica* manifests the monstrous as an attestation of both Antichrist and, ultimately, divine order.

The *Chronica majora* represents the Mongols as monstrous from the very first. In an entry for the 1238 annal—three years before Batu Khan would lead his army across the Carpathians and into central Europe—Matthew introduces the Mongols as a people with "very large heads, by no means proportionate to their bodies" and that "feed on raw flesh, and even on

[144] J.J. Saunders, "Matthew Paris and the Mongols," in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson,* eds. T.A. Sandquist and M.R. Powicke, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 132.

human beings."[145] The *Chronica* immediately emphasizes the disproportionate heads of the Mongols to the monstrous act of eating (raw) human flesh. As with Thomas's *Historia,* the *Chronica* conjures an image of the Mongol body to use as a heuristic device, a way to implicitly link appearance with behavior so that both appear innate.[146] After the fall of the major Kievan Rus' principalities in 1240, Matthew quickly escalates this rhetorical framing. The 1240 annal includes a lengthy entry that addresses the Mongols campaigns as a decidedly millenarian event:

> In this year, that human joys might not long continue and that the delights of this world might not last long unmixed with lamentation, an immense horde of that detestable race of Satan, the Tartars, burst forth from their mountain-bound regions, and making their way through rocks apparently impenetrable, rushed forth, like demons loosed from Tartarus […] The men are inhuman and of the nature of beats, rather to be called monsters than men, thirsting after and drinking blood, and tearing and devouring the flesh of dogs and human beings.[147]

Here the *Chronica* dramatically heightens the monstrosity of the Mongols. Matthew adds color to his previous description of the Mongol diet, now claiming that they thirst for blood and, seemingly, devour their victims whole. More notable however, is his inclusion of more explicitly millenarian language. The Mongols issue forth from the mountains—an allusion to the Gog prophecy—as demons loosed upon the world to end human joy. Suzanne Lewis links Matthew's representation of the Mongols with an eschatological prediction that Antichrist would arrive in the year 1250.[148] As she explains, "The impact of the Mongol invasion of Europe on the prophecy of Antichrist's advent in 1250 was so profound that Matthew decided, probably in the

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[145] Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora,* trans., J.A. Giles, *Matthew Paris's English History* (London: H.G. Bohn, 1852), 1: 131.

[146] Matthew's entirely false narrative around cannibalism draws from the Gog and Magog legend, which he later links directly to the Mongols.

[147] Paris*,* I: 312–313.

[148] Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 103.

1240s, to end his chronicle at midcentury, concluding his history with a dramatic summary of events portending the end of the sixth and last age that had begun with the Incarnation of Christ."[149] According to his belief that Antichrist would soon materialize, Matthew contextualizes the Mongols as an apocalyptic sign.

Despite their firsthand exposure to Mongol warfare, neither Roger of Torre Maggiore nor Thomas of Split adopt such a view. Matthew, however, identifies the Mongols as harbingers of the apocalypse. This difference can partially be attributed to Matthew's approach to historical writing. The *Chronica majora* heavily revises and extends Roger of Wendover's *Flores historiarum,* adding entries from 1236—when Roger died—to 1259, the year of Matthew's death. The original sections of the *Chronica* (1236-1259) emphasize the events of Matthew's lifetime, so that "the memory of modern events might not be destroyed by age or oblivion."[150] As a universal history, the *Chronica* approaches these modern events teleologically. Bjorn Weiler succinctly describes this teleological framework "as a means of, on the one hand, offering moral counsel, and, on the other, of setting events within the broader context of human history and its place within a divine plan of creation."[151] To that end, Matthew's discussion of the Mongols—particularly after the 1241–1242 invasions—negotiates the growth of the unfamiliar empire in relation to a Christian cosmology. In contrast with how both the *Carmen miserabile* and the *Historia* present the 1241–1242 Mongol invasions as specific indictments against the specific sins of the Hungarian people, the *Chronica* depicts the same events as having universal

[149] Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris,* 288.

[150] Paris, II: 410.

[151] Bjorn Weiler, "Matthew Paris on the writing of history," *Journal of Medieval History* 35 (2009), 258.

significance. Concerned with the broad implications of the invasions, the *Chronica* emphasizes the verisimilitude of its Mongol narrative.

Although Matthew had no direct contact with the Mongols, as a monk of St. Albans he did have privileged access to information about both insular and continental affairs.[152] In the 1257 annal, Matthew describes St. Albans as an important repository for communications about the Mongols, declaring that "If anyone is desirous of learning the impurities of these Tartars, and their mode of life and customs [...] he may obtain information by making diligent search at St. Albans."[153] For the *Chronica,* documentary evidence stands in lieu of a direct eyewitness, approximating firsthand experience. Four such documents are embedded within the *Chronica*: a letter from Henry, Count of Lorraine, to his father-in-law, the duke of Brabant, requesting immediate military assistance; a likely spurious letter from Frederick II to Henry III; a letter from Ivo of Narbonne to the archbishop of Bordeaux, written from the Austrian-Hungarian border; and a report from Peter, a Russian archbishop, who escaped to Italy after the Mongol conquests of the Kievan Rus' principalities. Matthew would go on to add an additional seven testimonies to the chronicle's appendix. The letters that Matthew includes within the *Chronica*, particularly the seemingly invented letter from Frederick II, speak to the "reality effects" of medieval Latin epistolography that "issue from a desire to bridge spatial as well as temporal gaps."[154] The letters included within the *Chronica* not only give evidence to Matthew's conclusions, but also make present these conclusions to an English audience, cinching together

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[152] The powerful Benedictine house frequently received communications from abbeys outside of England, in addition to regular visits from members of Henry III's court. See: J.J. Saunders, "Matthew Paris and the Mongols," in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson,* eds. T.A. Sandquist and M.R. Powicke, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 130–131.

[153] Paris, III: 251.

[154] Michael Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 105.

the space between St. Albans and central Europe. The documents that Matthew includes within the *Chronica* point to a larger interest in creating aesthetic verisimilitude. This effort to make the Mongols present in England—to make them tangible—is neatly exemplified by a curious detail included in the 1238 annal. In the 1238 entry on the Mongols, Matthew explains how "the inhabitants of Gothland and Friesland, dreading [Mongol] attacks, did not, as was their custom, come to Yarmouth, in England, at the time of the herring fisheries"; as a result, the overabundance of herring—"although very good"—caused a significant depreciation in price.[155] Even before the 1241–1242 invasions, the *Chronica* correlates Mongol military advancements with English domestic issues to demonstrate how the Mongols have a direct, negative material presence in England.

As the real distance between the invasions and St. Albans begins to narrow, Matthew begins to embellish his narrative with illuminations depicting the Mongols. Matthew, the scribe and illuminator of his own work, adds two illustrations of Mongols to the *Chronica majora.* Suzanne Lewis has argued that Matthew Paris took an unorthodox approach to visual art, extending "his recording of reality as he saw it into the realm of pictorial illustration."[156] In the *Chronica*, text and illustration interplay so that narrative events "are perceived concretely as visual images and sensory detail."[157] Similar to the documentary evidence Matthew embeds within his written narrative, his stylistic "realism" addresses the gaps between the viewer, representation, and represented object. Tellingly, the first of Matthew's two visual representations of the Mongols accompanies the fictive letter from Frederick II in the 1241

[155] Paris, 1: 131.

[156] Lewis, 428.

[157] Ibid.

annal. The image is of a horsed figure, stockily drawn with—pulling from the 1238 reference—a large head. The lone horseman is shown wearing scaled armor (an approximation of Mongol plating) and a cap-like helm. Gazing beneath the rearing legs of his horse, the Mongol spears two unarmed victims that have fallen underfoot. The illumination is set below a letter that purports to hastily "bring [the Mongols invasions] to your knowledge, although the true facts of the matter have but lately come to ours."[158] The horsed figure gives sensory detail to the "true facts" that Frederick narrates; for instance, his description of Mongol armor as "pieces of iron stitched to them."[159] Moreover, the image punctuates the letter's closing call to arms. Frederick's hope that "every noble and renowned country lying under the royal star of the West, shall send forth their chosen ornaments preceded by the symbol of the life-giving cross," is paired with an image of Mongol brutality—concretizing the need for western authorities to set aside schismatic difference and band together in defense of Christendom.

Frederick II's 1241 letter, whether "real" or not, marks a pivotal moment within the *Chronica*. Documentary evidence alone is no longer sufficient make the Mongol threat known to a distant audience. Instead, Matthew must *show* his reader this threat. Matthew's second illustration amplifies the monstrosity that he attributes to the Mongols. Appearing below the text of Ivo's letter, this second illustration captures, as Suzanne Lewis observes, the "sadistic and horrifying details" that Matthew adds to the letter.[160] The textual embellishments that Matthew adds all work to paint the Mongols as fantastically monstrous. One particularly gruesome vignette imagines how "Virgins were deflowered until they died of exhaustion; when their

[158] Paris, 1: 341.

[159] Paris, 1: 344.

[160] Lewis, 285.

breasts were cut off to be kept as dainties for their chiefs, and their bodies furnished a jovial banquet to the savages."[161] To complement this narrative of the "demons loosed from Tartarus," Matthew exaggerates his earlier representation of Mongol violence. Inscribed "Nephandi Tartari vel Tattari humanis carnibus vescentes," the image depicts three Mongol warriors engaged in a cannibalistic feast. Grouped in a cluster toward the left of the image, the warriors are shown (in order from left to right): decapitating a captured man, eating two severed human feet, and roasting another human victim on a spit. To the right of the image a horse rears above the bound body of a female victim, gorging upon the leaves of a tree, in a position that evokes the letter's brutal account of rape. The illustration resonates with John Parker's consideration of the medieval aesthetic experience "whereby false, unreal images are rightly taken to intimate via their unreality a form of truth."[162] The *Chronica* embellishes Ivo's letter, both narratively and visually, to make the truth more real. As Parker goes on to explain, "The miraculous aspect of aesthetic experience, whereby false, unreal images are rightly taken to intimate via their unreality a form of truth, contains the same typological conversion whereby historical events of dubious significance are sublimed into the stuff of faith, except that even the unconverted can accept the aesthetic version without contest"[163] Through an aesthetic evocation of the senses—the representational sight of violence—the *Chronica* performs a kind of divine paradox that allows the Mongols to be "seen" as they truly are: Antichrist.

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[161] Paris, 1: 470.

[162] John Parker, *The Aesthetics of the Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 84–5.

[163] Parker, *The Aesthetics of the Antichrist*, 85.

This chapter began with a consideration of “darkness” as a useful heuristic device for approaching the epistemological resonances of the 1241–1242 Mongol invasions in contemporary narrative accounts. To close, I return once again to the *Opus majus* where Roger Bacon passionately proclaims that philosophy and “the secret works of science” are “absolutely necessary to the Church of God against the fury of Antichrist.”[164] Like Matthew Paris, Bacon interprets the sudden appearance of the Mongols as a sign that “we are not far removed from the times of Antichrist.”[165] Under the looming “darkness” of the Mongol threat, Bacon urges the pope to adopt natural science as a means of defense. Indeed, he attributes the unprecedented military success of the Mongols to their study of science (particularly astronomy); and further, he warns that by disavowing natural philosophy the Church “will be intolerably burdened by these scourges of Christian people.”[166] Despite Bacon’s intimations regarding optical science as a means for spiritual instruction, he repeatedly returns to its potential weaponization against nonbelievers. Mirrors, he explains with some enthusiasm, might be arranged so “that a single object will appear as many times as we wish” to the “advantage of the state.”[167] Thereby a single soldier could be multiplied, and “might be used against unbelievers to inspire terror.”[168] Alternatively, mirrors might be “erected on an elevation opposite hostile cities and armies, so that all that was being done by the enemy might be visible.”[169] Here again Bacon recognizes the

[164] Bacon, *Opus Majus,* volume 1, 407; Et quia praecepistis ut scriberem de sapientia philosophiae, recitabo Vestrae Clementiae sententias sapientum, praecipue cum ecclesiae Dei sit omnino necessarium contra furiam Antichristi (393)

[165] Ibid., 417; Et creditur ab omnibus sapientibus quod non sumus multum remoti a temporibus Antichristi (402).

[166] Ibid.; aggravabitur intolerabiliter flagellis Christianorum (402).

[167] Ibid., 2: 581.

[168] Ibid., 2: 582, 581.

[169] Ibid., 2: 581.

multiplicity of the semiotic web, understanding "the state" as a worldly proxy for divine truth. The presumed state is, of course, a Christian one; and its political enemies are the nonbelievers, the non-Christians. The Christian state is the political manifestation of faith, and those outside the faith are outside the state.

The preceding books of the *Opus majus* give context to these "hostile cities and armies" of non-believers. In his treatise on mathematics, Bacon explains how the Mongols have opportunely deployed natural philosophy, science, in the service of their own interests. Whether followers of Antichrist or not, the Mongols—and other non-believers—are inherently anti-Christian for their use of science without faith. It is the providence of the Church to reunite natural and spiritual truths; and as Bacon makes clear in his discussion of vision, science need not only be used as a weapon of defense. Instead, he very explicitly frames optical science as a tool of empire, citing Julius Caesar's use of mirrors to see the "arrangement of the cities and camps" before invading England.[170] Through this anecdote about Julius Caesar, Bacon seems to collapse distinctions between "unbelievers" and the political enemies of an empire-building state. In response to Mongol imperial expansion, Bacon, thus, begins to develop a logic of empire organized around *illumination*. Reversing, then, the "darkening" effects of the 1241–1242 Mongol invasions, Bacon's imagined form of Christian imperialism uses the tools of natural philosophy—the same tools used by the Mongols—to expose the enemy, to make visible the nonbelievers, and inspire its own form of terror.

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[170] Ibid., 581; Sic enim Julius Caesar, quando voluit Angliam expugnare, refertur maxima specula erexisse, ut a Gallicano littore dispositionem civitatum et castrorum Angliae praevideret (165).

CHAPTER TWO

"A voys was herd":

The Border Politics of Sound in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and *Squire's Tale*

In a 1238 entry in the *Chronica majora*, Matthew Paris reports that the Old Man of the Mountain sent a "powerful and noble Saracen messenger" to the king of France.[1] Upon his arrival, the envoy—"sent on behalf of the whole people of the East"[2]—implores the king to join Muslim rulers in fighting against the Mongols. Meanwhile, another messenger travels to England with the warning "that if they themselves could not withstand the attacks of such people, nothing remained to prevent their devastating the countries of the West."[3] The bishop of Winchester responds by exclaiming,

> Let us leave these dogs to devour one another, that they may all be consumed, and perish; and we, will slay them, and cleanse the face of the earth, so that all the world will be subject to the one Catholic church, and there will be one shepherd and one fold.[4]

Whereas the leader of the Assassins finds common ground via a common enemy, the bishop of Winchester refuses to entertain the possibility of a Muslim-Christian alliance against the Mongols. Just as telling, the *Chronica majora* only gives voice to the bishop of Winchester. Regardless of whether the kings of England and France agree, *his* is the only statement that Paris deems relevant. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Mongol imperial expansion and conquest continued to throw competing geopolitical interests into relief; and the bishop of Winchester's response to the Old Man of the Mountain's entreaty exposes a zero-sum approach

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[1] J.A. Giles, trans., *Matthew Paris's English History*, volume 1 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1852), 131, archive.org.

[2] Giles, trans., *Matthew Paris's English History*, volume 1, 131.

[3] Ibid., 132.

[4] Ibid.

to earthly empire that Paris seems to endorse. By this measure, Christendom only "wins" by suppressing all other centers of political power. Widescale European panic following the 1241-1242 Mongol invasions only works to calcify the bishop's worldview within the *Chronica majora*. Identifying the Mongols as harbingers of the apocalypse, Paris concedes that universal Mongol conquest is inevitable.

The following chapter moves from the domain of sight to that of sound as a way to engage with the bishop of Winchester's approach to empire, political competition, and conquest. Drawing upon Geraldine Heng's formulation of medieval romance as the simultaneous "vanishing point of history and the instantiation of cultural fantasy," this chapter considers the transformative properties of sound in relation to fantasies that imagine difference as a site for empire building. I contend that fourteenth-century Middle English romances link this project to sound because of sound's public properties. After considering how medieval romances use sound to stage questions around the will and the common good, the chapter moves on to an extended study of Chaucer's *Squire's Tale.* Here I argue that the Squire *sounds* the limitations of an "oriental" conversion fantasy. The tale critiques this fantasy by suggesting that contact with a foreign body always occurs in a frictive frontier space, one where control cannot be asserted unilaterally. Such border spaces are always cross-directional: penetrating and penetrative. Although romance may offer fantastic possibilities, the Squire intimates that romancing the border may open up the English subject to unanticipated transformations.

Aural Communities: Sounding the "Common Good" in Middle English Romance

In *On the Free Choice of Will,* Augustine explains to his interlocutor Evodius that there are "some sensible items that we sense without destroying them in the process of changing them into

our body" (2.7.I9.76).[5] Because some sense experiences—namely sight and sound—do not "destroy" the perceived object, the object can be perceived by multiple bodies at once.[6] While the same bite of cake cannot be simultaneously tasted by different bodies, those bodies *can* simultaneously hear the same sermon. Augustine thus reasons that the "things we sense with our bodily senses but do not transform (*a*) do not pertain to the nature of our senses and so (*b*) are the more common to us, since they are not changed and converted into our or 'private property' (so to speak)" (2.7.I9.77). If one mode of sensing transforms objects into "private property," then the other reveals certain "sensible items" as belonging to the public.[7] The distinction between private and public sense experiences introduces a kind of sense ethic, the relationship between perception and social life. Augustine uses the language of the will to describe this phenomenon:

> Thus when the will, which is an intermediate good, holds fast to the unchangeable good as something common rather than private—like the truth, which we have discussed at length without saying anything adequate—a person grasps the happy life. And the happy life, *i.e.* the attachment of the mind holding fast to the unchangeable good, is the proper and fundamental good for a human being" (2.I9.52.I96).

This implies that sense experience *feels* private. The will must correct impulses for privatization through a process of cognition that contextualizes certain sense experiences beyond the confines of a single body. The body is not, by this measure, solely "private property." Rather, the sensorium—the domain of the senses—pulls bodies into shifting private/public spheres. A body's senses do not "belong" to any one individual, but instead form a matrix of experience that can be publicly accessed.

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[5] *On the Free Choice of Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings,* trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 46. All subsequent citations will appear in-text as section numbers for cross-reference.

[6] Although Augustine designates sight and hearing as the most "public" senses, he emphasizes sound because it is more uniformly experienced than sight.

[7] I am struck by the implications of this distinction in regard to depictions of cannibalism in texts like *Richard Coer de Lyon,* where Muslim bodies are transformed into "private property."

The concept of the common good was at the foundation of medieval scholastic political thought. Latin translations of Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries introduced the concept of "the human community as a complete or 'perfect' group, as an association whose goal is not just to live, to provide the material means for collective self-sufficiency, but to live well, to live the life of virtue."[8] By linking sense to the common good, Augustine provides an easily reproducible template for a collective life of virtue. Because the senses reproduce similar experiences across bodies, a sense-based ethic offers a universalizing political model.

Tellingly, Augustinian sense properties behave similarly to the structural patterns of medieval romance that Geraldine Heng identifies in *Empire of Magic.* Treating English romance as a genre of the nation, Heng argues that such texts imagine and project "a national totality out of fragmentation and division."[9] In the following section I turn to the Middle English romance *Roland and Vernagu*, which, like Augustine's sensorium, is invested in making certain "sensibles"—in this case, a nascent national identity—into a common good. Moreover, the common good of *Roland and Vernagu* is borne from an oscillation that mimics Augustine's public/private spheres. Heng explains that "romance represents a medium that is neither wholly fantastical nor wholly historical, but in which history and fantasy collide, the one vanishing into the other, almost without trace, at the location where the advantage of both can most easily be mined."[10] Fantasy, a mode of desire, elaborates upon the body's pleasures, mimicking "private property." History helps direct the fantastical "private" pleasures of romance toward a common

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[8] M.S. Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.

[9] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 8.

[10] Heng, *Empire of Magic,* 45.

end, the "public property" of the nation. The very structure of romance—the "vanishing into the other" of history and fantasy—seems to perform an exertion of will. I draw upon the parallel forms of sense and romance in order to suggest that Middle English romances use sound to actively locate "national totality" projects within the bodies of their audience; in other words, they make common the (English) body that "hears."[11]

The Middle English Charlemagne romance *Roland and Vernagu* offers an example of how romance uses sound as a border-space to articulate English "public property." *Roland and Vernagu* primarily casts religious difference as a hearing problem—and in so doing resists treating physical characteristics as signs of otherness. I do not mean to suggest here that the poem is disengaged from any effort to racialize Muslim[12] difference; rather, *Roland and Vernagu* seems to anticipate an audience that would limit Vernagu's alterity to his appearance. The poem offers Vernagu's body as a false site of difference, subverting any bias from its audience that privileges sight as the best means for apprehending truth. Instead, *Roland and Vernagu* posits that absolute truth must be heard—and as a result, "true" communities (i.e., Christian communities) are distinguished by their common acts of listening (namely, Roland's proselytizing). David Chidester has argued that Augustine draws similar analogies between sacred truth and the sense modalities of sight and hearing. Chidester maintains that symbolic synesthesia occurs, at least for Augustine, when the "limitations of sense perception and ordinary

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[11] For studies of medieval romance as a genre, see: Stephen Knight, "The Social Function of Middle English Romance," edited by David Aers, *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986); Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2004); Yin Liu, "Middle English Romance as Protype Genre," *Chaucer Review* 40.4 (2006): 335–353; Raluca Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England: Politics, Piety, and Penance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013); K.S. Whetter, *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

[12] Regarding terminology, I follow Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh's practice of using "Muslim" over "Saracen" when not directly quoting from a text. See: Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, "The depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure," special issue, *Literature Compass: Critical Race and the Middle Ages* 16 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12548.

language are most intensely felt."[13] Symbolic synesthesia goes beyond the normal modes of perception in order to produce an entirely new experience—a commune of the senses. Here the distinct properties of the senses combine and transfer to create a "common good": apprehension of divine truth. In other words, symbolic synesthesia exceeds the limits of a singular feeling body in pursuit of a more universal knowledge. *Roland and Vernagu* stresses the importance of "hearing" visual symbols when defining the Christian community. It does so by anticipating, and ultimately undermining, an audience bias that would privilege sight alone as the basis for knowledge. The text invites its audience to (mis)read the giant Vernagu's body as the root of his religious, cultural, and racial differences. Indeed, the excesses of Vernagu's body seem to privilege sight as the sense that alienates human from monster. However, the text subverts this expectation by emphasizing sound as a cultural border-maker. Vernagu cannot hear the only truth worth hearing—the Christian truth that sounds within the aural field of Charlemagne's domain.

Early in the poem Charlemagne is given several Passion relics by the emperor Constantine—gifts in advance for Charlemagne's military assistance in Spain. Charlemagne asks Christ "To sende him might and space / For to wite the sothe there, / Yif the relikes verray were" (127–29). The prayer asks for the means (the "might and space") to apprehend the truth ("to wite the sothe") about the relics. While Charlemagne ultimately seeks the truth, his attention to *how* that truth is conveyed emphasizes knowledge as a product of cognition. Here, the use of "might" indicates that the relics can only be authenticated through a mental exertion of spiritual strength. Charlemagne's prayer is answered by a series of sense experiences that, indeed, require "might" in order to configure their symbolic identifications. First, a ray of light descends from the

[13] Chidester, "Symbolism and the senses in Saint Augustine," 44.

heavens, "So ful it was of grace" those who saw it believed they were in Paradise (136). Next, Charlemagne observes a "way of sterres," burning red like a flame, that leads from Spain to Galicia (173). Finally, as he thinks about what the stars might mean, "Ther com a voice and spac to him" (150). The voice belongs to James the Apostle, who explains to Charlemagne that "The way of sterres bitokneth, ywis, / That of Spaine and of Galis / Thou schalt be conquerer" (173–75). The sensory modes of seeing and hearing seem to converge and transfer[14] as Charlemagne considers the meaning behind what he perceives. Notably, the voice that speaks comes "*in the thought* that [Charlemagne] was in" (149, emphasis added). The voice is perceived in two ways: it is externally "heard" by the poem's audience through direct dialogue, and it is internally sounded in the space of Charlemagne's thoughts. Thus, it becomes clear that the "might and space" Charlemagne initially requests are internal faculties oriented toward the reception of spiritual truth. Looking upon the stars and thinking about their meaning creates the space for Charlemagne to hear James's voice within his own thoughts. To see symbolically then is a mental practice that hears divine truth. But as Charlemagne's prayer indicates, such practices of symbolic synesthesia require an endowed ability and strength. Herein lies the root of inexorable religious difference in the poem: those who cannot "hear" divine truth have not been given the "might and space" to do so.

Vernagu appears in the text after Charlemagne—ratified by James's "voice"—begins a series of campaigns against Muslim Spain. In response, the Sultan of Babylon sends the giant Vernagu to confront Charlemagne's forces. As a single challenger then, Vernagu seems to embody the entirety of the "Saracen" world within the poem's imagination. This impression is heightened when Vernagu is compared with Charlemagne—the "lord of al Cristendome" (15)—

[14] David Chidester, "Symbolism and the senses in Saint Augustine," *Religion* 14, no. 1 (1984), 36.

who functions as a similar avatar for the Christian state. Tellingly, Charlemagne's physical description does not coincide with his introduction to the poem; instead, he visibly materializes only just before Vernagu does. Although he is not named a giant by the poem, Charlemagne's body is more than human—taller, stronger, both "stern" and "douhti":

> Tuenti fete he was o lengthe,
> And also of gret strengthe,
> And of a stern sight.
> Blac of here and rede of face,
> Whare he com in ani place
> He was a douhti knight (431–36).

Charlemagne's description produces a symbol, a body to be read or, more to the point, to be *heard* through its image. Just as Charlemagne hears James by seeing the stars as signs, the poem "voices" Charlemagne as a figuration of Christendom through its impossible excesses. The allegorical dimension of Charlemagne's description primes the reading or listening audience to encounter Vernagu's description in the same way.

Vernagu, too, is extra-human, his body similarly defined by the impossibility of its excesses[15]:

> He hadde tuenti men strengthe,
> And fourti fet of lengthe
> Thilke panim hede,
> And four fet in the face
> Ymeten in the place,
> And fiften in brede.
> His nose was a fot and more,
> His browe as brestles wore,
> He that it seighe it sede.
> He loked lotheliche

[15] Throughout this section I draw from Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's work on the status of the giant in medieval literature. According to Cohen, the giant emerges in Middle English romance as part of the poetics of nation building, appearing just "when the boundaries of the body are being culturally demarcated" (Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999], xiii). The giant's body signifies, in part, "those dangerous excesses of the flesh that the process of masculine embodiment produces in order to forbid" (xiii).

And was swart as piche —
Of him men might adrede![16]

Both figures embody their respective communities, with Charlemagne's body defining the line between the extraordinary and the monstrous. By exceeding Charlemagne's dimensions, Vernagu crosses Christendom's border, his body veering from "douhti" to "lotheliche." He is, literally, double Charlemagne's size—both in height (forty feet versus twenty feet) and in the number of poetic lines dedicated to his appearance (twelve lines versus six lines). Likewise, his "swart as piche" skin suggests an excess of color, an oversaturation of Charlemagne's redness. Vernagu's blackness functions, in part, as a metaphor for the non-Christian other as *too* embodied.[17] That which lies beyond the border appears, at least at first, as too much body—the implication being that Vernagu is all body and no (Christian) soul. Vernagu's excessive embodiment simultaneously encourages excessive looking, an overreliance on symbolic sight that distracts from the synesthetic mode of interpretation previously encouraged by the text. Based on his physical appearance, "Of him men *might* adrede" (emphasis added). That is, fear is a possible response to Vernagu's body—but it is not the only one. As Dorthee Metlitzki observes, Vernagu's difference is merely superficial, not of kind[18]; for Vernagu is also a "douhti knight" (430), one that graciously refuses to harm his lesser challengers in combat. Like Metlitzki, Siobhain Bly Calkin concludes that the poem imagines Vernagu "more as a noble warrior than as animalistic

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[16] Elizabeth Melick, Susanna Fein, and David Raybin, eds., *Roland and Vernagu* in *The Roland and Otuel Romances and the Anglo-Norman Otinel* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019): lines 473–84. All subsequent citations will appear in text.

[17] For more on the use of black metaphors in late medieval romance see: Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), chapter 2.

[18] Dorthee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 193.

monster."[19] Vernagu may look fearsome, but the text ultimately discourages its audience from ignoring Vernagu's humanity based on appearance alone.

Roland, for one, recognizes Vernagu's humanity by refusing sight as the sole means of judgement. After Vernagu defeats a series of challengers, Roland, Charlemagne's nephew, volunteers to fight. The two duel in a grueling battle, fighting for hours without end. Eventually they need rest and Vernagu begins to "rout thore / As a wild bore" (629–30). Although the speaker qualifies Vernagu's snoring, to borrow Calkin's phrase, "as animalistic monster," Roland experiences the sound as a sign of his humanity. Vernagu's snores certainly exceed normal human dimensions, but in them Roland *hears* the familiar and the intimate. He brings a stone to rest beneath Vernagu's head, a gesture that Vernagu later describes as a "leve and dere" (648).

The moment marks a turning point in the battle; after Vernagu wakes the two begin a dialogue aimed at interrogating their differences. Roland—perhaps exploiting his opponent's goodwill—asks why Vernagu's skin is so tough (655). Vernagu continues the conversation by first asking Roland where he was born (667), and then asking of the Christian god, "Hou might it ever be / That he were on and thre?" (701–2). Here is where the text ultimately condemns Vernagu, who continues question Roland about the basic tenets of Christianity. Roland (somewhat shoddily) answers these questions until Vernagu finally exclaims, "… 'Now ichot well / Your Cristen lawe, every grot. / Now we wil fight!'" (785–87). After listening to Roland's explications, Vernagu still considers Christianity an irreconcilable difference. Moreover, he doubly emphasizes this difference by identifying "Cristen lawe" as a good (marked by the possessive pronoun "Your") that does not belong to him; and by concluding that such difference can only be resolved through combat. Roland responds by kneeling in prayer "To God in heven

[19] Siobhain Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 23.

light” (799). Speaking aloud, Roland clarifies what now motivates him to continue fighting Vernagu: “… ‘Lord understond / Y no fight for no lond, / Bot for to save Thi right” (800–803). Vernagu’s “monstrous” difference lies in his dismissal of Christianity as a foreign religion.

Ultimately, Vernagu is condemned to die because he is unable to hear—to be moved by—Roland’s explication of Christianity. At the end of the poem Vernagu remains unconverted; he does not “hear” himself belonging to the community that would take Roland’s speech as a public good. Vernagu’s inability to “hear” himself within the Christian community gets further amplified by the poem’s final miracle: an intervening angel who encourages Roland to finally defeat Vernagu in battle. Upon offering his prayer, Roland—like Charlemagne before him—receives direct intercession from heaven. An “angel com ful sone” (806) answers Roland with unequivocal assurance, saying of Vernagu: “Thei alle prechours alive / To Cristen wald him schrive, / Gode nold he never be” (812–14). That is, even if Vernagu were to be given Christian penance by all the preachers in the world, he would still never be “gode.” Vernagu’s difference—his impenetrable “foreignness” from Christianity—is unassailable and absolute: he can never be made “gode.” The Middle English “gode” was used to describe both abstract virtue and communal property, and both meanings seem present in the angel’s use of the word. Vernagu will never fix himself to the common Christian “gode,” which renders him inhuman and monstrous, a “foule wight” (805). By contrast, visual markers falter as symbols of essential difference. For instance, the inability of “Cristen law, every grot” to penetrate Vernagu’s difference contrasts with the only partial impenetrability of his skin. As Vernagu explains to Roland, “No man is harder than Y / Fram the navel upward” (660–61). In other words, the excesses of Vernagu’s body are not total—below the navel he retains human vulnerability. Thus, *Roland and Vernagu* dispels visible monstrosity as a source of difference only to reveal the hope for religious

conversion as even more fantastic. The poem ultimately asserts true monstrosity as the inability to hear the common good, to hear "truth." That Vernagu does not hear the angel's indictment is then unsurprising; but Roland does and so do we, the poem's audience. With conversion off the table *Roland and Vernagu* offers only a single alternative: "Arise, Rouland, and fight!" (808).

Boethian sound in *The House of Fame* and *The Man of Law's Tale*

Roland and Vernagu is characteristic of romance's "national totality" project: it makes its audience into a community of like listeners. Moreover, the poem essentializes religious difference by *sounding* the border between its presumed Christian audience and Vernagu. Chaucer, whose *Canterbury Tales* is itself a performance of communal listening, is similarly interested in exploring the implications of sound as a cultural determinate; and yet, as I will argue, Chaucer uses sound in his "oriental" romances to resist designating difference as wholly external to the nation. The stories of *The Canterbury Tales* are voiced cultural objects, each shaped by the pilgrims' subject positions. The danger of universalizing such sounds is the danger of becoming like the flawed speakers. Conformity, in this case, is by no means desirable. The remainder of the chapter traces Chaucer's engagement with the Boethian sound tradition in two such romances, *The Man of Law's Tale* and *The Squire's Tale.* I begin by first exploring how *The Man of Law's Tale* uses sound to critique the kind of aural community imagined in *Roland and Vernagu*. To do so, I ground the tale in Boethius's treatment of sound. I get at this reading, in part, by examining how Chaucer theorizes sound in *The House of Fame*; which, to borrow a phrase from Rebecca Davis, functions as a kind of theoretical general prologue to *The Canterbury Tales***.**

Sound—as Boethius claims in *De institutione musica*—can cause radical transformations in character. Indeed, Boethius observes that the mind is shaped more by hearing than by any other sense.[20] For this reason, the human production of sound is integral to sociocultural formations. Boethius explains that "when the rhythms and modes [of sound] reach an intellect through the ears, they doubtless affect and reshape that mind according to their particular character."[21] Sound is instructive, a mind-shaping phenomenon that has the power to "sink through the ears into one's character."[22] Drawing heavily from Plato's *Republic,* Boethius therefore contends that music (as a culturally produced sound) has grave social and political import. He explains the problem as such: a lascivious culture will find pleasurable likeness in lascivious music; and in turn, this lascivious music indoctrinates each new generation into lasciviousness through its characteristic sound.[23] A people, therefore, can be defined largely as a community of like listeners. As a result, differences in—to borrow Boethius's terminology—musical "modes" reinforce cross-cultural divisions. For example, a person enculturated by lascivious music will find abhorrent the music from a "rougher" (*asperior*) people. Sound then

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[20] Nulla enim magis ad animum disciplinis via quam auribus patet. Boethius, *De institutione artithmetica libri duo; De institutione musica libri quinque*, ed. Gottfried Friedlein (Leipzig, Germany: in aedibus B.G. Teubneri, 1867): 180.

[21] Here I quote from Calvin Bower's English translation: Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, trans. Calvin Bower, ed. Claude V. Palisca (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3. Cum ergo per eas rythmi modique ad animum usque descenderint, dubitari non potest, quin aequo modo mentem atque ipsa sunt afficiant alque conforment (Boethius, *De institutione musica,* 180).

[22] Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music,* 4. Here, Boethius is commenting upon how slight changes in music can have profound effects for the listener: Atque hic maxime retlnendum est illud, quod si quo modo per parvissimas mutationes hinc aliquid permutaretur, recens quidem minime sentiri, post vero magnam facere differentiam et per aures ad animum usque delabi (Boethius, *De institutione musica,* 181).

[23] Lascivus quippe animus vel ipse lascivioribus delectatur modis vel saepe eosdem audiens emoliitur ac frangitur. Rursus asperior mens vel incitatioribus gaudet vel incitatioribus asperatur. Hinc est quod modi etiam musici gentium vocabulo designa sunt, ut lydius modus et phrygius. Quo enim quasi una quaeque gens gaudel, eodem modus ipse vocabulo nuncupatur. Gaudet vero gens modis morum similitudine; neque enim fleri potest, ut mollia duris, dura mollioribus adnectantur aut gaudeant, sed amorem delectationemque, ut dictum est, similitudo conciliat (Boethius, *De institutione musica,* 180).

becomes a site both for affirming distinct cultural identities and for assessing difference. However, Boethius emphasizes how aural affinities among human groups are both innate and learned. Sound transforms the listener, which suggests that cultural differences in "listening" are malleable.

Boethius's discussion of music captures how sound can function as a transformative cultural object, unique in its ability to both penetrate the body and to be shaped by it. And, as Martin Irvine suggests, voice too belongs to the category of sounded cultural objects.[24] Structured by convention and informed by the speaker's intent, human utterance is a non-neutral signification. Chaucer's *House of Fame* picks up on this idea, teasing apart the relationship between voice and truth. The poem begins to do so by focusing on the physical properties of voice—a focus aimed at alienating voice entirely from signification (cultural or otherwise). Although *House of Fame* does not cite Boethius as a direct source, the eagle's musings on sound demonstrates familiarity with Boethius's musical treatise.[25] In Book II a golden eagle captures Geoffrey, the narrator-dreamer, within its talons. In a "mannes vois" the eagle explains that it was sent by Jove to bring Geoffrey to the House of Fame (556). Eager to convince Geoffrey that the goddess Fame hears every noise that occurs on earth, the eagle soon launches into a philosophical discussion of sound, quipping "that spech is soun, / Or ells no man myghte hyt here."[26] This premise—one that "ys knowen kouth / Of every philosophres mouth" (757–58)—

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[24] Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*" *Speculum* 60.4 (1985): 850–876.

[25] However, Chaucer does directly cite Boethius in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*—and as David Chamberlain has long since noted, the *Nun's Priest's Tale* coheres with Boethius's musical doctrine. While not an "oriental" romance, the *Nun's Priest's Tale* is similarly concerned with the relationship between "governaunce" and "jangleth" (lines 3434 and 3435 in the *Riverside Chaucer*). See: David Chamberlain, "The Nun's Priest's Tale and Boethius's *De Musica*," *Modern Philology* 68, no. 2 (1970): 188–91.

[26] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), lines 762–63. For ease of reference, all subsequent citations will appear in text.

then allows the eagle to recontextualize speech in terms of the physics of sound. Sound, according to the eagle, is notable for how it moves: composed of air, sound rises upward, "Thurgh hys multiplicacioun" (784). Using the same example as Boethius does in *De institutione musica*[27], the eagle likens the phenomenon to that of a stone dropped into water. Just as the stone disturbs the surface of tranquil water, sound ripples the air in circular waves, each "sercle causynge other/ Wydder than hymselve was" (752–3). In Boethius's text, the stone-in-water example follows a short discussion of the limitations of human voice (breath and pitch); therefore, it is unsurprising that he then uses *vox* (voice) in place of "sound" when describing how sound travels. Chaucer's eagle seems to play off this blurred distinction by emphasizing the neutrality of human voice. All sound behaves the same, every "speche, or noyse, or soun" (781), regardless of context. Thus, human speech is deprioritized as a form of utterance. As the eagle points out, it is indistinguishable from a mouse's squeaks (785).

Chaucer's eagle draws from Boethius to neutralize voice as noise—but with one key point of differentiation. Boethius holds that sound is *diffused* through the medium of air. Using the passive construction of *diffundo,* he implies that sound moves passively, spreading without force. By contrast, the eagle in *House of Fame* declares that sound is "noght but eyr ybroken" (765). This is Chaucer's innovation: sound breaks air, it does not pass smoothly through it. Sound marks a rupture, a break; which suggests that to hear sound is to experience change as it happens. Sound travels by means of sequential, and increasingly large, breaks. What happens, then, to human speech as it disseminates through repeated rupture? As if in answer, Martin Irvine

[27] "Tale enim quiddam fieri consuevit in vocibus, quale cum [in] paludibus vel quietis aquis iactum eminus mergitur saxum. Prius enim in parvissimum orbem undam colligit, deinde maioribus orbibus undarum globos spargit …" [**Such occurs when a stone**, cast from a distance, sinks into a pond or quiet water. First it draws together a wave in a small circle, then it scatters bands of waves into larger circles …] (Boethius, *De institutione arithmetica; De institutione musica,* ed. Gottfried Friedlein [Leipzig: B.G. Teubneri, 1867], 200, archive.org. My translation.)

has argued that the poem reduces vocal utterance to its natural substance—air and sound—in order to disrupt the relationship between signifier and signified.[28] This critique is quite clearly allegorized in *House of Fame,* where blasts from Aeolus's trumpet—"lowde as any thunder" (1681)—directly signify moral judgement. To those who arrive before her, Fame metes out the judgement that Aeolus announces—either "Clere Laude" or "Sklaundre." But as the eagle's earlier pronouncements make clear, sound is a science of discontinuity. While each "ripple" of sound is sequential, each ripple *also* forms a new break in air. The sequential-but-not-continuous nature of sound creates a problem when sound is equated with judgement. In the *House of Fame,* there is no direct relationship between a person's good works and Fame's judgement. The text underscores this point when Fame peevishly informs a group of souls "That ye shall have a shrewed fame,/ And wikkyd loos, and worse name/ Though ye good loos have wel deserved" (1619–21). Good works might suggest "good loos," but because judgement is a sound it breaks any continuity between a person's actions and their social reputation. *House of Fame* thus poses a challenge to the political work of romance. Hearing holds no intrinsic value because spoken utterances cannot be held as absolute truths.

The Man of Law's Tale dramatizes disruptive sound to critique the (fascist) implications of a homogenous listening community. Told through the biased voice of its narrator, the tale begins in the romantic mode of *Roland and Vernagu*; that is, it begins with the fantasy of a like community defined by its ability to hear the common good. At the start of the narrative action a group of Syrian merchants travel to Rome, where they immediately hear report of Custance, the Emperor's exemplary daughter. Spoken in "the commune voys of every man" (II. 155), Custance is praised throughout Rome: "Nas never swich another as is shee./ I prey to God in honor hire

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susteene,/ And wolde she were of al Europe the queene" (II. 159–61). The Man of Law introduces Custance to both the Syrian merchants and his tale's audience by directly quoting the public's appraisal of her worth. In other words, she is introduced to the text by the diegetic sound of the "commune voys." By *sounding* her praises, the common voice has made Custance into an Augustinian common good. Voiced across the public sphere, her unchangeable virtues, her constancy, can be fixed upon by any listening body without being destroyed. And, as Augustine describes, to hold Custance as common is to grasp a life of virtue. Unlike *Roland and Vernagu,* however, *The Man of Law's Tale* seemingly interrogates the imperial logic of the common. The complete singularity of Rome's voice—marked by the singular pronoun "I"—is knitted to the politics of empire. To desire Custance's coronation as the queen of all Europe is to desire a singular Europe, a Europe indistinguishably collapsed into the remarkable uniformity of the "commune."

Chaucer's interest in the discontinuity of sound quickly undercuts the fantasy voiced by the Roman public. Sound, after all, has no fixed relationship to meaning or truth. Boethius again helps clarify the social implications of this discontinuity by implying that sound, as a cultural object, is subject to continuous interference. When describing the mechanics of sound, Boethius notes that if something should impede a sound wave, the motion of that wave will immediately rebound, "making *new* circles by the same undulations as at the center whence it originated."[29] As Andrew Lemons has recently argued, interference multiplies the horizons of sound for Boethius, forming new centers and, perhaps, new sources of utterance.[30] In reference to *The*

[29] Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, trans. Calvin Bower, 21. Emphasis added.

[30] Andrew Lemons, "The Poetic Form of Voice in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *The Chaucer Review* 53.2 (2018), 146.

House of Fame, Lemons argues that Boethian rebounding "develops into a fascinating image of the creation of new authors and new authorities as points of interference and mediation, of multiplications and misturnings, in the circular life of voice."[31] The introduction to *The Man of Law's Tale* plays off this idea by parodying an approach to sound that not only refuses aural multiplication, but holds sound as a consumable good. Limited by own his mercenary self-interest, the Man of Law approaches all goods—storytelling included—as private and consumable. When Harry Bailey calls upon him to entertain the group, for instance, the Man of Law complains that Chaucer has left no suitable tale untold—they've all been sounded, heard, and, therefore, used up.[32] In his prologue the Man of Law goes even further, twisting Pope Innocent III's denunciation of poverty into a logic of privatization, the personal acquisition of goods. The Man of Law carries this perspective to the point of grotesquery, declaring midway through his harangue, "Herkne what is the sentence of the wise:/ 'Bet is to dyen than have indigence'" (II. 113–14). Because he operates fully within a zero-sum logic, the Man of Law is unable to recognize sound's structural capacity for interference, multiplication, and new utterance.

Interestingly, this focus on private goods quickly develops into a rationale for empire. Having thoroughly proclaimed the horrors of poverty, the Man of Law pivots and begins to celebrate wealthy merchants. Merchants, by his estimation, are particularly prudent because their search for wealth corresponds with an imperial project:

> Ye seken lond and see for yowre wynnynges;
> As wise folk ye knowen al th'estaat
> Of regnes; ye been fadres of tidyinges
> And tales, bothe of pees and of debaat (II. 127–30).

[31] Lemons, "The Poetic Form of Voice in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," 147.

[32] **See lines**

These "wise folk" extend the borders of what is known by trafficking in both material items and tidings. The Man of Law thus equates the two, transforming "tidyinges/ And tales" into private commodities. This "consumption" presciently enacts Homi Bhabha's description of cultural difference. In distinguishing cultural diversity from cultural difference, Bhabha explains cultural difference as "a process of signification through which statements *of* culture or *on* culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity."[33] Cultural difference is an "enunciation" of knowledgeability.[34] The Man of Law's rich merchants "knowen al th'estaat" of foreign lands; moreover, they *make known* these foreign places through storytelling. These stories—as the Man of Law expresses in his introduction—are consumable, private goods.[35] Merchants, by this account, announce difference while simultaneously commodifying this difference for consumption. Therefore, the "consumption" of difference is a political force. Considering once again the Man of Law's zero-sum approach to goods, consumption becomes shorthand for a competitive global politics. The world must be consumed, lest the world consumes you.

The tale initially corroborates this view. As mentioned above, the Man of Law begins his story with a "compaignye / Of chapmen riche" that trade in both merchandise and information (II. 134-5). Abroad, these merchants are well sought after for their goods; while at home, the Syrian sultan regards the merchants themselves as a valuable resource. In exchange for "good chiere" (II. 180), the merchants regale the Sultan with news from "any strange place" they visit (II. 178). When the merchants return from Rome, they immediately tell the Sultan about

[33] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 34.

[34] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 34.

[35] Kathryn Lynch has similarly discussed the commodification of storytelling in the tale. See: Kathryn Lynch, "Storytelling, Exchange, and Constancy: East and West in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale,*" *The Chaucer Review* 33.4 (1999): 409–422.

Custance. This process of enunciation transforms Custance from a common good into a private one, for the Sultan becomes so inflamed with lust it is determined that he must "han Custance" (II. 208). The Sultan's infatuation immediately threatens to destabilize the kingdom by threatening his life: he is "nas but deed" without her (II. 209), causing his own pricy council to "shapen for his lyf som remedye" (II. 210). After much debate about what to do, the privy council concludes that "[t]hey kan nat seen in that noon avantage,/ Ne in noon oother wey, save marriage" (II. 216–17). Suprisingly, however, the council readily accepts conversion to Christianity as a condition for the marriage. All the "argumenten" (II. 212), the "subtil resoun" (II. 213), of the council's debates, therefore, must be concerned with something other than religious difference (II. 213). Indeed, the council only recognizes the potential problems of a Christian-Muslim alliance *after* they already fix upon the marriage (II. 218). Given that the dynamic between sultan and merchants mirrors the Man of Law's earlier description of an enunciative imperial project, the tale seems to suggest that the council's concern is geopolitical. Within this context, the proposed marriage holds clear strategic value: by "privatizing" Custance through marriage, the Syrian kingdom blocks the potential for Europe uniting around Custance as a common good. The Sultan's own lovesickness exposes the threat such an empire might pose. Rather than risk the Sultan's—and the kingdom's—absorption into the foreign community that holds Custance as common, the council instead determines that she must be consumed. In terms of geopolitics, religion, then, does not appear to dissolve Roman/Syrian difference. In contrast with *Roland and Vernagu, The Man of Law's Tale* does not assert Christianity as the basis for the common. Instead, Syria blocks the formation of a competing empire by removing the very foundation for unification—Custance.

Meanwhile, the entire Roman political apparatus likewise finds the marriage politically strategic. The union is agreed upon by "al the chirche, and al the chivalrie" for two reasons (II. 235): "That in destruccioun of mawmettrie,/ And in encrees of Cristes lawe deere" (II. 236–37). Unlike the Sultan's privy council, Rome's institutions of power *do* equate religious difference with geopolitical competition; Christian law increases by Islamic loss. And yet, the adverbial placement of the word "deere" in the line above suggests that Rome's Christian imperialism has its own high cost. To destroy "mawmettrie" and spread Christianity, Rome must liquidate Custance as a form of currency. The "deere" cost of this exchange, however, exceeds even Custance. By commuting Custance into a private commodity, Rome concretizes Syrian "interference," resulting in the formation of a new center within the tale. As previously discussed, Custance enters the text as story—the collective speech of Rome. But as her story travels from Rome to Syria, it becomes increasingly remote from the very virtue it originally meant to signify. Despite the Man of Law's assertions, stories—as sounds—are not static; they move. When the merchants tell Custance's story to the Sultan, they add new emphasis—emphasis that seemingly draws from their own direct experience. Having had no occasion to test Custance's virtue, the merchants are ready to return home "whan they han this blissful mayden sayn" (II. 172). The merchants presumably embellish their version of the Custance story by incorporating what they *saw*. This would explain the Sultan's reaction. Upon hearing the merchants describe Custance's "virtues," the Sultan becomes so inflamed by lust that he desires, above all, "To han hir figure in his remembrance" (II. 187). In Rome, Custance's beauty is mentioned only to highlight her modesty ("In hire is heigh beautee, without pride" [II. 162]), but in Syria her beauty seems the focus of her story. Thus, the "commune voys" of Rome rebounds from the Syrian merchants, forming a new center and a new utterance: a statement of Custance

as sexual object, as wife, as privatized object. By conforming to this new utterance, the Emperor unintentionally yields to Syrian power.

Ultimately, Custance's conversion—from public to private good—exposes how quickly projects of empire disrupt the fantasy of communal listening. The Sultan and his baronage convert to Christianity without *hearing* themselves as part of Christendom. *Roland and Vernagu*—much like the Man of Law and the Rome of his tale—considers cross-cultural contact as a binary encounter of difference. Vernagu can either hear the good in Roland's speech (thereby converting) or remain unhearing. Conversely, *The Man of Law's Tale* demonstrates the fallacy of a clear self/other binarism through Boethian interference and multiplication. Chaucer's tale condemns the merchants' "interference"—and Rome's compliance—by dissolving the marriage in a moment of spectacular violence. The Sultan's mother, perhaps unwilling to endorse "hir sones pleyn entente" with Custance (II. 324), plots a coup. After feigning conversion, the Sultan's mother and her followers massacre the Christians (converted and otherwise) in attendance at her daughter-in-law's reception feast. Custance alone survives. With a single stroke the Sultan's mother undoes all hope associated with the Custance-Christianity exchange. The Sultan is killed before he can consummate his marriage; and, under his mother's reign, Syria is once again Islamic, for "ther was Surryen noon that was converted, / That of the conseil of the Sowdan woot, / That he nas al tohewe er he asterted" (II. 435–37). Self-interested conversion fails; Christian imperialism fails; even the privy council's concern about a united Europe is thwarted by Custance's survival. The episode's universally disastrous conclusion demonstrates the faulty logic behind the Man of Law's zero-sum philosophy. Rome's imperialism commodifies Custance's body while failing to recognize that her virtue cannot be privatized,

because it is not, as Holly Crocker argues, inert.[36] In her anti-imperialist reading, Crocker contends that the *The Man of Law's Tale* "figures virtues as external powers that transfer between bodies, remaking subjects through transformative moments of unsettling contact."[37] Custance's virtue thus behaves very similarly to sound. Virtue emanates, it spreads, forming new "centers" (subjects) at each point of contact. The tale's (new) Syrian center threatens Rome's religiopolitical authority; and, as a result, both Rome and Syria must recede from the text to stabilize Custance's virtue as a Christian power.[38]

Rome and Syria fail as narrative centers because neither the Emperor nor the Sultan are able to recognize Custance as a public good. Custance must then be "heard" elsewhere. After the wedding massacre she is cast into a rudderless boat from which she reaches the shores of a still-pagan Northumbria. Unknown, she arrives in Northumbria without story; no report precedes her arrival. Because Northumbria is completely disconnected from the tale's earlier networks of exchange, Custance can speak for herself (as it were). Thus, as Crocker concludes, she is free to enact "the qualities she was earlier assigned."[39] When Custance washes up on shore, she is taken in by a kindly constable and his wife, Hermengyld, who becomes her benefactor, companion, and religious pupil. In stark contrast with the Sultan's hasty conversion, Custance slowly converts Hermengyld through "orisons, with many a bitter teere" (II. 537). Custance speaks, but she does not speak about herself. In fact, Custance cannot speak her own story because "she

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[36] See chapter 2 in: Holly Crocker, *The Matter of Virtue: Women's Ethical Action from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

[37] Crocker, *The Matter of Virtue,* 125.

[38] Crocker arrives at a very similar conclusion, arguing, "Because it aims to suppress virtue's vitality, imperialism doesn't work, and actually must be sidelined in order to prevent the erosion of Christian authority it is meant to enlarge" (*The Matter of Virtue,* 125).

[39] Crocker, *The Matter of Virtue,* 126.

forgat hir mynde” during her long voyage at sea (II. 527). Rather than speak about herself, Custance prays on behalf of the pagans in “that contree everywhere” (II. 534). Hermengyld converts after listening to Custance’s “orisons,” unmotivated by any material interest. Moreover, the Man of Law does not represent Custance’s “orisons” within the tale; he merely mentions that they occur. In these moments of silent utterance, Custance evades the Man of Law’s mode of storytelling—a mode incapable of sounding “oure lay” (II. 572), the communal Christian story.

Custance’s “sound” spreads from Hermengyld outward, in increasingly large circles—from the private space of the constable’s home to the kingdom at large. But, as *The House of Fame* suggests, each aural circle requires a break, a rupture. The rupture that amplifies Custance’s message is occasioned by a young knight’s violent interference. Struck by her beauty, the knight desires Custance as a private good. When Custance rejects his sexual advances, the knight retaliates by murdering Hermengyld in her bed and naming Custance the killer. Two miracles are witnessed during Custance’s subsequent trial. First, the young knight—Custance’s accuser—is struck down by a disembodied hand just at the moment when he swears to her guilt. The force of the blow so strong it causes his eyes to burst. Second, a heavenly voice—heard by all those in attendance—proclaims Custance’s innocence. Although the violence of the disembodied hand is spectacular, the voice has a much more profound effect upon the crowd:

> A voys was herd in general audience,
> And seyde, “Thou hast desclaundred, giltelees,
> The doghter of hooly chirche in heigh presence;
> Thus hastou doon, and yet holde I my pees!”
> Of this mervaille agast was al the prees;
> As mazed folk they stoden everichone,
> For drede of wreche, save Custance allone (II. 673–79).

Unlike Aeolus’s trumpet blasts in *The House of Fame,* the sound that publicly pronounces Custance’s judgement is voiced—that is, her judgement (guiltless) is actually sounded in

language. And the voice's judgement is also true: Custance is innocent of the crime for which she is accused. The miracle that stuns the crowd is the paradoxical signification of truth through voiced rupture. (Which perhaps also accounts for the paradox of both speaking and holding one's peace at the same time.) Coming from heaven, the voice's center of utterance is absolute, its rupture total. Like the voice that calls to Saint Paul on the road to Damascus, the voice that speaks Custance's innocence is a Revelation. And like Paul, the people who hear the voice are stunned into an entirely new mode of existence: they convert not through the efforts of proselytization, but through a break marked by sound. Revelation is marvelous in its discontinuity.

My reading here is informed by Alain Badiou's reappraisal of Saint Paul as a "theoretician of universality."[40] Badiou argues that Paul's works offer a profound ontological thesis: that universalism is the ability to think about the multiple not as part, but as in excess of itself. This idea finds compelling sympathy with Boethius's musical theory. Interested by how harmony unites diversity, Boethius uses Pythogorean theory to describe multitude as "limited with regard to the smallest term, but unlimited with regard to the larger; its origin is unity, and there is nothing smaller than unity."[41] In turn, this idea is closely linked to his Neopythagorean view of multiplicity. In Boethius's *De institutione arithmetica,* multiplicity is defined as a separation from the monad, the oneness underlying the principles of existence.[42] Using the term "equality" (*aequalitas*) for "unity," Boethius explains that "every type of inequality arises from a

[40] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism,* trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 108.

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[42] Here, Boethius presents an interpretation of the theory of "three rules"—a well-established tradition in Greek number theory. For a lucid explication, see: Svetla Slaveva-Griffin, *Plotinus on Number* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 42–53. The phrase "underlying principle of existence" is borrowed from Slaveva-Griffin's work.

prior equality so that equality is itself as it were the matrix and, taking the force of a root, it gives depth to the types and orders of inequality."[43] When Paul declares "there is neither Jew nor Greek; neither bond nor free; male nor female," he makes a similar argument about unity and multiplicity.[44] Badiou explains that Paul does not negate particularity with this statement. Instead, Paul asserts an absolute indifference to secular nominations. For Boethius, unity is the singleness of nature; what Paul refers to as either grace or love. The universal, then, is not concerned with conformity, but rather aims to dismantle hierarchical considerations of secular difference. As rupture, Revelation marks a break from tradition, from culture, from history. It promises a fundamental restructuring of the social order. *The Man of Law's Tale* demonstrates this approach to multiplicity through the heavenly voice's meter. Whereas Custance's "orisons" are left silent, the heavenly voice seems to cut through the Man of Law's mediated narration, offering a rare instance of extrametricality in the tale's prosodic form. Although the voice generally conforms with the tale's regular pentameter, it deviates when identifying Custance as a "daughter of holy churche," as represented below:

W	S	W	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S
The	dogh	ter	of	hoo	ly	chirche	in	heigh	pre	sence

Chaucer's use of elision resolves the line's extra syllable. By joining the third and fourth syllables, Chaucer joins Custance with the holy church—the two, while still distinguishable, are presented as one. The voice's metrical performance ruptures the Man of Law's narrative, thereby forming a new central authority.

[43] "… ut ipsa quodammodo aequalitas matris et radicis obtinens vim ipsa omnes inaequalitatis species ordinesque profundat" (Boethius, *De institutione arithmetica; De institutione musica,* ed. Gottfried Friedlein [Leipzig: B.G. Teubneri, 1867], 66, archive.org). Michael Masi, trans., *Boethian Number Theory: A translation of the* De Institutione Arithmetica (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 114.

[44] Galatians 3:28.

The Man of Law, however, is no Pauline thinker. Whatever "common good" belonged to the original Constance story gets warped by his own subjectivity. Indeed, the concept of multiplicity in excess of itself is wildly antithetical to his zero-sum logic. The Man of Law is (heretically) unable to accept Revelation as a common good because of his deep commitment to private consumption. After the voice speaks, the Man of Law quickly "converts" its utterance into a material good. He concludes the episode by stating, "And thus hath Crist ymaad Custance a queene" (II. 693). The voice of God *makes* Custance a queen because the Northumbrian king, moved by the miracle (and, of course, Custance's beauty), marries her soon after the trial. Even more tellingly, difference *is* hierarchical within the tale. Northumbria receives its Revelation only in contrast with the disastrous Syrian conversion; the implication being that Syrian difference is a difference that cannot be overcome—even when the so-called "Saracens" are Christian. The Word of God is not universal, for the Syrians hear only human utterance alienated from truth. Moreover, the Man of Law attempts to "correct" the equalizing potential of the voice's rupture with sameness. The story repeats itself. After Custance weds the Northumbrian king, his mother puts a plot into motion that leads to her being once again cast into the rudderless boat. Difference recedes. Even Northumbria fades from the narrative, for after Custance and her husband are reunited, they share only a year of marriage together before he dies and she returns to Rome. The tale ends where it began—only with the crucial addition of her son as heir to the Roman throne. Through Custance's son, Maurice, the Man of Law ensures that the Emperor's initial trade of his daughter yields a greater return. Moreover, this gain occurs only at a loss for the Syrians and for the Northumbrians. Despite Northumbria's privileged status within the tale—an exceptional site, the place of miracles and mass conversion—the Man of Law cannot help but highlight its material losses (King Alla, Custance, and Alla's heir).

The epilogue to *The Man of Law's Tale* adds context to the tensions between narrator and narration. After the Man of Law concludes his story, the Host enthusiastically calls upon the Parson to speak next: "'Sir Parisshe Prest,'" quod he, 'for Goddes bones, / Telle us a tale" (II. 1166–67). Alarmed by the language of the request, the Parson responds by exclaiming, "'Benedicite! / What eyleth the man, so synfully to swere?'" (II. 1171). As Andrew Cole observes, the Parson's response is surprising in two ways. First, the Parson begins with by swearing himself. Second, he does not explain why swearing—or rather, the Host's swearing—is so sinful.[45] These unusual features relate, in part, to the material emphasis of the Man of Law's version of the Constance story.[46] The Host's oath—*for God's bones*—is particularly blasphemous because it draws God's body into an economy of exchange; much like how the Man of Law continually tries to convert Custance's virtue into a private good. By beginning his rebuke with his own, much milder, oath, the Parson points to the extremity of the Host's language. The Host caustically replies by joking that the Parson must be a "lollard" and claims that the group will now "han a predicacioun" from him (II. 1176). Tellingly, the Shipman interjects before the Parson can speak again. Himself a wealthy merchant, the Shipman cuts off the suspected Wycliffite before he "wolde sowen som difficulte" by his preaching (II. 1182). The Shipman preemptively silences a sermon that he fears might "springen cokkel in our clene corn" (1183). In other words, the Shipman fears a sermon that would spoil his "store"—and although he speaks figuratively, the use of "clene corn" certainly evokes self-interested and worldly concerns. He, like the Man of Law, benefits from material inequality. Influenced, perhaps, by the tale just

[45] Andrew Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 76.

[46] Cole reads the epilogue to *The Man of Law's Tale* as a performance of Lollardy; and while I do not disagree with this argument, here I am merely concerned with the relationship between epilogue and tale.

heard, the Shipman seems especially averse to any kind of Pauline universalism. He thus performs the very phenomenon of listening that Chaucer seems to critique: the absorption of a flawed and socially determined worldview. In opposition to multiplicity, utterance holds the power to conform, to make like—a dangerous proposition when the voice that speaks is not the voice of God, but human.

Chaucer and the Mongol Empire

A Pauline critique of universalism emerges from the *The Man of Law's Tale* Boethian acoustics, inviting the question: to whom or to what is the tale's anti-imperialism aimed? Although *The Man of Law's Tale* is set long before the Mongol Empire, I suggest it embeds a skepticism toward fourteenth-century projects of empire that target the Mongols. The tale's primary source text is the life of Constance in Nicholas Trevet's *Les Cronicles* (ca. 1334)—a text very much engaged with Mongol imperialism.[47] Trevet's version of the Constance story (like the Man of Law's) notably revises an oft-repeated element of stories within the cycle: incest. Typically, a Constance story begins with an innocent Constance either fleeing from or being banished by her incestuous father.[48] Trevet, however, abandons this trope. As Robert Correale explains, Trevet's Constance instead "leaves home in obedience to her father's demand that she marry a Saracen prince who has agreed to convert to Christianity."[49] Lillian Hornstein has convincingly argued that Trevet

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[47] See: Jonathan Stavsky, "Translating the Near East in the *Man of Law's Tale* and Its Analogues," *The Chaucer Review* 55.1 (2020): 32–54.

[48] Lillian Hornstein, "Eustace-Constance-Florence-Griselda Legends" in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500*, volume 1, ed. J.B. Severs (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), 120.

[49] Robert Correale, "The Man of Law's Prologue and Tale," in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales,* ed. Robert Correale (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003).

revises the incest motif by drawing from a different story tradition—one that recounts the marriage of a Mongol khan and an Armenian princess.[50] Hornstein names the *King of Tars* as the Middle English version of the Mongol-Armenian marriage story, and identifies a number of close similarities between the two texts. Most importantly, both Trevet's Constance and the Mongol princess in the *King of Tars* are married for religious and political reasons—a particularly salient point when considered alongside the geopolitical shifts that follow the division of the Mongol Empire (1259–1264), as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.[51] By drawing from Trevet's Constance tradition, Chaucer implicitly links *The Man of Law's Tale* to the Mongols. Within this context, Rome's failure in Syria suggests that such an attempt to ally with the Mongols will result in an equally disastrous outcome.[52]

Both the Middle English *King of Tars* and *Les Cronicles* were likely produced in the 1330s. This date is significant, as it follows a watershed moment in European-Mongol relations: Ghazan Khan's coronation as Ilkhan in 1295. With tensions between the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde still high, Ghazan moved against the Mamlūk sultan in Syria in the winter of 1299.[53] The Ilkhanate forces defeated the sultan, the young al-Nāsir Muhammad, on December

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[50] Lillian Hornstein, "Trivet's Constance and the *King of Tars*," *Modern Language Notes,* 55.5 (1940), 354–55.

[51] Hornstein, "Trivet's Constance and the *King of Tars*," 355–56.

[52] It is important to note here that Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* after the Mongols had already been expelled from China. The Mongol Yuan dynasty collapsed in 1368, and was immediately replaced by the Chinese Ming dynasty. However, Peter Jackson argues that there is no evidence to suggest that this information was known in Europe. Instead, "Having been made aware, therefore, of an impressive and powerful civilization in Cathay, Western Christians continued to imagine the 'Great Khan' presiding over it long after he had in fact withdrawn into the steppes of Mongolia.

[53] Ghazan's victory in Syria is, however, short lived. The Mamlūks retreat in 1299 but reoccupy the country in 1300 when the Ilkhan's forces withdraw. Ghazan initiates a second invasion in 1301, targeting the Aleppo region. Poor weather makes engagement between the forces impossible, so Ghazan again withdraws. His third and final campaign occurs in the spring of 1303—a campaign which ends when the Ilkhanate forces suffer a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Mamlūks. See: Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West: 1221–1410,* second edition, (New York: Routledge, 2014).

22; by December 31, the Mongols had taken Damascus. In Europe, rumors circulated, taking on increasingly fantastic dimensions. The Ilkhan was Prester John; he had been baptized after capturing Jerusalem; he had returned the Holy Land to the Christians; the Holy Sepulchre had been recovered; and the Egyptian Sultan had been killed.[54] Amidst this glow of Christian triumph, Ghazan Khan—though himself Muslim—became connected with the Mongol-Armenian marriage tale. The tale had been in circulation since 1280; but following the 1299–1300 invasion of Syria, the details of the story made Ghazan an easy real-life analogue.[55] In early versions of the story, a daughter of the Armenian king marries a Mongol ruler and births a monstrous child. When baptized, the child loses its monstrosity, which causes its father to convert to Christianity. Inspired, the newly converted Mongol ruler then wages war against the Mamlūks to free Jerusalem for the Latin Christians.[56] Tellingly, Matthew Paris—despite his earlier doomsday fears—attaches this story to Ghazan's 1299 invasion of Syria. In a 1299 entry of the *Flores Historiarum,* Paris provides a short summary of the invasion, quickly adding that "the cause of the Tartars' conversion should be noted."[57] He then gives a version of the Mongol-Armenian marriage tale where the Mongol ruler in question is Ghazan's brother.[58] The episode concludes with universal conversion (as earlier indicated): "Having seen [the child's transformation], the father and his whole household were baptized as believers."[59] Matthew

[54] Peter Jackson, 172.

[55] Peter Jackson, 172.

[56] Jackson, 172.

[57] Notetur insuper Tartarorum hoc tempore conversionis causa. Matthew Paris, *Flores Historiarum,* volume 3, ed. Henry Richards Luard (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1890), 107, archive.org. My translation.

[58] Matthew Paris, *Flores Historiarum,* volume 3, ed. Henry Richards Luard (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1890), 107, archive.org.

[59] Quo viso pater et domus ejus tota credentes baptizer. Matthew Paris, *Flores Historiarum,* 108. My translation.

Paris's shifting treatment of the Mongols—from monstrous cannibals to Christian converts—is indicative of a broader trend. No longer feared as harbingers of Antichrist, the Mongols become potential Christian allies in the European literary imagination toward the end of the thirteenth century.[60]

The Canterbury Tales, however, significantly postdates these events. Indeed, by the time Chaucer had begun writing *The Canterbury Tales,* the Mongol Yuan dynasty 大元—the center of the Mongol polity—had already collapsed. Emperor Toghon Temür was deposed in 1368; his successor, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, assumed rule as the founder of the Chinese Ming dynasty 大明 that same year. And yet, as Peter Jackson has argued, there is no evidence to suggest that this information was known in Europe.[61] Instead, "Western Christians continued to imagine the 'Great Khan' presiding over [China] long after he had in fact withdrawn into the steppes of Mongolia."[62] During Chaucer's lifetime, perception of the Mongols had once again shifted. Kublai Khan founded the Yuan dynasty in 1271, but by this time he had already relocated the Mongol capital from Karakorum to Dadu 大都 (near present-day Beijing). Early Christian missions to the Mongols, like the ones conducted by John of Plano Carpini (1247) and William of Rubruck (1255), had no occasion to travel into China. By contrast, Yuan-era accounts of the Mongols would emphasize the wonders of the Mongol Chinese court. Marco Polo's *Le Devisement du monde* (1298) and Odoric of Pordenone's travel narrative (1330) celebrate the

[60] Sierra Lomuto, "The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330)," *Exemplaria* 31.3 (2019): 171–192.

[61] Jackson, 345.

[62] Ibid.

fabulous wealth of the Mongol court as well as its marvels. Polo, for instance, describes with awe the scale of commerce in Dadu, for

> greater quantities of the most costly and most worthy things come to this city than to any city in the world; and more merchandise is sold and bought there; for know in truth that each day, more than 1,000 carts loaded with silk enter this city, for many cloths of gold and silk are produced there.[63]

Perhaps especially attuned to such marvels as a merchant himself, Polo is careful to highlight the size and wealth of the city in relation to the rest of the world. There is nowhere else like it. A medieval "best seller," *Le Devisement du monde* helped generate interest in vernacular travel narratives to Asia—including the *Book of Marvels and Travels*, attributed to Sir John Mandeville. Mandeville's *Book,* like Polo's *Le Devisement*, includes lengthy descriptions of the Mongols in China, even though the earliest manuscript for the text (1371) appears three years after the Yuan dynasty is dissolved. Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* at a time when the Mongol Empire had largely become synonymous with wealth, power, and the wonders of its Chinese territories. If the *Man of Law's Tale* is to be understood as part of the literary genealogy of the Mongol-Armenian marriage, the Man of Law—inspired, perhaps, by Marco Polo's merchant tale—alludes to the Mongols because of his own pecuniary worldview. This type of material motivation for empire is precisely what the *Man of Law's Tale* cautions against.

Chaucer's Mongol Empire: Foreign Sounds in *The Squire's Tale*

In addition to *The Man of Law's Tale* veiled reference, Chaucer explicitly addresses the Mongol Empire in *The Squire's Tale*. As Chaucer's only two Mongol romances—and as romances very much concerned with projects of empire—the two tales seem to be in conversation with one

[63] Marco Polo, *The Description of the World,* trans. Sharon Kinoshita (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2016), 86.

another. In fact, Larry Benson notes that some manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* name the Squire as the speaker who interrupts the Parson in the Man of Law's Epilogue; the majority of which then follow the *Man of Law's Tale* with that of the Squire.[64] Even without the Squire's direct engagement, the two tales are still thematically (via the Mongols) and actively (via the Man of Law's introduction) linked. In the introduction to his tale, the Man of Law proclaims to shun "swiche cursed stories" as "thilke wikke ensample of Canacee, / That loved her brother sinfully" (80, 78–9). The Man of Law (ironically) cites the Canacee story as one that Chaucer has not put to poetry, alluding to John Gower's "Tale of Canace and Machaire" in Book III of the *Confession Amantis.*[65] Gower's tale is a close adaptation of Ovid's *Heroides* XI, an epistolary poem written from the perspective of Canace to her brother Macareus. The *Confessio Amantis* version narrates the siblings' incestuous union, their father's wrath, Canace's suicide, and their child's subsequent death. Despite the Man of Law's protestation, Canacee's "cursed" story is later told by the Squire in Fragment V of the *The Canterbury Tales.* However, the Squire radically reframes the tale of Canace and Machiare as an "oriental" romance set in the court of Chinngis Khan. *The Man of Law's Tale* and *The Squire's Tale* thus make an interesting pair: the former embeds its reference to the Mongols by merging the Mongol-Armenian marriage tale with that of Constance; the latter explicitly recontextualizes the Greek Canace myth as a Mongol tale of wonder. The two tales also share a preoccupation with sound. Whereas *The Man of Law's Tale* uses Boethian sound to critique projects of empire, *The Squire's Tale* explores the dangers of aural enculturation. *The Squire's Tale,* like *Roland and Vernagu,* uses sound to articulate

[64] However, these manuscripts likely reflect an early draft of *The Canterbury Tales* that gave the Man of Law the Melibee tale. Larry Benson, "Fragment II," in *The Riverside Chaucer,* 3rd edition, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 10.

[65] See, for instance: C. David Benson, "Incest and Moral Poetry in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *The Chaucer Review* 19.2 (1984), 100.

difference. But unlike *Roland and Vernagu*, *The Squire's Tale* does not treat conversion as an impossibility. Instead, the Squire extends the anti-imperial logic of the *Man of Law's Tale* to imagine an English-Mongol encounter that circumscribes English identity within a foreign context. He imagines, in other words, an inversion of conventional conversion fantasies—the danger of the fourteenth-century infatuation with Mongol marvels.

The three versions of the Canace story addressed above—*Heroides* XI, the "Tale of Canace and Machaire," and *The Squire's Tale*—share a preoccupation with the powers (and inefficacies) of human utterance. In *Heroides* XI, speech acts as a causal force between human actants. Canace's narration of the birth of her child is an interesting example. As she goes into labor, Canace is compelled by her nurse—and her shame—to suppress any cry of pain.[66] Death appears before her eyes, as Lucina, the goddess of childbirth, refuses any assistance: "mors erat ante oculos, et opem Lucina negabat" (55). Seeing Canace in this state, Macareus cries,

> "Live, sister, O beloved sister …
> Live, and do not destroy two persons in one!
> Good hope give you strength; for you will be your brother's bride.
> The one who made you a mother will also make you a wife." (55-56).

His words have a profound effect on Canace, who explains to her brother that "by your words I live again" (63). Macareus's marriage pledge functions as a performative utterance, an utterance that is, itself, a performance of an action—rather than a description of one.[67] Moreover, Macareus's promise immediately fulfills the imperative he gives Canace. The force of his *words* makes her live again. And yet a failure of language is what ultimately condemns Canace and her infant child. Canace's father, Aeolus, learns of her secret birth when he hears the child cry.

[66] 52. Subsequent line citations will appear in text. All translations my own.

[67] See: J.L. Austin, *How to do things with Words*, 2nd edition, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

Stunned by her sudden exposure, Canace is unable to speak for her tongue "had grown slack with ice cold fear" (80). Without the use of language Canace loses causal force and becomes caught up in her father's judgement. Gower amends this scene in the *Confession Amantis* by granting Canace speech:

> "Ha mercy! Fader, thenk I am
> Thi child, and of thi blod I cam.
> That I misdede yowthe it made,
> And in the flodes bad me wade,
> Wher that I sih no peril tho.
> Bot now it is befalle so,
> Merci, my fader, do no wreche!" [68]

However, Canace's plea, full of pathos, fails to move her father.[69] Unmoved, Eolus wordlessly responds by sending Canace a sword. Gower's "Tale of Canace and Machaire" is concerned with the linguistic force expressed in Ovid's version of the myth. As Amanda Leff puts it, Gower's tale grapples with the threatening "potential for texts to alter the cultural landscape."[70] Sharing this concern, *The Squire's Tale* expands Gower's cultural landscape to a "global" context to explore how engagement with the Mongols threatens to transform the "local."

The Squire, however, radically departs from the Canace myth. Instead of keeping the myth's Classical setting, the Squire relocates his version to the thirteenth-century court of Chinggis Khan (named Cambyuskan in the tale). Cambyuskan has three children with his wife Elpheta: Algarsyf, his eldest son; Cambalus, his second son (the Squire's Macareus); and his daughter Canacee, the youngest. The incestuous relationship between Canacee and Cambalus is referenced only once, when the Squire promises to eventually "speke of Cambalo, / That faught

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[68] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis,* volume 2, ed. Russell A. Peck (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), lines 225–31.

[69] For more on this topic, see: Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structure of Conversion: A Reading of* Confessio Amantis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), 113.

[70] Amanda Leff, "Writing, Gender, and Power in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Exemplaria* 20.1 (2008), 31.

in lystes with the bretheren two / For Canacee er that he myghte hire wynne" (V. 667–69). The Squire's capitulation around the incest theme is palpable in his syntax. He delays reference to Canacee while positioning Cambalo's competition with the "bretheren two" as the main action of this episode. Furthermore, the Squire distances the possibility of incest by stating that Cambalus *myghte* win Canacee. Cambalus appears romantically interested in Canacee, but the Squire leaves ambiguous whether he succeeds in this endeavor. Canacee's feelings toward her brother are never disclosed. Aside from this reference to potential incest and Canacee's name, *The Squire's Tale* tells an entirely different story than that of Canace and Macareus.[71] The tale is unevenly divided into three sections. Part I details the arrival of a Mamlūk emissary into Cambyuskan's court. The emissary presents the court with four magical gifts, including a ring that allows humans to converse with birds. In Part II, Canacee uses the magical ring to communicate with a lovelorn peregrine falcon. The Squire promises that Part III will cover the history of Cambyuskan's military efforts and the (potentially incestuous) love triangle involving Canacee, Cambalus, and the two unnamed brothers. This final section contains just two lines, ending abruptly mid-sentence.

But like *Heroides* XI and "The Tale of Canace and Machiare," *The Squire's Tale* attunes to the power of human utterance. Throughout the tale Chaucer draws attention not only to Squire's role as narrator, but also to the sound of his narration. As a result, *The Squire's Tale* remakes an oral convention of romance—the presence of a first-person speaker involved in the text's telling—into an aural conceit. I read the Squire not as an awkward, self-conscious poet, but as an orator who is highly conscious of sound's effects within his own narration. The Squire's (often maligned) prosody *sounds* translation. His clunky Middle English reflects the priority of

[71] Though critics have linked the tale to medieval travel narratives (such as *Le Devisement du monde*), it appears original to Chaucer.

his narration: to “commune entente” of a foreign tale (V. 107). The aural breaks in meter also demonstrate how sound transforms the further it travels. Because it is set in the far-off Mongol Empire, the tale grows distant from the English identity asserted by the Squire’s use of English. The loss of English suggests a corresponding loss of Englishness; rather than affirm a projected national identity, the tale’s foreign setting is imagined as a destabilizing border-space. No heavenly voice interrupts the narrative to ratify articulations of difference that favor the Christian/English subject. Instead, the Squire imagines the Mongol court as a space that fundamentally changes English and Englishness. *The Squire’s Tale* thus functions as a sound-story that breaks any illusion of continuity between a national English project and the fantasy of empire present in works like *Roland and Vernagu.*

The Squire as Translator-Poet[72]

The prosody of the *Squire’s Tale* is famously amateurish. Metrically belabored, the tale features clunky rhymes, excessive paralipsis, a disjointed narrative, and an interrupted ending. Confronted with such an aesthetically imperfect text, Derek Pearsall and others have held the Squire accountable for the poem’s stylistic concerns. Flaws in the verse become signs of Chaucer’s deft manipulation. And yet, this understanding of the Squire sits uneasily with his description in *The General Prologue.* Here the Chaucerian narrator mentions that the Squire, though young, possesses a talent for lyric, for “He koude songes make and wel endite” (I. 95). Either singing or flouting “al the day” (I. 91), Squire’s song-making and composition appear

[72] My account of Chaucer’s meter adopts definitions borrowed from the linguistic study of poetics. The following study focuses primarily on poetic *meter,* by which I mean the organizing rhythmic structure of a poem. The abstract metrical template for the pentameter of the *Canterbury Tales* is a pattern of ten unstressed/stressed syllables. This template is visually expressed in the following diagram:

Feet:		I		II		III		IV		V
Position:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Syllable:	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S

competent. *The Squire's Tale* can therefore be read as a poor performance by a competent lyricist. Rather than consider the Squire's poetics as separate from his narrative, the following reads the tale's formal qualities as an aural embodiment—a manifestation of frictive translation. Indeed, *The Squire's Tale* is the only tale from the *Canterbury* corpus that actively signals translation. Unlike the Knight, the Man of Law, the Physician, the Prioress, and the Manciple—the other pilgrims whose tales are set outside of medieval Christendom—the Squire makes visible his position as both poet and translator through his extra-narrative commentary. Paired with the tale's awkward prosody, the Squire's "translator's notes" draw attention to the limitations of translation. The Squire's versification performs a fragmented translation wherein aspects of the other, both textural and cultural, remain untranslatable and thereby disrupt narrative unity.

If not necessarily a bad poet, the Squire is recognizably self-conscious about his performance.[73] As if in anticipation of impending critique, the Squire begins his tale with an apology: "Have me excused," he begs his audience, "if I speke amys" (V. 8). Later, when the Franklin cuts off the Squire he does so with profuse placations: "As to my doom, ther is noon that is heere / Of eloquence that shal be thy peere" (V. 677-78). Simmering alongside the Franklin's sarcasm is a recognition that the Squire must be consoled; a response that indicates the Squire's palpable unease. In addition to marking his nerves, the Squire's anxious affect gestures toward translation. Although questions of authority (textual and otherwise) and the *auctor* have long been staples of translation studies, the scholarship around the affects of both translation and translators in the Middle Ages remains underdeveloped. Though one can imagine a number of plausible translator affects—for example, the rote boredom of a grammar school student practicing Latin—the push in translation studies toward a kind of "normative formalism" has led

[73] See: Derek Pearsall, "The Squire as Story-Teller," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 34 (1964): 84.

scholars like Jacqueline Jenkins to linger over anxiety as the dominant mood.[74] Consideration of a medieval translation anxiety helps account for the Squire's poor performance; moreover, this anxiety seems to dovetail alongside the stakes set up for the medieval translator-poet. The high stakes for poetic translation is expressed early by the Latin Church Father Jerome: "But if any one thinks that the grace of language does not suffer through translation, let him render Homer word for word into Latin. I will go further to say that, if he will translate this author into the prose of his own language, the order of the words will seem ridiculous, and the most eloquent of poets almost dumb." The loss of "grace" through aesthetically poor translations stops up the flow of communication altogether; the poet is silenced, made "almost dumb." Roger Bacon repeats this quote in his *Opus majus,* emphasizing the impediment to knowledge that poor translations provide. "For let any one," Bacon explains, "with an excellent knowledge of some science like logic or any other subject at all strive to turn this into his mother tongue, he will see that he is lacking not only in thoughts, but words, so that no one will be able to understand the science so translated as regards its potency" (71). A bad translation leads ultimately to a loss of "potency."

Such is the charge brought against another of Chaucer's translator-poets. In the prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* the Chaucerian narrator is lambasted by the god of Love for translating his devotional texts (such as the *Romance of the Rose*) into Middle English:

> And thow my foo, and al my folk werreyest,
> And myn olde servauntes throw mysseyest,
> And hynderest hem with thy translacioun,
> And lettest folk from hire devocioun
> To serve me, … (F 322–26).

The narrator is a "foo" of Love for his translations, which have misrepresented Love's original meaning. Love's texts are meant to inspire "devocioun," but the narrator's translations have lead

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people to “holdest it folye/ To serve Love” (F 326–27). Put into “playn text, withouten nede of glose,” these works lose their potency (F 328). Love itself is lost in translation. As a corrective, Love charges the narrator “upon thy lyf” (F 548) to “make the metres” (F 561) of “goode women alle/ And trewe of love” (F 560–61). The narrator must translate these tales well, on pain of death. Though comically exaggerated, Chaucer, like Bacon, identifies translation as central to the accurate and potent transmission of knowledge. The consequences for the Squire’s translation—aside from the Franklin’s ribbing—are undoubtedly more nuanced than the blunt punishment promised by Love in *The Legend of Good Women*. Yet, his anxiety is more tangible.

The Squire’s anxious apology at the beginning of his tale is quite unlike the confident storytelling expressed by many of his fellow pilgrims. The Knight, the Squire’s father, is a ready analogue, commanding his fellow pilgrims to “herkneth what I seye” (I. 855). In part, the Squire’s trepidation addresses the demands of the Host. Called upon to “sey somwhat of love” (V. 2), the Squire preemptively apologizes for any deficiencies his story might have in regard to the requested topic. However, this reading of the Squire’s disclaimer is markedly incongruous with his portrait in the *General Prologue* as “A lovyere and a lusty bacheler” (I. 80). There is little in his description to contradict the Squire’s status as a lover. The fussiness of his hair—“lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse” (I. 81)—is counterbalanced by his “greet strengthe” (I. 84) and the “chyvachie” (I. 86) he displays in “Flaundres, in Artoys, and Pycardie” (I. 86). He is as “fressh as is the month of May” (I. 92) and can sing, dance, draw, and write “weel purtreye” (I. 96). While these attributes may mock the tropes of courtly romance, they do not contradict Chaucer the pilgrim’s concluding remark: “So hoote he lovede that by nyghtertale / He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale” (I. 97–98). By this portrayal it seems unlikely that the Squire would “speke amys” (V. 7) of love. Any deficiencies in form are similarly surprising—the Squire

is not only familiar with writing lyric, he writes it well. The Squire's apology does not seem to refer to his abilities as a lover or a lyricist, but rather his abilities as a translator.

Throughout Part I of *The Squire's Tale*—during which a Mamlūk emissary brings four magical gifts to the court of Cambyuskan—the Squire draws attention to his inability to translate certain aspects of his source material. Most notably, the Squire references the limitations of his translation just before he voices the Mamlūk emissary's speech to the Mongol court. Following the emissary's dramatic entrance into the dining hall of Cambysukan, the Squire prepares his listeners for the ensuing speech by stating,

> He with a manly voys seide his message,
> After the forme used in his langage,
> Withouten vice of silable or of lettre;
> And for his tale sholde seme the bettre (V. 99–102).

Here, the Squire makes visible both another and an *other* language. This other language both indicates that a process of translation has occurred ("his langage" is set apart from Middle English). The emissary, we are told, speaks "After the forme used in his langage" (V. 100), marking his language as other than that of the Squire. Historically, an emissary of the Mamlūk dynasty would have likely spoken Persian, a language familiar to Mongol administrators and the political elite. However, the emissary's language is universally understood by those present to hear it, even among the "lewed peple" (V. 221). Despite the noted multilingualism of the Mongols and the presence of Persian within the empire, the total accessibility of the emissary's speech suggests the (historically inaccurate) fantasy of a common language. Attention to translation is entirely absent from the narrative action—the knight requires no interpreter—and is therefore shown to be the Squire's intervention. The Squire himself alludes to this narrative lack by qualifying the knight's speech as, "After the *forme* used in his langage" (V. 100, my emphasis), instead of *in* his language. The Mamluk emissary and the Mongol court all speak the

same language, the language of the Squire's source material. By drawing attention to the otherness of the emissary's speech, the Squire makes clear his role as translator. Unable to match the style of the original through translation, the Squire commits more simply to "commune entente: / Thus muche amounteth al that evere he mente, / If it so be that I have it in mynde" (V. 107-109). Lost in this translation are the formal qualities of the original speech, noted for being "Withouten vice of silable or of lettre" (V. 101). Therefore, it may be determined that any such "vice" within the Squire's retelling reveals friction between the original and the translation. The Squire's commentary on the formal effects of the knight's speech does as Jacques Derrida suggests in his work on translation. By drawing attention to his own work of translation, the Squire breaks the "economic law of the word, which defines the essence of translation in the strict sense, the normalized, pertinent, or relevant translation."[75]

In order to demonstrate how the prosodic "vice" of *The Squire's Tale* signals translation, a brief summary of Chaucer's meter in *The Canterbury Tales* is necessary for context. Scholars of English prosody generally agree that Chaucer wrote in a form of iambic pentameter that is not identical to the meter's modern iteration, such as that found in the works of Shakespeare. Donka Minkova summarizes this position by stating that what "unifies Chaucer's metre with the pentameter verse written subsequently, is that the abstract pattern has exactly five ictuses," or metrical feet.[76] Minkova goes on to note that if Chaucer's meter is linked to later pentameter through its ictus pattern, the key point where it differs may be identified as monosyllabic flexibility. Speaking of this flexibility, Stephen Ellis observers, "In metre, as in language in

[75] Jacques Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?" translated by Lawrence Venuti in *Critical Inquiry* 27.2 (2001), 181.

[76] Donka Minkova, "The Forms of Verse," in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c. 1350–c. 1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 183.

general, the underlying categories and their surface realization can differ within some well-defined limits."[77] Chaucer's meter therefore allows monosyllables to occupy either a strong or a weak position. Lexical monosyllables—particularly nouns, verbs, and adjectives—gravitate toward strong positions, but can be demoted depending on its placement within the line. The promotion of monosyllables occurs frequently in Chaucer's verse, while demotion is much rarer. Monosyllabic flexibility, particularly in regard to the rare occurrence of demotion, mark moments of metrical exceptionality. While still considered metrical, these promoted and demoted syllables create tension between a written line of text and its sounded rhythm. The Squire's translations feature a highly unusual number of promoted and demoted monosyllables. This metrical "vice" highlights the semantic tension between languages (original and translation) by exaggerating the monolinguistic tension between the "underlying categories and their surface realization" that is a result of translation.

The Squire's translation of the Mamlūk emissary's speech is riddled with both demoted and promoted monosyllables. Indeed, the promotion/demotion of monosyllables emerges as one of the most pervasive "vices" of the emissary's translated speech. Looking at the first ten lines of the emissary's speech, monosyllabic promotion occurs four times. In the same ten-line sample, there are ten instances of monosyllabic demotion. As Minkova asserts, monosyllabic demotion occurs very infrequently in Chaucer's verse.[78] The frequency with which demoted lexical monosyllables appear in theses first ten lines marks the emissary's speech as one that does not conform to the general contour of *The Canterbury Tale*'s versification. Looking more closely at what types of words are demoted, seven of the demoted words are pronouns. While the sample is

[77] Stephen Ellis, *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 149.

[78] Minkova, "The Forms of Verse," 189.

too small to make any definitive claims, the pattern visible in the first ten lines of the speech suggests that the Squire's process of translation demotes Middle English linguistic identity. The demotion of self-identifying words ("my," "me") and words directed at the Squire's English audience ("youre," "yow") defamiliarize the Middle English presentation. The repetition of this effect culminates into a sense of disorientation from the perspective of an English-speaking (and identifying) audience. Additional deviations from Chaucer's abstract metrical template in this selection include: elision (one time), extrametrical lines (five times), and a single instance of an acephalous line. These other metrical exceptions—elision, extrametricality, and acephaly—again highlight the metrical irregularity in the emissary's translated speech, defamiliarizing the normative forms of *The Canterbury Tales*. Cumulatively, the Squire's irregular meter presents translation as a defamiliarizing encounter.

The Squire's irregular metrics actively signal translation and, as a result, persistently recall his earlier commentary on the limitations of translation. This dual recollection—the fact of translation and the Squire's comments on that fact—present translation as an inherently fragmentary process. The unity of the Squire's narrative is disrupted by the frequent reminders of its status as a work of frictive (not word-by-word) translation. As Derrida posits, a translator's note breaks from the "economic law of the word." It then follows that, "Wherever the unity of the word is threatened or put into question, it is not only the operation of translation that finds itself compromised; it is also the concept, the definition, and the very axiomatics, the idea of translation that must be considered."[79] The Squire's notes on translation suggest an interest in foregrounding this untranslatability. Zrinka Stahuljak has shown both that translation "in the Middle Ages was a crossroads of multilingual and multicultural contacts and encounters" and

[79] Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 181.

that “untranslatability is embedded in a multicultural, plurilinguistic society.”[80] Stahuljak also states that, “While it extracts from obscurity, translation at the same time decomposes and prevents a return to the origin, it places that which it extracted back into obscurity. Such is the double bind of translation: in unveiling, it veils.”[81] The Squire’s irregular meter and his translator's notes draws attention to translation’s double bind in *The Squire’s Tale*. The double bind of translation stages cross-cultural contact between the Squire’s Christian English audience and an Eastern Other. Alan Ambrisco has similarly argued that the Squire employs rhetorical *occupatio,* paralipsis, to facilitate this East-West encounter. According to Ambrisco, the Squire’s excessive use of *occupation* evacuate “the Mongols from the ‘middle’ ground between marvelous Mamluk emissary and Chaucer’s English audience.”[82] In such a reading, *The Squire’s Tale* elides frictive contact (the “middle ground”) in favor of a fantasy of cultural acquisition (the English audience presented with marvel). By contrast, the metrical “vice” done to the Squire’s verse as a result of translation indicates that the contact is one marked by friction, a formal manifestation of the double bind.[83]

Embodying the West: The Falcon and Frictive Encounter

[80] Zrinka Stahuljak, “An Epistemology of Tension: Translation and Multiculturalism,” in *The Translator* 10.1 (2004): 33–57; 46.

[81] Stahuljak, “An Epistemology of Tension: Translation and Multiculturalism,” 44.

[82] Alan Ambrisco, “‘It lyth nat in my tonge’: Occupatio and Otherness in the *Squire’s Tale,*” *The Chaucer Review* 38.3 (2004): 205–228; 214.

[83] Though beyond the scope of the present study, I see resonances between the Squire’s position within the text and Zrinka Stahuljak’s treatment of medieval fixers. For more on medieval fixers, see: Zrinka Stahuljak, “Medieval Fixers: Politics of Interpreting in Western Historiography,” in *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics, Politics, Theory,* ed. Emma Campbell and Robert Mills, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer (2012).

The same irregular metrical signs of translation occur in the speech of the Mongol princess Canacee in Part II of the tale. Looking at a similar sample of text—the first ten lines of Canacee's opening speech—there occur nine instances of demoted lexical monosyllables, one instance of elision, three instances of extrametricality, and a single acephalous line. The speeches of Canacee and the Mamluk emissary share a similar pattern of metrical "vice." Canacee's speech, it would seem, is a performance of translation. Canacee begins her speech by asking the falcon, "Is this for sorwe of deeth or los of love?" (450). Juxtaposed against the conventional meter of the Squire's in the preceding line ("Quod Canacee unto this hauk above"), the metrical "vice" of Canacee's speech presents a moment of striking friction between the semantic meaning of the line and its realization. In order for the line to scan, the disyllabic "sorwe" must be elided with the word "of," which occupies a weak metrical position within the line. The elision is an awkward one. The final 'e' of "sorwe" is an unstressed schwa (an open 'e', pronounced like the 'a' in *bag*). While also open, the short 'o' in the word "of" is pronounced "ough," as in the word *bought.* The vowel clash between 'e' and 'o' results in the loss of the voiced 'e', as the word "of" occupies its own metrical position. As a result, "sorwe" becomes a monosyllabic voicing. Through this reading of metrical elision, the Middle English disyllabic "sorwe" is aurally replaced by the antiquated Old English word *sorh* (of the same meaning). Through the demands of translation (Canacee's Mongolian verse into metered English), the Squire's modern Middle English momentarily recalls its archaic and outmoded form. The slippage between "sorwe" and *sorh* performs an etymological link, a kind of English language genealogy.

The relationship between translation and etymology appears to be one of displacement. The doubling of "sorwe" with *sorh* interrupts the cross-cultural linguistic contact expressed through the Squire's imperfect translation. When *sorh* is voiced, the metrical "vice" of the line no

longer signifies the translation of the Mongolian source into Middle English verse. Instead, the tension between "sorwe" and the metrical performance of *sorh* is resolved as an intralinguistic genealogy, the direct and traceable lineage of the words. The Squire's etymological play shifts his position within the text. If irregular meter marks the Squire as a translator, sorwe/sorh makes visible his own poetic intervention. In his influential study on medieval poetics, Eugene Vance argues that "medieval poets subscribe not to the ontological autonomy of the poem but rather to its deep relational networks within a larger field of being."[84] Put another way, poets in the late Middle Ages, "had deep convictions about the interaction between poetry and history: poetry is not a passive mirror of reality, but an agent *in* reality" (268).[85] The Squire—as the meter of his tale suggests—is both translator and poet. As translator, the Squire mediates the turbulent confrontation between the ontological boundary between East and West. As poet, the Squire displays an interest in situating his work within an insular linguistic genealogy. The two positions are layered within the text. The irregular elision of "sorowe" occurs during Canacee's speech, thereby signaling translation. Conversely, *sorh* is only metrically voiced. In other words, *sorh* is sounded through the performance of the line and, thus, denotes the poetic (structural) voice of the text. Vance's point helps articulate how the Squire uses his dual roles to expand and complicate the tale as a cross-cultural contact zone. The irregular meter becomes a signal of frictive contact and an expression of how monocultural investment might displace this friction.

Up to this point, I have considered the Squire as both translator and poet primarily in terms of his meter. The ontological shifts observable in the Squire's meter are also present in the

[84] Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages,* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 268.

[85] Vance, *Mervelous Signals,* 268.

generic shifts of his tale. Leslie Kordecki has noted that *The Squire's Tale* vacillates between the othering conventions of medieval travel narrative and the mode of romance, "that distinguishes itself in its normative review of human history and human possibility."[86] According to Kordecki, the tale adjusts "to the genre of romance, not travelogue, in that it highlights the magical other" over the orientalized Eastern other.[87] Kordecki maps the generic shifts of the tale onto the figure of the peregrine falcon. For Kordecki, the falcon's status as a magical other supersedes its familiar animal reference. In the following, I linger on the falcon as a recognizable figure. The falcon, as Kordecki's work demonstrates, has been productively discussed in terms of her relationship to the genre of romance. In addition, the falcon and her tale offer several alternative points of recognition and identification for the Squire's audience: the falcon as represented in Western falconry literature, the falcon's religion, and the falcon's language.

Beryl Rowland has observed the pervasiveness of animal imagery in the literatures circulating in fourteenth-century England.[88] Animals appeared in a diverse array of texts ranging from encyclopedias and natural histories to romances, homilies, and travel narratives. Rowland reveals that the frequency with which animals appear suggests that, within later medieval literature, "Th**e** fact that an animal could have multiple and very opposite meanings was not considered confusing."[89] In terms of contemporary critical discourse, Rowland's work may serve as a reminder of an animal's multiple significations. The falcon's status as a mythical other does not necessarily detract from its ontological status. Indeed, as Sara Gutmann has recently

[86] Leslie Kordecki *Ecofeminist Subjectivities: Chaucer's Talking Birds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 80.

[87] Kordecki, *Ecofeminist Subjectivities,* 78.

[88] Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1971).

[89] Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts*, 4.

observed, the Squire draws attention to the falcon's exemplary avian qualities. In her study of the tale, Gutmann states that the Squire's falcon is "described as the ideal hunting bird."[90] Unparalleled in beauty, the falcon's "plumage" (V. 426) and "shap" are posited as "al that myghte yrekened be" (V. 427). The phrase "al that myghte yrekened be" (V. 427) alludes to a standard of assessment by which the Squire may render the falcon's image comprehensible to his audience. The physical perfection of the falcon *qua* falcon recalls the conventions of medieval literature on falconry. Thus, the falcon is comprehensible by Western schemas of knowing; it requires no translation.

When the Squire first relates the physical characteristics of the falcon, he mentions that "A faucon peregryn thanne semed she" (V. 428). The Squire uses the language of categorical assessment to describe the falcon. The falcon never designates her own particular breed; instead, the Squire determines that a "peregryn thanne semed she" based upon her physical appearance. It is only by first discerning her "plumage" (V. 426) and "shap" (V. 427) that the Squire is then able to name her breed. The Squire thus enacts a convention of falconry literature: classification. In *De arte venandi cum avibus,* for instance, Frederick II spends several chapters outlining the defining characteristics of an ideal specimen of peregrine falcon. Of a peregrine falcon's plumage, Frederick II writes that "All flight and contour feathers are everywhere flat, smooth, and closely applied to the body."[91] Regarding the peregrine falcon's shape, Frederick II includes such details as, "The distance from one shoulder to the other equals the width of the back."[92]

[90] Sara Gutman, "Chaucer's Chicks: Feminism and Falconry in 'The Knight's Tale,' 'The Squire's Tale,' and *The Parliament of Fowls,* in *Rethinking Chaucerian Beasts,* edited by Carolynn Van Dyke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 76.

[91] Frederick II, *The Art of Falconry,* trans. and eds. Casey A. Wood and F. Marjorie Fyfe (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1943), 122.

[92] Frederick II, *The Art of Falconry,* 122.

Similar categorizations may be found in the twelfth-century treatises of Gerardus Falconarius and Guillelmus Falconarius and in popular thirteenth-century encyclopedias, such as the works of Vincent of Beauvais and Albertus Magnus. The Squire's assessment of the falcon depends upon a knowledge of these types of sources. In addition, the falcon's gender underscores the connection with medieval falconry and hunting practices, as female birds were the ones used to hunt. The Squire's description of the bird, and his assessment of its breed, thereby makes his tale contiguous with other predominant modes of falconry literature. The Squire's tale begins where these other texts leave off. By positioning his falcon as an extenuation of descriptive falconry literature, the Squire renders the falcon a recognizable and familiar figure, a point of identification amidst the tale's foreign setting.

The familiarity of the falcon does not appear to be an accidental detail. Rather, the Squire seems to exaggerate this familiarity in order to situate the falcon as a figure with whom his audience might identify. The Squire makes clear that the falcon is "Of fremde land" (V. 429), a foreigner within the Mongol court. While the falcon's homeland is never specified, the Squire suggests that she comes from the Christian West. Within the tale, the Mongol setting broadly signals the concept of East.[93] If the setting of the tale already occupies "fremde land," the text raises the possibility that the falcon's homeland is one familiar to the Squire's English audience. The foreignness of the Mongol court for the Canterbury pilgrims is matched by Canacee's recognition of the peregrine falcon as foreign to her. Foreign to Canacee, the falcon becomes familiar to the pilgrims. This familiarity is underscored by the falcon's identity as a Christian. Claiming veracity, the falcon punctuates the recitation of her story with the phrase, "Seint John to borwe" (V. 596). By citing Saint John as her "borwe," her guarantor, the falcon makes explicit

[93] Kathryn Lynch, "East Meets West in Chaucer's Squire's and Franklin's Tales," in *Rethinking Chaucerian Beasts,* edited by Carolynn Van Dyke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 86.

her Christian identity. The falcon is, therefore, a Christian foreigner in the Mongol court. Just as the Mongol court of the *Squire's Tale* ontologically signals East, the falcon's foreignness embodies the Christian West, at least in part. As a figure of the Christian West, the falcon introduces a reciprocity in the Squire's translation project. The translation transposes the Mongol narrative into Middle English and the falcon transposes a Western ontology into the Mongol narrative. Finally, as I will demonstrate shortly, the easy alignment between the falcon's meter and Chaucer's abstract metrical template indicates that the falcon speaks in Middle English.

Following Canacee's initial speech, she and the falcon communicate through the use of a magic ring. The Squire, however, specifies that this communication does not occur in Canacee's language. "The point," according to Kordecki, "is that the ring does not translate the bird's chirps into human language, not exactly; it more accurately enables a human to speak a nonhuman's language."[94] The Squire makes clear that the dialogue between Canacee and the falcon occurs "in hir haukes ledene" (V. 478), but the language of the falcon is itself never specified. The positioning of the falcon as a figure of the Christian West, coupled with the meter of her speech, makes available the possibility that the falcon speaks in a language that the Squire does not need to translate. Unlike the uneasy disjuncture between the rhythm of Canacee's speech and the abstract metrical template of *The Canterbury Tales*, the falcon's speech is easily mapped to the template. The opening couplet of the falcon's speech is representative of her smooth, regular rhythm. It scans as follows:

W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S
Ther	I	was	bred — a		llas,	that	ilk	e	day!—
W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S

[94] Kordecki *Ecofeminist Subjectivities: Chaucer's Talking Birds,* 78.

And fos tred in a roche of mar bul gray

The steady pattern of weak and strong syllables are remarkably consistent throughout the falcon's speech. Examining a ten-line sample of her speech shows only six minor emendations to the abstract metrical template. These emendations appear in the form of elision, monosyllabic promotion/demotion, and extrametricality, the latter being the result of two instances of sounded final -e. Easily scanned elision only occurs once at line 504 (between "dwelte" and "a"). The consistency of the falcon's meter is striking when compared to the irregularity of the translated speeches belonging to the Mamluk emissary and Canacee. If irregularity signals translation, the metrical regularity (the absence of "vice") of the falcon's speech signals *untranslated* text. The Squire and the falcon, it would seem, speak the same language: Middle English.

The Squire's falcon speech is notable for its (decidedly) unmusical quality. Though her speech smoothly conforms to Chaucer's meter, the falcon does not sing. The falcon's lack of song is at odds with the typical treatment of bird noise in Middle English poetry. Amongst the speaking birds in *The Parliament of Fowls*—whose ranks include the crane "with his trompes soun" (343) and the "janglynge pye" (344)—it is a prime insult to suggest that another bird "can ne synge" (516). Other poems—including John Clanvowe's *The Book of Cupid, God of Love or The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* and *The Owl and the Nightingale*—illustrate how the qualities of bird-speech were conventionally linked to beautiful music in poems that feature anthropomorphic birds. In *The Owl and the Nightingale* the Owl, herself not a songbird, notably declares that she too can sing beautifully: "ich singe efne, / Mid fulle dreme & lude stefne." Conversely, the Squire's falcon has a markedly human and "pitous voys" (V. 412). She does not sing her lament, but rather "evere in oon she cryde alwey and shrighte" (V. 417). This is particularly surprising given the falcon's gendered status as a scorned female lover. According to

Elizabeth Leach, medieval writers preoccupied with aural aesthetics "often marked beautiful but immoral music as feminine."[95] She goes on to argue that the feminization of beautiful music was treated by these writers as a form of irrationality "through the use of feminine birds in moral critiques of music." It is thus ironic that the peregrine falcon does not sing. In *The Parliament of Fowls,* the shouting of the eagles sound as song to the narrator. Even without the use of Canacee's ring, the falcon's cries and shrieks cannot be mistaken for music. Unlike the onomatopoeic bird noise that appears in *The Parliament of Fowls* ("Kek kek! kokkow!")*,* the Squire is careful to assign the falcon a "voys" (498).

This point is emphasized by Canacee's inability to fully comprehend the falcon. If the Squire and the falcon speak the same language, it is a language that Canacee can only access through translation via the intervention of the Mamlūks magic ring. Canacee misunderstands the falcon's lovesickness as a physical ailment. The falcon complains of her unfaithful lover and yet Canacee responds with a practicality that evokes the early English writings on falconry. Not knowing how she "myghte the faucon glade" (V. 634), Canacee instead focuses on doctoring the bird's self-inflicted wounds:

> softely in plastres gan hire wrappe,
> Ther as she with hire beek hadde hurt hirselve.
> Now kan nat Canacee but herbes delve
> Out of the ground, and make salves newe
> Of herbes preciouse and fyne of hewe
> To heelen with this hauk. … (V. 636–641).

Canacee wraps the falcon is plaster and busies herself by making salves with which to treat her external wounds. The designation of these salves as "newe" (V. 639) indicates that they are being made specifically to the demands of the bird's ailments. In other words, these salves are made to

[95] Elizabeth Leach, *Sung Birds: Music, Nature, and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 239.

address the particular needs of a physically wounded falcon. Canacee's practical approach evokes early English falconry literature because, as Robin Oggins writes, "No tradition of writings on falconry existed in the ancient Western world because falconry as such was unknown in antiquity. This lack of a literary tradition may well explain why early writings on falconry are practical, concerned largely with treatments for ailments in hawks."[96] Similarly, Canacee's response suggests that she too lacks a literary tradition by which to address the mode and tropes of Western courtly romance. Canacee's unknowing ("Now kan nat") of the conventions of courtly romance points toward translation as a fragmentary practice.

Unable to fully "read" the falcon's tale, to translate its meaning, Canacee attempts to inscribe the foreign bird within a familiar field of knowing. Canacee responds to the inequity posed by cross-cultural contact—the literal inability to count word-by-word between the falcon's language and her own—by physically capturing the bird. The bird, by Canacee's reading, is physically ill and therefore she treats it as such. Forcibly, she encloses its narrative within her own translation of its wants. Tellingly, Canacee adorns the falcon's cage with a painted taxonomy of birds—"tidyves, tercelettes, and owles" (V. 648)—as if to write over any alternative significations that the falcon might carry. Thus, Canacee mediates contact with the Christian West through a program of enclosure and evacuation. The Christian other is replaced by the more familiar animal other. Canacee's mediation dramatizes the friction of cross-cultural contact. For, as we learn, the falcon is never just a falcon.

Despite Canacee's efforts to enclose meaning, the Squire states that the falcon's romance continues until she "gat hire love ageyn" (V. 654). Here, the Squire seems to posit that even violent modes of translation, embodied by the falcon's physical capture, are imperfect and

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[96] Robin Oggins, *The Kings and Their Hawks: Falconry in Medieval England* (New Haven:Yale University Press, 2004), 1.

incomplete. *The Squire's Tale* cuts off before the Squire can finish speaking. However, he does hint at how the falcon's story will eventually conclude. After wrapping up his discussion of the falcon's imprisonment, the Squire remarks:

> Thus lete I Canacee hir hauk kepyng;
> I wol namoore as now speke of hir ryng
> Til it come eft to purpos for to seyn
> How that this faucon gat hire love ageyn
> Repentant, as the storie telleth us,
> By mediacion of Cambalus,
> The kynges sone, of which I yow tolde (V. 651–57).

Before turning to the falcon's fate, it is helpful to consider how the Squire summarizes the Canacee-falcon encounter. The Squire, specifying that he "wol namoore as now speke of hir ryng," intimates that the story he just told is *about* the ring's translation abilities. The story's "translator" thus becomes its central figure; and by making the ring a kind of protagonist, the Squire draws even more attention to his own role as his tale's translator. After all, the Squire's metanarrative function is exactly that of the magic ring: he translates.

By configuring his narrative around himself as translator, the Squire mirrors how *Le devisement du monde* discusses Marco Polo's importance within the Mongol court (and the text). The prologue to *Le devisement* celebrates Polo's facility with language, stating "that Marco, Messer Niccolò's son, learned the Tartars' customs, languages, and writing so well that it was a marvel: for I tell you in all truth that not long after coming to the great lord's court, he learned to read and write [four] languages."[97] Within the world of Kubilai Khan's wonderous court, Polo is *himself* a marvel—a distinction that works to equalize the imbalance of wealth and power between Latinate Europe and the Mongol Empire. The Squire, like Polo, attempts to control the

[97] Polo, *Le devisement du monde,* trans. Sharon Kinoshita, 10.

space of Mongol power by underscoring the important work of his translation; he is just as magical as Canacee's ring.

Although the Squire positions himself as a marvel within his tale, his tale continues to undercut an imperial translation project. In his summary remarks on the falcon's romance, the Squire further troubles the work of cross-cultural translation by subtly alluding to the Canace myth. As expressed in the passage above, the Squire promises the magic ring's return; only he implies that Cambalus, not Canacee, will be the one to use it. Cambalus, by means of the ring, eventually comes to mediate the falcon's reconciliation with her tercelet lover. The ring's movement—from Canacee to Cambalus—intimates a mode of translation even more threatening than Canacee's attempt to violently inscribe the falcon. Cambalus's reappearance in the context of courtly love recalls the Man of Law's indictment against the "wikke ensample of Canacee, / That loved hir owen brother synfully" (II. 78-79). While no incest occurs directly within *The Squire's Tale*, the Squire does mention that Cambalus's romantic interest in Canacee. Even more, the Squire gives enough information about the Canacee-Cambalus romance to draw comparison with the falcon's thwarted love. Like the falcon, Cambalus's love experiences interference from a competitor. The similarities between Cambalus and the falcon make translation fraught. Given his own "wikke" love, what is the character of Cambalus's mediation? The falcon's happy ending is colored by Cambalus's mediating translation. Less violent, it would seem, than Canacee's cage, Cambalus's influence is all the more dangerous for its insidiousness. It should be noted that neither Ovid's *Heroides* XI nor Gower's "Tale of Canace and Machaire" particularly condemn the incestuous relationship between Canace and her brother. Katerina Philippides, for one, has effectively shown how differently Ovid treats the incest in *Heroides* XI from his other, more

negative, incest narratives.[98] This is not the case for the Squire. Before the Squire is even called upon to speak, the Man of Law already condemns the incestuous relationship of the Canacee tale. Moreover, Cambalus's successful intervention in the falcon's romance suggests that he is likewise capable of mediating a successful outcome for his own romance. Romance itself, first embodied by the falcon, thus transforms through the reciprocal porosity of translation.

Translation in *The Squire's Tale* is a messy and uneven project. The irregular meter of the Squire's translation and Canacee's failure to recode the falcon within familiar ontological boundaries demonstrate how cross-cultural contact introduces gaps between meaning, intent, and knowing. The attempts of the Squire and Canacee to fully know the other, to make the other *mean,* reveal both the impossibility of this kind of cultural translation as well as the friction that goes along with it. Translation manifests within the tale as moments of tension and violence (violence of meter, violence of enclosure). In her 2005 ethnographic study of global contact zones, Anna Tsing states that moments of challenge at frontier borders tend to produce both chaos and "the technical, sensuous features of such chaos." The materialization of chaos is so extreme that this disorientation "itself becomes a historical agent, drawing people and landscapes in its path."[99] Tsing's work, though anachronistic, helps to articulate the significance of the tale's poor poetry. As critics have long noted, *The Squire's Tale* is an uneven, irregular, and fragmented text. These tensions are not the result of the Squire's inexperience; rather, as Tsing puts it, they are the "technical, sensuous features" of the tale's cross-cultural contact.[100]

[98] Katerina Philippides, "Canacee Misunderstood: Ovid's *Heroides* XI," *Mnemosyne* 49 (1996), 430.

[99] Ann Tsing, *Friction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 43.

[100] Tsing, *Friction*, 43.

The tale's abrupt ending is, thus, a fitting conclusion. *The Squire's Tale* ends mid-sentence, with no explanation given. As a result, the reader is forced to confront the tale as a fragment. Moreover, the reader is forced to confront the tale as a fragment that is incapable of ever reaching completion. The Squire gestures toward the epic scope that his narrative will take, promising to "telle yow of Cambyuskan, / That in his tyme many a citee wan" (661-2); and, "Algarsif, / How that he wan Theodora to his wif" (663-4); and finally, "Cambalo, / That faught in lystes with the bretheren two / For Canacee er that he myghte hire wynne" (667-9). The jarring contrast between the Squire's promise and the tale's abrupt end is, in effect, disorienting. Positioning the text as other, the ending of *The Squire's Tale* causes the reader to mimetically experience the shock of fragmentary, unwhole, encounter. The entirety of the Squire's attempt at cross-cultural contact is abandoned by the framing text of *The Canterbury Tales.* The Squire's frictive, potentially violent, project is cut off with only the falcon's narrative concluded. The falcon, the stand in for the Christian West, is the only figure (the Squire included) who is rescued from the inconclusive project of cross-cultural encounter. Through conclusion, the falcon has been extracted from the Squire's inconclusive project of translation. Reunited with her tercelet, she remains safe within the familiar boundaries of Western romance.

Chapter two marks the end of my European case studies, with the *Squire's Tale* functioning as an apt transition between my European and Chinese corpora. The *Squire's Tale*, as I have argued, uses discordance to correct for translation's destructive tendencies by asserting an "impassable barrier" between Englishness and a Mongol other. In chapter three I explore the cross-cultural encounters and exchanges between the Mongols and their native Chinese subjects within the Yuan dynasty. The chapter begins with a study of the *Secret History of the Mongols*, the official Mongol record of the Yeke Mongγol Ulus. As with the *Squire's Tale*, the *Secret*

History is preoccupied by the forms of cross-cultural friction produced by empire. In response, I argue that the text develops a universalizing politics of touch, one that attempts to dissolve such cultural barriers as part of a program of conquest and control.

INTERLUDE

Imperial Hapticity I: The *Secret History of the Mongols*

Chapter two considered Chaucer's aural poetics in the *Man of Law's Tale* and the *Squire's Tale* as a caution against forms of historiography that represent the Mongol polity as a site of marvel and wonder. At stake in Chaucer's work is the idea that the genre of marvel writing reassuringly "fixes" the Mongols as a remote curiosity, and not as a mobile force. The Mongols are much closer—threateningly so—than they may appear. The present interlude and chapter three, however, reapproach Mongol imperialism through the intimacy of touch. Unlike sight and sound, which necessitate distance from the sensory object in order to be coherent, touch collapses the space between the sensing body and the cause of sensation. Touch is intersubjective, it moves between subjects, connecting them through the simultaneity of feeling and being felt. Using an intersubjective model, the present chapter attempts to build a case study around the political work of touch from two cultural perspectives. The first part of the chapter focuses on the relationship between touch and imperial ideology in *The Secret History of the Mongols,* the official Mongol historiography of Chinggis Khan's life and reign. The second part of the chapter looks at the *Yuanshi,* the Chinese dynastic history of the Mongol Yuan empire. Together the two histories form a representation of imperial hapticity. On one hand, *The Secret History* develops a strategy of universalizing touch, touch that makes bodies into imperial citizens; and on the other, the *Yuanshi* both captures the experience of being touched by empire and develops a form of political resistance by limiting the scope of Mongol touch.

Imperial Touch: *The Secret History of the Mongols*

In 1231, while campaigning against the Liao dynasty in Northwest China, Ögödei Khan fell violently ill. Having likely suffered an alcohol-induced stroke[1], the newly elected *khagan* was incapacitated by his ailments—leaving vulnerable not only his troops, but the entire Mongol polity. Indeed, the incident is attested as a moment of political crisis by the thirteenth-century Mongol historiography, *The Secret History of the Mongols*. By 1231 the Mongols had been at war with the Northern Chinese states for nearly two decades; but as the *Secret History* makes clear, the Northern people were much harder to subdue than their armies. It is through this context that the text explains the cause of Ögödei's illness: matching the rage of their people, the spirit-lords of the invaded lands have taken vengeance against the body of the *khagan.* To appease these spirits, the shamans and soothsayers of Ögödei's court agree that either the *khagan* or one of his kinsmen must die. At this climactic moment in the text, Prince Tolui, Chinggis Khan's[2] youngest son and Ögödei's younger brother, offers himself as sacrifice. Tolui explains that the fate of the empire rests with Ögödei, for he was the one their father chose "as one would *choose* a gelding, feeling you as one would *feel* a wether *to make sure it is fat*."[3] Through Tolui the *Secret History* articulates a relationship between touch—the experience of feeling and being felt—and justified political rule. The present chapter considers this relationship as an aesthetic

[1] The incident is attested in the *Secret History of the Mongols* and Rashīd al-Dīn's *Compendium of Chronicles.* Ögödei was a notoriously heavy drinker, leading scholars like Igor de Rachewiltz and Thomas Allsen to posit that the illness was likely alcohol related (seemingly an alcohol-induced stroke). For a short study, see: Thomas T. Allsen, "Ögedei and Alcohol," *Mongolian Studies* 29 (2007): 3–12.

[2] The title *khagan* was formalized only after Chinggis's death.

[3] Igor de Rachewiltz, trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 2. All subsequent citations will be taken from the same edition and appear in-text for ease of reference.

[3] Rachewiltz, "Commentary," in *The Secret History of the Mongols,* 204.

program[4] of the *Secret History.* In the following I argue that the text develops a haptic epistemology, a way of cognizing empire and conquest via touch.

Haptic, or tactile, epistemology is a term borrowed from postcolonial studies.[5] As originally conceived, haptic epistemology is a discursive tool that helps expose how socio-political power structures are encoded within the feeling body.[6] For scholars like Laura Marks, Milena Marinkova, and Sarah Ahmed, an aesthetic based on such an epistemology holds an emancipatory potential for bodies caught up in colonial regimes.[7] The *Secret History of the Mongols* was likely composed as the official record of Chinggisid rule, charting the formation and expansion of the Mongol empire under Chinggis and Ögödei Khan. The *Secret History* offers no postcolonial recuperation: it is a cultural product deeply embedded within imperial structures of power. Therefore, I read the haptic aesthetics of the text as part of an ideological formation—the development of a coercive epistemology that imagines touch as a way to broadly legitimize Mongol rule. As suggested by the narration of Ögödei's 1231 illness, the epistemic project of the text centers around the Mongol conquest of the Northern Chinese dynasties. The issue was certainly salient at the time of the text's original composition. The Jin dynasty fell to the Mongol-Song alliance in 1234. Kublai Khan conquered the Southern Song dynasty in 1279, thereby reunifying China for the first time since the dynastic fractures of the tenth century.

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[4] Here I follow Jennifer Fisher's recuperation of the term "aesthetic" as both a performative practice and a morphology of feeling, as it has to do with sense perception. See: Jennifer Fisher, "Relational Sense: Towards A Haptic Æsthetics," *Parachute* 87 (1997), 4.

[5] Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 138–145.

[6] Marks, *The Skin of the Film,* 152–153.

[7] See: Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Milena Marinkova, *Michael Ondaatje: Haptic Aesthetics and Micropolitical Writing* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011); Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).

Ultimately, I posit that the aesthetics of touch expose how the *Secret History* is coextensive with Kublai Khan's use of Tibetan Buddhism as an imperial tool for a reunified China under foreign rule.

The *Secret History* contains 282 sections and, following the Chinese tradition of the text, is typically divided into twelve chapters. The first ten chapters narrate Chinggis's boyhood, his rise to power, and his reign, whereas the final two are limited to Chinggis's late campaigns into Northern China and the early years of Ögödei's rule. For this reason, scholars of the text tend to assign its composition in two parts: the first (chapters 1–10) in 1228 after Chinggis's death, and the second (chapters 11–12) sometime before 1268. The issue of dating the *Secret History,* however, is hotly contested, with some historians arguing in favor of a unitary text completed anywhere from 1251 to as late as 1324.[8] This ambiguity reflects the textual transmission of the *Secret History,* which stems from Ming-era scholars who transcribed and translated a now lost Uighur-script version into Classical Chinese after the fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1368. These scholars renamed the text *Yuanchao Mishi* 元朝秘史 (*The Secret History of the Yuan Dynasty*), thereby placing *The Secret History* within the broader history of Chinese imperialism.[9] All surviving editions of the *Yuanchao Mishi* derive from two sources: A printed edition in twelve chapters (ca. 1403–1405) and the *Yuanchao Mishi* included in the monumental *Yongle Dadian* 永

[8] See: Christopher Atwood, "The Date of the 'Secret History of the Mongols' Reconsidered," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 37 (2007), 1–48.

[9] The *Yuanchao Mishi* was not intended to function as the official history of the Yuan dynasty. In addition to the *Yuanchao Mishi,* the Ming court commissioned the Bureau of History to compile an official history, which was completed in 1370. The historian Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381) oversaw the project, consulting Mongol documents that likely included *The Secret History*. Known as the *Yuanshi* 元史 (*History of Yuan*), the history includes imperial biographies (including pre-Yuan rulers), legal and military treatises, and the biographies of other notable figures. However, the document was quickly pulled together and has been critiqued since the Qing period for its inaccuracies.

樂大典 encyclopedia (originally compiled between 1403–1408, extant in sixteenth century copies), which has fifteen chapters.

I generally follow the formulation proposed by Igor de Rachewiltz: that the text was originally composed in 1228, expanded before 1251, and heavily amended during the reign of Kublai Khan.[10] A literary analysis of the text's varying conceptualizations of empire supports this approach. *The Secret History* alternates between three distinct narrative modes: narrative prose, epic verse, and gnomic verse. This vacillation in form—from prose to epic and gnomic verse—is endemic to the project of establishing a singular Mongol identity. Because the multivalent structure of the *Secret History* is entirely without precedent in Mongolian historiography, Chris Halperin has suggested that the unusual composition likely resulted from an effort to assimilate new polities into the Mongolian empire.[11] Building from Halperin's argument, the shifting haptic epistemology of the *Secret History* demonstrates how the Chinggis and Ögödei sections differ in their approach to unification within the empire. Chapters 1–10 aestheticize touch as an extension of Mongol Shamanism and Quanzhen Daoism. Chapter 12 marks a shift in how touch is represented, responding to new demands for a religiopolitical ideology with the power to forcibly integrate the conquered Chinese dynasties within the larger Mongol polity. The text's move toward a Tibetan Buddhist modality of touch suggests a date that corresponds with Kublai Khan's political ascension from 1250–1253. It is during this period that Kublai was introduced to the Tibetan monk 'Phags-pa lama (1235–1280) and converted to Buddhism. My argument hinges on a bifurcated reading of *The Secret History.* It is a text written in two parts, reflecting two distinct cultural-historical moments. The first part of the text, depicting Chinggis's life and reign,

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[10] See Rachewiltz's "Introduction" to his translation of the *Secret History of the Mongols.*

[11] Charles Halperin, "The Missing Golden Horde Chronicles and Historiography in the Mongol Empire," *Mongolian Studies* 23 (2000): 2.

reflects a very real institutional investment in Daoism as a tool for synthesizing ethnocultural difference among the nomadic tribes of the Mongolian plateau. The second, draws from Tibetan Buddhist traditions to explain Mongol dynastic rule in China.

Singular Touch

Western scholars have long remarked upon the religious tolerance of the Mongol polity. In a footnote to *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire,* Edward Gibbons muses that "a singular conformity may be found between the religious laws of Zingis Khan and of Mr. Locke."[12] This tradition however, has tended to overstate the matter. Chinggis Khan and his successors neither imagined nor implemented a complete separation of religious institutions and ideologies from political ones. Religious tolerance was, in part, institutionalized because native Shamanism accommodated foreign religions as "branches of Mongolian pantheistic teachings"[13]; therefore, the suppression of other religions was felt to be unnecessary. The priests and monks of these foreign religions were also considered by the Mongols as *boes,* or shamans, themselves. Moreover, texts like William of Rubruck's *Mission* make clear the imperial strategy behind religious tolerance. William depicts Möngke Khan entertaining spiritual advisors from an array of religions in order, ultimately, to mitigate dissent.[14] Non-native religions impacted both policy and ideology within the Mongol Empire. In the following I will explain how, of these religions, Quanzhen Daoism and Tibetan Buddhism hold particular importance. I do not deny the presence

[12] Edward Gibbons notes that the Mongols "anticipated the lessons of philosophy" by creating a system of "perfect toleration." Quoted in David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1986), 41.

[13] Sechin Jagchid, "The Mongol Khans and Chinese Buddhism and Taoism," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 2 (1979), 7.

[14] See, especially, chapter XXXIV. Peter Jackson, trans., *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His journey to the court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1990).

of native shamanism in the text, its founding mythologies and descriptions of material practices and ceremonies centralize Tengrinism. Rather, my claim is that the philosophies of Quanzhen Daoism and Tibetan Buddhism had a part in shaping how Chinggis and Kublai (who was himself a practicing Buddhist) justified their rule within two distinct historical moments, the early formation of the Mongol Empire and Kublai Khan's conquest of the Chinese dynasties.

During his lifetime Chinggis Khan favored Quanzhen 全真 (literally, "all true") Daoism, and was particularly drawn to its focus on *neidan* 內丹 (internal alchemy) practice. Quanzhen, the first Daoist monastic order, was founded in Northern China around the year 1170. Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (1113–1170), the principal founder of Quanzhen, was himself known for his alchemical *neidan* practice. The doctrine of Quanzhen internal alchemy pursues self-cultivation through a range of physical, spiritual, and intellectual practices. The aim of *neidan* is to achieve immortality or union with the Dao through self-metamorphosis. This form of immortality is primarily imagined as attaining celestial rank—either as a deity (*tianxian* 天仙) or an official (*tianguan* 天官) in the celestial sphere.[15] In 1219 an aging Chinggis summoned the Daoist master Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (1143–1227) to visit with him, inquiring after "the medicine of perpetual life."[16] Although Qiu Chuji quickly disputed having such power, their meeting, recorded by Qiu's disciple Li Zhichang 李志常 (1193–1256) in *Changchun zhenren xiyou ji* 長春真人西遊記 (*The Record of the Perfected Master Chanchun's Journey to the West*), was extremely satisfactory to the khan. After listening to several Daoist sermons, Chinggis made two

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[15] Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, "Neidan," in The Encyclopedia of Taoism, volume 2, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (New York: Routledge, 2008), 762.

[16] Louis Komjathy, trans. *The Way of Complete Perfection: A Quanzhen Daoist Anthology* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2013), 261.

exceptional decrees. First, that Qiu Chuji would control all religious persons within the recently conquered Northern Jin territory; and second, that all Quanzhen monks and monasteries were absolved from any taxation. It is in this context that *The Secret History* was first composed; and I hope to assert that Daoism's influence is structural, that its cosmological understanding of an emperor's exceptional body helps give emphasis to the ways in which Mongol conquest is justified in the text.

Li Zhichang's *Record* helps explicate the structural function of Quanzhen in early Mongol political thought. Li's text is primarily dedicated to describing their travels from Shandong 山東 (a coastal region of Northeast China) to the Hindu Kush where Chinggis has traveled to campaign against the Khwarazmian Empire, which ruled over a region that includes present-day Afghanistan and Iraq. The journey took several years to complete. During this time, the Daoist monks observe regions (and contested regions) of the newly formed Mongol Empire. Ming Tak Ted Hui has shown how the *Record* deliberately portrays Inner Asia as a warzone with the inference that "the Mongols would bring Sinitic civilization to the barren land."[17] Here Hui identifies the motivating force of the text: to justify Mongol conquest as the vehicle for Chinese cultural imperialism. According to Hui, the *Record* proposes "a basis for political legitimation as it contrasts the Mongols with other cultural groups in the west, portraying them as political leaders who would eventually bring Sinitic order to the 'barbarians.'"[18] It is revealing then that Li offers little detail regarding the substance of Qiu Chuji's doctrinal discourse with Chinggis Khan—the excellence of Qiu's spiritual (and cultural) achievements is presumed and, therefore,

[17] Ming Tak Ted Hui, "Journeys to the West: Travelogues and Discursive Power in the Making of the Mongol Empire," *The Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 7.1 (2020), 71.

[18] Hui, "Journeys to the West: Travelogues and Discursive Power in the Making of the Mongol Empire," 71.

requires no explication. Instead, Li focuses his narrative around how Chinggis proposes to *use* Qiu's teachings. After Qiu delivers three sermons to the Mongol khan, Li reports that

> [His Highness] ordered his retainers to record [Qiu's sermons] and decreed they should be set down with Chinese characters so that their meaning is illuminated and not forgotten. He spoke to his retainers, saying, "The spiritually transcendent being thrice discussed the Way of nurturing existence. [His words] have truly entered Our heart; do not leak [this information] outside oneself—from here on out keep [it] within bounds."
>
> [上]令左右録之仍勑誌以漢字意示不忘謂左右曰神仙三說養生之道我甚入心使勿泄於外自爾扈從而東時敷奏道。[19]

Chinggis's first response to the sermons is to order their inscription, specifically requesting that Qiu's words be recorded in Chinese script so that their meaning is preserved. Before Kubilai Khan's consolidation of the Chinese dynasties, Uighur script was the language used within the Mongol bureaucratic apparatus. Li, however, attributes Chinggis Khan with the desire to preserve the sermons in Chinese. Chinggis, it would seem, thought Qiu's meaning would be better preserved in his original language—which seems to corroborate his dual impulses for recording *and* restricting the information. He commands his retainers to "keep [the information] within bounds" and uses the negative imperative *wu* 勿 ("do not") to ensure that the sermons are not "leaked." Thus, Qiu's doctrine emerges as princely information intended to teach "the Way of nurturing existence" to only the most politically elite. The scene within Li's narrative suggests that the Quanzhen immortalization practice should be used to privilege the ruling class, thereby justifying their status.

Although the influence of Quanzhen Daoism was primarily structural, its emphasis on the body as a site for self-transformation has a strong thematic resonance with the first ten chapters

[19] 長春真人西遊記. My translation. Zhichang Li 李志常 長春真人西遊記 (*Changchunzhenren xi you ji*), China: Zhang Yunyi chong kan.

of *The Secret History of the Mongols.* As Cheng Lesong describes, Daoism maintains that the "fragile and corruptible body contains its own salvation in itself; it is inherently a transcendent entity."[20] Bodies—all bodies—have the capacity for transcendence; and each body is a microcosm of the universe. Daoist self-cultivation is, therefore, a universal and universalizing practice. In Li's travelogue, Chinggis Khan's reluctance to share Qiu Chuji's teachings beyond the Mongol political elite hints at a wariness of Daoism's populist (so to speak) potential. *The Secret History*, however, seems to check this potential by assigning the transformative power of self-cultivation to Chinggis alone. Chinggis is exceptional within the text for his ability to metamorphosize himself—an ability that *The Secret History* identifies as haptic. Moreover, the chapters dedicated to his ascendency mirror the Daoist symbolic body system; within the narrative, Chinggis's body stands in first for his tribe, then his empire, and finally the world. Daoism's body symbolism pairs with the historiographic aims of *The Secret History.* In *The Record of the Perfected Master Chanchun's Journey to the West*, Chinggis's impulse for preservation indicates that he considers Quanzhen Daoism as part of a historiographic project. Halperin contextualizes this move toward historiography by explaining that as the Mongols expanded into new territories—particularly, as they expanded into regions with strong cultures of writing— they began to systematically adopt "the historiographic conception of their more numerous indigenous subjects."[21] Hui's argument about Li's sinitic audience supports the application of this idea to his *Record*. In the following, I demonstrate how chapters 1–10 of *The Secret History* historicizes Quanzhen self-cultivation as a part of Chinggis's haptic epistemology.

[20] Lesong Cheng, "The Symbolism of the Body in Daoism," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 12.1 (2017), 57.

[21] Halperin, "The Missing Golden Horde Chronicles and Historiography in the Mongol Empire," 5.

The Secret History of the Mongols opens in mythic and pre-human past. It is here, in a far distant past, that Chinggis Khan's genealogy is formed. A blue-grey wolf, "born with his destiny ordained by Heaven Above," marries a fallow doe—their human offspring, the first of Chinggis's ancestors (225). Beginning in the insular world of early Mongol legend, the text then immediately alludes to the cosmology of native Mongol Shamanism, which links "Heaven Above" with the Supreme Power that governs the destinies of all animal life.[22] Within this context, the heavenly ordination of Chinggis's ancestors is unexceptional. As a point of contrast, later Lamaist editions of the *Secret History* recast this lineage in more extraordinary terms by transforming the blue-grey wolf into a human descendent of the legendary Buddhist rulers of India and Tibet.[23] The thirteenth-century *Secret History* locates Chinggis's genealogy within the mythic past, but this lineage is not used as the primary justification for his reign on earth.[24] As intimated by the Lamaist tradition, Mongol historiographies that post-date the Mongol's incorporation into the Buddhist Qing dynasty would come to represent Chinggis Khan as an infallible manifestation of dharma, especially ordained to liberate the world. The Chinggis of the *Secret History,* however, is far more human, with a far more human mandate: vengeance.

Instead of framing Chinggis's rise to power as meeting a universal need, the *Secret History* explains his ascension as a form of retributive justice against the Tatars and the Jurchen Jin dynasty. The narrative action of the *Secret History* begins with the capture of the Ambaqai

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[22] Rachewiltz, "Commentary," in *The Secret History of the Mongols,* 225.

[23] See, for instance: Urunge Onon, trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols: The Life and Times of Chinggis Khan,* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[24] Peter Jackson similarly posits that the *Secret History* does not imagine Chinggis as a world-conqueror, but instead limited his mandate to the Mongol *ulus.* See: Peter Jackson, "World-Conquest and Local Accommodation: threat and blandishment in Mongol diplomacy," in Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn (eds.), *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East. Studies in honor of John E. Woods* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

Qan of the Khamag Mongols. Betrayed by the Tatar confederation, Ambaqai is captured and subsequently executed by the Jin as a check to Mongol political strength. Before his death, Ambaqai sends the following message back to his ten sons in the form of a poem:

> Until the nails of your five fingers
> Are ground down,
> Until your ten fingers are worn away,
> Strive to avenge me! (11).

Ambaqai's use of verse suggests an aesthetic performance aimed at "transform[ing] the terrain of discourse."[25] With these short lines he reorients the aims of the Mongol confederation entirely towards retaliatory action, thereby "ordaining" their fate in relation to the subjugation of the Tatars and the Jin. Tellingly, this entire aesthetic performance centers around hapticity. Ambaqai's mandate requires touch—grinding down fingernails, wearing away fingers. Having issued this injunction, Ambaqai disappears from the text. Immediately, and with no transition, the narrative smash cuts to Chinggis's personal history. Yisügei, his father, is described as "at that time" hunting (13). Just as Ambaqai calls for vengeance, Yisügei meets Högelün and takes her as his wife. From this brief interlude, the text then cuts back to the events following Ambaqai's capture and execution. Thirteen times the Mongols fought the Tatars, but they were unable "To take revenge, / To requite the wrong / *for the slaying of* Ambaqai Khan" (13). From here the two narrative threads become intertwined. Though the Mongols have failed to avenge Ambaqai, Yisügei returns to the text having captured the Tatar Temüjin Uge. At the same time, Högelün gives birth to Chinggis and it is "for this very reason they gave him the name Temüjin" (13). Chinggis's birth becomes a very literal symbol of Yisügei's victory against the Tatars.

The *Secret History* merges the capture of the Tatar Temüjin with the birth of the Mongol Temüjin, forming the two events into a single signifier for Mongol retribution. Chinggis's birth

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[25] Jennifer Fisher, "Relational Sense," *Parachute* 87 (1997), 5.

embodies the Mongol defeat of Temüjin Uge[26], enfleshing victory. The *Secret History* furthers this process of enfleshment by noting how Chinggis was born "clutching in his right hand a clot of blood the size of a knucklebone" (13). Portending the rise of a great conqueror, the story of a child born clutching a clot of blood is a common theme across ancient Asiatic folklore.[27] Herein lies Chinggis's divine ordinance. As if in answer to Ambaqai's call for revenge, the infant Temüjin is born grasping a blood clot that resembles a ground down, worn-away finger. The blood clot clasped in his right hand represents a kind of coronation, linking Chinggis directly to the injunction Ambaqai leaves his sons. Chinggis is born into the text grasping his own inheritance. Though he was not one of Ambaqai's sons, he is the one to meet Ambaqai's call. As the official record of Chinggisid rule, this is how the *Secret History* contextualizes—and justifies—Chinggis's rise to power: through his singular "touch."

While exceptional in its singularity, the depiction of Chinggis's self-fashioned rise to power in *The Secret History* echoes the Daoist belief that the body if a microcosm of the universe. Although the text never abandons the idea that Chinggis alone could have accomplished the unification of the Mongolian steppe tribes, it also fashions him into a microcosmic symbol of divine (and universal) will. By oft repeating the possessive pronoun "our" (*wo men* 我們 in the *Yuanchao Mishi*), *The Secret History* references a present audience to whom the history belongs. The first instance of the narrator's "our" usage occurs when a young Temüjin enlists two friends to help recover his wife Börte: "At night the Merkit people fled in disarray down the Selengge River, but even in the night *our* troops were pressing hard after the hastily fleeing Merkit" (40, emphasis mine). This battle against the Merkit marks the first of the

[26] The text makes no further note of Temujin Uge, and presumably he was killed.

[27] Rachewiltz, "Commentary," 321.

great Mongol military victories recorded in the *Secret History*—and signals the beginning of Temüjin's transformation into Chinggis Khan. Tellingly, "our" appears at the precise moment in the text when Temüjin wins his first major victory. Through its use of "our," the *Secret History* constructs a narrative present that automatically incorporates the audience. Temüjin's troops become *our* troops, linking the present to the near past. The effect is the creation of a history that is shared by the audience. Moreover, this history is ascribed as a militaristic one. The "our" does not appear until Temüjin begins to win battles. Thus, the historic legacy of the *Secret History* is most explicitly grounded in a single commonality: a shared history of conquest. This shared history accommodates both the conquerors and conquered, assimilating all into the collective "our." Through strategic uses of the word "our," the narrative assimilates a potentially diverse audience into a single history of conquest.

Universalizing Touch

But if Chinggis was ordained to avenge Ambaqai and rule as *khagan,* his death raises the question of succession. I turn next to the final chapter of *The Secret History,* which narrates Chinggis's death in 1227, Ögödei's elevation to *khagan* in 1229, and the early events of Ögödei's rule. Upon taking the throne, Ögödei is preoccupied by the problem of legitimation. Concerned, he asks his brother Chagadai for advice. "I have sat on the throne made ready by my father," Ögödei explains, "Will not people say of me, 'By what merit has he sat on it?'" (202). His concern in the text is well founded. Mongol *khagans* were chosen by *kuriltai,* a great assembly of the elite, in a process analogous to papal elections. Ögödei's anxiety about his own enthronement speaks to the fact that, historically, the basis for this election was in proven capacity.[28] When

[28] Denis Sinor, "The Acquisition, the Legitimation, the Confirmation and the Limitations of Political Power in Medieval Inner Asia" in Isabelle Charleux et al., eds., *Representing Power in Ancient Inner Asia: Legitimacy,*

Chinggis is made *khan* in chapter three of the *Secret History,* the scene is almost entirely composed of endorsement speeches that emphasize his military prowess. Superseding convention, Ögödei's election was merely nominal as Chinggis had already named him his successor. Moreover, Chinggis reportedly chose Ögödei as his heir because he imagined his son's easy, friendly temperament would be well applied to diplomatic relations.[29] Without his own proven works, Ögödei's ascension to the throne serves as a testament to his father's singular power. After his death in 1241, Ögödei's own named successor was soundly rejected by the *kuriltai.*[30]

When Ögödei's chapter was likely added to the *Secret History* sometime in the early 1250s, Tibetan Buddhism had already begun to influence Mongol governance. Before his election to the throne in 1260, a young Kublai was tasked with managing the religious conflict between Daoist and Buddhist monks that threatened to destabilize Mongol control of Northern China. As part of this project, Kublai ordered 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (ca. 1235–1280) to his court in 1253.[31] 'Phags pa was the patriarch of the Tibetan Sa skya monastery, as well as a member of the powerful 'Khon family.[32] At this meeting Kublai ultimately converts to

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Transmission and the Sacred, (Bellingham, WA: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 2010), 39.

[29] David Morgan, *The Mongols,* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1986), 39.

[30] David Morgan, *The Mongols,* 40.

[31] During the reign of Ogodei Khan, a Tibetan abbot was invited to the imperial camp where he spent time with the Prince Tolui's sons—Möngke, Kublai, and Hulegu. The abbot seems to have made an impression as Kublai would later give his eldest son the Tibetan name Dorji (born in 1233) (Luciano Petech, "Tibetan Relations with Sung China and with the Mongols," in *China Among Equals*, ed. Morris Rossabi [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983], 179–181).

[32] The Mongols invaded Tibet in 1240 and 1244. As a result of the 1244 campaign, the Mongols established administrative rule over Tibet. However, sources contest the degree of control the Mongols exerted over Tibet. Likely a result of the privileged position of Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders across the Mongol polity, Tibet was granted more autonomy than most regions incorporated within the empire.

Buddhism, with ‘Phags-pa performing the rite of tantric initiation.[33] Thereafter Kublai would greatly privilege Tibetan Buddhism, naming ‘Phags-pa Imperial Preceptor and establishing a patron-priest relationship between the Mongol empire and Tibet. After his election, Kublai Khan reversed his grandfather’s edicts regarding Quanzhen Daoism. In fact, Kublai made the equally remarkable decision to actively restrict the practice of Daoism within the empire, going so far as to order raids and violent attacks against Daoist temples. Under Kublai, Daosim became one of the only religions to ever be persecuted by the Mongols. Tibetan tantric Buddhism thereby became an integral institution of the state during Kublai’s reign.

Kublai Khan’s relationship with ‘Phags-pa intensified the patron-priest relationship modeled by Chinggis Khan and Qiu Chuji several decades before. Like Chinggis, Kublai sought direct tutelage from a foreign monk. However, Kublai’s conversion—which followed the earlier conversion of his principal wife—required ‘Phags-pa’s continued presence within his court. As a result, ‘Phags-pa became an important political figure during Kublai’s reign, largely acting as the viceroy for Mongol rule of Tibet. In addition to his political roles, ‘Phags-pa was also tasked with developing an official writing system for the entire empire. He revealed his quadratic alphabet for Mongolian in 1269; however, the system was somewhat difficult to use and never fully replaced the prominence of Uighur and Chinese script within Mongol Yuan bureaucracy. Despite this fact, ‘Phags-pa’s alphabet connects Kublai’s investment in Buddhism with the historiographic project implied in Li’s *Record.* For Kublai, as for Chinggis, the administrative (and personal) adoption of a foreign religion provided political structure. Indeed, Kublai’s conversion coincides with his rise to power. Kublai’s conversion marks a dramatic break from his grandfather’s legacy and ushers in a new age of empire. Tibetan Buddhism was a particularly

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[33] Lucian Petech, “Religous Leaders,” in Igor de Rachewiltz et al., eds., *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol Yüan Period,* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), 647.

useful political apparatus because of its belief in expedited salvation through the experience of mantras via the senses, especially touch. This is the key difference between Mahayana and tantric Buddhist systems (of the kind associated with the Tibetan school); tantrism offers the hope for expedited salvation—possible, perhaps, even within a single lifetime. Tantric practice also fits easily alongside Mongol shamanism. Because tantrism emphasizes the fundamental unity of all phenomena (divine and the profane) it functions as a ready analogue to the way in which Mongol shamanism explains shamans as bodies where the human and spirit worlds touch. Thus, Tibetan Buddhism allowed for new ways of imagining unity across an incredibly diverse empire while maintaining continuity with native Mongol religious practice.

Moreover, Kublai Khan adopted Tibetan Buddhism at a moment of political crisis. Kublai Khan was elected *khagan* in 1260; however, his ascension to the throne had been heavily contested and Kublai was under significant pressure to confirm his legitimacy quickly and decisively. The surest way to do so was through territorial expansion—particularly because the "Golden Horde" (occupying the northwestern territories of the empire) and the Mongol Ilkhanate (occupying the southwestern territories of the empire) had established themselves as largely autonomous khanates. Conquest of the southern Chinese Song dynasty, therefore, became Kublai's first object as *khagan.* The land was fertile and, perhaps even more importantly, the southern Chinese merchants had developed lucrative trade routes across Southeast Asia and India. Kublai also saw an opportunity to stabilize the Mongols' 1233 conquest of the Northern Jin by reunifying the Chinese dynasties into a single imperial state. Emphasizing the central importance of China to his reign, Kublai Khan ordered the construction of a new capital city near present-day Beijing in 1266. With the empire's seat now in Northern China, Kublai Khan made clear that his focus would be on Chinese governance. Within a month of his election, Kublai

Khan issued an imperial edict aimed at both Mongol and Chinese audiences. The document argues that he alone embodies Mongol military prowess *and* Chinese Confucian-style governance. In 1271 he formally claimed the title "Emperor of China," uniting the Jin and the Song under the newly formed Mongol Yuan dynasty.

New evidence from Andrea Acri and Aleksandra Wenta underscores the close relationship between Kublai Khan's imperial ideologies and the Tibetan tantric system. Focusing on tantric cult iconography from East Java during the reign of king Kṛtanagara (r. 1268–1292), Acri and Wenta argue that such images draw from an awareness of Kublai Khan's own tantric cult to produce,

> public statements expressing political power imbued with religious significance through the articulation of divine royalty and supernatural efficacy. Since analogous ideas and practices were current in the Yuan court as well as other coeval Asian milieus, it seems unlikely that these icons reflect local/indigenous 'ancestral' beliefs and practices, but rather represent a cross-fertilization between local and translocal tantric elements in the late phase of tantric Buddhism.[34]

Here, Acri and Wenta refer to icons produced during Kṛtanagara's reign that link the king to the martial tradition of Tibetan tantric systems. In particular, Acri and Wenta argue that a colossal—and puzzling—statue from Padang Roco/Sungai Langsat in Dharmasraya (Central-Western Sumatra) actually depicts Kṛtanagara as an emanation of Mahākāla, a protector deity in tantri Buddhism. The use of Mahākāla for the Padang Roco statue is suggestive of Mongol influence. Mahākāla became closely associated with Kublai Khan during his reign, appearing even as a war standard for his armies. King Kṛtanagara, with territorial ambitions of his own beyond Java, seemed to have recognized the utility in linking Mahākāla with images suggestive of imperial authority.

[34] Andrea Acri and Aleksandra Wenta, "A Buddhist Bhairava? Kṛtanagara's Tantric Buddhism in Transregional Perspective," *Entangled religions*, 13.7 (2022), https://dx.doi.org/10.46586/er.13.2022.9653.

As a technology of empire, Tibetan Buddhism created a system for transforming disparate peoples into *citizens* of a shared (and universal) state. I would like to posit that part of the appeal of Tibetan tantrism was its emphasis on the body as a site for transforming an individual's relationship with the world. Douglas Duckworth explains that through tantric rituals "the *body-subject* is staged in a highly aestheticized phenomenology of performance, involving the generation of a new identity of felt body image (or body schema) from emptiness, emerging from within an undetermined field (sunyata)."[35] In terms of how this aestheticized phenomenology of the body's performance informs subjectivity, Duckworth concludes: "Since being-in-the-world is a radically contingent affair (that is, it is interdependent and empty), subjective identity is not fixed; one's orientation and comportment toward the world is malleable. Subjectivity is constitutive of the world; and thus a shift here is a shift there (in the world)."[36] Similarly interested in the aestheticization of phenomenology in Tibetan tantric practice, Holly Gayley has described the belief in expedited salvation as a soteriology of the senses that crystallizes in the thirteenth century around the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Bar do thos grol*).[37] In the *Book of the Dead* a rubric for liberation is laid out that corresponds with the senses. According to this rubric, each of the senses offer potent means of enlightenment. However, the writings of Guru Chöwang (1212–1270) indicate that the benefits of touch are particularly relevant in a cross-cultural context. As an acolyte of the Avalokiteśvara cult, Guru Chöwang proposed that *any* contact with this bodhisattva's mantra "leads to rebirth in Sukhāvatī."[38] Thus,

[35] Douglas Duckworth, *Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy of Mind and Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 119–120.

[36] Duckworth, *Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy of Mind and Nature*, 120.

[37] Holly Gayley, "Soteriology of the Senses in Tibetan Buddhism," *Numen* 54 (2007): 459–499.

[38] Gayley, "Soteriology of the Senses in Tibetan Buddhism," 461.

neither linguistic nor reading comprehension is necessary to activate the mantra. To simply touch the words of the mantra—carved perhaps into a stone—constitutes a devotional activity. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir explains that in the *Book of the Dead* liberation through touch originates from "the body of the Enlightened One, termed *nirmanakāya*."[39] In the absence of this group liberation can still "be obtained from their representatives, in the literal (Tibetan *sKu tshab*) and metaphorical meanings of the word."[40] Buddhist iconography comes to stand in as one such representative. Anning Jing has shown how Kublai's conversion to Tibetan Buddhism initiated the widespread patronage of Tibetan artists by the Mongol Yuan court.[41] I posit that part of this interest in Tibetan Buddhist objects can be tied back to sense soteriology. For instance, the Tibetan Buddhist images "transferred into luxury textile versions" worn for specific occasions resonates with how some traditions of the *Book of the Dead* refer to the liberation of touch as the liberation of *wearing*.[42] To wear Buddhist iconography, to touch it, became part of Mongol Yuan Buddhist practice.

Returning once again to *The Secret History*, Ögödei continues his appeal to Chagadai by suggesting a path toward legitimization: "If elder brother [Chagadai] agrees, since our father the Qa'an has left *matters* with the Altan Qan of the Kitat people unfinished, I shall now move against the Kitat people" (202). Ögödei refers here to the people of the Western Liao dynasty introduced at the beginning of my talk. By focusing on the Northern Chinese campaigns, Ögödei attempts to prove his own rightful rule by adopting the same mandate that legitimized his father:

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[39] Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Naive Sensualism, Docta Ignoranta. Tibetan Liberation Through the Senses," *Numen* 47.1 (2001), 77.

[40] Tokarska-Bakir, "Naive Sensualism, Docta Ignoranta. Tibetan Liberation Through the Senses," 77.

[41] Anning Jing, "Financial and Material Aspects of Tibetan Art Under the Yuan Dynasty," in Artibus Asia, volume 64.2 (2004): 213-241.

[42] Anning Jing, "Financial and Material Aspects of Tibetan Art Under the Yuan Dynasty," 214.

to avenge Ambaqai Khan. And yet Ögödei's duty, as the text makes clear, is *not* to wear down his fingers in the pursuit of vengeance. As Tolui explains before sacrificing himself for his brother, Ögödei's ordinance lies in Chinggis's feeling touch. Chinggis felt Ögödei as "one would *feel* a wether *to make sure it is fat*" (204). Chinggis does not feel his successor as one might, for instance, feel a warhorse. Instead, Chinggis's touch aims to identify which of his sons is like a wether, a domesticated animal used for food. Tolui's analogy exposes a shift in how the *Secret History* imagines the role of the Great Khan within the empire—from the child born with a bloody fist to the fatted wether ready for consumption. This shift reflects the changing demands of the rapidly expanding empire. In reference to these new demands, Ögödei's illness inverts Chinggis's original mandate. The Mongols have now been made subject to another people's retaliatory justice. Empire based on vengeance can experience no dynastic stability, it is a zero-sum game.[43] Seeming to recognize this, Chinggis chooses Ögödei for his potential to "feed" the empire. In other words, Ögödei is intentionally selected for his potential to broker peace.

Tolui's death signals a major turning point within the *Secret History.* With the spirit-lords appeased the cycle of retribution is broken, allowing for new modes of imperial conquest to emerge. Hereby the *Secret History* continues to represent touch as an aesthetic motif for empire by recalibrating its haptic epistemology. In chapters 1–10 Chinggis emerges as a literal embodiment, an enfleshment, of victory. He is born into the text marked by blood, symbolizing a pre-ordained mandate that already entangles concepts of conquest and rule within the unconscious body of an infant. In chapter 12, Chinggis's touch becomes epistemic. Chinggis only knows his successor by *feeling* which of his sons is fit to rule. From this point onward, the *Secret History* frames touch as a coercive tool that contains both a cognitive and physical

[43] As discussed in chapter two, this understanding of empire is what the Man of Law is unable to grasp in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale.*

dimension. Once recovered from his illness, Ögödei reconsiders how to merit his rule. This project culminates in a transmutation of both Chinggis' proclamations that mark the beginning of the Mongol Empire and Ambaqai's original demand. At the end of the text Ögödei formally declares: "We shall make the people rejoice, causing them to rest: Their feet upon the ground, / Their hands upon the earth" (213).[44] Unlike Chinggis's clenched and bloody fist, the fist that signaled war and conquest, Ögödei promises to make the hands of the Kitat and Jurchen people become like feet: resting flat upon the earth. Ögödei does not, however, entertain the idea of freeing the Northern Chinese dynasties from Mongol rule. Rather, he determines that placing their "hands upon the earth" would be a more effective strategy of conquest than continuing to quell dissent with his armies. Ögödei adds an affective dimension to this repose. To cause rest, to cause the people to lay their hands upon the ground, is tied to the project of "mak[ing] the people rejoice" (213). Once again Ögödei reappropriates his father's legacy. If Chinggis's touch had the power to *know* peace via the bodies of his sons, then Ögödei imagines that his subjects could similarly *know* peace by their own touch. Thus, the text reimagines the epistemic, world-making work of touch. Ögödei suggests that compulsory touch—"We shall make the people rejoice"—can be used as a means of subjugation.

The *Secret History* concludes with a speech from Ögödei given a few years after the events of his illness and Tolui's subsequent death. In this speech Ögödei enumerates his four meritorious acts as *qahan,* as well as his for sins. Regarding his four good deeds, Ögödei lists: 1) his conquest of Northern China; 2) his institutionalization of post stations for rapid communication; 3) his provision of water by means of digging of wells; and 4) the establishment

[44] This remains a common Mongolian expression, meaning to relax. I have not been able to find an earlier attestation of the phrase than what appears in *The Secret History.* The endurance of the phrase suggests that Ögödei's reformation of Mongol imperial politics—at least as it is imagined in the text—is one of its most central and important themes.

of "scouts and garrison troops among the people of cities everywhere and so I let the people live *in peace,* causing them to rest: Their feet upon the ground / Their hands upon the earth" (217). Such peace as Ögödei describes not only stems from conquest (indicated by his first good deed) but is accomplished by means of surveillance and embodied force. Ögödei unequivocally attributes his spies and garrison troops as the primary cause of the people's rest. Having broken from the retributive model of rule and conquest, Ögödei develops a haptic system of standardization. All conquered territories, and all conquered people, are regulated by the practice of establishing a fixed Mongol military presence across all parts of the empire. The permanence of these garrison troops also hints at how Mongol political ideology, culture, and governance begins adapting around the sedentary states now incorporated within the empire. Physical stasis—a permanent bodily presence—emerges as a means of better controlling the rebellious minds and bodies of those conquered by the Mongols.

The link between Tibetan Buddhism's sense soteriology and the *Secret History* is compelling attested in the seventeenth-century, *Jewel Translucent Sutra.* As the name implies, the *Jewel Translucent Sutra* is a Buddhist history that describes the life and reign of Altan Khan (1507–1582), the leader of the Tümed Mongols that led a series of military campaigns against Chinese Ming dynasty 大明 (1368–1644) resulted in a 1571 peace treaty between the two states. Altan Khan, who allied with the Tibetan Guleg order, is also credited with reintroducing Buddhism to the Mongols. A descendent of Kublai Khan, Altan Khan is celebrated by the text as a reincarnation of the *khagan*—in part because of his success against the Ming and, in part, because of his devotion to Buddhism. Interestingly, the *Jewel Translucent Sutra* uses Ögödei's revised political mandate—to have the people rest their hands upon the earth—as an epithet for a united Chinese-Mongol state. Like the earlier *Secret History*, the *Jewel Translucent Sutra* is a

Mongol historiographic text. The *Jewel Translucent Sutra* primarily focuses on the khan's military raids against the Chinese Ming dynasty—resulting in the 1571 peace accord—and his "reconversion" of the Mongols to Tibetan Buddhism. Celebrating Altan Khan as a second Kublai, the text reimagines Mongol imperialism as *Buddhist* imperialism. That is, it identifies Buddhist religious affiliation as a political basis. The sutra contextualizes Altan Khan's history early, stating near its beginning how,

> From then afterwards the Chinese-Mongol Great State was stabilized.
> Evenly the Great State rested with their feet and hands on the earth.
> This made the whole Great nation very happy.
> Thus it was that the peaceful Great State was stabilized.[45]

Here, the passage rejoices in the incorporation of the Mongols within the Chinese Ming dynasty, a Buddhist imperial state. Like the *Secret History,* the *Jewel Translucent Sutra*—a tantric text—enmeshes political stability and touch. Touch, in the tantric tradition I have discussed, enables the feeling practitioner to redefine their place in world. In the *Jewel Translucent Sutra,* the emancipatory potential for touch has been applied explicitly to the state. Moreover, the sutra's circular logic here captures the essence of Ögödei's haptic epistemology: stability by conquest is the cause of happiness, in turn this happiness is the causes of an even more stable stability. Such "happiness" is the foundation for the imperial state: control their bodies, and one controls their minds.

Scholarship on the European reception of the Mongols tends to treat the Mongol empire as both static and somewhat monolithic by the end of the thirteenth century. And yet, the *Secret History of the Mongols* makes clear that the formation of the Mongol Yuan dynasty fundamentally shifted the empire's focus, its political ideology, and its forms of governance. This

[45] Johan Elverskog, trans., *The Jewel Translucent Sūtra,* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), lines 510–513.

more nuanced understanding of Mongol imperialism invites further inquiry into the conception of the empire and its court in medieval European romances, like the *Squire's Tale*. I argue that Kublai Khan's conquest of China—and the subsequent establishment of his court in China's most populous and prosperous region—helped facilitate a change in how European writers imagined the Mongols; from harbingers of Antichrist to a wonderous people of fabulous wealth. Notably, this change occurs around the sedentary Yuan court, which works to fix, literally, the threat of Mongol mobility. This perceived distance creates new space for fantasy, transforming the Mongol empire into a site for European chivalric romance and its attendant interests. As I have discussed, the Squire responds to this fantasy by informing his audience that different sense modalities (like sound) bring the Mongols much closer to Europe than they might otherwise appear. The following chapter reconsiders Mongol imperialism from a position of extreme proximity—Yuan China.

CHAPTER THREE

Imperial Hapticity II: Gender and Embodied Politics in the *Yuanshi*

The *Secret History of the Mongols* traces a teleology of Mongol political thought through two distinct stages of the empire. The textual expansions that occurred during the political ascension and reign of Kublai Khan expose tantric "touch" as a new (to the Mongols) imperial technology. The text imagines touch as a tool for unification—and subjugation. The empire makes citizens through direct contact; to "touch" the empire—or rather, to be touched *by* it—is to become incorporated within it. In chapter three I expand upon this premise to explore how touch informs Chinese responses to the Mongol Yuan dynasty. I begin by considering the relationship between empire and touch in the Chinese historiographical tradition. Looking at two early Chinese imperial historiographies, I argue that "touch" emerges, evolves, and reemerges as a strategy to neutralize the threat to Imperial China posed by the so-called barbarian nations. The chapter then returns to the idea that sensory dysfunction is a byproduct of Mongol imperialism. The Mongol empire introduced new forms of global relation, forms that threatened the coherence of preexisting cultural Umwelts. As I discuss in chapter one, narratives of the Mongol campaigns in central Europe represent the Mongols themselves through a disrupted visual process. At the time of the invasions, chroniclers could not apprehend the Mongols as a "sight" within Christendom. Instead, the Mongols are a non-sight, an unseeable force that challenges the very integrity of Christian cosmology. Similarly, as I discuss in the present chapter, Chinese chroniclers respond to Mongol rule by negating touch. Tactile friction is a feature of the *Secret History* precisely because the text is invested in articulating ways to integrate conquered peoples into a stable polity. Conversely, the *Yuanshi* revises Mongol historiography so that it smoothly aligns with

Chinese historiography. The *Yuanshi* denies cross-cultural touch in order to justify Mongol foreign rule as coextensive with the longer history of Chinese imperialism. The chapter ultimately concludes with a coda that links touch and taste in the Chinese historiographic tradition through, what I call, a motif of aesthetic indigestion. Looking at the Yuan-era *zaju* (variety play) *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife* (*Qiu Hu xiqi* 秋胡戲妻), I argue that the play portrays the Yuan as a form of indigestion—the foreign taken up within the body (politic) and causing it distress.

Imperial Ontologies: The "Xiongnu problem" in Chinese Imperial Historiography

Attention to touch in *The Secret History of the Mongols* reveals a shift in Mongol imperial ideology. This shift, as I have previously discussed, coincided with the growing importance of China within the Mongol world empire. The haptic politics of the *Secret History* provide a strategy for incorporating conquered peoples within the empire—for making those peoples into citizens. This strategy resonates with the role of touch in Chinese imperial historiography, where haptic exchange is similarly used to negotiate the relationship between imperial China and its "barbaric" neighbors. The Chinese perspective on imperial touch is undergirded by a worldview and philosophy that requires some parsing.

The historiographical tradition of treating premodern China as a uniform, homogenous, and static entity does not accurately reflect the history of imperial China. Indeed, the people, territory, institutions, and cultures—the constitutive elements of "China"—were in flux throughout Chinese dynastic history. Shuchen Xiang, whose work offers a corrective to common misunderstandings of Chinese history and identity in the Western academe, has recently argued that Chinese historical continuity lies in the continuity of Chinese identity. The continuity of

identity "without identity (in the sense of sameness)" testifies to the Chinese worldview (*tian xia* 天下; "All-Under-Heaven"), governed by a non-dualistic concept of harmony.[1] Xiang defines this concept of harmony as "finding a coherence which does justice to particularity."[2] Informed by a philosophy of harmony, the traditional Chinese worldview locates Chinese civilization at its center. According to Xiang,

> The centre (order/the universal/whole) does not externally impose order on the particulars (which are assumed to be identical), the interactions among the (diverse) particulars themselves *constitute* the centre. The centre is thus *not* a static form that seeks to impose itself onto the particulars … [it is] a centre which harmonises the whole.[3]

In modern Mandarin the colloquial name for the People's Republic of China is *Zhongguo* 中國*,* meaning "central state" or "middle kingdom." *Zhongguo* ("Central States" in premodern China) and *Zhonghua* ("central efflorescence," i.e., civilization) are terms that traditionally have been used to describe the harmonizing center of the world.

Whereas *Zhonghua* has a cultural connotation, *Zhongguo* alludes to space. During the pre-imperial Zhou Dynasty 周 (1046–256 BCE), "China" was imagined at the center of four barbarian (*siyi* 四夷) peoples: the Yi 夷 to the east; the Man 蠻 to the south; the Rong 戎 to the west; and the Di 狄 to the north.[4] Throughout the long history of imperial China, the legacy of the *siyi* informed conceptions of both the center (that is, the Central States) and empire. As Pu

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[1] Shuchen Xiang, "A Harmony Account of Chinese Identity," *Journal of East-West Thought* 2.10 (2020), 83.

[2] Xiang, "A Harmony Account of Chinese Identity," 89.

[3] Xiang, 96.

[4] The Four Barbarians of ancient China are distinct from the Five Barbarians of the fourth and fifth centuries CE. This period is known as that of the Sixteen Kingdoms 十六國 (304–439) or, more caustically, the Sixteen Kingdoms of the Five Barbarians 五胡十六國. The Sixteen Kingdoms period was characterized by competing, short-lived dynastic states in northern China. The Sixteen Kingdoms were ruled by non-Han peoples that have been historically referred to as the Five Barbarians 五胡 in Chinese historiography. These peoples were the Di, the Jie, the Qiang, the Xianbei, and the Xiongnu.

Muzhou explains, the names Yi, Man, Rong, and Di became general descriptors of the "barbarian" tribal confederations that bordered Northern China.[5] The harmony principle suggests that the center (*Zhongguo/hua*) organizes the periphery (*yi,* "barbarians") into a coherent narrative of the world. In reductive terms, the distinction between the Central States as civilization and that beyond as "barbaric" to varying degrees. It is, however, important to remember Xiang's argument—that the center is not static but organic, changing as the relationships between center and periphery change.

Harmonizing the relationship between the Central States and the world is a historiographic project. But because neither center nor periphery are static, the project is one without end. It is then of little surprise that Chinese historiography developed alongside Chinese imperialism, a form of governance that centralizes the relationships between the Central States and the outer barbarians. Broadly, Chinese imperial historiography is characterized by a dynastic cycle model.[6] According to this model, the strength and charisma of dynastic founders (the first emperor of each new dynasty) is the animating force behind each new regime. Dynastic collapse is attributed to the faults of the *last* emperor. The cycle is commemorated at the beginning of each new dynasty when official historians would compile a record of the preceding one. The *Xinshu* 新書 ("New Writings")—an early and influential essay on imperial Confucianism—articulates the importance of historiography. Written by the scholar and politician Jia Yi 賈誼 (ca. 200–169 BCE), the *Xinshu* explains that a virtuous person—"on behalf of the nation"[7]—

[5] Muzhou Pu, *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 45.

[6] Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 5.

[7] 是以君子為國。 My translation. Jia Yi 賈誼, *Xinshu* 新書, Congshu jicheng chubian edition. Shanghai: Shangwu, 1937.

"observes history from above, [and] examines the present age" in part to better "scrutiniz[e] the rise and fall of moral principle."[8] Historiography creates the order necessary to evaluate the shifting boundaries between *hua* and *yi,* civilization and barbarity. Moral decline suggests a pull from center, which threatens to upend the entire world order by drawing the Central States into a more barbarous sphere. Thus, the historiography of Imperial China is intimately intertwined with narratives about the border between the Central States and the outer barbarians.

Imperial China and the Xiongnu

The story of Chinese imperial historiography roughly begins with the formation of the Qin dynasty 秦朝 in 221 BCE, when the King of Qin conquered—and unified—all of the other major Chinese states (Chu 楚; Han 韓; Qi 齊; Wei 魏; Yan 燕; and Zhao 趙). To distinguish himself from the rulers of the previous Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE), the king adopted a new title—"emperor" (*huangdi* 皇帝).[9] The translation of his regnal name, Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇, literally means, "The First Emperor of Qin." Although Qin Shi Huang's reign was short (r. 221–210 BCE), his legacy and the legacy of his reign are foundational to Chinese imperial historiography. Chinese rulers, for example, would continue to use the title *huangdi* up until the Xinhai Revolution 辛亥革命 of 1911. More materially, the First Emperor instituted centralized jurisdiction. The empire was divided into thirty-six commanderies made up of a governor (*shou*

[8] The full passage reads: 是以君子為國，觀之上古，驗之當世，參之人事。察盛衰之理，審權勢之宜，去就有序，變化因時，故曠日長久，而社稷安矣。My translation. Ibid.

[9] The famous terra-cotta soldiers of Xian were buried in the tomb of Qin Shi Huang. More than 7,000 life-sized statues have been excavated from the tomb. The monumental scale of the model army not only reflects the emperor's successful military conquests, but also his enduring cosmological importance in the afterlife. Qin Shi Huang was entombed with an army to support any future contests in the underworld. Moreover, the terra-cotta soldiers are indicative of the massive public works projects implanted under the Qin dynasty.

守*)*, a military commander (*wei*), and an imperial inspector (*jian yushi* 監御史).[10] Each commandery was subdivided into counties that were, in turn, administered by centrally appointed officials. The Qin commandery/country system constituted a dramatic change from the feudal investiture that had characterized earlier forms of empire in China. One of the most enduring legacies of the Qin dynasty is the idea of "China" as a distinct polity rightly governed by a central authority. Indeed, over time the commandery/country system has evolved into that of the present province/county model in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Globally, the legacy of the Qin dynasty is remembered in the English word "China," which is rooted in Latin and Sanskrit transliterations of Qin.

The Qin dynasty was quickly succeeded by the Han (202 BCE–220 CE).[11] Over the course of four centuries, Han dynasty emperors and officials adapted and expanded upon the Qin model of universal governance and centralized administration. However, Han military conquest expanded far beyond that of the previous dynasty, particularly in the area west of the Yellow River known as Xiyou 西域 (the Western Regions).[12] The most significant period of Han *diguo* 帝國 expansion—that is, expansion to "seize, acquire, or control another sovereign state or a specific independent territory […] for political, economic, religious, security, ideological, or

[10] Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 54**.**

[11] Han historiography is typically divided into two distinct periods: The Western Han (*Xihan* 西漢) and the Eastern Han (*Donghan* 東漢), also known as the Later Han (*Houhan* 後漢). The period of the Western Han—also referred to as the Former Han (*Qianhan* 前漢)—spans from 206 BCE to 9 CE; and the period of the Eastern Han spans from 25 to 220 CE. The two Han periods are interrupted by the Wang Mang's 王莽 (r. 9–23) usurpation of the throne and his formation of the brief Xin dynasty (新朝; 9–23). However, Wang Mang was killed by a rebel faction—made up of both Han soldiers and civilians—that sacked the Xin capitol in the year 23. After Wang's death, the Gengshi Emperor (更始帝; r. 23–25) ruled briefly before the Han was fully restored under Han Guangwudi (漢光武帝; r. 25–57).

[12] Although the term "Xiyou" is somewhat mobile, it roughly refers to the region of present-day Xinjiang in the west and parts of Central Asia in the northwest (Inner Mongolia, for example).

nationalistic reasons"[13]—occurred during the reign of the fifth Han emperor, posthumously known as Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE). Emperor Wu's focus on the Western Regions reflects the perceived threat that the Xiongnu tribal confederation posed to China's imperial unification.

The Xiongnu confederation was a nomadic steppe empire, likely composed of different ethnic and linguistic groups.[14] At the start of the Han empire, in 200 BCE, the Xiongnu first attacked and then allied with Hann, a northern satrapy. In response, Emperor Gaozu, the first emperor of Han, led an army to Pingcheng (present-day Datong) to confront the Xiongnu and the rebel ruler of Hann. But as it was soon revealed, the Han infantry and charioteers were no match for the Xiongnu cavalry. Seizing the advantage, the Xiongnu imposed tributary conditions on the Han, which led to the ratification of an uneasy treaty between the two nations.[15] The diplomatic policy created to manage relations between the Han and the Xiongnu was based around the concept of *heqin* 和親 ("peace between relatives"). Historian Chun-shu Chang characterizes the main components of the *heqin* diplomatic policy in terms of the following expectations: 1) That the Han and the Xiongnu are equal nations living in peace; 2) that the land north of the Great Wall was Xiongnu and south of the Great Wall was Han; 3) that the Han court would send fixed, annual "gifts" to the Xiongnu (including materials for clothes, foodstuffs, and precious goods

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[13] Here I quote from Chun-shu Chang's definition of the Chinese term *diguo*, which is commonly translated as "empire" in English. Chun-shu Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire, Volume One: Nation, State, and Imperialism in Early China, ca. 1600 BC–AD 8* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), xxv.

[14] The ethnic origin of the Xiongnu is a topic of much debate. The Chinese scholarship tends to agree that a) the Xiongnu were the descendants of nomadic peoples mentioned in ancient sources; and b) the Xiongnu were themselves the ancestors of the Turks and the Mongols. Mongol scholars largely consider the Xiongnu as a proto-Mongolic peoples. For a detailed summary of the debate, see: Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 163–66.

[15] Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 192.

like gold); 4) that the Xiongnu were permitted to frequent Han markets; and 5) that the Han would send an imperial princess to marry the Xiongnu *chanyu* ("supreme ruler").[16] Chang argues that the *heqin* policy was conceived by the Chinese as a "long-range plan to sinicize the [Xiongnu]," which was thought to occur "by accepting Chinese codes of etiquette and moral behavior and adopting Chinese material civilization, exemplified by gifts and other valuable goods received through the Han."[17] However, the *heqin* policy was repeatedly challenged by the Xiongnu. In the first fifty years of the Han dynasty, the Xiongnu violated treaty terms by invading Chinese territories thirteen times. The Han court began to shift its policy toward the Xiongnu during the reign of Emperor Wen, prioritizing strengthening Han defenses through border settlement programs and a mounted cavalry. This shift, as Chang explains, suggests that the *heqin* arrangement was more practical than ideological for the Han.[18]

The *heqin* policy espoused a model of international relations predicated on the idea that "kinship" relations between nations were non-hierarchical. In practice, however, the arrangement was always a precarious one; indeed, Chinese proponents of the *heqin* policy recognized that it largely served as a temporary anti-war measure.[19] Because the *heqin* arrangement was so unstable, contemporaneous Chinese writing on the "Xiongnu problem" tended to focus on the ontology of Xiongnu difference—and how this ontology conforms to, or challenges, Han imperialism. The ontological status of the Xiongnu is representatively explored in the historian Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE) treatise on the Xiongnu in the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the*

[16] Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire,* 140–41.

[17] Chang, 137.

[18] Chang, 152.

[19] Chang, 153–54.

Grand Historian), the first official dynastic history of imperial China.[20] More broadly, Sima Qian's treatise is directly relevant to later depictions of the Mongols in Chinese historiography because it established a framework for representing the northern "barbarians" in Chinese imperial terms, enduring in its very inclination toward the "construction of universal cosmological paradigms and unified historical patterns."[21] As Nicola Di Cosmo observes, Sima's treatise is based "on the assumption (or pretense of it) that a chasm had always existed between China—the [Huaxia] people—and the various alien groups inhabiting the north. That assumption is still with us, reflected in modern notions that the norther frontier has always been characterized by a set of dual oppositions—between pastoral and settled people (steppe and sown), between nomadic tribes and Chinese states, between an urban civilization and a warlike uncivilized society."[22] And yet, Di Cosmo's description somewhat elides the role of kinship in the *Shiji's* navigation of Xiongnu difference. Interestingly, the *Shiji* does not entirely abandon the kinship ties implied in the *heqin* policy. Instead, the text recognizes the ultimate potential for the Xiongnu to be incorporated into the Han empire.

Sima Qian's account of the Xiongnu begins with an assertion of shared origin: "As for the Xiongnu," he writes, "their earliest ancestor was a descendent of the Xia dynasty ruling clan, named Shunwei."[23] Elsewhere in the *Shiji* Sima describes the Xia 夏 as the first dynasty to

[20] The official dynastic histories of imperial China are collectively known as the *Twenty-Four Histories* 二十四史, and cover the Han through the Ming dynasties. Over time, it became the purview of each new dynasty to compile the official history of its predecessor.

[21] Di Cosmo, 255.

[22] Di Cosmo, 2.

[23] 匈奴，其先祖夏后氏之苗裔也，曰淳維。My Translation. This and all subsequent citations from: Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, juan 110, ed. Zhang Wenhu (Nanjing: Jingling Publishing House 金陵局本, 1856–1875.

emerge after the mythical Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors period 三皇五帝.[24] And while archeologists have found evidence of a historic Xia dynasty in the late Neolithic period,[25] it is clear that Shunwei is an invention of the *Shiji*. By narrativizing the Xiongnu as a branch of the Xia through Shunwei as a shared ancestor, the *Shiji* coherently frames the "barbarian" threat within the Han worldview. The Xiongnu are fundamentally different from the Han (barbarian versus civilized); and yet, they are also kin. In contrast with theories of kinship that privilege mutuality, Magnus Course has argued that culture and kinship are intertwined and difference "is best conceptualized not as an external source acting upon kinship, but as already *within* kinship."[26] If alterity is intrinsic to social relations—if it emerges from these relations—then difference and similarity cannot be understood as simple, oppositional indices of identity. As Course concludes, alterity is formed by "a complex interplay in which similarity is as salient as difference."[27] Sima Qian evokes this kind of interplay by assigning the Xiongnu a Chinese origin. The Xiongnu are Chinese, have always been Chinese—and, at the same time, they are fundamentally different.

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[24] According to Chinese mythology, the Three Sovereigns were demigods that helped to both create and shape human life (e.g., the invention of farming). The Five Emperors were legendary rulers marked by their exemplary moral character. Sima Qian treats the Five Emperors as real historical figures, identifying the Yellow Emperor (黄帝) as the first of these human leaders. As a result, Sima establishes a cultural, political, and ethnic genealogy that extends onward from creation. Before the Han dynasty, the term *Huaxia* (華夏) was used to describe this early form of Chinese nationality. In modern Mandarin, "Huaren" (華人) is a term for Chinese ethnicity.

[25] The Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project—a project developed around dating the first three dynasties in Chinese historiography—attests that the Xia dynasty lasted from 2070 BCE to 1600 BCE. See: Xueqin Li, "The Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project: Methodology and Results," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4.1 (2002): 321–33.

[26] Magnus Course, "Changelings: alterity beyond difference," *Folk Like* 55.1 (2017), 19; emphasis original.

[27] Course, "Changelings," 20.

The *Shiji* explores the ontological status of Xiongnu difference in an anecdote about Zhonghang Yue 中行說, a eunuch in the court of Emperor Wen (r. 180–157 BCE).[28] According to the *Shiji*, Emperor Wu tried to re-broker amnesty with the Xiongnu after the death of Modun 冒頓單于 (r. 209–174)[29], the *chanyu* (supreme ruler) of the confederation, through marriage. When Modun's son takes the throne, Emperor Wen sends a princess from the imperial family as a consort for the new c*hanyu*. Zhonghang Yue accompanies the princess as her tutor. Initially, Zhonghang Yue does not want to make the journey, warning Han officials that "If I go, it will make trouble for the Han."[30] His pronouncement proves correct, for "Not long after Zhonghang expressed [his concern], he thereupon submitted to the *chanyu*, and the *chanyu* himself greatly favored him."[31] Sima Qian then uses Zhonghang to articulate a political ontology for Xiongnu difference:

> From the beginning, the Xiongnu have been fond of Han silks and food stuffs, so Zhonghang explained [to the *chanyu*], saying: "The manifold Xiongnu people would be unable to occupy a single Han commandery; however, the reason why [the Xiongnu] are strong is that—because their clothes and food are different—they do not rely on the Han. Today the *chanyu* alters custom with his penchant for Han goods; and although the Han do not send more than a fifth of their goods, the Xiongnu, in the end, will give their allegiance to the Han. [From now on,] should you obtain Han silks, gallop through weeds

[28] Court eunuchs have played an important role throughout the history of imperial China. In the pre-imperial Chinese states, eunuchs served as palace servants. During the Qin and Han dynasties, eunuchs gained increasingly powerful positions within the imperial government. Symbolizing the androgynous or ungendered body, eunuchs were able to enter the Inner Court—thereby gaining unique and privileged access to the women of the court, as well as to the emperor himself. Orlando Patterson has argued that Chinese court eunuchs—embodying binary opposition—became potent representations of mediation; and as a result, eunuchs "mediated" the emperor's (or monarch's) image, often receiving blame for issues in governance (Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study,* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982], 325–26). In subsequent dynasties, castration was a qualification for certain forms of civil service. Castration was also one of the Five Punishments, a form of corporal punishment used to sometimes remit an execution. When Sima Qian defended general Li Ling (Li had been captured by the Xiongnu after a failed campaign), he was sentenced to death by the emperor. Because of his high status within the court, Sima opted for castration instead so that he might finish the *Shiji.* For a general overview, see: Mary Anderson, *Hidden Power: The Palace Eunuchs of Imperial China* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1990).

[29] Maodun is the Chinese transliteration of Modun.

[30]「必我行也，為漢患者。」My translation. All subsequent translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[31] 中行說既至，因降單于，單于甚親幸之。

and brambles—your tunic and breeches will rip apart and be spoiled, and this will show silk to be inferior to the advantages of felt and fur garments. Should you obtain Han foodstuffs, abandon them completely—and this will show [the food] to be inferior to the convenience and flavor of milk and kumiss!"

初，匈奴好漢繒絮食物，中行說曰：「匈奴人眾不能當漢之一郡，然所以彊者，以衣食異，無仰於漢也。今單于變俗好漢物，漢物不過什二，則匈奴盡歸於漢矣。其得漢繒絮，以馳草棘中，衣袴皆裂敝，以示不如旃裘之完善也。得漢食物皆去之，以示不如湩酪之便美也。」

Here, Zhonghang offers the *chanyu* an analysis of the relationship between the two states. He begins by cautioning the Xiongnu against participating in the Han market—at once acknowledging the strength of the Han economy and positioning that strength as a point of Xiongnu vulnerability. The Han will wholly subjugate the Xiongnu *through* their dependence on Han goods. Zhonghang wholly attributes the strength of the Xiongnu to cultural difference. While silk clothes may be suitable for the Han court, the nature of Xiongnu life, at least according to Zhonghang, is incompatible with wearing silk. Similarly, Han food is incompatible with Xiongnu life. As Zhonghang explains, Han food has none of the convenience or practicality (*bian* 便) of milk and koumiss. The underlying logic of Zhonghang's speech asserts that Xiongnu life—a culture determined, in part, by geographic considerations—is fundamentally incompatible with Han culture.

Even as Zhonghang describes the Xiongnu as categorically different from the Han, his speech suggests that this difference is not innate. For instance, he uses the character *gui* 歸 for "give allegiance to"—a character that carries with it the sense of returning home. By submitting to the Han, it is as if the Xiongnu are literally returning from whence they came. This idea resonates with Sima Qian's geneaological claims about the Xiongnu. Not only were the Xiongnu Chinese, Zhonghang seems to express that the Xiongnu have the potential to become Chinese *again* by submitting to the Han. Xiongnu difference is conditional. Moreover, this difference is

ontologically defined as opposition to Han culture and politics. The "barbarian" status, therefore, is not fixed; by enculturaltion the barbarian may "return home" and become "civilized." Zhonghang, of course, sees this potential for change as a threat to the Xiongnu—to submit, to become Han, would be the death of the Xiongnu. Sima Qian's perspective is less clear. The precarity of barbarism, its potential to "return home," creates a malleable political border between the Han and Xiongnu states. The Xiongnu are always both threatening and kin.

Ultimately, the *Shiji* poses Xiongnu difference as a problem internal to the Han state. The treatise concludes with a coded reference to Confucius's composition of the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (S*pring and Autumn Annals*). In his own voice ("the Grand Historian says"; 太史公曰), Sima Qian states that Confucius could not openly critique the rulers of his own time and was, instead, forced to use guarded language when describing the affairs of his own age.[32] Sima thus infers that he too must use guarded language when discussing the current, troubled relationship between the Han and the Xiongnu. Underlying this inference is a powerful critique of the Han: the Xiongnu are not to blame for the instability of the border. Earlier in the text, Sima Qian observes how high-ranking Han officials and military leaders have engaged with the Xiongnu in one of two ways: to submit to them or to attack them indiscriminately. Both are equally bad practices, because both preclude the possibility for the Xiongnu to "return home," to become Han. The Zhonghang incident shows how submission only reaffirms Xiongnu difference. Similarly, Sima Qian describes the ineffectiveness of recent military campaigns against the Xiongnu, stating, "Among the Han troops that went out to [and returned from] the Xiongnu this year, none were able to say what achievements—be they many or few—were accomplished;

[32] 孔氏著春秋，隱桓之閒則章，至定哀之際則微，為其切當世之文而罔褒，忌諱之辭也。

thus, no commendations were extended."[33] Attacking the border gave the Han no imperial benefit ("no commendations were extended" to the returning troops), but instead only strengthened the Xiongnu position. Conflict entrenches difference. Ultimately, Sima posits that an imperial politics predicated on difference only serves "a temporary advantage" (一時之權). It is therefore implied that affinity, relating to the Xiongnu as kin, is crucial for dynastic longevity.[34]

For the *Shiji,* Xiongnu identity is a choice. By refusing to become reliant upon the Han state, the Xiongnu remain Xiongnu—they deny being assimilated into the center. Following the reign of Emperor Wu, however, historiographic treatment of the "barbarian threat" begins to shift away from a kinship model. While the philosophy of harmony continued to undergird Han-Xiongnu relations, Chinese historiographers emphasized the potential for the Xiongnu to transform the Han (the center, *Zhongguo*). Xiongnu difference gets calcified, represented as both innate and fundamentally at odds with Han society. Hindsight afforded historiographers of the later Han the opportunity to reflect on how previous attempts to enculturate the Xiongnu had failed. The Xiongnu repeatedly broke the *heqin* agreement, indicating to the Chinese that they could not be incorporated into *Zhongguo*. This shift in Han imperial ideology is represented in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (*Book of Han*), the official historiographic record of the Western Han dynasty.

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[33] 是歲漢兵之出擊匈奴者不得言功多少，功不得御。

[34] Sima Qian's nuanced treatment of the Xiongnu would ultimately put him into political conflict with Emperor Wu. After *heqin* policy had deteriorated, Emperor Wu ordered a series of campaigns against the Xiongnu. In 99 BCE, two Han military commanders were defeated in battle. Rather than die by suicide, the general Li Ling 李陵 (d. 75 BCE) surrendered to the Xiongnu and was taken captive. Despite the overwhelming pressure to do so, Sima Qian did not condemn Li Ling. Emperor Wu responded by sentencing Sima Qian to death. Dedicated to completing the *Shiji,* Sima Qian commuted his death sentence by accepting castration as a form of corporal punishment. Tamara Chin reads Sima Qian's end-comment to his treatise as a unique moment in early Chinese ethnographic writing on the Xiongnu: Tamara Chin, "Defamiliarizing the Foreigner: Sima Qian's Ethnography and Han-Xiongnu Marriage Diplomacy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 70.2 (2010), 311–354.

The *Hanshu* was begun by the court historian Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54 CE), but the text was primarily compiled by his son, Ban Gu 孟堅 (32–92 CE). Composed during the aftermath of Wang Mang's 王莽 (r. 9–23) usurpation of the throne, his disastrous rule, and his execution at the hands of rebel forces, the *Hanshu* is concerned with the mechanisms and ideologies of just imperial rule. As with the *Shiji,* the *Hanshu* frequently explores the limits of empire and Han cultural hegemony through the Xiongnu. For example, when describing the Xiongnu attack of the Shanggu Commander 上谷郡 (near present-day Zhangjiakou, Hebei), the *Hanshu* includes a revealing transcription of the imperial edict issued by Emperor Wu. As justification for breaking the *heqin* policy (sending troops to the Xiongnu) the edict explains, "The barbarian tribes are without principle, and that has been the case, from past to present, for a long time. Recently, the Xiongnu repeatedly raided the border regions, therefore We sent generals to suppress the throngs."[35] The edict begins by contextualizing the Xiongnu as *yidi* 夷狄 ("barbarian tribes"), a compound word alluding to the Yi (夷) and Di (狄) people set outside *Zhonnguo/Zhonghua* in the Chinese worldview. According to the harmony model, the *yidi* are the diversity necessary to organize the Central States as the moral and cultural center of the world. By identifying the Xiongnu as *yidi*, the *Hanshu* asserts the following: that to view the relationship between the Han and the Xiongnu "from above" (in Jia Yi's sense of history writing) is to understand the present form of the center (the Central States). In other words, any global understanding or assessment of the Han must derive from an account of the Han-Xiongnu "border" (the difference between Han and Xiongnu territory, society, politics, and culture).

[35] 夷狄無義，所從來久。間者匈奴數寇邊境，故遣將撫師。Translations my own unless otherwise noted. Ban Gu 孟堅, *Hanshu* 漢書, juan 6, https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&res=77689&by_collection=7. All subsequent citations come from this edition.

Emperor Wu's edict in the *Hanshu* appears within the annals of his reign. Throughout these annals, engagements with the Xiongnu punctuate the narrative like a refrain: the Xiongnu raid the border; they enter the commanderies, killing officials and civilians; the Han respond by capturing heads and prisoners. From the macro perspective of the annals, conquest and treaty do little to alter the pattern of Xiongnu aggression at the empire's border. The times are characterized by the Xiongnu—the present iteration of the eternal *yidi*—actively encroachment on the world's center. Unlike the *Shiji* however, the *Hanshu* pushes back against the idea that the Xiongnu could be "civilized" (assimilated into the Central States). The imperial edict issued by Emperor Wu positions Xiongnu difference as essential; they are "without principle." The edict also makes clear that any possibility for the Xiongnu to "return home" is unlikely. "From past to present" the *yidi* remain unchanged; and during this long period, the Xiongnu have indeed become ontologically different from the Han as "barbarians without principle." This difference functions as a real and metaphysical threat to the Han's position at the center. By threatening the Han, the Xiongnu threaten harmony, the very order of the world. The Xiongnu pose a universal challenge—and therefore must be suppressed.

The *Hanshu* confronts the (seeming) limitations of Han diplomacy and military action when dealing with the Xiongnu. Ban Gu stresses how the Xiongnu have repeatedly violated the terms of peace Tamara Chin makes a similar argument about the *Hanshu's* treatment of the Xiongnu. The *Hanshu,* like the *Shiji*, includes a lengthy ethnographic description of the Xiongnu known as the "Xiongnu zhuan" 匈奴傳 (Memoir of the Xiongnu). Chin observes how Ban Gu uses "phobic anthropological rhetoric" throughout the "Xiongnu zhuan" to contextualize the Xiongnu within a broader history of antagonism between the tribal steppe confederations and the

Han.[36] As depicted in the *Hanshu,* the Xiongnu are not only morally inferior to the Han, but they are also unlikely to change. The inveterate nature of Xiongnu moral inferiority poses a direct challenge to the *heqin* policy that had previously structured relations between the Han and the Xiongnu in terms of kinship. And yet, Chinese dynastic states would continue to make use of *heqin* policies through the Tang 唐 (618–907). Anthropologist Uradyn Bulag explains the continued use of *heqin* policies—despite ideological challenges to those policies—in terms of sexual contact. Identifying a tendency among Western scholarship to approach *heqin* solely as a military strategy, Bulag emphasizes the fact that elite Han women were indeed sent to the Xiongnu:

> It is clear that during the Han dynasty, princesses or nominal princesses were seen as an important sexual resource that could be put to political purposes. What we can also glean from this is that the Chinese task of conquest (if not civilizing) was intended to be fulfilled by means of women's sexuality, and loyalty was to be obtained not through cultivation of mind and spirit, but primarily through the exchange of women—that is, through reproduction.[37]

Bulag exposes an interesting tension between the idea that the Xiongnu are inherently barbaric (as demonstrated by the *Hanshu*) and the transformative potential of the (Han) female body. Where other forms of cultural and martial domination fail, the female body succeeds in "touching" the Xiongnu. Women's flesh has the capacity to create new lines of kinship through reproduction; and as a result, women's flesh also has the capacity to assimilate various "nationalities into the unity of the Chinese Nation."[38] Bulag's attention to the marriage component of *heqin* policies reveals a haptic dimension to Chinese imperial politics. Women's

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[36] Tamara Chin, "Defamiliarizing the Foreigner: Sima Qian's Ethnography and Han-Xiongnu Marriage Diplomacy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 70.2 (2010), 317–318.

[37] Uradyn Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 68.

[38] Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge*, 70.

bodies allowed the Han imperial court to imagine a form of empire-building through mediated forms of sexual contact. Gendered "touch" thus emerges as a crucial strategy in the formation of Chinese imperialism.

Attention to how the *heqin* policy structures women as a resource of empire exposes the importance of (ideologically) stabilizing the Han-Xiongnu border in Chinese imperial historiography. Key to this project is the unidirectional flow of *women* between states (from the Central States to Xiongnu territory) mandated by *heqin* policies. According to the "Xiongnu zhuan" of the *Hanshu,* the peace treaty—at least as it was conceived by Han statesmen—originally called for an equivalent, though still gendered, exchange: Xiongnu princes, to be held as political hostages, for Han princesses, to serve as consorts.[39] In defending Emperor Wu's military campaigns against the Xiongnu (a breach of *heqin*), Ban Gu concludes that, "If [the state] does not establish hostages, then it is in vain to arrange a *heqin* agreement."[40] Tellingly, he follows this statement by asserting the need for stronger and more permanent defense measures at the border. This attention to border defenses suggests that the border itself is at stake in failed *heqin* policies. A nonreciprocal "exchange" of bodies threatens to fully dissolve the border between the Han and the Xiongnu, solidifying a suzerain/vassal relationship that would ultimately concede any pretensions of empire to the Xiongnu.[41] Likewise, the gendered element

[39] The text includes a summary of the philosopher and high-ranking Han minister Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) arguments in favor of the *heqin* policy. Stemming from the belief that "the Xiongnu cannot be moved by humanity and righteousness," Dong's rationale is simple—placate Xiongnu greed with costly gifts, swear alliances (through marriage), and "take their beloved sons as hostages so as to bind their hearts."

[40] 若不置質，空約和親，是襲孝文既往之悔，而長匈奴無已之詐也。

[41] Ultimately, Ban Gu dismisses *heqin* arrangements altogether because even if the *chanyu* were to send princes to the Han, he may still decide to abandon them. As an example, he cites the *chanyu* Wulei (r. 13–18 CE) who sent two sons to be educated at the Han imperial city of Chang'an. Wulei, however, still abandoned the *heqin* policy (and his sons) because the policy was less profitable—the Han never sent more than one thousand *jin* of gold in a year—than raiding expeditions and military conquests.

of reciprocal *heqin* exchange is structured to maintain difference—to fix the border in place. Xiongnu women are excluded from *heqin* exchange because of their own transformative potential. If Han women could sinicize Xiongnu men (either directly through sexual contact or through reproductive labor), then Xiongnu women could exert the same influence over Han men. As I will discuss in the following, this legacy of Xiongnu representation in Chinese imperial historiography directly informs how Chinese writers discussed the Mongols during the Yuan dynasty. Mongol women are similarly excluded from the narrative of Chinese-Mongol cultural exchange because of their potential to spread barbarism.

In order to better contextualize how Mongol women are represented in Yuan historiography, I first turn to how Neo-Confucianism reimagines the role of gendered touch in resisting the "northern barbarians" during the Yuan. Focusing on the Neo-Confucian trope of the chaste wife, I argue that the Mongol conquests of the Central States produced new ways of imagining the cultural and political work of touch; or rather, the *denial* of touch. From there, the chapter concludes with an exploration of gendered touch (and its absence) in the *Yuanshi* 元史 (*The History of Yuan*), the official dynastic record of the Mongol Yuan.

Neo-Confucian Widow Chastity as Political Resistance

The following section considers the role of the chaste wife as an allegory for political resistance against the Mongols in the *Songshi* 宋史 (*History of Song*), the official dynastic record of the Song dynasty 宋 (960–1279). Unlike the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu,* the *Songshi* was composed under "foreign" rule of the Central States. Indeed, Toghon Temür (r. 1333–1368), the last Mongol emperor of Yuan, ordered the compilation of the *Songshi* in 1343 (along with complementary histories of the Liao and Jin dynasties). The text was completed just two years later. Although the

text was primarily prepared by Chinese scholars, the project was overseen by the historian and grand councilor Toqto'a (1314–1356). Produced within the Yuan—and directly under Mongol[42] supervision—the *Songshi* reflects the uneasy relationship between Chinese imperial history and the Mongol conquests. Through its biographies of "faithful" Song women, the text encodes political resistance through the physical resistance of Mongol touch by Chinese women. Before moving forward with my argument, however, it is important to note that the Song dynasty is separated from the Han by close to a thousand years; and it is imperative for Western scholars to challenge the tradition of scholarship that approaches Chinese imperial history as static or somehow out of time—a tradition motivated by implicit bias and "orientalist" methodologies.[43] For the purposes of the present study, I move from the Han to the Song to show how Neo-Confucianism developed as a new technology to meet the shifting demands of empire.

The Song dynasty emerged from a period of dynastic fracture, known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period 五代十國 (907–979). Alongside the Song, three other major dynasties developed out of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period: the Liao 大遼 (916–1125; also known as the Khitan empire); the Western Xia 大夏 (1038–1227; also known as the Tangut empire); and the Jin 大金 (1115–1234). Each of these "Chinese" dynasties was led by a different ethnic group; the Song was led by the Han, the Liao by the Khitans, the Western Xia by the Tangut, and the Jin by the Jurchen.[44] When the Song was established in 960, the new state

[42] Toqto'a was born to a high-ranking Merkit family. Prior to Genghis Khan's formation of the Mongol world empire (1206), the Merkit were one of the five major tribal confederations of the Mongolian plateau.
[43] Frederich Hegel articulates this tradition well in his *Philosophy of History*. Hegel considers both China and India to be fixed outside of so-called "World History" because of their stagnant devotion to premodern modes of being.

[44] The Khitan were a nomadic people likely descended from the Xianbei, known as proto-Mongolic confederation. The Tangut were a Sino-Tibetan people, and the Western Xia was a Buddhist imperial state. Based out of present-day Manchuria, the Jurchen—later known as Manchus—were descendants of the nomadic Donghu confederation. But as Denis Twitchett and Herbert Franke note, the Khitan, Tangut, and Jurchen were not homogenous ethnic groups, but rather polyethnic federations *led* by the Khitan, Tangut, and Jurchen. These federations were fluid in

focused on reuniting the territories that had been formerly controlled by imperial China. Conflict centered around controlling the Sixteen Prefectures 燕雲十六州, a historic region that stretches along the mountains dividing central China from the northern steppe.[45] At the nexus of the Song, Liao, Western Xia, and Jin states, the Sixteen Prefectures—despite having been acquired by the Liao in 937—became a crucial border-space for negotiating imperial politics in conjunction with sociocultural difference.

The northern border regions took on an especially potent symbolic register for the Song in the twelfth century. In 1126 the Jin attacked the Song capital after the two states had successfully allied to conquer the Liao. The Song were forced to retreat from the north altogether, reconstituting the empire south of the Huai River. Through her work on the relationship between gender and empire in Yuan China, the historian Beverly Bossler has shown how the trope of the faithful wife (*jie fu*) became a pervasive political allegory during this period of the Song dynasty. After the Song reformed in the south, stories of loyal heroism during the fall of the northern capital became a frequent theme in Song writings. Bossler argues that loyal women—that is, "women whose 'loyalty' rested in the fact that they refused to submit to rape by soldiers"[46]—came to represent "the territorial integrity of the state."[47] A faithful woman's

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their composition and often included conquered populations of ethnic Han Chinese. As a result, Twitchett and Franke argue that the wars between the Song and its neighboring dynasties cannot solely be understood in terms of ethnic or racial difference. See: Denis C. Twitchett and Herbert Franke, editors, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume Six: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12.

[45] The Sixteen Prefectures were heavily contested, in part, because of their strategic position between the steppe and central China. The prefectures are clustered around the Great Wall and present-day Beijing. The Song dynasty was unable to conquer the region, which ultimately made them vulnerable to the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century.

[46] Beverly Bossler, "Gender and Empire: A View from Yuan China," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34.1 (2004), 202.

[47] Bossler, "Gender and Empire," 202.

defense of her own “bodily integrity” (to borrow a phrase from Bossler) mirrors that by loyal male subjects in response to the integrity of the state; for both women and men, loyalty is proven through resistance to foreign “invasion.” But as Bossler points out, Song stories of faithful wives “leav[e] open the question of to whom or to what the woman is loyal.”[48] For Bossler, the symbolic potency attached to women’s “loyalty” reflects this ambiguity. Because a woman’s loyalty “could simultaneously embody loyalty to a spouse, loyalty to the regime, and even loyalty to Chinese culture itself,” stories about faithful wives were able to function allegorically as political exemplars for men.[49]

The Song capital fell to the Mongols in 1276, and by 1279 the dynasty had officially collapsed. Under Mongol foreign rule, Chinese literati continued the Song tradition around faithful wives. The fourteenth-century *Songshi* includes two well-circulated stories of Song women resisting Mongol invaders. In the volume dedicated to exemplary women (*lie nü* 列女), the *Songshi* relates the stories of Han Ximeng 韓希孟 and Wang Liang 王梁. Han Ximeng, a young married woman, died by suicide shortly after the Mongols invaded the Baling commandery in 1259. According to the text, Wang Liang, only recently married, was captured by Mongol Yuan soldiers—likely during the 1276 conquest of the Song capital. Wang Liang was ultimately killed for remaining faithful to her husband upon capture. Both the stories of Han Ximeng and the “chaste wife” (*zhen fu*) Wang were popular subjects for Han Chinese writers throughout the Yuan.[50] In the *Songshi,* the stories of Han Ximeng and Wang Liang demonstrate

[48] Bossler, 202.

[49] Ibid., 203.

[50] Ibid., 206–207.

how women's bodies are used to resist foreign political "touch" in Chinese imperial historiography.

According to the *Songshi,* Han Ximeng was eighteen when Mongol troops arrived at her home city in the Baling commandery. According to the text, she was captured by soldiers and held as an offering for their general. Knowing that there was no hope of escape, Ximeng through herself into a nearby river. When her body was recovered, a poem was found written onto the waistband of her skirt:

> I, whose nature is like a *hulian*[51]*,*
> Frequently provided the ancestral shrine with artemisia[52].
> But before long I suffered from misfortune and difficulty,
> And lost my life among barbarians and horses.
> I would rather confront bloodshed and death,
> Then undertake sleeping on a [foreign] mat.
>
> On the Han [River] was Wang Meng,
> But South of the Yangzi [River] there was no Xie An.
> A long wail—I throw myself into the powerful current
> In furious agony, I dash my heart and liver to pieces.[53]

As recorded in the *Songshi,* Han Ximeng's poem clearly positions her death as a form of political resistance. Wang Meng and Xie An were both statesmen during the turbulent dynastic wars of the fourth-century Sixteen Kingdoms period. Wang Meng 王猛 (325–375), though ethnically Han, served as a chancellor to the Former Qin 秦 dynasty (351–394)[54] and is primarily

[51] A ritual vessel used for sacrificial offerings of grain in ancestral temples. In Classical Chinese, *hulian* was also used to symbolize an exemplary person.

[52] Historically, artemisia was burned as part of ritual ancestral worship in China.

[53] "我質本瑚璉，宗廟供蘋蘩。一朝嬰禍難，失身戎馬間。寧當血刃死，不作衽席完。漢上有王猛，江南無謝安。長號赴洪流，激烈摧心肝。" This and all subsequent translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. Songshi 宋史, juan 460, biographies 219, http://chinesenotes.com/songshi/songshi460.html.

[54] The Former Qin was ruled by the Di 氐, one of the five "barbarian" groups that established dynastic states in northern China during the Sixteen Kingdoms period.

remembered for the territorial expansion he oversaw. As a prime minister of the Eastern Jin 晉朝 (266–420), Xie An 謝安 (ca. 320–385) guided the state through a series of attacks by the Former Qin. Han Ximeng compares the Mongol conquests to Wang Meng's expansionism, while lamenting that the Song had no hero like Xie An to defend them from such encroachments. In other words, Han Ximeng situates her suicide as a mode of resistance in the absence of any male political hero. Notably, Han Ximeng's resistance precludes touch; her poem standing in place of her body. As an allegory for the state, Han Ximeng's absent body symbolizes territory that cannot be touched—and, as a result, territory that cannot be transformed.

The *Songshi's* account of Wang Liang underscores how Mongol touch has the capacity to fundamentally transform the state. Wang Liang, like Han Ximeng, is a young married woman when she is captured by Mongol Yuan forces. Just before she is taken captive, Wang Liang says to her husband, "When I encounter the troops I must die, because propriety does not tolerate dishonor."[55] Wang Liang is unequivocal: she *must* (*bi* 必) die, because to *encounter* (*yu* 遇) the Mongol forces is to be touched by them. For Wang Liang, death is the only solution to the transformative properties of Mongol foreign "touch." Mongol touch cannot be tolerated within Han society because it violates ritual propriety (*yi* 義). In the *Hanshu,* Han Emperor Wu's edict against the Xiongnu expressed a similar understanding of the northern "barbarians"—that they are *without principle, without ritual propriety* (*wu yi* 無義). For Wang Liang and the *Songshi*, however, the ontological difference of the barbarians can be transferred by touch. To encounter Mongol Yuan troops, to be "touched" by them, is a violation of propriety incommensurate with "civilized" life. Therefore, to be dishonored by the Mongols is to be forcibly removed from the

[55] "吾遇兵必死，義不受汙辱。若後娶，當告我。" Ibid.

religious, social, and cultural norms (*yi* 義) that structure life in the Song. Thus figured, "barbarian" touch is a destructive force.

The *Songshi* resolves the problem of destructive Mongol touch through another substitution. Instead of a poem, Wang Liang's body is replaced through reincarnation. Although Wang Liang is killed after refusing to submit her body to a Yuan commander, her biography ends with a supernatural twist. Ten years after Wang Liang's death, her spirit appears before her husband in a dream, informing him that she had been reborn and would once again become his wife in seven years' time. The text upholds Song sociocultural and political life by rewarding Wang Liang's fidelity to her husband with a new body. This ending is somewhat unique to the *Songshi* as other Yuan-era accounts of the chaste wife Wang end with her penning a poem in blood before throwing herself off a cliff.[56] Interestingly, the *Songshi* does not radically transform Wang Liang's body. Wang Liang's reincarnation emphasizes a closed circuit, impenetrable to foreign "touch." Her biography maintains the integrity of the Song family unit. Indeed, the texts explains that Wang Liang's husband is circumstantially forced to remarry because the couple had not produced an heir before her death. Wang Liang's reincarnation not only restores the family but revitalizes it by presumably extending the family line. Allegorically, Wang Liang's biography positions the state as a closed and self-sustaining (via reincarnation) system. The threat of foreign "touch"—that is, the threat of *transformational* influence—must be evaded precisely because it cannot be sustained within "propriety."

Negating Touch: Displacing Mongol Cultural Autonomy in the *Yuanshi*

[56] Bossler, 206.

Confucianism offers a compelling strategy for uncovering how and why gender plays such a significant role in Chinese narratives, both modern and premodern, of the Mongols. For the present study, the salience of Confucianism is twofold. First, as Beverly Bossler summarizes, a central tenet of Confucian philosophy maintains that "human beings are understood as completing the moral transformations of the universe."[57] Human behavior is not just social, but cosmic; and human action has the power to shape—and reshape—the world. As Bossler has argued, Mongol governance curtailed the public scope of action for men, resulting in the Han literati practice of extolling female virtue as a primary site for political resistance.[58] In particular, the figure of the faithful wife came to represent the perpetuity of Chinese cultural norms—especially amidst change. Second, the Neo-Confucian revival during the Song-Ming period (960–1648) empowered a view of Chinese political universalism that accommodated both Chinese dynastic fracture (following the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907) and foreign Mongol rule under the Yuan (1271–1368).[59] Here too women played a central role in imagining the Chinese imperium. Even before Kublai Khan's formation of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271), Chinese writers essentialized "Mongol" difference[60] around marriage practice and women's property

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[57] Ibid., 213.

[58] Ibid., 214–15.

[59] The ongoing sociopolitical crises between the Song and the northern dynastic states contributed to the formation—and popularity—of Neo-Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism is, in part, an apparatus *not* of empire, but of the state. As Peter Bol argues, Neo-Confucianism developed alongside "the idea of rulership as universal kingship had lost viability [during the Song] because Song accepted that it existed in a world of multiple dynastic states, which exchanged ambassadors and signed peace treaties." Not to be confused with the New Confucianism movement of the twentieth century, the term Neo-Confucianism specifically refers to the Confucian revival that occurred during the Song-Ming period of Chinese imperial history. In broad strokes, Neo-Confucianism is characterized by two complementary pursuits: first, to clarify and expand the Confucian tradition of moral psychology into a more coherent cosmological system; and second, to counteract the influence of Buddhism and Daoism in Chinese society. (Peter K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008], 120).

[60] Rather, the difference between Han culture and the northern nomadic cultures of Manchuria and the steppe.

rights. For instance, Wen Weijian 文惟簡, a twelfth-century writer, remarked that among the Jurchen there are those "who have made their stepmother their wife, just like dogs or pigs. With the Chinese this is different because they know that it would be against the law."[61]

Wen's commentary on the levirate—a form of marriage inheritance practiced among the Jurchen and the Mongols—demonstrates how Neo-Confucian thought mediates cross-cultural contact through discourses of moral governance centered around gendered social roles.[62] At the time of Wen's writing (ca. 1138), the Jurchen Jin dynasty had recently broken its alliance with the Han Song dynasty and the two were at war. The Jin thus posed a significant threat to the Song state. Wen's response to the levirate intimates an underlying political ideology that is a) in direct opposition with the Jin; and b) rooted in the status of widowed women. The status of widowed women was particularly vexed during the Song dynasty as women gained new property rights.[63] Reactionary writers leaned on Confucianism to try and limiting women's economic independence by celebrating female piety through acts of domestic subservience.[64] For Wen, the Jurchen threaten to upend the Han Chinese family system at a time when it already felt vulnerable—and, in turn, threaten the entire Han way of life. If the Han are to be distinguished by their knowledge of law, it is a knowledge (*zhi* 知) that implies the recognition of some

[61] 有妻其繼母者，與犬豕無異。漢兒則不然，知其非法也。Translation: Herbert Franke, "Jurchen Customary Law and the Chinese Law of the Chin Dynasty," in *State and Law in East Asia: Festschrift Karl Bünger,* ed. Dieter Eikemeier and Herbert Franke (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), 228.

[62] The Chinese name for the Jurchen was transliterated as *Nüzhen* 女真. Interestingly, the characters used for the name are "woman" (女) and "true, ideal, perfected" (真). Chinese perception of the Jurchen is inherently gendered.

[63] See: Bettine Birge, *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Song and Yüan China (960–1368)*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[64] See: Robert Hymes, "Sung Society and Social Change," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. John W. Chaffee and Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 526–664.

underlying realty. This point is underscored by Wen's use of the word *fa* 法, which refers to legal ordinance as well as normative patterns of behavior. Wen's logic—that patterns of behavior form human law that leads to a well-ordered society—broadly conforms to the Neo-Confucian emphasis on the innate human capacity to apprehend, and align with, cosmological order. For many Confucian thinkers doing the Song–Ming period, the family was seen as a microcosm of this order.[65] By violating this familial order, the Jurchen are objectively wrong and cosmically misaligned. By extension, so too is the Jin.

The threats, real and metaphysical, posed to the Song by the Jin were magnified by the Mongols. However, the Mongols, unlike the Jurchen, succeeded in conquering the Song dynasty (as well as the Jin). In response to the resultant Yuan dynasty, formed in 1271 by Kublai Khan, Han writers retooled Neo-Confucian concepts to accommodate foreign rule alongside Han cultural norms and China's long imperial history. The *Yuanshi,* the official Chinese historiography of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, addresses the problem of foreign rule by filtering Mongol history through a Neo-Confucian lens that, once again, is structured around patriarchal gender roles. The text was hastily composed in 1368 following the fall of the last Mongol Yuan emperor, Toghon Temür. The court historian Song Lian—himself a prominent Neo-Confucian—oversaw the compilation of the *Yuanshi*, completed in 1370. Although the *Yuanshi* is formally styled as a typical Chinese dynastic history[66], it draws heavily from contemporaneous Mongol

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[65] Zhang Zai (1020–1077) metaphysical writings are illustrative of this belief and are characterized by his conception of the cosmos as a family. See, for instance: Zhang Zai, "The Western Inscription" in *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Justin Tiwald and Bryan Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), 134–136.

[66] The Han historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 compiled the first of the official Chinese dynastic histories in 91 BCE. Beginning with the Tang dynasty (618–907) it became customary for each new dynasty to compile the history of its predecessor. These histories are compiled in the monumental *Twenty-Four Histories* (二十四史). The dynastic histories generally include five distinct sections: Annals (biographies of emperors/kings), Chronologies, Treatises (on statecraft), Hereditary Houses (biographies of regional ruling houses and eminent persons), and Biographies (the

historiographies, including *The Secret History of the Mongols* (the official Mongol record of Chinggisid rule) and Rashīd al-Dīn's *Compendium of Chronicles* (a Persian world history composed from within the Mongol Ilkhanate).[67] The resulting text is unique: a blend of the Chinese and Mongol historiographic traditions. The text rationalizes this blend by "sinicizing" Mongol historiography through Neo-Confucian revisions—the Mongols, it would seem, were always Chinese. A brief note before continuing: the following study of the *Yuanshi* is limited to its first volume, the biography of Chinggis Khan. I focus specifically on this volume because it is here where the text most obviously revises Mongol historiography to accommodate the Yuan as an inherently *Chinese* dynasty.

The *Yuanshi* begins with the Yuan dynastic Annals (biographies of the Mongol Great Khans); and from the outset, the text lays out a revisory rubric for Mongol assimilation. For example, Chinggis Khan is introduced by his temple name, Taizu (*great progenitor*)—a name typically reserved for the founding ruler of a Chinese dynasty. Immediately, then, the text exposes the central tension of its historiographic project: narrating the Mongol empire as a Chinese dynasty, even though it preceded the Yuan by more than half a century. Chinggis Khan may have ruled as the first *khagan,* the "khan of khans," but it was Kublai Khan (Chinggis's grandson) who ruled as the first Mongol emperor of China. By beginning the Yuan Annals with Chinggis Khan, the *Yuanshi* moves to assimilate the entire Mongol empire within Chinese dynastic history. The annals rationalize this sinicization by portraying the Chinggis Khan, his ancestors, and his descendants as preternaturally Confucian. Because Confucian biography was

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personal histories of notable figures, including women; the collective accounts of political groups—like bureaucratic officials—and reports of foreign states.

[67] See, for instance: Shagdaryn Bira, *Mongolian Historical Writing from 1200 to 1700,* 2nd edition, trans. John R. Krueger, (Bellingham, WA: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 2002), 78.

designed to be didactic[68], the annals illustrate where the *Yuanshi* compilers took issue with Mongol historiography and why. As with Wen's writing on the Jurchen, the Neo-Confucian revision in the annals focuses on moments in Mongol historiography where cultural differences around gender are the most obvious.

The first annal focuses on Chinggis Khan and his rise to power, opening with a retelling of the Mongol Bodonchar gest. The historical Bodonchar founded the Mongol Borjigin clan in the tenth century and was a direct ancestor of Chinggis Khan. In *The Secret History,* the Bodonchar story focuses on how Alan Goa, Bodonchar's widowed mother, instructs her sons to prepare them for rule. The *Yuanshi,* however, limits Alan's role in the larger dynastic narrative. In this version, Alan appears only in the text to demonstrate Bodonchar's exceptional origins. Here, Alan dreams of light. She dreams of light streaming through the smoke-hole of her tent; of it taking the shape of a man; of that man lying upon her bench. When Alan wakes, she is pregnant.[69] The child born from Alan's miraculous pregnancy is, of course, Bodonchar. Alone in recognizing Bodonchar's celestial birth and its import, Alan declares that "among future generations, his descendants are sure to have great nobility."[70]

The *Yuanshi* does not significantly alter the details of Bodonchar's miraculous birth in *The Secret History.* In both versions of the tale, Alan Goa is visited by a celestial being who impregnates her simply by placing his hand over her womb. This form of heavenly touch does not violate the "bodily integrity" of Alan Goa in the same way that Mongol touch violates the

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[68] Denis Twitchett, "Chinese Biographical Writing," in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 95–114.

[69] 既而夫亡，阿蘭寡居，夜寢帳中，夢白光自天窗中入，化為金色神人，來趨臥榻。阿蘭驚覺，遂有娠，產一子，即孛端義兒也。This and all subsequent translations are my own unless otherwise noted. This and all future citations from: Song Lian 宋濂, *Yuanshi* 元史, juan 1, http://chinesenotes.com/yuanshi/yuanshi001.html.

[70] 「此兒非癡，後世子孫必有大貴者。」Ibid.

bodies of Han Ximeng and Wang Liang in the *Songshi*. Instead, Alan conceives without remitting her status as a faithful wife. Within the context of Mongol historiography, however, Alan Goa's fidelity to her husband is, decidedly, stripped of political allegory. Alan is transformed by foreign "touch," but unlike the "barbarian" touch that threatens to strip Han Ximeng and Wang Liang of their status among the "civilized" in the *Songshi,* this heavenly touch places her *within* the bounds of Chinese society. In other words, the celestial visitor's touch "civilizes" Alan and naturalizes Bodonchar as a progenitor of a new Chinese imperial cycle. Though not ethnically Han, the text distinguishes Alan Goa and Bodonchar by preternatural, heavenly touch: proto-Chinese. Indeed, the visitor's touch is *literally* "civilizing," as it creates an entirely new—and exemplary—"Mongol" dynastic line through Bodonchar. Unlike the ocular and aural borders discussed in chapters one and two, civilizing touch in the *Yuanshi* is directed toward dissolving the border of Mongol difference. Ultimately, this form of civilizing touch reimagines the foreign Yuan dynasty as inherently Chinese through the Chinggisid line. The man of yellow light transforms not just Alan Goa, but the course of history as well.

The *Yuanshi*, however, misses the punchline of Alan's story. In *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Alan bears *three* sons after the death of her husband. As Alan never remarried, her first two sons conclude that their brothers must be fathered by a servant. Overhearing this, Alan calls together her five sons. She asks them each to break a single arrow—easily done. Next, she bundles five arrows together and asks them to break the bundle. When none of them can, Alan reveals the celestial parentage of her younger children (she describes the father as a yellow man that travels by light) and then explains:

> You, my five sons, were born of one womb. If, like the five arrow-shafts just now, each of you keeps to himself, then, like those single arrow-shafts, anybody will easily break you.

> If, like, the bound arrow-shafts, you remain together and of one mind, how can anyone deal with you so easily?[71]

The Arrow Parable[72] of *The Secret History* offsets the miraculous origins of Alan's three youngest sons. While Alan is confident that her three heaven-born sons will "become rulers of all," she emphasizes that *all* her sons "were born of one womb." This shared humanity—decidedly located within the female body—is crucial to the dynastic project first signaled by the yellow man's heavenly status. Yes, Alan's sons are fated to rule, but their success will be determined by remaining "of one mind"; that is, her sons will only succeed by remembering their shared mother.

The *Yuanshi* heavily revises the myth of Alan Goa. Instead of three additional sons, Alan bears just one after the death of her husband: Bodonchar. Moreover, Alan herself is only introduced in relation to her son, "the patriarch Bodonchar" (*zu* 祖). The *Yuanshi* makes structural revisions to the Alan Goa myth, revisions that sideline her role in Chinggis Khan's genealogy. In her absence, the text shifts its focus entirely to Bodonchar as Chinggis's *zu* (祖), meaning both patriarch (of a clan or dynasty) *and* paternal grandfather in Classical Chinese.[73] Bodonchar's epithet (*zu*) imposes a more rigid patriarchal structure onto Mongol historiography. The text uses this structure to justify the future Mongol empire in two ways: first, by heavenly mandate (his exemplary birth); and second, by familial genealogy ("paternal grandfather"). In the *Secret History,* Alan Goa occupies an important place in Mongol historiography: she is the shared human origin of *five* dynastic clans, one founded by each of her five sons. Tellingly, the

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[71] *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century,* volume 1, trans. Igor de Rachelwiltz (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 5. All subsequent citations will appear in text for ease of reference.

[72] See: Timothy May, "Alan Goa and the Arrow Parable," in *The Mongol Empire: A Historical Encyclopedia*, volume 2, ed. Timothy May (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO LLC, 2017), 4–6.

[73] The Mongol empire's Great Khans were all Borjigid.

Yuanshi excises the entire Arrow Parable—and with it, Alan's emphasis on the womb as progenitor.

Moreover, the *Yuanshi's* Bodonchar is refashioned to exemplify Neo-Confucian masculinity. As a discursive term, "gender" has no corollary in Chinese. According to Confucianism, gender identity, like all differentiating identities, is formed through kinship and ritual.[74] Confucius himself distinguished female/male gender roles in terms of domestic (***nei***) and public (***wei***) domains.[75] Neo-Confucian metaphysics, as exemplified by Cheng Yi (1033–1107), apprehends masculinity as active, correct, and illuminative of the universal order.[76] In service of this (masculine) order, Neo-Confucian self-cultivation maintains that a ruler's moral perfection is the foundation for a just government and healthy society. Zhu Xi (1130–1200), one of the most influential Song Neo-Confucians, explains that such a ruler "does not inquire into fate, but instead looks only toward righteousness. Poverty or wealth, nobility or lowliness, if it derives from being righteous then that which befalls [a sage] is regarded with tranquility."[77] The *Yuanshi's* Bodonchar expresses a similar sentiment after the death of his mother. When Alan dies, Bodonchar's older brothers divide up the family wealth between themselves—leaving Bodonchar with nothing. He responds by saying, "Fate determines whether one is poor and lowly

[74] For a recent primer, see: Sin Yee Chan, "Confucianism and Gender," in *The Oxford Handbook of Confucianism*, ed. Jennifer Oldstone-Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[75] Lijun Yuan, *Confucian Ren and Feminist Ethics of Care* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019), 23.

[76] Bret Hinsch, "Metaphysics and Reality of the Feminine in Early Neo-Confucian Thought," *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 11.6 (1988), 593–94.

[77] 聖人更不問命，只看義如何。貧富貴賤，惟義所在，謂安於所遇也。My translation. Here I quote from Li Jingde's 黎靖德 1270 compilation of the *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (*Classified Conversations of Master Zhu*), *juan* 34. https://ctext.org/zhuzi-yulei

or rich and noble; how insufficient wealth is for following the proper path in life!"[78] Bodonchar, though untrained, is innately endowed with the qualities of a Neo-Confucian sage. Unsurprisingly, the Mongol version of the story is quite different. In *The Secret History,* Bodonchar simply exclaims, "If I die, I die; if I live, I live!" Here, Bodonchar expresses a kind of fatalism not found in Neo-Confucian discussions of destiny and free will. As Chung-ying Cheng argues, the will (***zhi***) "is a choice and decision the self makes in view or in recognition of an ideal value or a potential reality that can be achieved through one's efforts."[79] For Zhu Xi, such acts of *zhi* belong to men, for: "To do wrong is unbecoming to a wife, and to do good is also unbecoming to a wife. A woman is merely to be obedient to what is proper."[80] The *Yuanshi* emphasizes this point by pairing Bodonchar's gest with a markedly negative anecdote about Mother Nomolun.

By the time she appears in the *Yuanshi*, Nomolun, the wife of Bodonchar's descendent Menen-tudun, is widowed with seven adult sons. Nomolun, whose "inborn nature was unyielding and stern," [81] seems to appear in the text solely as an example of women's inability to participate in statecraft. According to the *Yuanshi,* Nomolun was riding in her chariot when she encountered a group of Jalair children digging for roots in a field. Angrily, Nomolun remarks to herself, "This field, to be sure, is the place where my son gallops horses—and children dare to

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[78] 孛端義兒曰：「貧賤富貴，命也，貲財何足道！ *Yuanshi* 元史, juan 1, http://chinesenotes.com/yuanshi/yuanshi001.html.

[79] Chung-ying Cheng, "A Theory of Confucian Selfhood: Self-Cultivation and Free Will in Confucian Philosophy," in *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy and Community*, ed. Kwong-loi Shun and David B. Wong (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 124.

[80] 朱子曰：有非非婦人也有善非婦人也蓋女子以順為正。Transcription from: Zhu Xi, *Xu Jinsi Lu* 續近思錄 (*Further Reflections on Things at Hand*), (Taipei: Shijie Shuju 世界書局, 1974), 121. Translation from: Chu Hsi [Zhu Xi], *Further Reflections on Things at Hand,* trans. Allen Wittenborn (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1991), 115.

[81] 莫拿倫性剛急。*Yuanshi* 元史, juan 1, http://chinesenotes.com/yuanshi/yuanshi001.html.

destroy it?"[82] She then drives the chariot toward the children, crushing and injuring them. The Jalair—a prominent tribe of the Mongolian plateau during the eleventh and twelfth centuries—responded by driving off her horse herd. Six of Nomolun's sons went in pursuit of the Jalair without donning their armor. All six were killed. The Jalair then attack Nomolun's camp, killing all but Qaidu, one of Nomolun's grandchildren who had been hidden in the forest by his mother. Nomolun's youngest son, Nachin the Brave, survives only because he had relocated to Barguchin[83] to be with his wife's family. The conflict between Nomolun and the Jalair does not appear in the *The Secret History*, though the story is attested in Rashīd al-Dīn's *Compendium*. The presence of Nomolun's story in the *Yuanshi* is striking. Not only is her story the last piece of pre-Chinggis historiography included within the text, but it is also the last story to prominently feature a woman. In *The Secret History of the Mongols,* women continue to play important roles in the narrative action of the text—including Chinggis's mother, Hoelun, and Börte, his first wife. But in the *Yuanshi,* Hoelun makes only a fleeting appearance; Börte, none at all. After Nomolun's negative exemplar, Mongol women, particularly Mongol women with political power, are excised from the text.

Nomolun's "unyielding and stern" nature, coupled with her rash decision making, substantiates both Bondonchar's exemplarity *and* Neo-Confucian gender roles. Ordained by heaven, Bodonchar's rule is further justified in the text for his innate sense of Neo-Confucian propriety and ethics. Conversely, Nomolun's story offsets Bodonchar's embodiment of the Confucian sage. She is a reminder that the Mongols themselves are not inherently Chinese. While the *Yuanshi* naturalizes Bodonchar and his descendants, it also uses Nomolun as a stand-in

[82] 「此田乃我子馳馬之所，群兒輒敢壞之邪？」*Yuanshi* 元史, juan 1, http://chinesenotes.com/yuanshi/yuanshi001.html.

[83] A plains region north of the Orkhon valley in present-day Mongolia.

for Mongol difference. In turn, this difference is coded as barbarism—that is, the inability to cultivate Confucian qualities. Nomolun's presence in the text serves as a reminder that a) Bodonchar and his line are exceptions to the barbaric Mongols; and b) cultural sinicization is an unstable and precarious process. Nomolun's inability to serve her clan as a Confucian almost results in the complete destruction of Bodonchar's (heavenly mandated) lineage. Echoing earlier implications about the destructive potential of Xiongnu women during the Han, the *Yuanshi* removes the productive capacity of Chinese women from the women in its Mongol historiography. On one hand, the text recedes Alan Goa's role in order to establish the celestial figure that visits her yurt as the sole *cause* of Mongol rule in China; and on the other, it raises Nomolun's role to demonstrate the continued necessity for maintaining the border between Chinese and Mongol identities. Mongol men have the potential to become Chinese through divine intervention, but Mongol women are always Mongol. By displacing Mongol identity entirely onto its female characters, the *Yuanshi* is able to sublimate both the historical reality of Mongol conquest and any critique of Mongol rule. Gender thus becomes a strategy for disempowering the cultural and political work of Mongol "touch." By removing Mongol women from Mongol historiography, the *Yuanshi* never allows "the Mongols"—as distinct from the Chinese—to cross the border into the Central States. Thus, the text asserts that the Yuan dynasty was never a Mongol dynasty and—what is more—that the Mongol world empire was actually sinitic in origin.

As with the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu,* the *Yuanshi* uses the "northern barbarians" as a hermeneutical tool for negotiating Chinese imperial identity and ideology. In its opening annal, the *Yuanshi* revises Mongol historiography through a Neo-Confucian lens as a means to justify Mongol rule of China. By establishing the Chinggisid line as innately "Chinese," the *Yuanshi*

articulates a sinitic genealogy for the Mongol empire. However, the text's version of Mongol historiography assimilates the Yuan into a broader view of Chinese imperial history while simultaneously rejecting Mongol cultural autonomy. I argue that the *Yuanshi* extends the Neo-Confucian trope of the chaste wife to actively preclude any cross-cultural exchange of women's bodies. In other words, the *Yuanshi* attempts to limit the transformative potential of women's touch. The Han *heqin* policy was empowered, in part, by the belief that women could function as a valuable cultural-political export. The *Yuanshi* adapts the Neo-Confucian allegory of the state as an "intact" female body to resist the implications of an inverted (Mongol women into China) exchange. The text thus refuses to "touch" Mongol women—to naturalize them into Chinese imperial historiography.

The *Secret History* imagines a new politics of touch, one that (ultimately) deploys Tibetan Buddhism as a primary vehicle for cultural conquest. The text draws from this "foreign" religion as a way to create a new genealogy for a blended society. By contrast, the *Yuanshi* attempts to stabilize Mongol rule within a much longer Chinese imperial tradition (seen in the way the *Yuanshi* "sinicizes" Mongol historiography). The *Yuanshi* denies an intimate politics of touch, and instead makes the Mongols untouchable through their memorialization.

Coda: "Indigestion"—Bridging Touch, Taste, and Smell

Throughout the present chapter I have argued that the historiographical tradition of Imperial China uses the "northern barbarians" as a heuristic for defining Chinese empire and identity. As the official record of the Yuan, the *Yuanshi* draws upon Neo-Confucian gender norms to challenge Mongol political conquest. Women's bodies take on an allegorical register for the Chinese state when they deny sexual access by the Mongols. Building upon this premise, the

following builds a link between the political practices of touch and smell in Yuan China. In this short coda I gesture towards my next research project, which considers the Silvan Tomkins concept of "dissmell" as a postcolonial practice in Chinese vernacular texts produced within the Yuan. However, the bulk of the following case study is dedicated toward bridging touch with taste and smell in Yuan-era literatures. Focusing on the play *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife* (*Qiu Hu xiqi* 秋胡戲妻), I argue that indigestion emerges as an aesthetic motif for the subjugated body (and body politic) in Yuan vernacular texts.

From Touch to Taste: Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife (Qiu Hu xiqi 秋胡戲妻)

Dating back to the Han dynasty, the story of Qiu Hu and his wife is one of the earliest examples of a chaste woman's suicide in the Chinese literary tradition. First attested in Liu Xiang's 劉向 (77–6 BCE) *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (*Accounts of Notable Women*), the story appears as an entry entitled the "Chaste Woman Qiu of Lu" (Lu Qiu Jiefu 魯秋潔婦):

> The chaste woman was the wife of Qiu Hu of Lu. Five days after taking her as his wife, he left to serve as an official in Chen. Five years later, he returned. Before he got home, he saw a woman picking mulberry leaves by the wayside. Entranced by her, Qiu Hu got down from his carriage and said, "The sun is burning you as you pick mulberry leaves, and I have come a long way. I want to take advantage of the mulberry's shade, eat something, put down my baggage, and get some rest." The woman continued picking mulberry leaves. Qiu Hu said, "Toiling in a field is not as good as coming upon a year of abundant harvest; toiling among mulberry trees is not as good as meeting a minister of the state. I have gold that I wish to offer to you, My Lady." The woman replied, "Alas! I pick mulberry leaves and work hard to spin and weave so that I can provide for our food and clothing, support my parents, and serve my husband. I do not want the gold. What I want is for you to not have base motives, and for me to banish all licentious thoughts. Put away your baggage and the gold from your cache!" Qiu Hu thus left.
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> When he reached home, he offered the gold to his mother and had someone send for his wife. She turned out to be the person picking mulberry leaves. Qiu Hu was ashamed. The woman said, "You tied back your hair, cultivated your person, took leave of your parents, and went off to serve in court. Returning after five years, you should be galloping in a cloud of dust, eager to see your parents as quickly as possible. But just now you were entranced by a woman on the road, put down your baggage, and offered her

gold: this is to forget your mother; forgetting your mother is unfilial. To love sensual beauty and to indulge in licentiousness are to corrupt your conduct; corrupting your conduct is undutiful. He who is unfilial in serving his parents will be disloyal in serving his ruler; he who is undutiful in managing his family will ruin government affairs as an official. Having lost both filial piety and dutifulness, you will certainly not succeed. I cannot bear to see you remarry; and I too will not marry again." She left and went east, threw herself into the river, and died. …[84]

潔婦者，魯秋胡子妻也。既納之五日，去而宦於陳，五年乃歸。未至 家，見路旁婦人採桑， 秋胡子悅之，下車謂曰:「若曝採桑，吾行 道湌，願託桑蔭下湌，下齎休焉。」婦人採桑不輟， 秋胡子謂曰: 「力田不如逢豐年，力桑不如見國卿。吾有金，願以與夫人。」婦人 曰:「嘻!夫採桑力作，紡績織紝，以供衣食，奉二親，養夫子。吾 不願金，所願卿無有外意，妾亦無淫泆之志，收子之齎與笥金。」 秋胡子遂去，至家，奉金遺母，使人喚婦至，乃嚮採桑者也， 秋胡 子慚。婦曰:「子束髮脩身，辭親往仕，五年乃還，當所悅馳驟，揚 塵疾至。今也乃悅路傍婦人，下子之裝，以金予之，是忘母也。忘母 不孝，好色淫泆，是污行也，污行不義。夫事親不孝，則事君不忠。 處家不義，則治官不理。孝義並亡，必不遂矣。妾不忍見，子改娶 矣，妾亦不嫁。」遂去而東走，投河而死。[85]

In the stories of Han Ximeng and the widow Wang discussed in chapter three, suicide becomes a form of political resistance against a foreign enemy. Conversely, the antagonist of Qiu Hu's story is Qiu Hu himself, a high-ranking official of the Chinese state. By abandoning "propriety" (義)—conduct, as discussed in the previous chapter, that loosely defined premodern Chinese identity—Qiu Hu has made himself alien to his wife, whose chastity, by the same logic, maintains her "Chinese" status. Qiu Hu's wife refuses to "touch" her husband because his "foreign" touch would remove her from the bounds of civilization, it would fundamentally change her identity into something other than a filial wife. Tellingly, she seems particularly horrified by Qiu Hu's attempt at abusing his government position. Having first failed to elicit the sympathies of the woman picking mulberry leaves when stating that he desires rest, Qiu Hu

[84] Translation quoted from: Wai-yee Li, "Introduction to *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife,*" in *Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama,* eds. C.T. Hsia, Wai-yee Li, and George Kao (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 299.

[85] Liu Xiang 劉向, "Lu Qiu Jiefu 魯秋潔婦," in *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳, https://ctext.org/lie-nv-zhuan/lu-qiu-jie-fu/zh.

adopts a new strategy for getting her attention. Coyly he remarks that "toiling among mulberry trees is not as good as meeting a minister of the state." To *this* the woman responds, asserting that while she does not want for gold, she does want the minister "to not have base motives." Later, when the woman's identity is revealed, she concludes that "he who is undutiful in managing his family will ruin government affairs as an official." Here, the family is explicitly imagined as an analogy for the state, thereby proving Qiu Hu to be corrupt as both a husband *and* as a minister. Like the deaths of Han Ximeng and the widow Wang, the death of Qiu Hu's wife is a statement of political resistance.

During the Yuan, the playwright Shi Junbao 石君寶 (1192–1276) adapted the story of Qiu Hu and his wife into a *zaju* 雜劇 (variety play).[86] The play, *The Lu Official Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife* (*Lu daifu Qiu Hu xiqi* 魯大夫秋胡戲妻), is the first extant text to transform Liu Xiang's version of the tale into a comedy.[87] Most notably, the play alters the ending of the original story so that Qiu Hu and his wife reconcile. Through his comedic revisions and expansion, Shi also shifts the allegorical resonances between family and state found in the "Chaste Woman Qiu" story. Instead of rejecting Qiu Hu as a "barbarian" (someone outside the bounds of Chinese civilization), the play deploys what I refer to as an aesthetics of indigestion as a subversive challenge to the idea of a binary difference between the civilized and the barbarous. Before turning to the text, however, I will briefly outline the formal features of Yuan *zaju.* During the Song dynasty the term *zaju* referred to a variety of different types of musical, dramatic, and acrobatic performances. After the Mongols united the Song and Jin dynasties, the

[86] Interestingly, some scholars like William Dolby have argued that Shi Junbao was actually of Jurchen descent. See: William Dolby, *Eight Chinese Plays from the Thirteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 11–13.

[87] Wai-yee Li, "Introduction to *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife*," in *Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama*, ed. C.T. Hsia, Wai-yee Li, and George Kao (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 301.

zaju became a more concretized genre. Heavily influenced by features of Jin drama and performance, the formal features of *zaju* coalesced into a play of (typically) four acts, with each act organized around a particular song suite, "in which all arias follow one [musical] mode (*gongdiao* 宮調) and one rhyme."[88] The arias of each act take precedence over spoken dialogue, which was likely often improvised by performers. Many Yuan-era plays also feature what is known as a "wedge" (*xiezi* 楔子) placed either at the beginning of a play or between two acts. Distinct from acts by their brevity, wedges typically feature only one or two arias and serve as an introduction to a new scene or as a transition between two scenes.

The Yuan-era *zaju Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife* begins shortly after Qiu Hu and his wife, named Meiying in the play, are married. Their nuptials, however, are interrupted when a draft officer comes to collect Qiu Hu as a "proper conscript" (*zhengjun* 正軍) for military service. The intrusion of the draft officer into the wedding celebrations of Qiu Hu and Meiying also marks several other critical intrusions. First, Qiu Hu's conscription marks the first major change that Shi Junbao makes to the "Chaste Woman Qiu" story. Instead of leaving home to take on a post as a bureaucratic official, Shi's Qiu Hu is forced to join the army. Although the play makes no specific reference to a particular campaign or war, it is set during the waning years of the Spring and Autumn period (from 770 to roughly 481 BCE) when the kingdom of Zhou 周 started to lose centralized control over regional rulers. As a presage to the Warring States period (c. 475–221 BCE), the latter part of the Spring and Autumn period can be partially characterized as an era of increasing conflict between semi-autonomous states. Therefore, it is likely that Qiu Hu is conscripted to fight in an internal armed conflict. The second intrusion is a temporal one.

[88] Wai-yee Li, "Introduction," in *Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama*, eds. C.T. Hsia, Wai-yee Li, and George Kao (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 3.

As Wai-yee Li has observed, the phrase "proper conscript" was used by the Yuan military system, referring to when two or three families would send a single conscript to the army.[89] Thus when the draft officer announces that he is there because "I have received orders from my superiors that you [Qiu Hu] are a proper conscript,"[90] he likewise announces the presence of the Yuan within the world of the play. The simultaneity of the play's temporality—the ancient past alongside the "present" moment of the Yuan—signals its allegorical register.

In chapter three, I explore the chaste female body as a metaphor for the Chinese state (and Chinese identity). As discussed, the "integrity" of the chaste woman's body served as an allegory for the Chinese state against foreign conquest. But *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife* disrupts the symmetry between the chaste woman and the state. By combining temporalities through a Yuan military term, the play suggests that the unnamed enemy is the "civilized barbarian," the Mongols domesticated within the Chinese bureaucratic and cultural sphere. Indeed, the draft officer himself is more of a direct antagonist to Qiu Hu than the unnamed forces he is sent to fight against. The "Chaste Woman Qiu of Lu" similarly imagines Qiu Hu's corruption as alien to China and Chinese identity. In this earlier version of the tale, Qiu Hu's licentiousness strips him off his "civilized" status so that he too figures as a kind of internal barbarian presence. The play however does not treat the internal barbarian as foreign; instead, its entire state apparatus seems to be primarily coded as Yuan—a blend of Chinese and Mongol societies. Despite his undutiful conduct, Qiu Hu does not lose his Chinese identity—he is never made into a barbarian. Moreover, Meiying is not a chaste wife. When Qiu Hu attempts to seduce

[89] See footnote 16 in the *Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama* edition of *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife.*

[90] Shi Junbao, *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife,* in *Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama*, eds. C.T. Hsia, Wai-yee Li, and George Kao (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 305. All s English citations are from this edition. Subsequent citations will appear parenthetically in text.

her, Meiying does not kill herself, but instead asks for a divorce. This more mild form of protest is likewise abandoned by the play when Meiying ultimately reunites with Qiu Hu. The status of the chaste wife as an embodiment of the state seems to be at stake in Shi Junbao's revisions to the story of Qiu Hu and his wife.

Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife subverts the conventions of the chaste wife trope by allowing Meiying and Qiu Hu to touch. Shortly after Qiu Hu is conscripted (only three days after he and Meiying are wed), Meiying sings,

> I recall it was just last night when marriage brought harmonious union.
> Scarcely were the phoenix quilts warmed,
> Yet today we, we see you off as you depart from the old wicker gate (306).

Here, the play offers a slightly different perspective on the relationship between warfare and the chaste woman's body. Instead of exposing Meiying to unwanted touch, war interrupts desired sexual contact—the newlywed's domestic, marital touch. Emphasizing the loss of this touch, Meiying goes on to lament that "Soon you'll be lying in armor, and scales will sprout on the ground" (306). In this line of song, Meiying uses a common idiom of Yuan drama, referring to the imprints made in the ground by the scaled armor of sleeping soldiers. The scales that "sprout on the ground" inverts Ögödei's mandate to have the people "rest their hands flat upon the earth" in repose as described in the *Secret History of the Mongols.* Instead of the flat palms of peace, the Yuan has caused its subjects to rest their armored bodies onto the earth. The Yuan has changed its subjects from husbands into warriors. The change renders Qiu Hu unrecognizable to Meiying. After Qiu Hu returns and tries to seduce his wife, Meiying sings, "Your salacious eyes are staring and bulging, / With hands and feet you tug and pull" (318). When Qiu Hu is conscripted Meiying laments the loss of his domestic touch (sex between husband and wife). Now the very hands and feet she once welcomed "tug and pull" at her body in unwanted sexual

contact. The play alternately assigns desirable and undesirable forms of touch to the same figure, Qiu Hu, thus complicating the dichotomies between domestic and foreign, civilized and barbarian. Because the play's audience is always aware of Qiu Hu's identity—and because Qiu Hu's conduct is eventually pardoned via his reconciliation with Meiying[91]—the dichotomies listed above are *shown* to be false.

The play does not attempt to absent the Mongols by drawing false dichotomies that work to ideologically incorporate (as always already Chinese) or expel (as barbarians) the Mongols within *Zhongguo/Zhonghua*, but rather represents the Yuan as an uneasy hybrid. I refer to this post-conquest posture as a kind of indigestion, a transitional political stance that draws attention to the bad "taste" of cultural hybridization under the Yuan. To demonstrate what I mean by "indigestion," I turn to a small comic moment in *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife.* In Act II, a scheming local magnate, Squire Li, attempts to court Meiying during her husband's absence. At the beginning of the act, Squire Li summons Meiying's natal father (named Luo) telling him, "Hey, old man, I sent for you because there is something I want to talk to you about. While in the army, your son-in-law, Qiu Hu, ate some bean curd and died of diarrhea" (309).[92] Food and food practices are curiously at the center of Squire Li's machinations. According to Li, Qiu Hu literally dies of indigestion. Later, when Meiying's natal parents confront her at the end of the act, they both emphasize food as a motivating reason for forwarding the marriage:

> Luo: My child, if you marry him, I'll get some wine to drink and meat to eat.
> Meiying (*sings:*)

[91] Qiu Hu's final aria attempts to justify his behavior by claiming the whole seduction as a plot to test Meiying's virtue. This explanation, however, does not accord with any of the previous scenes. Qiu Hu's self-justification may be read as a moment of dramatic irony for the audience, a comically obvious attempt to rationalize his actions, and/or as an editorial revision to make the play's happy ending seem more deserved.

[92] 兀那老的。我喚將你來。有樁事和你說。你的那女婿秋胡。當軍去吃豆腐瀉死了。Shi Junbao 石君寶, *Lu daifu Qiu Hu xiqi* 魯大夫秋胡戲妻, http://ccddb.econ.hc.keio.ac.jp/wiki/元曲選/秋胡戲妻/02 第二折.

[*Drunk in Peacetime*][93]
Father, fortunately you've not yet enjoyed the food and drink!
Mother Luo: My child, I want to have a banquet too.
Meiying (*sings:*)
Mother, must you have a banquet as easily as that (313).

羅云: 孩兒也。你嫁了他。等我也落得他些酒肉吃。
正旦 (*唱*):
[*醉太平*]
爹爹也大古裡不曾吃那些酒食。
搽旦云: 孩兒。俺也要做個筵席哩。
正旦 (*唱*):
妳妳也只恁般好做那筵席。[94]

Lured by the promise of wine and mutton, the Luos readily abandon Neo-Confucian gender ideals. Meiying should remarry—should remit her "widow" chastity—to feed her family.

The comedic food plots of the play underscore the importance of cuisine as a cultural intermediary within the Yuan. To explain, I compare the foods discussed in *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife* with Hu Sihui's 忽思慧 *Yinshan zhengyao* 飲膳正要 (*Proper and Essential Things for the Emperor's Food and Drink*). The text, a dietary manual and cookbook, was presented by Hu Sihui to the Yuan emperor in 1330. Little is known about Hu Sihui's background other than his position as a court dietary physician. Although the text is written in Classical Chinese and framed in terms of Chinese dietary science, it is also a remarkable testament to the complex cultural exchanges of medieval Eurasia.[95] The recipes of the *Yinshan zhengyao* reflect a number of different ethnic and regional cuisines, including South Asian,

[93] This designation refers to the musical mode.

[94] Shi 石, *Lu daifu Qiu Hu xiqi* 魯大夫秋胡戲妻, http://ccddb.econ.hc.keio.ac.jp/wiki/元曲選/秋胡戲妻/02 第二折.

[95] Paul D. Buell and Eugene N. Anderson, *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era As Seen in Hu Sihui's* Yinshan Zhengyao (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 4.

Turkic, Arabo-Persian[96] and, most notably, Mongol food traditions (including a recipe for fermented mare's milk). Produced in the decades following the Mongol conquest of the Song (1279), the text—as Paul Buell and Eugene Anderson assert—"is a product of the time of greatest Mongolian power and cultural influence in China."[97] For example

> [The] Yuan court cuisine as reflected in the [*Yinshan zhengyao* (YSZY)] rests upon a foundation of Central Asian pastoralism. The sheep is paramount. Most main dishes are based on its meat or broth. Literally all parts were used: head, and feet, skin and intestines, bones, and tail. … Only the pig, the principal animal of Chinese diet, is virtually absent from the *YSZY*.[2]

The *Yinshan zhengyao* privileges dishes made from sheep over those made from pig, despite the fact that mutton was rarely eaten in Chinese cuisine before the Yuan. And yet the text also conforms to the principles of Chinese cooking, such as the golden rule that all ingredients within a dish are cut the same way.[98] Compiled specifically for the Mongol Yuan court, the *Yinshan zhengyao* demonstrates the possibility of a transcultural combination, embracing a Mongol and Chinese cultural fusion.

The foods mentioned in *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife* play off of the idea that Yuan cuisine readily functions as a site for cultural exchange and interaction. Squire Li informs Meiying's father that Qiu Hu died from eating bean curd (*doufu* 豆腐). The *Yinshan zhengyao* describes soybeans (from which *doufu* is made) as "non-toxic" (无毒) and *doufu* itself as healthy. Why, then, does Squire Li say that *doufu* killed Qiu Hu? Of course, Squire Li's treatment of Qiu Hu's supposed death is delivered to comedic effect. The image of Qiu Hu,

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[96] See Françoise Sabban's arguments about the text's recipe for deer soup using milk and "Arab fat": Françoise Sabban "Court Cuisine in Fourteenth-Century Imperial China: Some Culinary Aspects of Hu Sihui's *Yinshan Zhengyao*," *Food and Foodways* 1 (1986), 170–171.

[97] Buell and Anderson, *A Soup for the Qan*, 16.

[98] Sabban, "Court Cousine in Fourteenth-Century Imerial China," 168.

drafted into military service, dying by bean curd is, well, funny in its absurd irony. In addition, the *doufu* story also speaks to Qiu Hu's blending of proper (i.e., culturally Chinese) and undutiful (foreign) conduct. By the Yuan, *doufu* had already become a staple of the Chinese diet, coinciding with the rise of the soybean as an important crop in Chinese agriculture. Despite the fact that it had been eaten in China since the Han, *doufu*, as noted by Buell and Anderson, may have been influenced by Altaic cheese- and curd-making practices.[99] As a result, *doufu* resembles the cultural fusions found in the *Yinshan zhengyao*, inherently both Chinese and other. To declare this fusion the cause of Qiu Hu's death is *as* absurd as claiming he was killed by *doufu* in the first place. Similarly, the Luos' desire for wedding mutton alludes the porosity between Chinese and Mongol cultural practices. Sheep, as previously discussed, were central to Mongol cuisine, but they were not eaten as a staple food in China before the Yuan. The desire to eat mutton (the food promised by Squire Li) at the proposed wedding banquet parodies a desire to become "Mongol" under the Yuan for self-interested reasons.[100] The Mongols, in other words, occasion the opportunity for Chinese subjects to modify the traditional codes of conduct to serve self-interest—in this case, wine and mutton. As a quick point of resonance: After Qiu Hu is transformed by the Yuan from husband to soldier, he ends up profiting greatly, eventually earning an appointment as a state minister. Qiu Hu embraces the Yuan, is rewarded, but loses touch with his Chinese identity (the propriety due his mother and wife). The play ultimately corrects this loss by staging the reconciliation between Qiu Hu and Meiying.

Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife describes the Yuan as a combinative project, shifting and unstable. The play's blend of Mongol identity, governance, and culture with that of China

[99] See footnote 11 on page 491: Buell and Anderson, *A Soup for the Qan*, 491.

[100] More overtly, the Luo's desire for mutton parodies divisions in class. However, for the purposes of the present case study I limit my discussion of the mutton to its more coded cultural implications.

problematizes the idea of a dichotomous relationship between civilization and barbarism (self and other). I describe this nuanced perspective on the Yuan as a form of aesthetic indigestion. The foreign has already been taken in, incorporated into the body—but uneasily so. Shi Junbao's politics within the play are ambiguous, neither rejecting nor enthusiastically embracing Mongol foreign rule.

Smell: The Imperial Politics of "Dissmell"

Up until this point of the dissertation I have discussed the Mongol empire through sight, sound, touch, and "taste." I reserve smell for my next research project, which explores smell as a strong sign in Buddhist and Daoist hagiography, potent in its ability to penetrate between cosmological realms. For the present study, I close by linking Shi Junbao's aesthetic indigestion with an application of Silvan Tomkins's "dissmell" to post-conquest China. I posit that Yuan texts borrow from smell's cosmological tradition to represent the Mongols as belonging to another "realm," one distinct from both Chinese cultural identity and Imperial history. In other words, smell demarcates the cultural and political borders that are collapsed—made unseen—by Mongol conquest. To draw out this argument, I borrow Silvan Tomkins' concept of "dissmell." Tomkins, a psychologist and early pioneer of affect theory, argues that both disgust and dissmell are auxiliary mechanisms that have "evolved" into negative affects. The biological responses of disgust (expulsion: spitting out, vomiting forth) and dissmell (distancing: turning away from the offensive smell) have, over time, become impulses responsive to symbolic objects. Tomkins thus helps to articulate different modes of distancing between a self (or selves) and an offending foreign object. With this in mind, the distinction between disgust and dissmell is significant. Disgust occurs after a foreign object has already been invited in—the disgusted party has, for

example, eaten the mealy apple thinking it was crisp. As a response, disgust then aims to expel the offending object (spitting the apple out). Conversely, dissmell distances smeller from object: upon smelling the rotten fruit, the smeller does not take a bite. Although the foreign Mongol rulers were, in a sense, incorporated into the political body of Imperial China, I argue that they are not represented with disgust, but rather dissmell. Having never been "invited" into the Chinese body, the Mongols are distanced throughout Yuan vernacular texts, but not ejected.

This distinction—distance without rejection—speaks to Homi Bhabha's work on postcolonial articulations of cultural difference. I do not read Chinese representations of Mongol difference as a "reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits" that attempts to locate a singular and originary subjectivity. Instead, the borders marked by smell reinscribe the present to gesture toward the formation of a new historical subject. Emerging from the interstitial space of overlapping, invisible "realms," is a subject unbound from Imperial history. In *The Location of Culture,* Bhabha asserts that depictions of difference create an in-between moment to conceptualize the political conditions of the present. I suggest that the Yuan texts use smell as a diachronic sign—an in-between moment—that collapses past, present, and future. Although dissmell asserts distance, it is a distance predicated on a sensory experience that is both immediate and intimate. By pulling from Daoist and Chan Buddhist traditions, the Yuan texts renew "the past, reconfiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present."

The Three Sui Quash the Demon's Revolt offers a clear demonstration of the in-between space that Bhabha describes. The novel, attributed to Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (ca. 1330–1400), is highly attuned to sense experience. Not only does it mimic oral performance (each chapter ends with an injunction to "hear the tale that continues below!"), but much of the novel's comedy

comes from visual gags. By contrast, allusions to smell are restricted to poems embedded within the narrative. The poems themselves function as a kind of liminal space. Pausing the narrative to add rich non-diegetic descriptions, the poems address a world beyond the text. The narrator introduces each poem by commanding the reader to "just see" what it describes. In addition to marking a border between realms (that of the text and that of the reader), the poems also provide a mediating space. I think it significant that smell is relegated to the in-between space of the poems. As in the Daoist and Chan Buddhist texts, the poems treat smell as a border-crossing experience. For example, when one of the three *sui* enters a netherworld by accident, the text embeds a poem that describes a stately house where, "A fragrant breeze slowly pierces the yellow gauze panels."[101] Pierced by a fragrant breeze, the house becomes at once a "mansion of an immortal in Heaven" and "the dwelling of an emperor on earth" (60). Smell once again moves between cosmological realms. The formal decision to encapsulate smell solely within the novel's poems emphasizes the sense as an in-between experience. I ultimately read this experience as one of dissmell. The world of *The Three Sui* is an unpleasant one, where lecherous and greedy religious figures have a disastrous impact on imperial politics. Mediating between the present (the reader's sense experiences) and the narrative action set in the historical past (the Wang Ze rebellion), the novel indicates that the subject—the perceiving self—is *not* continuous with Chinese Imperial history.

Although I treat smell as a strong sign, medieval Chinese theories of the senses closely link smell with taste. The experience of smell is *also* an experience of taste, the mouth, for instance, sours at the whiff of rotten milk. To close the coda I would like to consider taste, or rather distaste, as the earthly analogue to smell. If smell marks the crossing of "unseen" realms,

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[101] Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, *The Three Sui Quash the Demons' Revolt*, translated by Lois Fusek (Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 2010), 60. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will appear in text.

taste renders difference as grossly material. Here I claim that the Yuan vernacular texts inherently tie smell to taste by referencing Confucian discourses of "palate." In the texts of my study, descriptions of food and eating always additionally encapsulate the experience of smell. Roel Sterckx traces the impact of palate in the Confucian Analects, arguing that "food analogies can be found in virtually every philosophical and political text produced in Warring States and Han China where they provide *topoi* for the analysis of sagehood and human government, or the exploration of the human senses."[102] Palate thus becomes a malleable metaphor in the Classical Chinese tradition. A balanced palate—those indulging in *good* taste—is indicative of a balanced *xin* 心 (heart). In *Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* taste appears as an earth-bound manifestation of one's *xin*. The violently treacherous Cao Cao, for instance, is repeatedly referred to as having a strong taste for combat. Elsewhere, in a show of friendship, Xuande empathizes with Shan Fu over his mother's imprisonment by exclaiming even the "rarest delicacies will seem tasteless to me."[103] To taste well is to experience emotional and spiritual harmony. Distaste, as a companion to dissmell, provides a point of productive comparative analysis.

[102] Roel Sterckx, "Food Philosophy in Early China," in *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China,* ed. Roel Sterckx (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 42.

[103] Luo Guanzhong, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* trans. Moss Roberts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 125.

CONCLUSION

The Sixth Sense

Throughout *Sensing Empire*, I have interrogated the Mongol empire as an event (in Badiou's sense of the epochal event) that challenged previously held truth-beliefs about the possible and the impossible.[1] The shocking emergence of the Mongols as a global power challenged, and ultimately changed, the cultural Umwelts of the people that came into contact with the empire. To approach how Mongol imperialism changed cultural understandings of the world order, I have deployed a methodology rooted in cultural phenomenology. From disordered vision to affective dissmell, descriptions of sensation can expose both where and, more importantly, how Mongol imperialism was interpolated. As in the case of the *Yuanshi,* for example, the desensitization to Mongol imperial touch—its total and unremarked absence—presents the Chinese feeling body as a manifestation of cultural, institutional, and political ideologies. This approach presumes—as dominant medieval theories of mind presume—the ontological reality of matter and a process of knowledge stimulated by sense experience. Throughout the dissertation I have suggested that the texts of my archive attempt to produce real, material experience by evoking the senses. But what happens when this form of knowing is not taken up as a premise? In other words, are there texts that wholly *imagine* the Mongols as unrecognizable through the body? To explore these questions, I conclude by briefly examining two textual traditions that primarily confront the Mongols as objects of cognition—that is, as mental objects. The first of these short case studies turns to European accounts of Prester John that tie his legend to the Mongol empire. I read this version of the Prester John legend as an experiment in imaginative,

[1] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism,* trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 45.

utopian thought. The second study considers Takezaki Suenaga's firsthand accounts of the Mongol invasions of Japan (in 1274 and 1281) through the lens of the Buddhist sixth sense (the cognitive faculties). Following the two case studies, the conclusion ends with a short, cumulative discussion of *Sensing Empire* as a Global Middle Ages project.

Imagination: Prester John and European Political Thought

In both the Christian and Buddhist traditions, empiricism informs most medieval theories of mind. For the Latinate West, accounts of imagination are less consistent. Murray Wright Bundy notes that because of the inherent dualism in Christian theology, there was a tendency amongst medieval thinkers to emphasize "the reality of the supra-sensible world" and depreciate "matter and works of the flesh."[2] Jacques Le Goff posits that for medieval historians of imagination it is important to recognize that

> the clerics of the Middle Ages always saw a connection between external sensibility and *internal* sensibility. … Beyond the outer eye and ear are the inner eye and ear—far more important because what they perceive is the divine vision and the divine word, the whisper of a world more real than this one, a world of eternal truths.[3]

In light of this dualism, Augustine provides a popular, synthesized theory of mind that helps contextualize Prester John's kingdom as an imagined place.

In *De trinitate,* Augustine states that mental *phantasia* (images) can be formed through indirect sense experience. A description of Alexandria, for example, is enough to form an image of the city without ever having been there. In Book Eleven of the treatise, Augustine considers the relationship between sense experience, mental images, and the will:

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[2] Murray Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1928), 177.

[3] Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 5–6.

> Accordingly, not only desire but also fear causes the sense of the body to be informed by sensible things, and the eye of the mind by the images of sensible things. And, therefore, the more vehement the fear or the desire, the more clearly is the eye informed, whether in the case of him who experiences the sensation from the body that lies close to him in place, or in the case of him who conceives from the image of the body contained in his memory.[4]

Desire or fear shape mental visions through the will, the thinker's *intention* toward the imagined body. Augustine's emphasis on how acts of will shape *phantasia* resonates with how the Prester John legend changes in response to shifting geopolitics in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By no means a neutral project, medieval representations of Prester John occupy a fantastic register.

Reports of Prester John first began to circulate in Europe after the Persian Seljuk empire suffered a defeat by the non-Muslim Khitan dynasty (known as the Liao 遼 in Chinese historiography) in 1141. As described in his *Chronica sive Historia de duabus civitatibus* (the *Chronicle or History of the Two Cities*), Otto of Freising met with the Latin bishop Hugh of Jabala in 1145. Hugh attributes the Khitan victory over the Seljuk to "one John, a king and priest living in the Far East, beyond Persia and Armenia, and who, with his people, is a Christian, but a Nestorian."[5] This is the earliest extent reference to the legendary Prester John, though scholars have argued that Otto's report suggests that the figure of Prester John had already been in

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[4] Augustine, *On the Trinity,* ed., Gareth B. Matthews and trans., Stephen McKenna (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 69.

[5] Otto of Freising, *Chronicon*, ed. G.H. Pertz, *MGH SSRG* (Hanover: Hahn, 1867), VII, 33, (334–35), translated by James Brundage, *The Crusades: A Documentary History*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1962)

circulation—perhaps as a result of several earlier Khitan victories against Muslim forces.[6] The idea of Prester John—a powerful Christian ally in the East—was clearly a captivating one as the legend continued to evolve over time. He was alternatingly imagined as an ally against Islamic states and against the Mongols, while his rumored kingdom grew in size, riches, and importance. Eventually, Prester John was transformed from a single ruler to an entire line of kings. As a constant, however, Prester John allowed the Latin West to reimagine the world order through his fictive position as a Christian monarch in "foreign" lands.

The imaginative potential of Prester John, however, is more explicitly explored in the *Prester John Letter.* The first iteration of the *Prester John Letter* is thought to have been penned by someone living within the Kingdom of Germany, and likely dates to the period between 1165–1170. The letter is styled as a diplomatic document, purportedly written by Prester John himself to Frederick I, which alone signals a new phantasmic register for the king. The letter itself, a material object, implies the real body of its supposed author—but where does this body exist if not in the reader's own mind? Written and circulated at a time when the contest between Frederick I and Pope Alexander III was coming to a head, Prester John's vast and unified domain offers a compelling alternative to the political fractures across Western Christendom. The letter complements Prester John's unmatched political and military power with rich accounts of the kingdom's wonders, which adds to its sense of wonder overall.

One such wonder, as it is presented by the text, is the fact that Prester John's kingdom is both unified and heterogenous. Most notably, the Christian utopia imagined by the letter is not dependent upon the faith of its subjects. For instance, the letter states: "Beyond the river of stones are the ten tribes of the Jews, who although they contrive kings for themselves, they are in

[6] Peter Jackson, "Prester John redivivus: A review article," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* series 3, 7.3 (1997), 425.

fact our servants and tributaries to our excellency."[7] Prester John rules a Christian kingdom because he himself is Christian and governs as such. His policies seem to be shaped by the king's Christian worldview (such as his oath to protect Jerusalem and giving alms to the Christian poor). The political schema of the kingdom is Christian—regardless of its subjects' beliefs—because Prester John is Christian. The Jewish tribes in Prester John's kingdom live in the service of a Christian authority, despite their nominal kings. In the above translation Keagan Brewer uses "contrive" for "fingant," but the Latin *fingo* also connotes creative invention: to imagine. The Jews live in harmonious service of a Christian authority because they *imagine* the world differently. The world of the mind does not necessarily reflect an external reality; and yet, imagination still has a kind of materiality to it. Here, Prester John's kingdom allows the letter's author to imagine a flexible political system that maintains a hierarchized consideration of Christendom's supremacy within a cross-cultural context. On the one hand, Prester John's Christian authority asserts the superior place of Christendom in the world order; while on the other, the king's "tolerant" approach to difference (the Jews) allows him to subsume disparate peoples into his empire without friction. Thus, the ultimate fantasy of the letter is its vision of a new form of Christian imperialism. Instead of the more competitive logic of crusading ideologies (conquest and conversion), the *Prester John Letter* imagines a new Christian empire built through tolerant expansion.

The *Prester John Letter* establishes Prester John as an eastern ally against Christendom's most oft-cited rivals in the twelfth century: the Muslims and the Jews. However, the emergence of the Mongol empire in thirteenth century would radically alter accounts of the legendary king. Responding to shifting geopolitics, later narratives that describe Prester John are frequently

[7] Keagan Brewer, trans, *Prester John: the Legend and Its Sources* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

tempered by a skepticism that introduces delusion as a dangerous form of imagination. Writing in 1237, Alberic de Trois-Fontaines greatly revises earlier reports of Prester John's military might. According to Alberic, the Mongols (originally a people of Prester John's kingdom) killed Prester John and "occupied his land for the most part, setting a king above them, as though he was Prester John."[8] Simon of Saint Quentin gives a similar story, but in his version the Mongols kill Prester John's son, King David. This act caused the Mongols to rage "with madness to such a state of pride that, by the Devil's instigation, they conceived in their minds to subjugate the whole world little by little to their dominion."[9] Both Alberic and Simon explain the rise of the Mongol empire as a twofold process: a violent act of war coupled with mass delusion. For Alberic, the Mongols create a rupture between real and imaginary worlds. Although Prester John is dead, the Mongols pretend otherwise and exploit this notion to expand their empire under the guise of Christianity. For Simon, the Mongols are themselves deluded. Instigated by pride, domination for the Mongols begins in the world of the mind. In this section of the conclusion, I consider how writers like Alberic and Simon differentiate between imagination and delusion. In these skeptical visions of Prester John, the inventive capacity of the mind presses "little by little" into the real world. The utopian potential for *phantasia* however, is still present; for if delusion is spurred on by the Devil, imagination then belongs to the realm of God.

My final consideration of Prester John in the medieval European imaginary comes from *Mandeville's Travels,* which walks back the skepticism over Prester John expressed in the accounts of Alberic de Trois-Fontaines and Simon of Saint Quentin. Perhaps most explicitly, the text rejects William of Rubruck's assertion that Prester John was not a Christian. Instead,

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[8] Brewer, *Prester John,* 312.

[9] Brewer, 332.

Mandeville's Travels draws from Odoric of Pordenone to reinscribe Prester John and his subjects as something akin to proto-Christians. Though they "have not alle the articles of oure feyth," Prester John and his people are represented by the text as *better* Christian believers—and subjects—than much of Europe.[10] This description resonates with Alexander romances that similarly begin to develop a concept of the "noble savage" in the imagined East. Mandeville's treatment of the Prester John legend is suggestive of nascent European imperialism and shifting geopolitics in the mid-fourteenth century. By the time that *Mandeville's Travels* first began to circulate in the late 1350s, the Yuan dynasty was close to collapse. A series of natural disasters (including a devastating flood of the Yellow River in 1344 and a series of bubonic plague outbreaks in the 1340s and 1350s) ultimately led to the Red Turban Rebellion. Citing the disasters as proof the Mongols had lost their heavenly mandate, Red Turban leaders amassed an army that began staging successful attacks against the empire in 1356. A decade later the Red Turbans would take control of Dadu, thereby ousting the last of the Yuan court. It is during this period of instability and flux that Mandeville gains traction.

The material conditions that shape global politics were changing at the time when *Mandeville's Travels* became one of the most widely circulated texts in Europe. If the Mongols no longer fully register as an immediate threat, what becomes of their imaginative potential? In answer to this question, I tentatively gesture toward the emergence of European state empires. *Mandeville's Travels* expands on early European ethnographic writing to interpolate the marvels of the Mongol court as in the service of western explorers. Sebastian Sobecki has argued that Mandeville develops an epistemology of "devotion" and *curiositas,* best articulated in "the

[10] Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson, eds. *The Book of John Mandeville.* Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007.

search for similarity on the grounds of a shared creation."[11] Sobecki states that the language of "devotion" in the text holds a "kind of euphoric creativity which sets afire the narrator's religious imagination."[12] Acts of devotion—whether or not they be to a Christian god—affirm a shared divinity. In the Prester John letter, the Jewish tribes located with the kingdom imagine themselves separately from Prester John's domain and, by extrapolation, a Christian cosmology. But as *Mandeville's Travels* seems to suggest, difference is itself the stuff of *phantasia*. If difference is only a matter of mind, perceived difference can be played upon to ultimately exert a Christian hierarchy. Why not let the Jews *imagine* themselves as different as long as they pay tributaries? In such a schema, the marvels belonging to the East—inclusive of both Prester John's kingdom and that of the "Great Cham"—do not signify difference, but rather a potential resource. In the world of the text, their marvels are testaments to *our* god—they belong to us.

The Sixth Sense: The Mongols and Japanese (proto)Nationalism

To conclude, I at last turn to a unique case study within my archive of study: description of direct conflict with the Mongols from *outside* the empire. Although Japanese armies twice fought Mongol invading forces—first in 1274 and again in 1281—the Japanese archipelago was never conquered. Takezaki Suenaga's illustrated handscrolls of the Mongol invasion, known as the *Mōko Shūrai Ekotoba* 蒙古襲来絵詞 (*Illustrated Account of the Mongol Invasions*), offer firsthand accounts of both the 1274 and 1281 battles from the perspective of Suenaga himself. Recently, scholars like G.A. Testa and Haruko Wakabayashi have contextualized Suenaga's scrolls in terms of representing the Mongols as distinctly foreign. I would like to add to this

[11] Sebastian I. Sobecki, "Mandeville's Thought of the Limit: The Discourse of Similarity and Difference in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville,*" in *The Review of English Studies,* 53.211 (2002), 340.

[12] Sobecki, "Mandeville's Thought of the Limit," 337.

growing body of scholarship by suggesting the following: Suenaga's original work is not invested in depicting Mongol "foreignness" as strange or grotesque. Rather, the foreign in Suenaga's handscrolls serve as the occasion for relational experience. This experience invites an interplay between text/image and reader/viewer. The handscrolls themselves become "the body" to the reader/viewer's "mind." In other words, to read/view the handscrolls is to have a mind-body experience. To read/view the handscrolls is to comprehend—to make sense of—their depictions of sense experiences. The "self" that emerges from this process is not Suenaga, but neither is it the reader/viewer. The "self" of the text is a sociocultural one.

As a *gokenin* (御家人, *houseman*) in the Kyūshū Higo province, Suenaga was part of medieval Japan's emerging warrior class. My reading of Suenaga's text depends upon a consideration of this sociopolitical status. According to historian Jeffrey Mass, thirteenth-century Japan was characterized by the formation of "two capitals and two interconnected loci of authority": the imperial court of Kyoto and the Kamakura *bakufu*, a warrior government.[13] By the end of the twelfth century, the imperial power of Kyoto was on the decline. In addition to the rising contest posed by growing, independent religious institutions (Buddhist temples near the capitol began to regularly storm the palace with armed warrior monks demanding political favors), competing family clans staged a civil war that resulted in a political schism. At the end of the Genpei War (1180–1185) between the reigning Taira and the rebel Minamoto clans, Minamoto Yoritomo sets up headquarters in the eastern city of Kamakura. Feigning allegiance to the emperor, Minamoto Yoritomo receives the title of *sei'i taishōgun* (征夷大将軍, commonly shortened to "shōgun") in 1192, which validates Kamakura as a political center. Japan was now

[13] Jeffrey P. Mass, "The Kamakura Bakufu," in *Warrior Rule in Japan,* edited by Marius Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.

divided into two governments: the feudal, military government of the Kamakura bakufu, and imperial court in Kyoto. However, balance of power was not evenly split between the two authorities. A second civil war in 1221 weakened imperial hold over the western provinces and the Kamakura bakufu gained increasing power. With Kyoto's political and cultural dominance waning, warriors held new social importance in Kamakura-led Japan. Local warlords with retinues of samurai retainers displaced the class of hereditary nobility and court-appointed officials from prominence.

Suenaga's written text asserts his narrative as a performance of a plural identity. Through subtle shifts in perspective, Suenaga formulates a universalized "self" that cuts across political and social factions to articulate a distinctly Japanese "I." In English-language studies of the scrolls, Suenaga's narrative voice is often characterized as self-aggrandizing. I would like to push against this interpretation. Although Suenaga clearly centers himself within the action, he never uses pronouns in the first personal singular. Instead, he uses the conventions of Classical Japanese —namely, the omission of a defined subject within a sentence—to deploy a mobile subjectivity that is predicated on both literal and symbolics acts of sight. To see, in Suenaga's text, is to become a knowing witness. Sight forms *tachiau* (立ち会う)—"witnesses"—through a mind-body sense experience. To see from the perspectives of the text is to understand the world in terms of specific interconnected, relational experiences. Thomas Conlan notes that the entire text could be either be translated in either the first or the third person; I argue that the Suenaga purposefully elides these two identities in service of producing a variegated Japanese self. The physical and textual forms of the handscroll support this argument. *Emakimono* (絵巻物) of the Kamakura period mark a departure from the Chinese tradition; most notably, these handscrolls reject literary convention by using native writing systems. Suenaga's text primarily uses native

Japanese script (instead of Chinese characters) and grammar, thereby presenting a physical object that *looks* distinctly Japanese to its viewer.

The scrolls synthesize multiple stimuli into a coherent mind-body experience through Suenaga's evocation of the sixth sense. According to Zen Buddhism, the body perceives the world via six senses, with each sense corresponding with a sense consciousness. The mind is an internal sense organ that comprehends mental objects, the result of objects perceived by other sense organs and consciousnesses. The staccato nature of Suenaga's text—short written passages interposed with narrative images—highlights the perceptive mind, the "I" that process the image. This relationship is a kind of performance of the sixth sense. Scene Six of the first handscroll demonstrates this performance well. The image is revealed right to left as the scroll opens up. Occupying the far right section of the image, Suenaga appears first within the scene. Seated upon a bucking black horse, red blood streaming from its sides, Suenaga commands the viewer's attention. His face, rendered strikingly white, is set in stark contrast with the rest of the scene. Moreover, Suenaga's face occupies the very center of the rightmost action. With focus set on Suenaga's face, the viewer is invited to align their experience of the enfolding scene with his. As we join our sight to his, Suenaga's perspective becomes a plural one. I suggest this alignment activates a Zen Buddhist process of "selfing." Thomas Kasulis explains that Zen Buddhism "serves as the ground of both the universality and individuality of the person: universality in that one's meaning as a person is derived from a context beyond the bounds of one's egocentrism; individuality in that one is defined as a person by one's unique set of interrelationships."[14] The individual *only* acquires meaning through relation to others, a kind of transcendent social

[14] Thomas P. Kasulis, *Zen Action/ Zen Person* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1981), 9.

identity. When Suenaga speaks as an "I," I believe he evokes this social identity in reaction to traumatic encounter with the Mongols.

Suenaga only becomes a subject by the viewer singling him out. Returning again to Scene Six, the action unfurls away from Suenaga into a kind of synesthetic chaos. Facing Suenaga are three Mongol warriors. Arrows whiz by in both directions, disrupting any linear (left-right) experience of the scene as a neutral observer. Adding to the frenzy, the Mongol warrior closest to Suenaga seems to have tossed a bomb that explodes mid-air (evoking a sense of "touch" as the blast impact is represented by rays of propulsive fire and smoke). Unlike Suenaga, the Mongols charge with their mouths wide open, as if screaming (evoking sound). In a recent article, G.A. Testa considers this scene as one that demonstrates new modes of imagining *ikoku* (異国), foreign "others."[15] While Testa argues that the exaggerated features of the Mongols—for instance their skin is hued a sickly green—are later emendations to the original image, I am more interested in how the scene's composition invites a mimetic experience. The viewer's perspective is first tied to Suenaga's and then refracted by different sense experiences. The result is a relational and pluralized "self" consciousness. I do not think that the *Mōko Shūrai Ekotoba* are particularly interested in representing the Mongols as either monstrous or marvelous. Instead, the handscrolls show the Mongols as an event, an experience that produces a Japanese self. This style of cross-cultural representation is unique within my archive. Here, affective response to the (very real) Mongol threat is almost entirely eliminated. Suenaga does not qualify his depiction of the Mongols; again, emphasis is placed on the Mongols as (neutral) events, triggers for a kind of coming-into-being.

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[15] G.A. Testa, "Mōko shūrai ekotoba ("Illustrated Account of the Mongol Invasions"): A Case Study of Encounter with the Other in Japan," in *Eikón Imago* 15 (2020): 35–57.

Sensing Empire and the "Global Middle Ages"

One of the primary goals of this dissertation has been to challenge normative views of the Mongol empire as a peripheral event for the Middle Ages. Throughout *Sensing Empire* I have attempted to demonstrate how an "intimate" methodology rooted in cultural phenomenology and sense studies can help expand our understanding of the Mongol empire as a global event. The case studies that make up the dissertation—from Roger Bacon's rational sight to Takezaki Suenaga's relational "I"—have considered how the senses, as cultural constructions, are engaged in making, accommodating, and resisting Mongol imperialism. I identify this work as a Global Middle Ages project, and would like to conclude the dissertation by sharing my vision for the Global Middle Ages and how *Sensing Empire* fits in.

In the introduction to this study, I reference George Orwell's description of impassable sense barriers to articulate the political stakes of cultural phenomenology and sensory studies. I'd like to now conclude by highlighting a similar urgency behind the "global turn" in medieval studies. Outside of the academy, the myth of a homogenous, white medieval Europe has grown increasingly salient since 2016.[16] We can see that in this passage from the congressional America First Caucus's stance on immigration, penned in 2021: "America is a nation with a border, and a culture, strengthened by a common respect for uniquely Anglo-Saxon political traditions."[17] The term "Anglo-Saxon" is not a neutral one; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was popularly used to connect whiteness with a supposed origin. This is clearly the function of

[16] For an introductory reading list on the topic, please see: Jonathan Hsy and Julie Orlemanski, "Race and medieval studies: a partial bibliography," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 8 (2017): 500–531,

[17] The full platform can be found online here: https://punchbowl.news/wp-content/uploads/America-First-Caucus-Policy-Platform-FINAL-2.pdf

"Anglo-Saxon political tradition." The medieval is deployed to demarcate, and police, the U.S. border. The caucus has seemed to embrace the myth of an all-white medieval Europe to justify its racist and xenophobic platforms. Academics trained in medieval studies have an opportunity—and I would argue responsibility—to challenge these ideas; and *this* is the work of the Global Middle Ages.

Currently, the Global Middle Ages is a topic of some vibrant debate among medievalists. Critics of the field have expressed concern that the "Global Middle Ages," is, essentially, a marketing term—a way to acknowledge white supremacist medievalism without really addressing it. Such critiques have tended to focus on the contradictions contained within the term the "Global Middle Ages." How can the Middle Ages—a historiographic concept developed around a narrative of Western chronology—be global? Indeed, the idea of a universal, synchronous chronology only flattens our understanding of premodern globalities and interconnections. However, I find the "Global Middle Ages" to be a useful name—at least for the time being. Although there is real political urgency behind the global turn in medieval studies, I follow Geraldine Heng's formulation of the "Global Middle Ages" as, primarily, an academic movement.[18] The "Global Middle Ages" uses an established academic vocabulary to articulate a critique of the status quo—in the same way that a term like "post-structuralism" implies a critique or response to the preceding dominance of structuralism within the academe.[19] Like post-structuralism, then, the "Global Middle Ages" establishes a genealogy of thought. This view of the Global Middle Ages helps articulate the field's primary investment: to offer a corrective to the Eurocentrism that has traditionally shaped medieval studies. The Global Middle Ages thus

[18] Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 22.

[19] Heng, *The Global Middle Ages,* 23.

offers an alternative to *how* the "medieval" is studied, taught, and popularly understood—it is a necessary first step toward unlearning the deeply entrenched biases, the "impassable barriers," shaped by Eurocentrism.

Sensing Empire is a Global Middle Ages project. Through a hyper-subjective approach, the dissertation, counterintuitively, decenters its study. *All* human worlds are constructed worlds and must be studied as such. By deploying sense as a critical approach, *Sensing Empire* resists reinforcing dichotomies of self and other. Despite their ability to form *seemingly* impassable barriers, the senses actually stage much more fluid forms of cross-cultural encounter. The border-space of the body is constituted by both feeling and being felt. *Sensing Empire's* sensory history develops a new Global Middle Ages methodology that is both decentered and combinative; one that highlights the dynamic interconnections and movements between regional and "global" histories.

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