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Moving Borders in Medieval Central Europe

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Finding Batu's Hill at Muhi: Liminality between Rebellious Territory and Submissive Territory, Earth and Heaven for a Mongol Prince on the Eve of Battle*

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This study offers a reconstruction of a crucial event of pan-Eurasian historical significance—namely, the Battle of Muhi in 1241—by focusing on two primary source accounts of Batu Khan ascending a hill shortly before the battle. The two sources are not related to each other, and they represent two fundamentally different source groups related to the battle. By using a complex analytical approach, this article tries to identify the character and significance of the hill in question—something made difficult by the fact that there are no hills or mountains near the battlefield today. The attested purposes that Mongol rulers and troops had for ascending mountains are explored for clues. A hypothesis emerges according to which Batu likely ascended two different types of hill, one being a small mound (kurgan) of the type which characteristically dotted Hungary's landscape around the battlefield. The other hill, which he ascended for religious ritual purposes, was probably one of the more prominent features in the area of Szerencs about thirty kilometers from the site of the clash. Several earlier attempts to identify the hill are now revisited in this study with two different types of approaches. Combining a unique range of textual accounts with recent archaeological findings, we suggest a drastic and perhaps more accurate reinterpretation of the course of events leading up to the important battle than the interpretations which have been proposed so far. Furthermore, by looking closely at the different narrative structures of the sources we can identify 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. This research forms part of an interdisciplinary research project carried out by a group of scholars dealing with the historical, archaeological, and topographical aspects of the Battle of Muhi.

Keywords: Mongol invasion of Europe, Batu, Mongol Empire, Battle of Muhi, battlefield archaeology, kurgan, Kingdom of Hungary

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Introduction

In the ruling ideology of the Mongol Empire, a distinct dichotomy was drawn between two types of polity. In relationship to the Mongols and their heaven-ordained empire, any other nation could only exist as a submissive people (*il irgen*) or a rebellious people (*bulγa irgen*).[1] Therefore, when the Mongols invaded the territory of a recalcitrant foe who refused to submit to Mongol demands, this represented a passage from peaceful submission to chaos and war. Indeed, this transition across the border to break down rebellious nations that put up resistance to their authority must have carried symbolic weight, particularly for Mongol leaders and princes, when they set out on campaigns. In the case of Batu Khan and his fellow Chinggisid princes advancing through the passes of the Carpathian Mountains to invade the Kingdom of Hungary in early 1241, this sense of liminality must have been particularly stark. The passage through the rugged Carpathians at the outset might have been an omen of things to come. Hills and mountains played a significant role in the historical events of the Mongol invasion period in the kingdom, most notably as refuges for the populace and sites of rare successful resistance.[2] That story is well known. However, for descendants of Chinggis Khan, hills held an additional and unique spiritual significance. They were sites of another type of liminality between Earth and Eternal Heaven (*Möngke Tengri*), a place of communication between a ruler of the world and its divine overseer.

Therefore, it is interesting to note that in two primary sources, written within a couple decades of the events, a hill plays a role in the Battle of Muhi. Fought in April 1241 between the Hungarian royal army and the Mongols under Batu and the famed general Sübe'etei, the battle was the most important episode in the entire invasion, and it was a clash of global historical significance.[3] Yet the two accounts of Batu ascending a hilltop are very mysterious, because the battle occurred in a flatland area of the Great Hungarian Plain. The general area of the engagement is known today, but there are no real hills near the medieval village of Muhi, the presumed site of the Hungarian camp, or on either side of the Sajó River, where, according to the sources, the battle unfolded. Granted, there are the Carpathian Mountains to the north in the present-day Slovakian

1 Allsen, "Mongol Census Taking in Rus'," 50.

2 Laszlovszky et al., "Contextualizing the Mongol Invasion," 423–31, 437; Nagy, *Tatárjárás*, 175–201; Pow, "Hungary's Castle Defense Strategy," 234–36.

3 Laszlovszky et al., "Reconstructing the Battle of Muhi," 30.

border region and those farther away in Transylvania. Closer by are the hills of Zemplén, more than thirty kilometers to the northeast, but none of these hills or mountains are close enough to the battlefield that they could have played any role in the events there.

This study attempts to identify Batu's hill, as we might call it. Our hypothesis is that this detail as described in two different sources cannot be simply neglected, and we should explore why the authors of the accounts of the battle included this element in their descriptions. To that end, we will first describe both primary source accounts related to it. Then, we explore the larger body of references to the Mongols and their activities involving hills. In this discussion, we will show that there were two broad categories of activity for which the Mongols specifically sought a hilltop. In this context, the role of hills in military tactics and religious-ritual activities are taken into consideration. Finally, we offer a plausible identification of the hilltop—or possibly hilltops and a hypothesis which is intended to explain the sequence of events in this battle of pan-Eurasian significance.

At different times, Hungarian historical research has dealt with the issue of the hilltop episodes related to the Battle of Muhi, but even according to the most recent studies, the various explanations which have been offered so far are not convincing.[4] More recently, the Hungarian sinologist Sándor P. Szabó proposed new solutions in his study dealing with the place names in Chinese sources connected to the Battle of Muhi and mentioned the hill problem.[5] The historian John Man personally drove around the area of the battlefield and concluded that the accounts of a hill in the preliminary events to the battle must simply be an error by medieval authors.[6]

Before accepting a wholesale dismissal of the claims found in the sources according to which Batu, the principal Mongol commander, mounted a hilltop shortly before the engagement at Muhi, this essay first aims to identify the hill, or hills, in question. This is important, because the Battle of Muhi retains a degree of mystery, and our present knowledge of exact places where stages of the battle unfolded is far from precise. As we pointed out in an earlier study, in order to make better sense of the battle as a series of events, we must pinpoint more accurately the geographical locations where various key events mentioned in the surviving sources occurred. These manmade and natural features include

4 Négyesi, "A muhi csata," 302; B. Szabó, *A tatárjárás*, 128.

5 P. Szabó, "A muhi csata és a tatárjárás," 259–86.

6 Man, *Genghis Khan*, 271.

a bridge where the engagement was centered, the Hungarian camp which was surrounded by the Mongols, the highway along which the Hungarians retreated, and of course the hilltop which Batu ascended before ordering his troops to attack.[7] Some past excavations have uncovered significant finds associated with the events, including an excavation of the medieval village of Muhi, while recent battlefield archaeological research utilizing metal detectors has unearthed new artifacts, such as weapons and jewelry.

More significantly, the same project has identified the medieval village of Hídvég (literally meaning "end of the bridge"). Perhaps surprisingly, the medieval settlement has a different location from the present-day village of Sajóhídvég (literally meaning "end of the bridge at the Sajó River"), even though it was depicted in eighteenth-century maps at its present location. This is a very important topographical point, as the first extant mention we have of the settlement Hidvég is a charter written in 1261. Granted, that was two decades after the battle itself, but this late appearance is due to the destruction of earlier charters in the invasion; the villages of the settlement system in the region only appear in the written sources towards the end of the thirteenth century or in the first half of the fourteenth century. Archaeological evidence, however, confirms that most of these villages were already present in the area in the earlier centuries of the Árpád Era. Thus, the medieval village Hídvég, appearing in the charter of 1261 as *Hydueghe*, can now be identified. We cannot be absolutely sure that the bridge mentioned in the accounts of the battle was located at this village, though it seems likely. Some wooden structures have been identified in the Sajó at various parts of the riverbed, but their exact dating is currently being worked out with the help of underwater archaeological investigations and dendrochronological studies which are now underway. This is also a part of the present research project, which plans to identify a significant number of topographical points connected to different events of the battle. By and large, the site of the battlefield can be quite accurately identified within a zone of at least 25-30 square kilometers. This means that the landscape features, including any related hills or mountains, can be analyzed in the context of the descriptions of the battle.

We have also tried to make better use of the scanty but valuable details of the battle in Asian sources. For instance, the site of the battle in the Chinese–Mongolian biography of Sübe'etei is recorded as the "Huoning" River (滹寧)—

7 Laszlovszky et al., "Reconstructing the Battle of Muhi," 32–33.

the original Mongolian was perhaps something like "Qorning." Previously, this place name was not identified. An earlier translation of the biography by György Kara did not offer any suggestion for this name as it appears in the source.[8] More recently a solution for this problem has been offered; in all likelihood, it is a reference to the Hernád River (in Slovakian it is called Hornád), which forks off the Sajó close to the medieval crossing point. Identifying the river as the Hernád/Hornád sheds some light on the preliminary troop positions from a Mongol perspective on the eve of battle.[9] This interpretation of an important Asian source, originally recorded in Mongolian not long after the events, would help confirm that the area of the battlefield can be found near Muhi, and the "hill" mentioned in other sources should be sought in the general area if one wishes to interpret that detail of the sources as well. It should be noted that there is another interpretation for the Huoning River. Szabó argues that it is in fact meant to convey "Kerengő-ér" (Kerengő-stream), another feature in the area which has been proposed as the site of the Hungarian camp.[10] In the context of his recent study, he also raised the issue of the hill. In any case, his conclusions do not change the general localization of the battle, and therefore we should still be seeking a hill in the same area.

The Two Accounts of Batu Ascending a Hill

Both accounts according to which a hill played an important role in the events surrounding the Battle of Muhi were recorded in the mid-thirteenth century. However, the very different social, geographical, and linguistic contexts of their composition make it certain the two narratives did not inform each other in any way. The first account we will look at is found in the *Historia Salonitana* of Thomas of Split (1200–1268), a high-ranking clergyman in Split (Spalato), a city on the Dalmatian coast which was under the rule of the kings of Hungary at the time. The author was a personal acquaintance of King Béla IV and other leading magnates of the kingdom. According to his account, Batu, the Mongol prince and supreme commander of Mongol forces during their westward campaign in Europe in 1241–42, used a hill for military-reconnaissance purposes. The story relates that a body of Mongol troops had retreated slowly from the central part of the kingdom (the area of the Hungarian camp near Pest), pursued by the

8 Katona, *A tatárjárás emlékezete*, 83–84.

9 Pow and Liao, "Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction," 65–66.

10 P. Szabó, "A muhi csata és a tatárjárás," 270–75.

Hungarians to the Sajó River in the northeast part of modern Hungary. Having crossed the river, the Mongols were then encamped and made a stand. The Hungarian and Mongol armies faced each other across the river, though according to Thomas of Split, the Hungarians could see only some of the Mongol forces, as the Mongols had hidden in thick woods along the bank. The Hungarians likewise made their camp, which would be the site of the ensuing battle. At that point, the Mongols' senior commander Batu "ascended a hill to spy out carefully the disposition of the whole army." The specific terminology ("*in quondam collem conscendens*") implies that this was just *some* or *any* hill—certainly not a mountain or some defining feature of the landscape that was of any particular importance. The term applied to the landscape feature, *collis*, is etymologically related to "hill" or mound. In the context of the Hungarian Plain, medieval charters describing floodplain zones in this region used "mountain" (*mons*) for higher, elevated places, even if they are only 15–25 meters higher than the surrounding area.[11] Thus, *collis* here probably means a mound (kurgan) on the plain. In any case, having seen the cramped disorganization of the Hungarian camp, Batu returned to his comrades and told them to be confident, since their enemies had taken poor counsel, obviously lacking military sense, by laying out their camp as a sort of sheepfold. Then, "the very same night," he ordered a surreptitious advance across the Sajó against the Hungarians. He managed to surround their camp and won a decisive victory after they began to flee in panic.[12]

The second account of the Battle of Muhi which makes mention of a hill is found in the *Tarikh-i Jahan-gusha* by the famous Persian historian and administrator, Juvayni (1226–1283). According to this account, upon advancing into Hungary, Batu sent his brother Shiban ahead with 10,000 troops to determine the size of the Hungarian army. Shiban came back to Batu after a week, having scouted out the enemy position. He reported that the advancing Hungarian forces outnumbered the Mongol forces twofold in terms of numerical strength. Faced with this news and with the Hungarian and Mongol armies coming into proximity, Batu anxiously ascended a hilltop. For one day and night he "prayed and lamented; and he bade the Moslems also assemble together and offer up prayers."[13] The following day, the Mongols prepared for battle, and Batu ordered an attack which initiated a hotly contested struggle that ultimately ended in his victory when the Mongols entered the Hungarian camp and overturned the tents

11 Laszlovszky, "Dedi etiam terram," 9–24.

12 Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 262–63.

13 Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Jahan-gusha-yi Juvayni*, 325; Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 270–71.

of the king. Regarding the terminology for the hill Batu ascended, it is referred to as a *pushta* (پشته), which is defined in Francis Joseph Steingass's *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* as, "A little hill, an embankment; declivity; a heap; the shoulder-blades; a load; a faggot; a buttress, prop; a vault; a quay."[14] Like the Latin account, the Persian narrative states that Batu "went up on *some* hill" ("*bar pushta-i rafi*"), in this case by using the suffix -i to indicate indetermination. This was "some" or "any" hill, rather than a particularly special location. It was certainly not a high mountain, since the word for that is *koh* (کوه).[15]

Thus, in passages from two unconnected sources, we see that the specific language in both cases paints a picture of a nondescript or modestly sized hill, rather than a prominent mountain. However, the described purpose for Batu's ascension differs in the two sources. In the account offered by Thomas of Split, Batu ascended the hill or mound with a strictly military purpose in mind—to view the positions of the Hungarians. According to Juvayni's account, Batu's ascension had a fundamentally religious purpose—to seclude himself and pray for victory. The different explanations offered for why the Mongol leader ascended the hill invites a wider discussion here of source accounts of the Mongol practice of climbing hills and the reasons for it.

Mongol Purposes for Ascending Hills: Military and Religious Functions

In the available sources, we can find many accounts of Mongols—often those in leadership roles—ascending hills for purposes that fall into two broad categories: pragmatic, military purposes and ceremonial, religious purposes. Looking at the first category, we see that hilltops were useful to the Mongols, particularly as vantage points from which to conduct reconnaissance, but also as strategically valuable strongpoints. There are many records of commanders of campaigns initially climbing a hill like Batu did to survey the enemy's positions and the lay of the land. Chelota, the Mongol general overseeing the campaign to subjugate Korea in 1256, is recorded to have unfurled his banners and climbed a prominent mountain, Munsusan, with several other leaders to view the topography of Kangdo (Ganghwa), the island where the Korean monarchy was holding out.[16] Likewise, Khubilai, still a prince and not yet khan, was campaigning against the Song Dynasty in 1259 and ascended the mountain Xianglushan (香鑪山) to

14 Steingass, *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, 252.

15 Ibid., 1064.

16 Schultz and Kang, *Koryosa Choryo II*, 352.

survey the Yangzi River, along which the Song were conducting an effective defense. His efforts paid off. He saw a vulnerable ferry crossing on the river, ordered an attack on it, and some of his troops even succeeded in breaking through the defenses to the southern riverbank.[17] These accounts lend credence to the report by Thomas, since they indicate that the surveying he described was part of the customary military tactics used by Mongol leaders.

In addition to top commanders, ordinary Mongol troops also made a strategic habit of occupying hilltops during their advances into enemy territory. A report of Song Chinese emissaries to the Mongols in the 1230s, the *Heida Shilue*,[18] noted that during their advances, the Mongols intensely feared ambushes, so they sent out light vanguard cavalry, who habitually climbed high hills to gain vantage points. These scouts then reported their observations, along with information taken from captured locals, back to the main army.[19] Elsewhere, we read that the very first thing the Mongols did during invasions was to ascend the local hills to inspect the terrain and glean the true situation of the enemy.[20] In a very different context, the French Dominican friar Simon of Saint-Quentin made observations about vanguard Mongol troops and their strategic use of hills:

> When they set out to invade another territory […] they occupy the whole extent of the land […] They ascend the mountains in the immediate vicinity all night long. Morning having come, they send out their vanguard troops, mentioned above, into the plains. The local people, struggling to escape the vanguard troops, flee to the mountains believing to save themselves there. Instantly, they are killed by the Tartars who were in hiding and descended on them.[21]

The Mendicant friar's references to light vanguard troops (*cursarios*) and the references in the Chinese reports to vanguard or advance troops (前鋒/先鋒), which in both cases are reported to have ascended mountains to reconnoiter, in all probability refer to the same type of troops and habitual tactics. The papal emissary, Carpini, described how the vanguard troops (*praecursores*), very lightly equipped with only their tents, arms, and mounts, went ahead of the main army with the sole task of killing or putting the inhabitants to flight; plunder would

17 *Yuan Shi*, 61–62.

18 For the Chinese text of the *Heida Shilue*, see: https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=922402#p62

19 Olbricht and Pinks, *Meng-ta pei-lu*, 183.

20 Ibid., 190.

21 Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 43.

be collected after the main army advanced into the area.[22] The *Tartar Relation* by Minorite friar C. de Bridia contains unique information which supports the general picture of Mongol forces advancing in segments. The author describes how, when the Mongols invaded a country, their army moved swiftly but cautiously in wagons and on horses, bringing along wives, children, slaves, herds, and all their property. Vanguard skirmishers (*cursores*) went ahead to spread havoc and kill, preventing the mobilization of local resistance, while the larger multitude with the families and property followed at a distance, as long as serious resistance was not encountered.[23] Thomas of Split mentioned that when the Mongols first broke through the frontier barriers and entered the Kingdom of Hungary, they basically rushed by the first peasants they encountered without showing their "ruthless nature" yet, something which could suggest that the vanguard troops had a more important mission of reconnaissance at that early stage.[24] Rashid al-Din, referring to a Mongol campaign in China in 1231, described the Mongols advancing in a wide hunting battue (*jerge*), ascending mountains, and moving across the plains.[25]

The sources mention other instances when the usage of hills blended military aims with ritual functions. Simon of Saint Quentin mentioned that when Mongol forces took a city or castle by siege, "as a sign of their glory and victory and for certainty about the number of those killed, and to strike terror in other people, they erect one of the fallen in a lofty and eminent place as a marker of a thousand, suspended upside down by his feet."[26] Old nomadic traditions long before the Mongol Empire may have seen the strategic usage of hilltops combined with ceremonial and religious practices. The semi-legendary record of the Magyar arrival in Hungary, the *Deeds of the Hungarians* [*Gesta Hungarorum*] (c. 1200), mentions that when the Magyar tribes first migrated into the Carpathian Basin, three of their chieftains raced to the top of Mt. Tokaj on horseback, and in fact the mountain was named after the figure who allegedly reached the summit first. They surveyed the landscape and then held a ritual feast, an *áldomás*, sacrificing a horse on the spot.[27] Though legendary, this account might show that Mt. Tokaj, jutting out imposingly on the plains, was immediately recognized

22 Van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana*, 80; Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 35.
23 Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 98–99.
24 Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 260–61.
25 Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 310.
26 Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 46.
27 Bak, Rady and Veszprémy, *Anonymus and Master Roger*, 44–45.

by nomadic invaders as both useful militarily and sacred. It is interesting to note that the route of the main Mongol forces in 1241, as much as we can reconstruct it from sources, must have passed near Mt. Tokaj, a very significant landscape feature, much higher than anything else in this region and perched on the edge of the Great Plain with its remarkable volcanic shape. It is curious that the author whose work shows a strong familiarity with the geography of northeastern Hungary in particular[28] suggested one could ride a horse up the rugged hill. In any case, returning to Mongol accounts specifically, we see this mixed usage of hilltops again when we read that, as a young man, Temujin (Chinggis Khan) went up a tall hill for the pragmatic purpose of surveying the landscape to see if enemies were near but felt as though God (*Tengri*) were communicating something to him when the saddle slipped off his horse.[29]

This relates directly to the other major activity related to ascending hills that we frequently find in the sources—a religious ritual for which Chinggis Khan himself seems to have set the precedent. Before a serious and dangerous military undertaking, we read of Chinggis Khan several times ritualistically being alone to commune with the divine on or near a mountain. Juzjani, a historian in the Sultanate of Delhi, related that when Chinggis Khan was going to go to war against the powerful Altan Khan of the Jin Dynasty in 1210–11, he first assembled his people at the base of a mountain and they fasted for three days, repeatedly chanting, "Tengri!" During that time, Chinggis Khan sat in a tent with a rope around his neck, and on the fourth day he dramatically emerged, shouting that Tengri would grant him victory.[30] They then marched to war and won against amazing odds. In Rashid al-Din's version of this event, Chinggis Khan actually ascended "the hill" alone, "as was his custom," and prayed for victory and vengeance on the Jin Dynasty.[31]

Chinggis Khan repeated this practice when his next major war erupted against the Khwarazmian Shah in 1218, following the well-known massacre of his merchants by the governor of Otrar. According to Juvayni, upon receiving news of the massacre, Chinggis Khan went alone to the summit of a hill, feverish with rage, bared his head, and for three nights he prayed for vengeance, since he was not the instigator of the conflict.[32] Descending the hill, he immediately made

28 Ibid., xxiii.

29 Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 46.

30 Raverty, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, 954.

31 Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 283.

32 Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Jahan-gusha-yi Juvayni*, 169; Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 80–81.

ready for war, in which he again would emerge as victor and which would make him a figure of global historical memory. The wording employed in this passage, "He went alone to the top of some hill" ("*tanha bar bala-yi pushta-i raft*"), is the same terminology used again later to describe Batu's hilltop seclusion before the Battle of Muhi. The only difference is that it emphasizes that Chinggis Khan went (*raft*) to "the top of" (*bala-yi*) a hill. An indeterminate suffix clearly indicates that Chinggis Khan ascended "some hill," rather than a particularly special hill. The idea that Batu's ritual before the battle with the Hungarians was made in conscious imitation of his grandfather was evident to contemporaries. Rashid al-Din essentially copied Juvayni's account of the Battle of Muhi, but in describing Batu's going up a hill, he added, "as had been Chinggis Khan's custom."[33] Related to Batu's conscious imitation of a ritual which Chinggis Khan is recorded to have performed before two very daunting wars against powerful enemies, it is interesting to note that Juvayni concludes his account of the Mongol victory at Muhi by noting that it was "one of their greatest deeds and fiercest battles."[34]

The apparent Mongolian custom of seclusion on a hilltop seems to mirror old Middle Eastern and Near Eastern traditions of ascetics or prophets in the wilderness, at least when this practice was described by Islamic and Christian authors. Indeed, Chinggis Khan is presented as an almost Moses-like figure in Simon of Saint-Quentin's account of his followers choosing him as khan:

> They all unanimously approved of his counsel and chose him, and his successors, as their ruler, and they promised to be obedient to him forever […] Having thus been elected, the next day while they all convened, he ascended a high mountain [*in montem altum ascendit*] and, exhorting them, said, "You all know that until now three sins have always been rampant amongst us—namely lying, thieving, and adultery…[35]

However, while in Persian, Arabic, Greek, or Syriac hagiographical texts, a holy ascetic would likely ascend a proper "mountain" (*koh, jabal, oros, tur*), Juvayni recorded that Chinggis Khan climbed more modest "hills." This might well be a conscious variation from the established literary precedent rather than something accidental.[36] Another interesting element is Juvayni's claim that

33 Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, 321.

34 Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 271.

35 Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 28–29.

36 Special thanks to Georg Leube (Bayreuth) for his deep literary and philological insights on this point.

Batu instructed the Muslims in his army to pray shortly before the Battle of Muhi. This fits with the general Mongol policy of allowing their subjects to practice any religion openly, provided they loyally served the Mongols. Simon of Saint-Quentin seemed surprised at the degree of Mongol liberality in this regard, noting, "The law of Muhammad is proclaimed five times a day openly by Saracens within earshot of [the Mongols'] army and in all the cities they have subjugated in which Saracens dwell. As well, the Saracens in their army and all their cities preach [Islam]."[37] So, there is nothing improbable about this episode, but what is interesting is what Juvayni as a Persian administrator and scholar in the Islamic tradition might have intended by highlighting it. As a subject of the Mongols, he perhaps wished to describe an episode which revealed sympathy for Islam among the highest princes of the empire, as this story might encourage his fellow Muslims, faced with the awkward situation of Mongol rule, to believe that a conversion of the animist nomads was imminent. Moreover, because it highlighted the important role that the Muslims had played in the victory, his account again appears to have been motivated by a desire to present a picture of harmony between Mongol princes and their Muslim subjects. Though this particular passage from Juvayni's narrative is not the topic of our present investigation, its interpretation would benefit from further studies connected to the Islamization process of the Mongols. Batu is clearly shown in the episode to be following an old tradition begun by Chinggis Khan but also relying on the spiritual influence of his Muslim followers. The combination seems to have brought about success even in what was evidently a very difficult struggle.

The Reconstructed Scenario and Identity of Batu's Hilltop at Muhi

The discussion above has established that a clergyman in Split and a Persian governor of Baghdad both separately described Batu ascending a hill shortly before the Battle of Muhi in 1241. In both cases, the terminology suggests a relatively modest hill, rather than an imposing mountain, but the accounts diverge fundamentally on the reason for which Batu ascended the hill. Based on several descriptions in sources of Mongol invasion tactics, the scenario described by Thomas fits with the practice of commanders and "vanguard" forces climbing a hill for reconnaissance. The ascension of a hill by a grandson of Chinggis Khan for religious reasons, as the event is described by Juvayni, fits more with the

37 Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 47.

image of a Mongol khan performing a traditional preparation for an important war—a ritual activity not undertaken in the actual course of a battle. Given the evidence of Mongols ascending all the hills in an area for scouting purposes and the many examples of the ritual, quasi-ascetic seclusion of khans on hilltops, we have to at least consider the possibility that the two accounts are describing episodes on two different hilltops.

The following hypothetical reconstruction of the events, based closely on the source material, suggests candidates for the hilltop activities described by Thomas of Split and Juvayni. Regarding Thomas of Split, he unquestionably provided the fullest account of the battle, and, when combined with the description provided by Rogerius, we can reconstruct the movements, activities, and positions of the Hungarians before the Battle of Muhi with a good degree of accuracy. Because of the nature of their informants, these authors obviously could not provide similar levels of detail concerning the activities of the Mongols, and they disagree on a fundamental issue. Rogerius stated that Batu himself advanced with his army within half a day of Pest on March 15, 1241. Rogerius implied that the entire Mongol army under its chief commander advanced close to the Hungarian camp at Pest, and when the Hungarian army moved against it at last, the whole army under Batu withdrew.[38] Rogerius' account seems to be confused, because it states that the Mongols broke through the border defenses at the Russian Gate, likely the Verecke Pass in the Carpathians, only on March 12, 1241.[39] This would suggest that the entire Mongol army (evidently with baggage, wagons, herds) moved 300 kilometers across most of Hungary in three days—a feat which is doubtful even for a small detachment, let alone the whole army. In contrast, Thomas claimed that Batu was the senior commander of the army, but "they sent on ahead of them a squad of cavalry. These troops rode up to the Hungarian camp, making repeated shows of themselves and challenging them to battle" before taking off in rapid flight, firing arrows, when the Hungarians at last pursued them.[40]

On this crucial issue, Thomas must be correct. His claim echoes the descriptions of the Mongol use of vanguard troops, which quickly moved far ahead of the more cautious main army, a practice detailed in many sources, including those outlined above. More importantly, his account agrees with the Asian sources, which provide versions of the invasion of Hungary originating

38 Bak, Rady and Veszprémy, *Anonymus and Master Roger*, 168–69, 180–81.

39 Ibid., 156, 160–61.

40 Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 260–61.

from Mongol accounts. Juvayni related that Batu sent ahead his brother Shiban in advance with a detachment of 10,000 troops to do reconnaissance on the Hungarian army. Shiban returned after a week and reported to Batu that the Hungarian army was twice the size of the Mongols' forces, news which caused the chief commander to ascend a hill as the armies drew close, praying and lamenting in apparent anxiety about the coming battle.[41] Sübe'etei's biography in the *Yuan Shi*, which was translated from a lost Mongolian original written in the mid-thirteenth century, states that the Mongol princes were divided along five different routes as their forces broke through the Carpathians and entered the Kingdom of Hungary. Sübe'etei operated in "the vanguard" unit, which went ahead, executing a plan to "lure" (誘) the king's army to the "Huoning River" ("速不台出奇計誘其軍至潡寧河").[42] The translation into Persian of a Mongolian report on the invasion found in Rashid al-Din's historical compendium agrees that the Mongol princes had entered Hungary along five distant routes. Thus, it appears that Batu, Shiban, and Sübe'etei were facing Hungary's royal army without the contingents of the other Chinggisid princes, who were in Transylvania and Poland attacking other enemy forces simultaneously.[43] This might partly explain the widespread anxiety in Batu's army documented in the *Yuan Shi* and in Mendicant reports.[44]

Asian sources, which are more reliable when it comes to the Mongol perspective, create a picture of a vanguard detachment having gone ahead of Batu and having carried out a premeditated plan to lure the Hungarians to a site chosen well in advance of the battle. This means that Batu and evidently the bulk of his army, including followers, herds, wagons, etc., were *already* east of the Sajó River well before the Hungarians arrived in pursuit of a vanguard contingent. Judging by his version's agreement on these details, Thomas of Split was well informed. He was aware that the Hungarian forces outnumbered the Mongols at the battle and he also stated that when the Hungarian forces arrived at the Sajó River, they realized that "the whole multitude of the Tatars" ("*universa multitudo Tartarorum*") was already encamped on the other side of the river.[45] This suggests the premeditated choice of the battlefield long in advance. In other words, there seems to have been a plan for the vanguard to lure the Hungarians

41 Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, 270.

42 Pow and Liao, "Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction," 63–66.

43 Boyle, *The Successors*, 69–70.

44 Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 82–83; Richard, *Histoire des Tartares*, 77.

45 Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 282–83, 260–61.

to Batu's already waiting main army. This position was likely chosen because the Sajó and Hernád Rivers provided a defensive line from which the Mongols could choose the time and place to attack. The natural gallery forest that runs along the floodplain of the Sajó would have concealed Mongol movements as they executed their plan to surround the Hungarians from several directions. There is textual evidence that this obscuring strategy was effective against the Hungarians. In a letter dated to July 1241, Emperor Frederick II offered an account of the battle based on what he had heard directly from the bishop of Vác, who had come to his court as an ambassador of the king of Hungary to seek help. The armies were thought to be still five miles apart from each other (*distarent quinque tantum miliaribus*) when the advance Mongol unit suddenly sprang forward and surrounded the Hungarian camp at dawn.[46] This suggests that the Hungarians thought the Mongols were still a considerable distance away since, in addition to the night darkness, the gallery forest along the Sajó obscured the Mongol positions and movements.

Most significant for our understanding of the battle, this interpretation of the sources suggests that vanguard forces were deployed in the leadup to the fighting, while Batu and the main body of the Mongols remained in the northeast of Hungary, never venturing as far as Pest before their victory. Thus, it is feasible that Batu was even considerably east of the Sajó River in the days before the battle, which then means we should consider hills that were not in the immediate vicinity of the site, especially since the sources on Mongol tactics note that they habitually ascended all the hills in a region during an invasion.

A key issue in determining the hilltop from which Batu reportedly viewed the Hungarian camp relates to the location of the camp itself. Several sources agree that during the battle, the Mongols struggled to force their way across the Sajó River in the area of a bridge spanning its banks. This crossing became the focal point of some of the heaviest fighting before the Mongols managed to force the Hungarians back and surround their camp.[47] The exact identifications of the site of the Hungarian camp and the bridge on the river are still tasks for the present research project. There is evidence that the courses of the Sajó and Hernád have shifted somewhat in the intervening centuries. For instance, a detailed map made in 1771 indicates the remains of an old bridge (*Vestigum Pontis antiqui*) east of Ónod and the Sajó. So, these questions are further complicated by

46 Luard, *Matthaei Parisiensis*, 114. A mile in medieval terminology is ambiguous but often could be considerably longer than the modern designation.

47 Painter, "The Tartar Relation," 82–83; Pow and Liao, "Subutai: Sorting Fact from Fiction," 66–67.

the problem of the interflow of the Hernád and Sajó rivers. The exact location of the confluence in the mid-thirteenth century is still a research problem, but there is clear evidence for its being situated at a different place compared to the present-day interflow. In fact, the very latest archaeological surveys of the area confirm that the site of medieval Hídvég—and therefore the location of the bridge over the river—must have been located at a site between the present

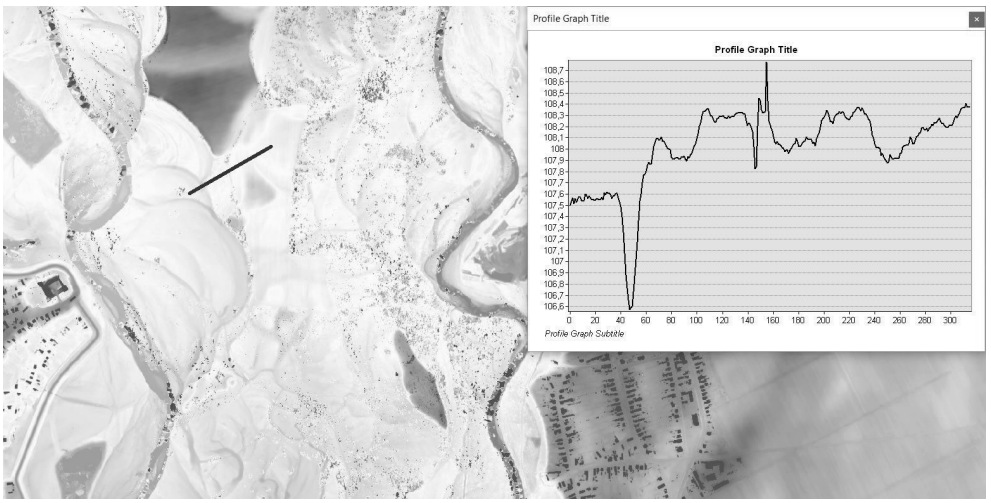

Figure 1. Interpretation of historical changes of watercourses of the Sajó near Ónod and of the river confluence sites Sajó and Hernád based on geomorphology, cross sections, and LIDAR survey. The upward spikes on the graph are representative of trees.

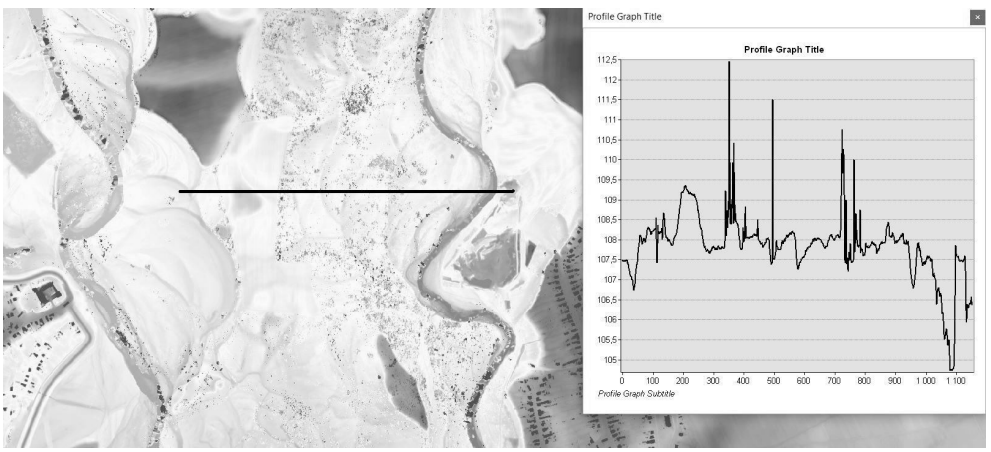

Figure 2. Another interpretation of historical changes of watercourses of the Sajó near Ónod and of the river confluence sites Sajó and Hernád based on geomorphology, cross sections, and LIDAR survey. The upward spikes on the graph are representative of trees.

channels of the rivers Sajó and Hernád, rather than at modern Sajóhídvég (east of the Hernád), as has long been assumed (Figs 1 and 2).

The map produced in the First Military Survey of Hungary undertaken by the Habsburg Empire (1782–1785) allows us to see the eighteenth-century landscape and road network.[48] This is very useful, because though five centuries had passed between the battle and the survey, it still depicts the area before the utterly transformative effects of modernization and huge population growth on the landscape. The general vicinity of the Hungarian camp was Muchi Rudera (Fig. 3), literally the ruins of Muhi, the actual location of the Árpád-era village and late medieval market town after which the battle was named in the modern secondary literature and general public discourse. Archaeological excavations have confirmed the existence of the medieval village at the site indicated in the survey.[49] The present-day village of Muhi on the riverbank was in fact called Poga in the Middle Ages, and it was renamed Muhi only in 1928 to commemorate the battlefield. Besides the village ruins, we notice on the survey map the existence of several small kurgans west of the Sajó River and to the east of the medieval village. These artificial prehistoric burial mounds (*kunhalom*) can be found in

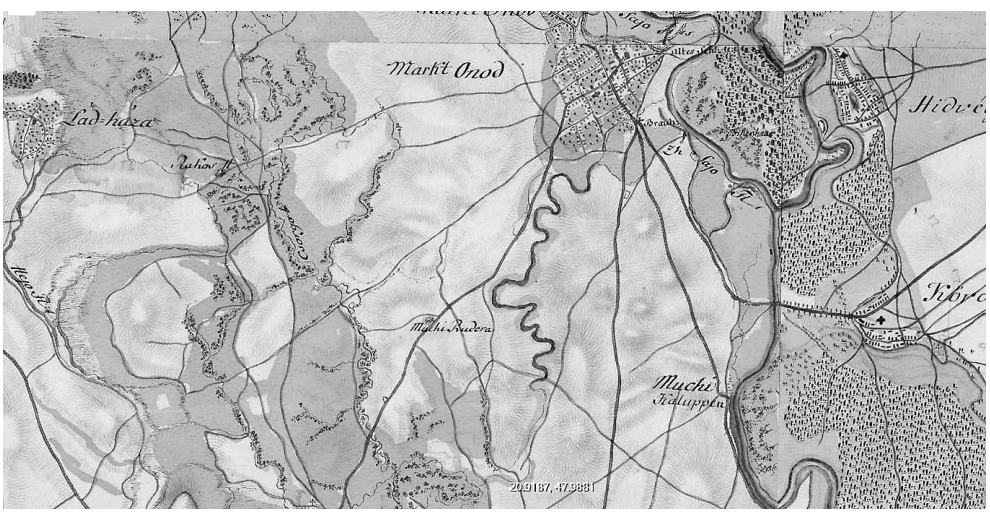

Figure 3. "Muchi Rudera," the ruins of the medieval town of Muhi in the First Military Survey Map. Source: "Königreich Ungarn (1782–1785) – First Military Survey." Digitized by Arcanum. https://mapire.eu/en/map/firstsurvey-hungary/?layers=147&bbox=2109136.4761014967%2C6019595.635189405%2C2134914.8638906726%2C6026283.875164358

48 The First Military Survey of the Kingdom of Hungary (1782–1785) is accessible at: https://mapire.eu/en/map/firstsurvey-hungary/

49 Laszlovszky et al., "Reconstructing the Battle of Muhi," 33.

many parts of Hungary. There are also natural mounds near the Sajó, on the western side of the river, in the area of the battle; some can be quite high, and they were used as permanent settlement sites for a long period in the Bronze Age.[50] These are in fact close to or in the immediate area of the Kerengő-ér, discussed earlier and sometimes proposed as the site of the Hungarian camp (Fig. 4). Recent archaeological investigations with metal detectors have found evidence of weapons and other artifacts located west of the Sajó River at a site where the remains of one of these mounds stand, suggesting that fighting took place there between the Hungarians and Mongols; clearly such features of the local landscape played a role in the battle. However, it is important to note that any mound that Batu might have used to survey the Hungarians before the fighting commenced must have been on the eastern side of the river.

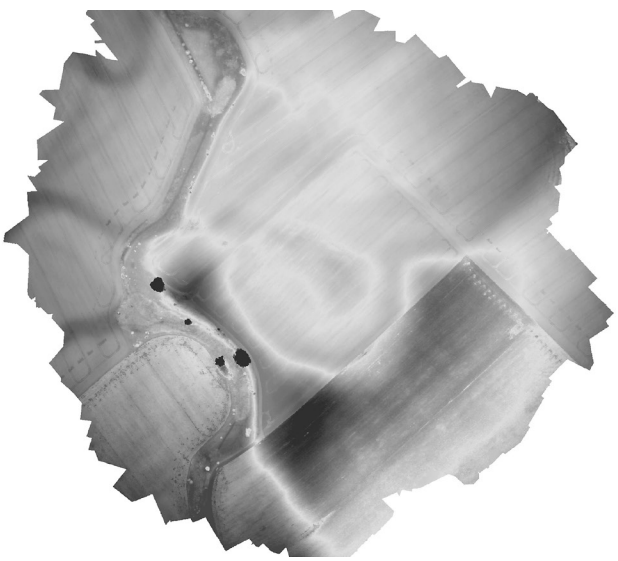

Fig. 4. UAV-based surface model of a supposed battle location (Csüllős) suggested in past scholarship on the basis of finds.

Regarding Thomas of Split's account, it is plausible that Batu used a kurgan as his vantage point. While the First Military Survey map shows several natural mounds on the western side of the river where the Hungarians were situated, we do not find artificial burial mounds (kurgans) in the immediate vicinity of the east side of the bank, where the Mongols were situated before the battle. However, on the map we see three mounds north of Tiszaluc, that is, east of

50 Fischl, "Bújócskázó bronzkori lelőhelyek."

the Sajó River and present-day Sajóhídvég. These mounds have already been discussed in the secondary literature in the context of the text of Thomas of Split,[51] but we wish to offer some new points of argumentation concerning the wider interpretation of this Latin source. The relevant mounds (kurgans) are situated roughly ten kilometers from what is likely the site of the medieval bridge or crossing on the river on a very prominent elevated landscape dotted with three kurgans, two of which were important enough to be named in the survey (Fig. 5). There is one with no name, and close to it is another kurgan named "Eperiesi Halom" (Eperjesi halom). It is interesting that Eperjesi halom is right next to a road which leads to the Sajó River crossing at Köröm, a place which has been often identified as a possible crossing on the river during the battle. Much more intriguing for the purposes of this study is the third mound of a higher elevation and seemingly greater importance named "Strásahalom" (Strázsahalom), which means a hill used for reconnaissance, i.e. a vantage point used for viewing enemies. There are similar mounds with the same name in other parts of the Great Plain (for example Strázsahalom near Cegléd or Strázsahegy near Hatvan), where the same explanation is given for the name. At the same time, we need to note that this name is modern, as it is derived from a South

Figure 5. The distance between the likely vantage point area and the supposed crossing point of the Sajó near Ónod. Source: "Königreich Ungarn (1782–1785) – First Military Survey." Digitized by Arcanum. https://mapire.eu/en/map/firstsurvey-hungary/?layers=147&bbox=2109136.4761014967%2C6019595.635189405%2C2134914.8638906726%2C6026283.875164358

51 Négyesi, "A muhi csata," 302–3.

Slavic language milieu and was not used in the Middle Ages. While Eperjesi halom is a typical kurgan site, relatively small with steep sides in a very flat area, Strázsahalom and its landscape is quite different. It is situated on a high plateau north of the Tisza River and the kurgan was erected on the highest point of this natural elevated slope. It is significantly higher than anything else in the area and offers a splendid viewpoint from where one can see Mt. Tokaj, the mountains near to Szerencs, the gallery woodland of the Tisza, the Sajó and Hernád Rivers, and the whole plain on the eastern side of the Sajó.

In any case, without a closer option, it is possible that Batu made use of this distant hill; its name proves that it was used for reconnaissance at some point in the past, and it was the most significant high ground in the general area. As evidence of that, it was depicted again in the Second Military Survey's map (1819–1869), with only the "Strázsa" kurgan being named among all local kurgans (Fig. 6). It is indicated on the map as the highest point in the landscape.

Figure 6. "Strázsa domb," the only named kurgan in the region in the Habsburg Second Military Survey. Source: "Hungary (1819–1869) – Second military survey of the Habsburg Empire." Digitized by Arcanum. https://mapire.eu/en/map/secondsurvey-hungary/?layers=5&bbox=2108467.652103985%2C6020316.891614754%2C2134246.039893161%2C6027005.131589707

On the Third Military Survey's map, created in the late nineteenth century, both the Eperjesi and Strázsa mounds are indicated. Eperjesi is marked without a name, but it is indicated to be 136 meters above sea level, while Strázsahalom is named and listed as being 156 meters above sea level. As such, it was the highest

point in the area. As clear evidence of this, this third survey's map offers another name for the mound in brackets, "Messzelátó." This means literally a vantage point from where you can see a long distance (Fig. 7). Thus, Strázsahalom must

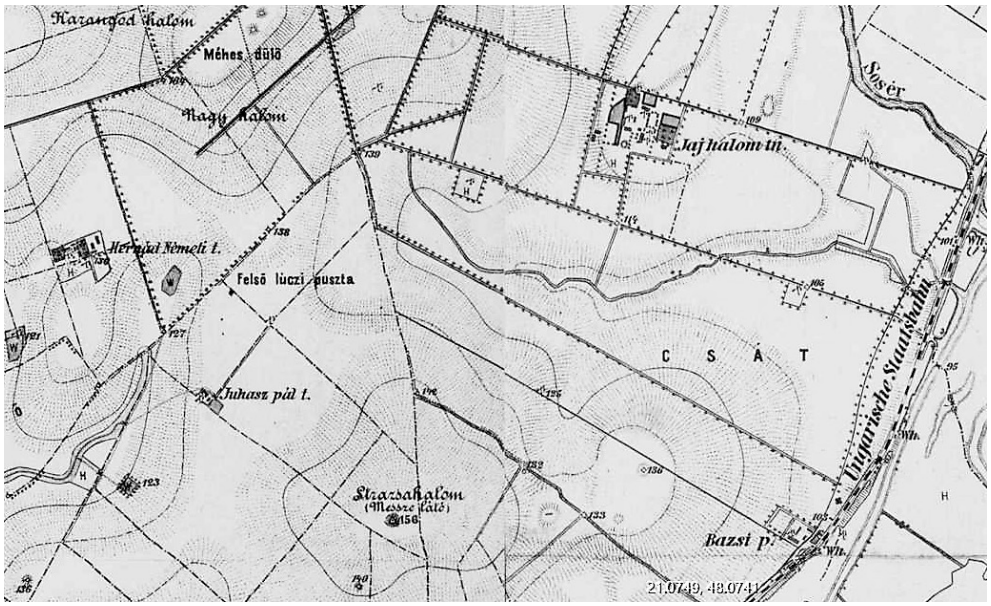

Figure 7. Strázsa-halom as depicted in the Habsburg Third Military Survey, with altitude (156 m.) and a comment that it offered a distant view of the surrounding area. Source: "Habsburg Empire (1869-1887) – Third Military Survey (1:25000)." Digitized by Arcanum https://mapire.eu/en/map/ thirdsurvey25000/?layers=129&bbox= 2108620.5261604865%2C6019892.496637743%2C2134398.9139496624%2C6026580.736612696

have been the most significant landmark in the Middle Ages and the highest point in this otherwise flat area. In the framework of our new research project on the Battle of Muhi, we will conduct some visibility experiments at the site, and with the help of GIS analytical methods, we will also be able to investigate various aspects of the topographical situation. While the shape and size of Eperjesi halom did not change, as it has never been ploughed, the area and the kurgan itself of Strázsahalom has been under agricultural cultivation and because of erosion, some changes have occurred. This means that it must have been higher in the Middle Ages than at present.

Modern agriculture has also worked changes on the surrounding landscape, but it is possible to see Strázsahalom and determine the view it provided. Granted, it was distant enough that Batu could not have viewed clear details of the Hungarian camp from it. Still, we must be aware of a key detail in our source on the matter. Thomas of Split noted that Batu viewed the Hungarian camp,

determining from its overall layout that the Hungarian king was a poor strategist, and "then, the very same night" ("*tunc, eadem nocte*"), he ordered his troops to attack.[52] From our own personal survey of the site it seems very probable that the torches and campfires of the Hungarian camp, situated on a mound on the western side of the Sajó river, would be clearly visible during a night in April. After all, it could be that Batu only saw a torchlight outline or the campfires of the troops (in early April it is ordinarily cold), something which would be visible for dozens of kilometers on a clear night. It is only 11 kilometers from Strázsahalom to the site of the Sajó River in the direct vicinity of medieval Hídvég, so if the Hungarian camp was somewhere nearby on the other side of the river, it was likely not more than 12–13 kilometers away from the vantage point. Another factor we should take into consideration is the presence of gallery woodlands in the floodplains of the Sajó River, which would have obscured the view of the other side if one were trying to conduct reconnaissance close to the river, even from a local kurgan. However, if one were to move farther away to a significantly higher point, one could then see the campfires or torchlights above the trees on a clear night from quite a distance. For what it is worth, the battle occurred very shortly before the new moon, when, under ordinary conditions, it would have been a dark night.[53]

In addition to the landscape features suggested above as candidates, we can also consider the remote possibility that similar kurgans *once* existed nearer the eastern banks of the Sajó and Hernád Rivers, across from the Hungarian camp, before the military surveys were conducted. On that side, there are some modest points of elevation, like Kövecses halom (110 m. today) and Németi halom, another *kunhalom* which appears in the First Military Survey. Perhaps there were nearby mounds that were already leveled in earlier centuries for agricultural purposes long before the Habsburg military surveys were made. In the earliest survey, one notices much agricultural land already along the Hernád River. But this is not a likely scenario. The type of agricultural practice that involved leveling the landscape and flattening kurgans started only in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The gazetteers of the Great Plain's kurgans give a very clear indication of these modern losses.[54] Furthermore, the term "Strázsa" indicates that Strázsahalom was a far higher mound than the surrounding features. So, all things considered, it seems to be the most likely candidate in the area for Batu's vantage point.

52 Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 262–63.

53 Négyesi, "A muhi csata," 296.

54 Ecsedy, *The people*; *"Ex lege" védett*; Rákóczi, "Újabb lépések," 1–11.

Regarding the hill in Juvayni's account, the vague terminology allows us to imagine some modest artificial mound like Strázsahalom serving a double purpose of vantage point and site of ritual seclusion. Yet, these drastically different purposes suggest that Batu may well have used a different hill; Juvayni made no mention of Batu seeing or attempting to see the Hungarian army during his time on the hill. In fact, the passage implies that the Hungarians had not yet arrived. Moreover, it is hard to believe that a Chinggisid prince on the eve of battle would have considered a modest artificial mound as a suitable site to commune ritualistically with Tengri in the model of his divine ancestor. About 30 kilometers northeast of the medieval ruins of Muhi, the isolated, impressive, and natural hills in the vicinity of Szerencs–Nagy-hegy and Fuló-hegy–seem likely candidates (Fig. 8). We might also consider Bekecs-hegy, which is one of

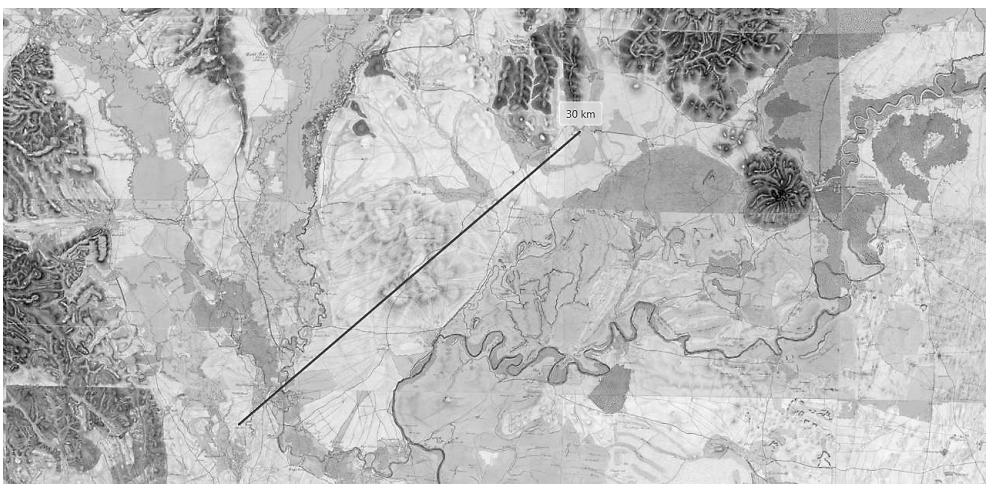

Figure 8. The distance between Szenrenc and the ruins of the medieval town of Muhi. Source: "Königreich Ungarn (1782–1785) – First Military Survey." Digitized by Arcanum. https://mapire.eu/en/map/firstsurvey-hungary/?layers=147&bbox=2109136.4761014967%2C6019595.635189405%2C2134914.8638906726%2C6026283.875164358

the most impressive hills on the edge of the Great Hungarian Plain, and which is situated very close to Szerencs. If one were travelling from the northeast, as we know the Mongols were in 1241, these three would be the most "hill"-like landscape features, and they stand out rather dramatically on the plain. Certainly, this general area and particularly Nagy-hegy (called Mount Szerencs in medieval works) were interpreted to have been both sacred and useful to earlier nomadic invaders of the Carpathian Basin.

The Mongols are recorded to have broken through the forests and wooden barricades in the northeast Carpathian border region, employing 40,000 men with axes to clear the way.[55] If we believe the *Deeds of the Hungarians*, a work thought to have been written around 1200 and predating the Mongol invasion, the Magyar tribes, when they entered the Carpathian Basin, proceeded by the same route and even employed peasants to clear a pathway through the Carpathians, like Batu and the Mongols allegedly later did.[56] The semi-mythical account tells us that their leading chieftain, Árpád, was immediately drawn to the hills of Szerencs, from which he examined the surrounding landscape. He made his base there initially. Indeed, the name "Szerencs" in Hungarian is tied to luck, suggesting this favorable association.[57] According to the story, the Magyar chieftain allegedly remained at the site and sent his followers deeper into the country to conquer and explore. When they returned with reports of victories, Árpád held a pagan feast for a week at Szerencs, and then the whole body of the nomadic Magyars camped by the Sajó River at the site of the later battle of 1241 before advancing into the heart of the Carpathian Basin.[58] If the possibility had not been ruled out on the basis of the paleographic study of the manuscript,[59] the similarities between the Magyar and Mongol invasions almost invite a renewed discussion of whether Anonymous could in fact have been Béla IV's notary rather than the notary of Béla III.[60] However, evidence suggests that the conventional view is valid.

The stories in the *Deeds of the Hungarians* might be mere myths, but then the startling parallels between the routes and actions of the Magyar prince, Árpád, and the Mongol prince, Batu, become even harder to explain. These parallels might support the view that the traditional accounts of the Magyars' arrival in the Carpathian Basin have a historical basis. Regardless, the hills of Szerencs and more distant Tokaj have a striking appearance on the flat plains, and they would be strategically valuable sites for nomadic invaders. Just as legends held that Árpád cautiously remained in the Szerencs area and sent vanguard divisions to explore the land, it is possible that Batu chose a similar strategy several centuries later. This scenario is more realistic than the notion that the Mongols brought families and

55 Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 258–59.
56 Bak, Rady and Veszprémy, *Anonymus and Master Roger*, 34–35, 160–61.
57 Ibid., 47.
58 Ibid., 59–59.
59 Ibid., xix–xxiv.
60 Vékony, "Anonymus kora."

carts full of property very close to the location of a battle which they feared they might well lose, with their herds scattered all over the area. The friars and Chinese diplomatic reports mentioned that Mongol troops brought their families during major invasions, as mentioned, and we can be sure this was the case in Hungary. We read details of Mongol children and women taking part in massacres of the local population in 1241.[61] Mongol armies included the family members of the highest leaders, as we see in an account of an unsuccessful second major Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1285. The Jochid royal campaign leader and future khan of the Golden Horde, Töle Buqa, "with his wife," retreated to his territory east of the Carpathians under desperate circumstances.[62]

Thus, it is plausible that the Mongol army followed a complex strategic system in 1241, and when Shiban was far ahead provoking the royal army near Pest, Batu was somewhere around Szerencs or Tokaj. While Tokaj is the most striking feature of the landscape (it figures prominently in the *Deeds of the Hungarians* for instance), it seems too far from the Muhi battlefield, so the hilly area near Szerencs was more likely the site where Batu ascended a hill (or two). The masses of the non-combatants, herds, and plunder were situated there at some distance from the battle and much closer to the mountains so that in the event of defeat, they could escape. In this scenario of uncertainty, Batu would have engaged in his ritual of spiritual preparation, going to a hilltop after having received news that he was facing daunting odds in the impending struggle. If so, this mirrors descriptions of Mongol behavior on campaigns detailed in Asian and Franciscan sources, which assert that Mongols were extremely cautious during advances into enemy territory, and they kept their families back in highly risky situations.

Conclusions

This paper has offered new speculative suggestions concerning which hill(s) Batu ascended near a battle site which was likely preselected by the Mongols because of the river barrier and gallery forest along it, which would conceal their movements (Fig. 5). It was an aim of the Mongols to conceal their positions and advances across the river in order to encircle the Hungarian camp in the predawn darkness. Regarding the crossing, the bridge where there was

61 Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops*, 272–73.

62 Perfecky, *The Hypatian Codex*, 96.

documented fighting between the Mongols and Hungarians is the key feature and, as mentioned earlier, we are now taking steps to identifying it as another aim of the larger project.

Less speculatively, this paper has also highlighted the two broad purposes for climbing hills described in the sources. The hills near Szerencs would be suitable for a solemn religious tradition described by Juvayni, an activity which can be interpreted as a movement between the frontiers of the earthly and heavenly spheres, whereas any sufficiently high, nearby kurgan would suit the purpose of reconnaissance described by Thomas of Split. This sort of military reconnaissance signified movement between the territory secured and pacified by the advance of the Mongols and the frontier zone of conflict with the Hungarian army. For Batu, it would have been the frontier between territory in submission and that which was still in rebellion.

Batu may only have ascended a single hill (or perhaps none). If he only ascended one hill, it is interesting to consider that a Persian and a Dalmatian author each saw a very different purpose in the act. Continued battlefield archaeological work at Muhi is right now revealing new findings which enrich our understanding of the events. Even for the connected topographical or landscape archaeological investigations, it is essential to analyze why different textual sources refer to significant landmarks in the area of the battle. Perhaps the issue of the hilltop, too, will be further clarified and deepen our understanding of the Mongol political, military, and spiritual associations with hills and mountains. At the same time, this hilltop episode illustrates how very different sources which emerged independently in European or Mongol-ruled milieus can mutually contribute to our understanding of the important battle. The episode also underlines that such details should be discussed within the narrative structures of each text, carefully contextualizing the aims of the authors behind these sources. While for Thomas of Split, details of the military tactics of the invading army were regarded as particularly important issues, the religious spiritual aspects of a Mongol ruler's behavior and its connections to a Chinggisid tradition were far more important issues for a Persian author writing a history of the Mongol Empire.

Acknowledgements

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relevant Hungarian secondary literature is the work of J. Laszlovszky. The issues connected to the battlefield archaeological investigations and the topographical features of Muhi were discussed by J. Laszlovszky. We wish to thank Georg Leube (University of Bayreuth) for his helpful advice on Persian philological issues. We would also like to thank Balázs Nagy (Department of Physical Geography, ELTE) for his advice on the battlefield site and for supplying useful figures. We are very grateful for the LIDAR survey results provided by HELM Solutions for our present research project.

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