

The Mongol Invasion of Hungary in Its Eurasian Context*

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Abstract. This report gives an account of the historiography of the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241–1242, and the ongoing research of the project “The Mongol Invasion of Hungary in its Eurasian Context.” The research has been carried out by an interdisciplinary team comprising representatives of diverse academic institutions and fields. The primary objective of the project was to reassess existing scholarship by comparing it with the findings of the project team members, ultimately generating new scholarly insights. The team members concentrated on various aspects, including archaeology, military history, and the short- and long-term impacts of the Mongol military invasions in the mid-thirteenth century.

Keywords: archaeology, battle of Muhi, medieval Hungary, Mongol invasions

In 2018, the interdisciplinary research project “The Mongol Invasion of Hungary in its Eurasian Context” was approved by the National Research, Development, and Innovation Office of Hungary. It aimed to conduct a comprehensive program focusing on one of the key events that had long-lasting effects on medieval Hungarian

* Based on the earlier research reports on the project: B. Szabó et al., “The Mongol Invasion,” 223–33; B. Szabó et al., “New Results,” 271–82; B. Szabó et al., “The Mongol Invasion of Hungary: From the Field Survey,” 203–18; Nagy et al., “The Mongol Invasion in Hungary,” 44–62.

history—the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241–1242 and its context. This period is significant not only for understanding Hungarian history but is also integral to a momentous historical process, namely, the expansion of the Mongol Empire. The scholarly interpretation of the impact is situated within its broader Eurasian context.¹

The project commenced in 2018 and is scheduled to continue until 2023. The research is conducted by an interdisciplinary team that includes representatives of various academic institutions and fields. The coordination is overseen by József Laszlovszky, Balázs Nagy, János B. Szabó, and Dorottya Uhrin. The primary academic fields covered by the team include archaeology, history (with a focus on economic, social, and church history), military history, Mongol studies, numismatics, Oriental Studies, and languages. In addition to these main fields, a broader circle of scholars from diverse academic backgrounds is contributing to the project. The extended group includes experts in art history, ethnography, community archaeology, and battlefield research, providing valuable perspectives to the program. The project emphasizes the importance of the Eurasian context, which is supported by a substantial international research network involving team members and their respective institutions.²

Historiography and state of research

The Hungarian historical research on the Mongol invasion of Hungary has a rich and extensive history, spanning over a century. Over the past two decades, there has been a concerted effort to synthesize information from various local and foreign sources, resulting in a harmonized account of this significant historical event. This approach has yielded major results and contributed to a deeper understanding of the invasion.

A significant contribution to this research comes from a volume on the Mongol invasions, published in 2003.³ It is a collection and Hungarian translation of crucial primary sources related to the invasion. It provides not only historical accounts but also an overview of the period's historiography and of contemporary scholarly perspectives. It also incorporates the first comprehensive summary and discussion of archaeological research on the Mongol invasion of Hungary. This aspect is particularly significant as archaeological studies have revealed new sites and sources shedding light on the events of the period.⁴

1 *The Mongol Invasion of Hungary and the Mongolian Conquest and its Eurasian Context*, supported by the National Research, Development, and Innovation Office K 128880. E-mail address: tatarjaras1241@gmail.com.

2 Uhrin, "The Mongols."

3 Nagy, ed., *Tatárjárás*.

4 Laszlovszky, "Tatárjárás és régészet," 453–68.

In addition to presenting the findings of archaeological research, the study also outlines potential research directions and approaches for future investigations. This forward-looking perspective contributes to the ongoing development of our understanding of the Mongol invasion.

János B. Szabó's comprehensive book on the impact of the Mongol invasion in Hungary, published in multiple editions, is the latest summary of the topic, primarily focusing on military historical aspects.⁵

Furthermore, the Hungarian National Museum has played a key role in disseminating the research findings to a broader audience. It organized a nationwide exhibition based on archaeological discoveries from the Mongol invasion period. A corresponding volume was published to accompany the exhibition, presenting the latest research results. The project was part of a larger international exhibition titled *Genghis Khan and His Heirs, The Great Mongol Empire*, which aimed to introduce several centuries of Mongolia's history and culture to a broad international audience.⁶

The combination of these volumes about the Mongol invasions of Hungary, the exhibition at the Hungarian National Museum, and the broader international exhibition reflect the current state of research into the Mongol invasion of Hungary. In fact, recent archaeological finds have confirmed the ideas they proposed.

An important conference organized at Kiskunfélegyháza in 2011 also emphasized the exploration of new archaeological sites associated with this period. *Carmen miserabile* (2014), the edited Hungarian volume stemming from the conference and dedicated to András Pálóczi Horváth, a renowned expert in the field, showcases significant advancements in research methods and approaches.⁷

Pálóczi Horváth's academic contributions are crucial for comprehending the history of the Mongol invasion of Hungary, particularly in his leading role in researching the Cumans—an ethnic group originating from the steppe regions of Eastern Europe that migrated to Hungary due to the expansion of the Mongol Empire. Following the 1241–1242 invasion, the Cumans settled in the plains of the Kingdom of Hungary. The archaeological interpretation of their material culture is indispensable for studying the invasion and assessing its enduring impact on the

5 B. Szabó, *A Tatárjárás*.

6 The stations of the exhibition *Dschingis Khan und seine Erben. Das Weltreich der Mongolen* were in Bonn, 16.06.2005 – 25.09.2005; Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich, 25.10.2005 – 29.01.2006; Schloss Schallaburg, Österreich, 31.03.2006 – 01.11.2006; Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul, 07.12.2006 – 08.04.2007; Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, 24.05.2007 – 02.09.2007. Ritoók and Garam, eds, *A tatárjárás*; Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, ed., *Dschingis Khan*.

7 Rosta and V. Székely, eds, '*Carmen miserabile*.'

country.⁸ The archaeology of the Cumans is relevant also for the research of late nomads (for example, the Pechenegs), and for other ethnic groups that originated from various areas of Eastern Europe or Asia (for example, the Iasians) and lived in Hungary in the Late Middle Ages. A similar conference held at Lakitelek in 2022 summarized the recent results of multidisciplinary research on the impact of the thirteenth-century Mongol invasion of Hungary, with a strong focus on archaeology and defense strategies against the Mongols.⁹

More recently, using new research methods and approaches, a more complex interpretation of this period has been enabled by archaeology. An article published in *Hungarian Archaeology* online journal in 2016 dealt with the archaeological discoveries connected to the invasion of the country, indicating the sites where we have direct evidence of fights and Mongol destruction.¹⁰ This study, as well as some other publications, raise methodological questions and issues about the extent archaeology can contribute to the understanding of a very short historical period and about the way invasions and their long-term consequences can be detected in material culture. All this may be considered to have represented the state of the research field up to the recent past. However, further publications in the last few years about ongoing archaeological excavations, along with publications about earlier finds, have offered new clues that help us shed light on the Battle of Muhi and surrounding events.

This project's general approach has been confirmed by an important international scholarly debate, which emerged before the launching of the new program. The cause of the sudden Mongol withdrawal from Hungary in 1242 has been an intriguing research question ever since the first scholarly studies about the history of the Mongol invasion in Europe. Recently, two leading scholars in the academic fields of oriental studies and climate history have proposed a new solution, thereby generating a lively discussion.¹¹ In response, we, the members of the present research project, jointly with other Hungarian scholars, have published a discussion paper on the new study, offering an environmental-historical solution to the puzzle of the withdrawal. We argue for a more complex, multi-causal explanation of the sequence of events in 1242.¹² This scholarly debate has also contributed to the shaping of the present research project and to the methodological approaches used in the complex research framework of the program. Thus, the Mongol invasion of Hungary is now discussed in a broad international framework, connected to a large geographical region, because one of the key factors of these new interpretations is related to the impact of climatic changes occurring at the time.

8 Pálóczi Horváth, *Pechenegs*; Pálóczi Horváth, "Steppe Traditions."

9 http://files.archaeolingua.hu/2022NY/Upload/Konf_02_02.pdf, Accessed: 29 November 2023.

10 Laszlovszky, Pow, and Pusztai, "Reconstructing," 29–38.

11 Büntgen and di Cosmo, "Climatic," 1–9.

12 Pinke et al., "Climate of Doubt," 1–6.

These new academic results, scholarly discussions, recent research projects, and investigations have made it clear that a new research project can only be successful if it applies an interdisciplinary approach, embracing a wide range of methods and disciplines. Thus, the present project and the research team offer a framework and a common research platform for new results. It is also one of the main goals of our project to summarize new findings and to present them in the form of conferences and publications to the widest possible international scholarly audience. This publication aspect and research strategy are crucial also because many previous important studies are unavailable to the wider academic public, since they are in Hungarian and in the languages of the Central European countries affected by the Mongol invasion. In this way, we make an effort to share research results currently available in Polish, Czech, Slovak, Croatian, and other publications.

As a result, the present research project can deal with several important issues, giving us a chance to re-interpret the crucial historical questions of the period concerned. In the following section, we offer a short summary of some of the main research questions and problems connected to the expansion of the Mongol Empire and its impact on Central Europe.

The Battle of Muhi

The Battle of Muhi, fought in April 1241 between the royal army of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Mongols, is not simply a crucial episode in Hungarian history: it occupies a position of Pan-Eurasian historical significance.¹³ It is therefore of utmost importance that serious efforts should be made to offer a reliable historical reconstruction not only of the battle itself, but also of the short and long-term impact of the related Mongol invasion and occupation of Hungary. Recent innovative historical interpretations and archaeological finds offer a complex, multidisciplinary approach, which may be the basis of a large-scale research project. Therefore, “The Mongol Invasion of Hungary in its Eurasian Context” is a project aimed at improving our understanding of the episode and its broader historical context through a fuller analysis of the surviving textual records and the most recent archaeological finds.

The Battle of Muhi (in medieval sources the nearby settlement was called Mohi) was one of the decisive events in a decades-long historical process, which saw the Mongol Empire occupying Central Asia, defeat the Russian principalities, and drive into the region of Central Europe, attacking Hungary and the duchies of Poland. That the battle was significant is evinced by the wide and disparate range of sources, European and non-European, which record a range of its aspects. As an example,

13 B. Szabó, “The Hungarian View.”

Juvaini, the Persian official and historian in the employ of the Mongols, described it as “one of their greatest deeds and their fiercest battles.”¹⁴ It also appears to be the only battle fought on European soil of which we have a descriptive medieval Chinese account: it is found in Sübe’etei’s biographies in the *Yuan Shi*, the official history of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty.¹⁵ A version of Juvaini’s account persisted in the work of the fifteenth-century Timurid court historian, Khwandamir¹⁶ and a very garbled version, which shifted the events to Moscow, is found in the seventeenth-century Turkic history of the Khanate by Khiva’s Abu al-Ghazi Bahadur.¹⁷

New archaeological surveys and battlefield research at Muhi

Improving our understanding of the Battle of Muhi as a series of events is concomitant with an improved identification of the geographical sites where various episodes of the battle occurred. Based on the sources, the battle was actually a series of sporadic engagements at different sites that unfolded in prolonged stages. From the same records, we are aware of certain key natural and manmade landscape features of the sites where the events took place (e.g., the hotly contested bridge spanning the Sajó, the Hungarian camp surrounded by the Mongols, the village of Mohi, a highway along which Hungarian troops retreated, and others). Nevertheless, the location of many important features remains conjectural. In large part, this has to do with the fact that scholars have attempted to reconstruct the battle mainly through the written sources, supplemented with some geographical and settlement history research.

Our project intends to integrate and synthesize findings from a range of disciplines wider than previously been attempted. Key to this is the integration of archaeological findings into the picture. Several recent Hungarian articles give details of at least two excavated sites that may be connected to the battle. Mária Wolf has excavated a settlement site in the framework of the M3 motorway rescue project near Hejőkeresztúr. The research reveals a sunken-floor house from the Árpád Age (1000–1301) with archaeological finds not characteristic of the average material culture of contemporary villages.¹⁸ She concludes that the finds can be connected to the Battle of Muhi. This aspect of the site has been discussed in the context of the Mongol invasion in an article by József Laszlovszky.¹⁹ Furthermore, in Wolf’s thorough publication about the swords and one

14 Boyle, trans., *Genghis Khan*.

15 Pow and Liao, “Subutai,” 37–76.

16 Thackston, trans., *Khwandamir*.

17 al-Ghazi Bahadur, *History of the Turks*.

18 Wolf, “Hejőkeresztúr-Vizekköze,” 44–47.

19 Laszlovszky, “Az ország,” 39–43.

piece of an armor, she argues that “based on the archaeological finds, here we can see the material culture of a larger than average rural settlement mixed with the objects of those who were running away from the battlefield.” She formulates the hypothesis that the site is connected to the route along which Prince Coloman fled the battlefield. She also points to the importance of studying the medieval historical-geographical situation and its relevance for the localization of various elements of the battle.²⁰ Also connected to the events, another significant discovery is the deviant burials described by Tamás Pusztai.²¹ Two burials with highly significant objects were found in a pit near the settlement remains of Mohi, at the edge of what was the thirteenth-century village. The sabretache and scabbard of a knife were attached to the belt of one of the skeletons, while near the other body, a bridle and eight coins dating back to the years 1235–1241 have been excavated. An octagonal-shaped iron mace was also found near the first body, which must have belonged to a warrior of Asiatic origin fighting in the battle. A mace of the same type has also been found in a deserted Hungarian village site, the destruction of which can be connected to the Mongol invasion.²² Furthermore, a similar find was excavated at Hlynske village, in present-day Ukraine at an archaeological site also connected to the Mongol expansion.²³ Based on their additional features and a detailed study of the objects (bridle and knife-scabbard) from the medieval settlement of Muhi, it seems certain that the two briefly described deviant burials belonged to casualties of the Battle of Muhi.

This most recent archaeological literature and the work already carried out on the former medieval settlement of Mohi serve as our starting point for a thorough investigation of the historical geography of the larger battle area. For example, based on the new interpretation of the settlement archaeology of the Mohi site, we can establish the position of the important medieval roadway going through the settlement and leading to a crossing on the Sajó River. Placing the road into the settlement network of the region and its dating are crucial for our understanding of the movements of different troop contingents during the battle. The use of written documents from the thirteenth century and later periods, particularly charters and perambulations included in charters, will offer us a better chance to reconstruct the surrounding settlement and road system to see how it was during the Mongol invasion. This work has already been started by the archaeologists of the Herman Ottó Museum at Miskolc and by the researchers of the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archive.

This reconstruction is accompanied by an intensive archaeological survey, including the application of metal detectors in specific targeted areas. This part of

20 Wolf, “Régészeti adatok,” 69–80.

21 Pusztai, “Buzogánnyal,” 141–50.

22 Pusztai and Boldog, “A Prismatic,” 181–96; Szilágyi and Serlegi, “Nád közé,” 127–40.

23 Pugolovok, “Navershye bulavy s Hlynskoho,” 161–64.

the project is supported by recent methodological developments in battlefield and conflict archaeology. These research fields have proved to be among the fastest-developing areas of archaeological investigations. The special team of the Hungarian Military History Institute has already produced significant results through their complex interdisciplinary research into battlefields of later periods, which are of high importance for Hungarian history.²⁴ Systematic metal detecting with the help of amateur detectorists is one of the main contributions to this project. Therefore, we have developed a special scheme with the Hungarian National Museum, the National Park of Bükk, the Ferenczy Museum Center, the Herman Ottó Museum at Miskolc, and with the recently established Association for Community Archaeology to conduct a systematic large-scale metal detector survey in the battlefield area.

During several weekend campaigns in 2018 and 2019, more than fifty volunteers checked the area of Muhi and the nearby settlements, looking for traces of the medieval battles and villages. All the data about the finds were entered into a GIS system, together with the track records of all participants. Furthermore, historical and archaeological data of relevance for the medieval settlement system were entered into this database, as well as the complex information gained from georeferenced historical maps. As a result, prior to the fieldwork, the archaeological and historical data were compared and summarized on a map. This map contains the medieval villages with church sites and settlement borders. Combining these research maps with the archaeological data from the new field surveys offers us a new basis of interpretation for the battle. Different levels and layers of this spatial database show 1) the modern geographical conditions of the area with the historical changes in the environment, 2) the medieval settlements system based on written evidence and the archaeological field survey, 3) the contemporary finds from the area, along with the various reconstruction attempts for the localization of the battlefield. This first survey helped us narrow down the possible site of the battle, as well as to specify the location of the medieval village Sajóhídvég (the placename means: at the bridge end of the Sajó River), where the medieval bridge used to be.

In 2019, the project team, jointly with the museums involved, organized a novel field survey program. This time thirty volunteers with metal detectors combed through the site. The archaeologists in the team (József Laszlovszky, Tamás Pusztai, and Tibor Rácz) and a researcher dealing with the history of the nearby villages (Tamás Bodnár) gave presentations to the volunteers, as training is crucial for the methodological development of this community archaeological project. During the short research campaign, the volunteers joined our archaeologists on the site of the medieval village of Hídvég. They found a medieval golden ring, a spur, a piece of a book binding, and localized the place of the medieval church based on a fragment of

24 Négyesi, *Csaták néma tanúi*; Polgár, “Oszmán-török.”

its walls. Thanks to local informants, we managed to identify another research area near Szakáld, where we found arrowheads of different types. The most outstanding finding of this weekend was a medieval seal ring. The ring depicts an ox-head with stars and a moon on its sides. The ox-head links the ring to the Hahót-Buzád family, however, the exact identification requires further investigation. Since there had been no medieval settlement in this area, the location the project has identified is most probably connected to the Battle of Muhi.

We planned to continue these searches in 2020 as well, but the Covid pandemic limited our opportunities. Therefore, we have focused on the publication of the field survey results. The methodological aspects of this research are discussed in an article in the Community Archaeology section of the *Hungarian Archaeology* journal (Winter 2020), covering the period of the Mongol invasion and summarizing the results of our research project.²⁵ This time, József Laszlovszky and Tibor Rácz's article on the Muhi battlefield does not focus on the new finds, but on the insights gained from an interdisciplinary research project integrating the work of enthusiastic volunteer metal detectorists with established field methods of battlefield archaeology. The identification of the battlefield site has greatly contributed to a better understanding of the events of 11 April 1241. The course of events as we know them was established according to subjective written sources often based on indirect information. The identification of geographical circumstances will provide new information and make it possible to reconstruct the tactical options open to the leadership of the Hungarian and Mongolian forces and to establish how the location influenced the outcome of the battle. Research concerning the battlefield of Muhi gained momentum through the assistance of volunteers associated with several museums, using metal detectors. In this article, the authors investigate the opportunities community archaeology may provide in the interdisciplinary investigation of a battlefield from the Árpád Age, and they demonstrate the practical and methodological problems research faces when using metal detectors.

Despite certain logistical challenges, the chance of discovering a relatively small number of finds connected to the battle is multiplied by having a large number of people equipped with metal detectors. It is relatively easy to recruit volunteers for battlefield research. Most volunteers with metal detectors have an active interest in military history. Many have been attracted to archaeology through the collection of world war relics. In addition, for many of our volunteers, the lecture series connected to our research project is an attractive program.²⁶ This article concludes that

25 Laszlovszky and Rácz, "Research Using," 71–81.

26 The lectures can be found on the YouTube channel of the project: 1241 Tatárjárás, Youtube channel, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0g0VCgxNMVNWWUHQ_BcqCg, accessed: 29 November 2023.

in addition to survey strategies, organizing work with volunteers requires particular attention. The seventy-eighty people who participate in a fieldwork campaign cannot be treated as a single group but should be divided into smaller units with well-defined subtasks. Sufficient professional staff should also be provided. The work of each unit should be supervised by an archaeologist, while the documentation is assisted by archaeology students. Since different volunteer organizations have developed different rules for how their members operate, training should reflect these rules, while being dependent on the number and previous training of the actual volunteers. Both the discovery of the Abaújvár treasure (also discussed in the present study) and the investigation of the Muhi battlefield highlight how fieldwork involving metal detecting surveys can contribute to a better understanding of a particular period.

Another noteworthy element of the project is related to underwater archaeology. Of particular importance is pinpointing the location of the bridge around which, according to a range of accounts, much of the fighting took place. This will be done partly by the investigation of the archaeological finds in the area, such as the wooden posts in lakes and riverbeds. Earlier research has already identified one of these sites near Köröm, but our goal is to collect more data and samples. To localize the medieval bridge, underwater archaeologist János Attila Tóth, and diver trainer László Lengyel went down a lake near the ferry of Köröm and took samples from the timber structure to determine the age of the wood by dendrochronology.

Furthermore, the complex reconstruction of the battlefield at Muhi requires the geo-morphological and hydrogeographic analysis of the area to offer a better reconstruction of the thirteenth-century course of the Sajó River. Particularly when we consider the high degree of meandering of the Sajó, we may rightly suppose that its floodplain and riverbed might have changed over the last centuries. A similar investigation proved to be successful in reconstructing the medieval changes of river courses in the area of the Drava, which was crucial for the interpretation of the contemporary land-use and settlement network.²⁷ Assisted by the head of the Physical Geography Department of Eötvös Loránd University Balázs Nagy, we have defined the medieval beds and the locations of floodplains of the rivers and runnels in the area. Moreover, the company HelmSolutions prepared the LIDAR survey of the territory, which offers detailed topographical material for the 3D terrain model of the area.²⁸ This survey was also combined with drone recordings done by the Faculty

27 <http://osdravaprojekt.ovf.hu>, accessed: 29 November 2023; Viczián, “Geomorphological Research,” 75–91.

28 The LIDAR survey was carried out in the framework of the project: “Creating a research center for the development of new measuring technologies and documentation processes targeting protected cultural and natural heritage. GINOP-2.1.1-15-2015- 00695” (Hungary). We acknowledge the help of HelmSolutions (<https://lidar-wmt.hu>) for the LIDAR survey of the area.

of Science of Eötvös Loránd University. This reconstruction of the local hydrogeographic conditions and of the road and settlement system will enable us to better describe how the various stages of the battle unfolded, including the engagement at the bridge and the subsequent attack on the Hungarian camp. It will also help reconstruct the road network along which the retreat took place. Thus, it will serve as the basis for further archaeological investigations. The first results of these investigations were presented at the Hungarian environmental-history conference in 2019.²⁹

Connected to the ongoing historical-geographical investigation of the battlefield, József Laszlovszky and Balázs Nagy (geographer) have recently published their results about the geographical changes in the area of Muhi.³⁰ Recent geographical surveys, geomorphological and hydrological studies, combined with historical-geographical interpretations, offer a complex, multidisciplinary reconstruction of the environmental changes in the region and the natural processes connected to the Rivers Sajó, Hernád, and Hejő in the wider area. A new LIDAR survey, drone flights, and 3D surface elevation studies have demonstrated large-scale riverbed changes in the Sajó with significant transformations in the floodplain areas of the three rivers. Based on this survey and the study of historical maps, the article discusses the places of possible crossing points on the River Sajó in the thirteenth century, which is crucial for the reconstruction of the battlefield. These geographical studies also serve as the basis for the large-scale community archaeology research (using metal detectors) of the project. The authors present the first results of a project aimed at improving our understanding of environmental changes and landscape transformation in the area over the last eight hundred years. Through a fuller analysis of surviving textual records and the most recent archaeological findings, the results are placed into the broader historical context of the battle.

Another important study dealing with geographical and historical aspects of the battlefield at Muhi is also among the first results of the new research project. By focusing on two primary source accounts of Batu Khan ascending a hill shortly before the battle, József Laszlovszky and Stephen Pow use a wide range of methods and approaches in their revised reconstruction of the Battle of Muhi.³¹ The two sources are not related to each other; moreover, they represent two fundamentally different source groups concerning the battle. By using a complex analytical approach to the sources, the article tries to identify the character and significance of the hill in question—an inquiry made difficult by the fact that today there are no hills or mountains near the battlefield. For clues, the authors explore the attested purposes that Mongol rulers and troops had for ascending mountains. The hypothesis emerges that Batu is likely to

29 30 October 2019. Nagy and Laszlovszky, “Új földrajzi,”

30 Laszlovszky and Nagy, “Új földrajzi, környezettörténeti,” 139–59.

31 Laszlovszky and Pow, “Finding Batu’s Hill,” 261–89.

have ascended two different types of hills. One was a small mound (*kurgan*) of the type that characteristically dotted Hungary's landscape around the battlefield. The other hill, which he climbed for religious ritual purposes, was probably one of the more prominent features around Szerencs, about thirty kilometers away from the site of the clash. The study revisits several earlier attempts at identifying the hill, using two different types of approaches. Combining a unique range of textual accounts with recent archaeological findings, the authors suggest a drastic and perhaps more accurate reinterpretation of the course of events leading up to the decisive battle than the interpretations proposed so far. Furthermore, by looking closely at the different narrative structures of the sources, we see attempts by medieval authors of Central European and Asian texts to contextualize this event within their general interpretations of the battle. Thus, the main arguments of this article cross real and figurative frontiers in contemporary accounts of the episode and in their modern interpretations.

New studies and results about the archaeology of the Mongol invasion of Hungary

The Winter 2020 issue of the *Hungarian Archaeology* online journal includes several articles that discuss various aspects of the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241–1242, although from different perspectives and using different approaches. First among them is a preliminary study of the treasure from the time of the 1241 Mongol invasion.³² Research into archaeological traces of the Mongol invasion has long discovered that hoards consisting of coins, jewelry, and other valuables come to light in various parts of the country,³³ and the coins are connected to the 1241–1242 attack. In other places, hidden iron objects, predominantly agricultural tools, are usually discovered by accident rather than by planned archaeological excavations. This is why, the finding that emerged in July 2019 from the Abaújvár earthwork fortification of Abaúj County, dating back to the Árpád Age, is so special. The coins, jewelry, and other unique objects, such as the textile remains woven with golden threads, as well as the contemporary importance of the fort made it worthwhile to briefly publish the initial results, even though the processing of the full material is still ongoing. The Abaújvár site is known from the period's written sources, and the archaeological investigation of this earthwork fortification has been underway for many decades. A little more than a year after its discovery, Mária Wolf and Csaba Tóth make their assessment of the site and the treasure, while Gábor Bakos and Enikő Sipos discuss the community archaeology aspects and the restoration issues of the finds.

32 Bakos et al., "A hoard from the period of the Mongol invasion."

33 See also the recent study by Csaba Tóth noted in a later part of this article: Tóth, "A tatárjárás kori kincshorizontról."

The hoard consists of a total of 890 coins, four silver and a bronze buckle, two silver and two golden rings, two pairs of silver earrings and three additional, drop-shaped earring parts, one silver ring that probably belonged to an earring, four golden knobs with gems, one piece of rock crystal that must have been part of a ring or pendant, a heavily worn Roman silver coin, a small metal artifact in the shape of a *fleur-de-lis*, and pieces of textiles interwoven with golden thread. Further archaeological finds that came to light both in the excavation area and outside it suggests that this fort of the county was attacked by the Mongol army. Written sources as well as the archaeological remains witness that the fort survived the siege and may have served as an important hub in the counterattack actions, as is indicated in a 1242 document. Further surveys inside the fort and in the rampart will contribute to a better understanding of the role this fort played in the history of the Mongol invasion.

Coin hoards are key research sources for the history of the Mongol invasion, and for a long time, numismatic studies have been addressing their various aspects. A more recent, highly important article in *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* [Papers in Military History] is about the hidden treasures connected to the Mongol invasion, demonstrating the find horizon of the invasion.³⁴ At present, we know of roughly 100–150 coin hoards from the Carpathian Basin, most likely hidden during the Mongol invasion in 1241–1242. This range of coins, introduced in a complex way only in recent decades, covers the entire territory of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, although their spread is not geographically uniform. A typical coin hoard from this age (or a mixed treasure containing jewelry and hack silver) may basically consist of two groups of coins. Foreign currencies are mainly represented by twelfth- and thirteenth-century *Friesacher Pfennigs*, but there are also *Wiener Pfennigs*, and to a lesser extent, coins minted in Cologne and England. Almost all the Hungarian coins were minted during the first phase of the reign of Béla IV (1235–1270), while earlier Hungarian coins are rarely found. The existence of the find horizon raises several issues, such as the spatial distribution pattern, hoards as indicators of the destruction during the invasion, the contemporary money economy, economic historical aspects, foreign trade issues, and others, the reinterpretation of which has only recently begun.

Another aspect of the archaeological studies of the research project is not connected to new fieldwork, but to the complex analysis of the archaeological finds dating from the period of the Mongol invasion. In addition to the investigation of the ceramics of Hejőkeresztúr-Vizekköze, a recent article gives a thorough analysis of the copper findings of the same site, using archaeological and metallographic methods.³⁵ The site is located about 700 meters south of Hejőkeresztúr, in the current location of the M-30 motorway. The excavation was carried out in 1995–1996

34 Tóth, “A tatárjárás kori,” 592–603.

35 Wolf and Barkóczy, “Hejőkeresztúr-Vizekköze lelőhely,” 604–28.

and covered about 12,000 square meters². The uncovered settlement was richest in findings and objects from the late Árpád Age in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Due to the high number of finds, especially iron tools, it may be concluded that the settlement was abandoned very suddenly, potentially when its inhabitants were forced to flee. Since the Battle of Muhi was fought close to this area, the flight is most likely to have been due to the battle. The material represents a combination of tools from the settlement, as well as weapons left behind by soldiers in the battle. The paper describes the archaeological and metallographic analysis of the copper findings. These objects must have served various purposes. Some of them were day-to-day tools (bowls and plates for scales), jewelry forming part of an apparel (rings and belts), furniture (parts of a door or chest), or were used in religious ceremonies. Some of the artifacts were impossible to identify. They are not typical of other excavations from the Árpád Age. Their detailed examination has revealed that their manufacturing was not uniform. Some were produced using simple methods, while others demonstrate more advanced technologies. This suggests that the village did not have its own metal workshop, and the objects were produced elsewhere, but not all in the same place. Therefore, we may conclude that the settlement was involved in a busy commercial activity and the locals were affluent enough to buy cheap mass products as well as more exclusive high-quality goods.

Archaeological studies carried out in the framework of the project are connected not only to the finds and sites in Hungary but also to archaeological research carried out in the Eurasian context. In order to better understand this battle and the Mongol invasion of Hungary in general, we should be familiar with the army of the Mongolian Empire, of which Gergely Csiky offers a detailed analysis.³⁶ The Mongol Empire (*Yeke Mongol Ulus*) was the largest continental empire at the time due to its efficient, complex, and well-organized army, which was far more sophisticated than the former nomadic hordes composed mainly of mounted archers. The army was disciplined, had a well-defined command-line, with the cooperation of various branches including heavy and light cavalry, infantry and artillery, and its specially trained warriors were drilled in encircling hunts. The army was also characterized by a combination of highly mobile tactical movements, an empire-wide logistical system (*yam*), the mass use of corvée labor, and the application of cutting-edge military innovations. Csiky's paper presents this military system by describing its organization, manpower, tactical units, weaponry, equipment, military training, tactics, and strategy as well as the technical novelties deployed in sieges. Beyond the stereotypes frequently applied to nomadic armies, contemporary descriptions reflect an army building on steppe nomadic traditions, but combining them with technical, tactical, and strategic elements adopted from neighboring and subjected civilizations,

36 Csiky, "A Nagy Mongol Birodalom," 528–57.

including China and Islamic Central Asia. Due to its highly militarized state ideology, building on the notion of constant conquest of a world empire, the Mongol military system created the largest and most effective army of the thirteenth century, which contributed to the empire's swift expansion resulting in the large-scale devastation of huge territories, the extinction of populated cities, and mass deportation. At the same time, it formed the so-called *Pax Mongolica*, that facilitated the spread of goods, ideas, people, and innovations in a huge area under the same polity.

New historical studies connected to the Mongol invasion of Hungary

An important goal of the research is understanding the Eurasian historical aspects of the Mongol invasion. In this context, several articles have been published about the resumed discussion of the relevant historical sources, the international contacts right after the invasion, as well as about their later interpretations.

László Veszprémy's article analyzes the memory of the invasion in contemporary chronicles.³⁷ The Mongol attack of Eastern and Central Europe shocked Europe, especially after the bloody victories against the Poles and the Hungarians in April 1241. Many of the chroniclers conveyed the vision of total destruction, including the German annals, the Hungarian chronicles, and the most widespread handbooks, like the *Speculum historiale*, and the world chronicle of Martin of Troppau. A unique and controversial source is the work of the Armenian prince Hayton, the "*Flos historiarum*," which gives a description of a Mongol defeat by the duke of Austria, where according to the author—in contradiction to historical records—the Mongol captain, Prince Batu met his death. For a long time, Hayton was labelled as an unreliable source, or at least a reckless storyteller. However, the article argues that there was an independent Mongol—partly oral—tradition of the war events in Hungary that survived in Oriental sources. These Arab, Persian, and Chinese sources (Ibn al-Said al-Maghribi- al-Fida, Jovayni, Rashīd al-Dīn /Rashiduddin, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*) may be recognized behind the vivid battle scene as portrayed by Hayton. The Mongol defeat at a certain bridge that Hayton mentions may be identified as the famous fight for the bridge at the Battle of Muhi, in April 1241, which is described by Thomas of Spalato.

Attila Bárány's article investigates the news, reports, relations, dispatches, and letters that reached the West about the 1241 Mongol invasion in Hungary and (partly) Poland.³⁸ It also explores how the Christian princes reacted to the increasing number of exhortations to take up arms in the kingdoms that were at the mercy of the Infidel.

37 Veszprémy, "A tatárjárás," 459–85.

38 Bárány, "A tatárjárás híre," 486–527.

The article offers an overview of the information that was communicated mainly to Germany, France, and England, and the channels used for this. It also discusses how the Western courts were notified by personally affected rulers, like Otto, Duke of Braunschweig, or King of Bohemia Wenceslas I, and how the news arrived in Paris or London via the wide network of the Church, especially the Mendicant Orders, and some individually concerned prelates, e.g., the Archbishop of Magdeburg. We find out what the West learned about the Tatars' devastation in Hungary and Silesia and when, and also who considered the threat to be serious from the outset, taking defense efforts in their own hands, particularly after Pope Gregory IX died, and Emperor Frederick II was engaged in warring his Guelph adversaries in Italy. It is seen how some pillars of the crusading zeal, the Duke of Brabant and Henry Raspe made sacrifices on the altar of the *negotium Christi*. The study seeks to re-interpret the report of Henry II that the Duke of Brabant received in March. It was long held in Hungarian historiography that the letter was written by Hermann, Landgrave of Thuringia, which, however, as the article proves, is impossible, since Hermann had died by that time, and the real writer was Henry Raspe, the new landgrave.

Two articles investigate the papal diplomacy and issues of Franciscan envoys and missionaries. Szilvia Kovács examines the relationships between the Latin West and the Mongol Empire after the Mongol invasion of Eastern Europe (1236–1242).³⁹ The focus is the missionary activities of the members of the Franciscan Order. Kovács seeks answers to questions about the time and way the Franciscan friars appeared in the territory of the Mongol Empire with missionary purposes and how they started to build their missionary network in the Golden Horde. Based on written sources, the author states that the missionaries appeared in the Mongol Empire in the 1250s and their missionary institutions were founded in the 1280s.

Dorottya Uhrin's article examines the relations of the reports of the two Franciscans, Johannes de Plano Carpini and C. de Bridia, and reviews the creation of their works and their manuscript tradition.⁴⁰ The Franciscans' reports are crucial, because the aim of the legation was not only to establish diplomatic connections between Europe and the Mongols, but also to acquire intelligence, which was vital if, indeed, an expected second invasion were to happen. For that, besides the strategic data, the Franciscan authors carefully described the cultural and geographical features they encountered. The main difference between the reports of Carpini and Bridia is that the latter puts more emphasis on readability, compared to Carpini's factual mode of presentation. Bridia's goal was not to encourage action against the Mongols; instead, he intended to demonstrate the divine punishment which afflicted Christians. Thus, he represented the Mongols more negatively than his colleague.

39 Kovács, "A nyugati keresztény," 572–82.

40 Uhrin, "Johannes de Plano Carpini," 583–91.

The difference between the two versions of Carpini's work is largely a matter of style. While the first version was a report for the pope, the second is a more colorful work, targeted at an interested audience while also satisfying historiographical needs.

The new research project also deals with the critical aspects of various national, local, and regional narratives, as well as with different scholarly traditions of the interpretation of the Mongol Empire's expansion. János B. Szabó analyzes the historiography of the Mongol invasion in Hungary.⁴¹ Modern historical literature on the Mongol invasion of Hungary has displayed very interesting trends over a period of nearly a century and a half. An event that occupies a prominent place in Hungarian national historical consciousness, even appearing in Ferenc Kölcsey's *National Anthem*, has received surprisingly scant attention from professional historians. One possible reason has been the lack of historical problems requiring investigation. The invasion was short-lived, and the Hungarian narrative sources were known very early. Apart from some scattered data, it had been a long time before any sources that might present a research challenge emerged. Master Roger's contemporary report on the invasion seemed to have done all the work for subsequent historians, who could do little but reproduce his account. The narrative of the Mongol invasion has been of limited utility in public discourse, seldom used as a parable or as historical justification for current events. Perhaps the most prominent exploitation of its potential in this respect was by the post-1945 communist regime. The breakthrough finally came with the upsurge of Oriental Studies in Hungary, which is ongoing and has restored the Hungarian events of the Mongol invasion to their international context.

In 2022, a major volume of collected studies was edited by members of the project team János B. Szabó and Dorottya Uhrin.⁴² The contributions in the volume entitled *Mongol Invasions against Europe, 1236–1242* are grouped into four major parts. The first "The Mongol Threats" explains the emergence and rise of the Great Mongol Empire, its army, and the military preparation of the Mongol troops. The second main chapter entitled "The Target: Europe" gives an overview of the main political entities of Europe at the time of the Mongol invasions and discusses in detail the main military conflicts of the period in Southern, Western, and Eastern Europe and in Asia Minor. The chapters in the third unit discuss the Mongols' Western campaigns, the preparations for them and the course of events, focusing on the impact of the military activity in Hungary. The concluding part of the volume, "The Rule of the Mongols in Europe" concentrates on the presence of the Mongols in Eastern Europe, in the Balkans, and in their later campaigns up to the end of the thirteenth century. The individual chapters are written by sixteen specialists, including some non-Hungarian scholars.

41 B. Szabó, "Most rabló," 559–71.

42 B. Szabó and Uhrin, eds, *Mongol invázió*.

Dissemination of results

One of the main goals of the project is to present new findings to the public. The public lecture series *A tatárjárásról sok szemmel: régi kérdések, új válaszok* [About the Mongol Invasion from Many Perspectives: Old Questions, New Answers] started its fifth semester in 2021. The members of the project are eager to present their research to interested audiences. Other distinguished scholars also contribute to the sessions and shed light on various aspects of the Mongol invasion and the Mongol Empire. On a special occasion, Ambassador of Mongolia to Hungary Batbayar Zeneemyadar also attended a roundtable discussion about the present-day image of the Mongolian Empire. These lectures are available on the project's YouTube channel.⁴³ Moreover, the results have been published in archaeological and cultural heritage magazines, such as *Határtalan Régészet* [Borderless Archaeology] or *Várak, Kastélyok, Templomok* [Castles, Palaces, Churches]. In these publications, we summarize the main aims of the project, its possible outcomes, and research methodologies, and introduce recently discovered archaeological findings. In connection with research methodology, the article published in the journal dealing with castles, palaces and churches, has presented the preliminary results of a new investigation of the spatial distribution patterns of place names with the suffix *-egyháza* ('church') and of Romanesque village churches, both groups used as indicators for the impact and destruction of the Mongol invasion in 1241–1242.⁴⁴

A major element in providing the public with information about the activity of the research project was the series of regular interviews with members of the research team, published by the online news site 24.hu. Between February 2021 and July 2023, thirty interviews were published on various aspects of the ongoing research project. The interviews made by Dániel Bihari reached many people and generated significant public interest.

The current findings of the research program confirm that initiating the research was justified. The history of the Mongol invasion in Hungary had not previously been a focal point of scholarly inquiry. Both experts' and the general public's interest affirm that there was a need for new research in this field. While the project may not have yielded satisfactory answers to every open question, it does confirm that employing interdisciplinary methodology and revisiting the topic may generate new scholarly insights.

43 1241 Tatárjárás. Youtube channel, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0g0VCgxNMVNW WUHQ_BcqCg/videos, accessed: 29 November 2023.

44 B. Szabó et al., "Új régészeti eredmények," 88–91; Laszlovszky and F. Romhányi, "A tatárjárás pusztítása," 32–35.

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