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Wild horses: Tartar warfare and the history of civilization

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ABSTRACT

In 1644, the Manchus, a Tungusic population from northeast Asia, conquered Ming China, establishing the Qing Empire. Four years later, Crimean Tartar horsemen joined a major uprising against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, gravely destabilizing one of Europe's largest states. These near-simultaneous incursions by ostensibly nomadic, horse-riding 'Tartars' into firearm-defended sedentary states generated extensive historiographical reflection on the role of nomads and their warhorse-centred armies in shaping human history. This article explores how the Jesuit Martino Martini drew on these Tartar wars to articulate a dialectical theory of human history, oscillating between civilization and barbarism, respectively embodied by agriculturalism and nomadic-pastoralism. Such theories, I argue, emerged in dialogue with pressing concerns about military security in metropolitan Europe. Indeed, the shock of the near-simultaneous Tartar wars spurred European writers to critically examine their own states' defences, contributing to controversies between Ancient and Modern military technologies. As this article shows, several Europeans came to construe Tartars simultaneously as 'barbarians' and a source of valuable martial expertise to be studied and selectively appropriated.

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In 1621, Jurchen horsemen, armed only with scimitars, bows, and arrows stormed the northeastern Ming metropolis of Liaoyang. Fighting for the Later Jin, a dynasty established in 1616 by the Jianzhou Jurchen khan Nurhaci (1559-1626), the mounted warriors braved Ming musket fire, charging at the city under a shower of Chinese bullets (Figure 1). To the Ming soldiers' horror, the Jurchens, holding up thick wooden boards, were not deterred by their enemies' gunfire. Shielded by these barricades, another Jurchen troop mounted ladders against Liaoyang's walls, breaching the city's final line of defence. The Ming musketeers fled, abandoning the city to the invaders. The fortified, firearm-defended Chinese city of Liaoyang thus fell into the hands

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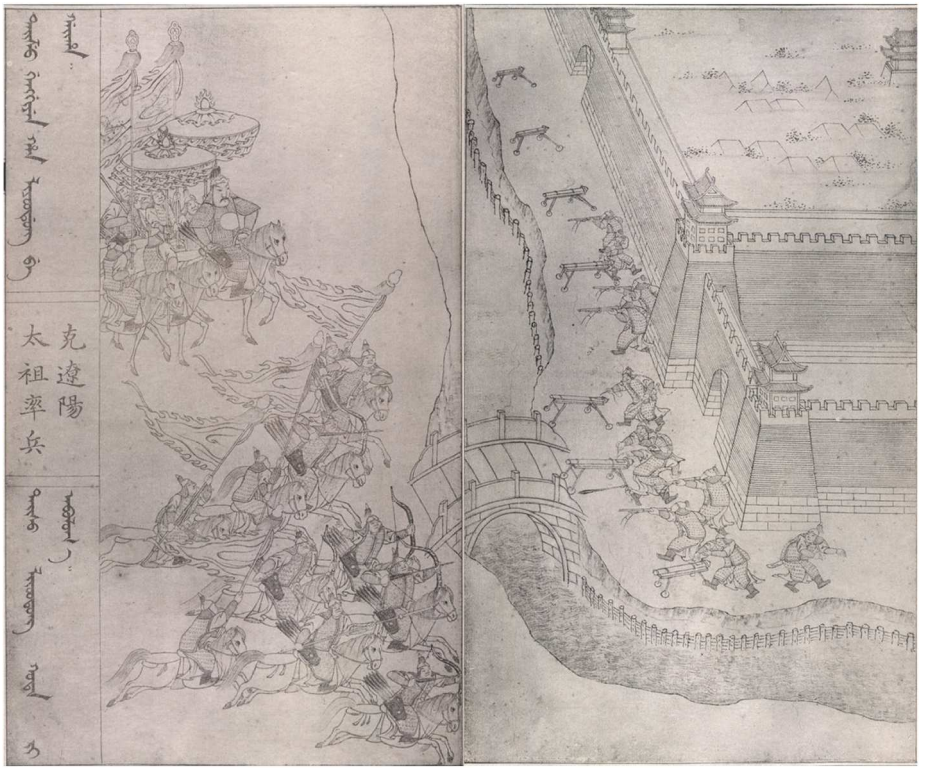

Figure 1. Jurchen soldiers on horseback attack the Ming city of Liaoyang, defended by Chinese arquebusiers. From the *Manzhou Shilu* [*Veritable Records of the Manchu Dynasty*]. © British Library Collection 15529.a.1. (7).

of the purportedly nomadic Jurchen 'barbarians'.[1] Little over two decades later, the Jurchens, renamed 'Manchus' in 1635 by Nurhaci's son and successor Hong Taiji (1592-1643) captured Beijing, establishing the minority-ruled Qing Empire (1644-1912).

European readers first learned about the fateful battle of Liaoyang in 1654. That year, the Jesuit missionary Martino Martini (1614-1661), who had experienced the fall of Ming China firsthand, published a punchy account of the war titled *De bello Tartarico historia*. By the end of the seventeenth century, the short, engaging book had been reissued at least twenty times in ten languages across confessional divides. Ranging in format from sextodecimo to folio, *Bello* reached an extensive array of diverse readerships.[2] Martini's

[1]This retelling is adapted from Martino Martini, *De bello Tartarico historia*, revised and augmented 2nd edition (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1654), pp. 28–29. Importantly, the Jurchens (and their Manchu successors) were *not* nomads. Rather, the Jianzhou Jurchens were agriculturalists who engaged extensively in hunting, fishing, and foraging. Nonetheless, they were typically characterized as such in contemporary European accounts. Thus, in seeking to understand how Europeans made sense of this population, this article follows its sources' convention in framing Manchus, like the Crimean Tatars, as nomadic 'Tartars'.

[2]Trude Dijkstra, *Printing and Publishing Chinese Religion and Philosophy in the Dutch Republic, 1595–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), p. 68.

'*scriptiuncula*', as he called it – an uninterrupted, mostly chronological narrative spanning little under two hundred sextodecimo-sized pages – came to have an outsized cultural impact. As he recounted, 'In the various [European] cities through which I pass, men of all kinds assemble and all enquire about the current state of the Kingdom of China'.[3] The answers the charismatic Jesuit offered inspired plays, poems, and novels across the continent.

Martini's writings intersected with two interrelated debates unfolding across early modern Europe. First, *Bello* spoke to the longstanding controversies over firearms – a characteristically Modern technology. Since the early sixteenth century, Europeans had been disagreeing about how gunpowder technologies had changed martial cultures, if at all.[4] Poets like Ludovico Ariosto and Philip Sidney viewed the new weapons as cowardly, lamenting that they were unraveling long-established chivalric customs.[5] In the later sixteenth century, the French humanist Michel de Montaigne compared guns to warhorses, praising the latter at the former's expense. 'Save for the startlingness of the sound', he reckoned, 'I consider [the pistol] a weapon of little effect, and hope that some day we shall give up on the use of it'.[6] Instead, Montaigne argued, the Ancients had recognized warhorses as indispensable military resources, and for good reason. The animals' significance was evidenced by the fact that the Romans always 'deprive[d] [newly conquered nations] of arms and horses', while the Ottomans do 'not to-day allow either Christian or Jew … to have a horse of his own'.[7] The next century, however, the unashamedly Modern English statesman Francis Bacon offered a radically different judgement on firearms. As he proclaimed, gunpowder, 'unknown to the ancients, … [has] changed the appearance and state of the whole world'.[8] Emerging in such a shifting and contested intellectual landscape, *Bello*'s narrative of substantially less gunpowder-armed Jurchen horsemen overthrowing Ming China made political events unfolding in East Asia appear strikingly pertinent to Europeans.

Digging deeper, *Bello* – especially when read alongside Martini's heftier and drier *Sinicae historiae decas prima* and the lavish *Novus atlas Sinensis* –

[3]Martini, *Bello*, p. 8.

[4]On the intersection of gunpowder with the Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns, see Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 97; Mary Henninger-Voss, 'How the 'New Science' of Cannons Shook up the Aristotelian Cosmos', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63.3 (2002), 371–97.

[5]Sheila J. Nayar, 'Arms or the Man I: Gunpowder Technology and Early Modern Romance', *Studies in Philology*, 114 (2017), 517–60.

[6]Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays of Montaigne, Volume I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1925), p. 382.

[7]Ibid., pp. 380–81.

[8]Francis Bacon, *Instauratio Magna* (London: Joannem Billium, 1620), pp. 147–48. On the impact of firearms on wider early modern European cultures, see Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: the Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 63; Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 3–4; Bert S. Hall, *Weapons & Warfare in Renaissance Europe* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

articulated a more general philosophy of human history.[9] As I suggest, Martini's *oeuvre*, shaped by his personal experience of the war, reading of Chinese historiographies, and awareness of trans-Eurasian geopolitics, largely presented human history as a dialectical struggle between sedentary agriculturalist and nomadic-pastoralist polities. History, according to Martini, consisted of cycles whereby states like China grew rich, indolent, and complacent through agricultural and, consequently, material abundance, priming them for defeat at the hands of hardened, nomadic-pastoralist Tartars, who 'brought almost all of Asia under their control'.[10] After conquering the sedentary agriculturalist state, however, Tartars themselves grew 'fractured by Chinese luxuries, adopted Chinese customs, and gradually unlearned their Tartaric fortitude', paving the way for their downfall.[11] In exploring how modes of subsistence shaped human history, Martini's writings prefigured several important later historiographical trends, although deviated from them by following a dialectical rather than progressivist pathway. The missionary's *oeuvre* foreshadowed the progressivist eighteenth-century debates linking luxury to moral decline and barbarism, as well as nineteenth-century studies proposing that 'the beginning of agriculture … was unanimously associated with the transition from hunter-gatherer communities to … civilization.'[12]

Martini's philosophy of history, which incorporated ethnographies of various nomadic martial cultures, resonated strongly with his European contemporaries. Just four years after the Manchu conquest, Crimean Tartar horsemen under Khan İslâm III Giray joined a major Cossack-led uprising against the sedentary Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. While, unlike the Ming, the Commonwealth eventually prevailed against the Tartars, the prolonged conflict, alongside annual Tartar raids into eastern European territories,

[9]On early modern European philosophies of history, see Anthony Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jochen Schlobach, *Zyklentheorie und Epochenmetaphorik. Studien zur bildlichen Sprache der Geschichtsreflexion in Frankreich von der Renaissance bis zur Frühaufklärung* (München: Fink, 1980), pp. 97–192; Daniel Špelda, 'Veritas filia temporis: The origins of the idea of scientific progress', *Annals of Science*, 73.4 (2016), 375–91; Dániel Margócsy, 'A natural history of the satyr: a dialectical history of myth and scientific observation since 1550', *Annals of Science* https://doi.org/10.1080/00033790.2024.2433643. For their intersection with Chinese history, see Alexander Statman, *A Global Enlightenment: Western Progress and Chinese Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023) and Gianamar Giovannetti-Singh, 'Oriental Chronology: Chinese Astronomy and the Politics of Antiquity in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Isis*, 115.4 (2024), 720–37.

[10]Martini, *Bello*, p. 20.

[11]Ibid., p. 22; On Martini's soteriological conception of the Tartars, see Antonella Romano, *Impressions de Chine: l'Europe et l'englobement du monde (XVI^e^-XVII^e^ siècles)* (Paris: Fayard, 2016), pp. 252–57.

[12]On the debates on luxury and moral decline, see *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. by Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); on civilization, barbarism, and morality in eighteenth-century historiography, see J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume 4. Barbarians, Savages and Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). On the entwined project of agricultural studies and civilizational history in the late nineteenth century, see Fabian Kraemer, Kärin Nickelsen, and Dana von Suffrin, 'Botany and the Science of History: Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Civilization, circa 1850–1900', *Isis*, 113.1 (2022), 45–62 and Tad Brown, 'Hamitic race theory and African cattle classification, 1868–1971', *Annals of Science* https://doi.org/10.1080/00033790.2025.2449858. Remarkably, Martini's dialectical conception of the relationship between steppe and sedentary cultures and technologies strikingly resembles the political philosophy outlined in the late twentieth century in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986).

created a renewed awareness of nomads across Europe, as far away as England.[13] Mirroring the tumultuous events unfolding in Poland-Lithuania, Martini's book informed Europeans about 'other Tartars, not very different in customs, physique, and mentality, nor too distant in their borders from these'.[14] The missionary explicitly connected the events unfolding at both poles of Eurasia, dedicating *Bello* to the Polish-Lithuanian king Jan II Kazimierz, who was engaged 'in war against the Cossacks and the Tartars closest to Europe'.[15] As he wrote, addressing the ruler directly: 'Those Tartars have been defeated by Your Majesty; these instead defeated the Chinese'.[16]

Elaborating this parallel, Martini urged Europeans to reflect on the similarities between the fall of the Ming dynasty and their own geopolitical predicament. *Bello*'s 1661 Amsterdam edition, for instance, opened with a striking engraving of a Manchu warrior atop a horse, holding a scimitar in his right hand and displaying a severed Chinese head in his left (Figure 2). The Manchu was depicted with distinctively Western features, underlining Europeans' proximity to the conflict in China. Pointedly, Martini concluded his book by noting that 'it appears remarkable and worthy of every observation how the Tartars, in the short span of seven years, occupied more territories than an entire army could traverse far and wide'.[17] His message was clear: Tartars posed a threat to settled polities across the Old World, and – thanks to their rapid and sturdy warhorses – they could strike at lightning speed.

How were sedentary Europeans to combat these purported nomads who threatened 'to desolate [their land in] the summer and winter' and enter 'with a hundred-thousand Tartars', devastating their 'demesne with fire and sword'?[18] Martini implicitly spurred readers to learn from the long history of nomadic incursions into China. As he emphasized, China had only succeeded in quashing Tartar attacks when its rulers integrated the latter's warfare – particularly its equestrianism – into their own military apparatus.[19]

In his influential account of the Qing's expansion, Peter Perdue argues that eighteenth-century 'China marche[d] west', coming to exert influence deep within Central Eurasia.[20] Resonating with Perdue's claim, this article extends its geopolitical and chronological scope, suggesting that, through Martini, the Manchus' influence came to stretch far into early modern Europe. It highlights

[13]Eric Song, *Dominion Undeserved: Milton and the Perils of Creation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), pp. 17–44; Mingjun Lu, 'Milton's Image of the Tartar: "Global Leviathan" vs. "Global Commonwealth"', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 17.1 (2014).
[14]Martini, *Bello*, p. 4.
[15]Ibid., pp. 4–5.
[16]Ibid., p. 5.
[17]Ibid., p. 158.
[18]Quoted in and translated by Andrzej Gliwa, 'The Tatar Military Art of War in the Early Modern Period: An Example of Asymmetric Warfare', *Acta Poloniae Historica* 114 (2016), 191–229, at p. 203.
[19]On the central role of the warhorse in maintaining semi-nomadic steppe empires, see Jos Gommans, 'Warhorse and post-nomadic empire in Asia, c. 1000-1800', *Journal of Global History*, 2 (2007), 1–21.
[20]Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Figure 2. Frontispiece of Martini's Regni Sinensis a Tartaris evastati depopulatique enarratio (Amsterdam: Aegidius Janssonius Valckenier, 1661). Public Domain.

an underexplored aspect of Martini's contributions to early modern historiography and military debates by examining his writings on nomadic warfare. The next section offers a *longue-durée* overview of the role played by warhorses in 'Tartar' martial cultures in Martini's *oeuvre*. Then, closely following *Bello*'s narrative of the Ming-Qing transition, it assesses how Martini characterized the relative strengths and weaknesses of sedentary and nomadic warfare, respectively. Finally, the article explores how the missionary's work emerged in tandem with a new European consciousness surrounding Tartars.

1. Heavenly horses and ancient Tartars

'The Tartars', began *Bello*, 'fought fierce wars against the Chinese' throughout their history.[21] This 'very ancient nation', who were the 'originators of many peoples', had been 'enemies of the Chinese empire for four thousand years'. Martini claimed that the frequent clashes between the two polities tended to follow a pattern. Although the Tartars 'were defeated on a few occasions', he observed that 'more often than not they were victorious'.[22] Situating China's new Manchu rulers in time and space, Martini defined the Tartars as those who 'inhabit ancient Tartary; both the eastern part, hitherto unknown to Europeans, and the western part'.[23] This vast territorial expanse stretched 'from Little Tartary' – that is, the Crimean peninsula – 'all the way to the Oriental Sea above Japan, where it is separated from Quivira of America by the Strait of Anian'.[24] According to Martini's cosmography, Tartars of various kinds occupied a gargantuan portion of Eurasia, connecting China to western Christendom. They formed a formidable fighting force, frequently irrupting into Chinese terrain.

The root cause of this longstanding conflict, suggested Martini, lay in the populations' radically different means of subsistence. Noting that *Bello* was too short to 'narrate all the wars between the Tartars and the Chinese', he directed readers to his protracted historical chronicle, *Sinicae historiae*, for a richer account of the conflict's prehistory.[25] As he (inaccurately) explained there, 'the Tartars have never built cities, and are content with wandering around in tents'.[26] In the present too, he wrote in his *Atlas*, the Manchus 'have mobile cities and wander with their herds and entire families, changing pastures as needed, in the same manner as we read about the Western Tartars'.[27] By contrast, China 'produces sufficient food for such a great multitude of people', and there is 'scarcely a single palm's breadth that is not fertile, either by nature or by artifice, or that is uncultivated or barren'.[28] In short, Martini saw Tartars as tent-dwelling nomadic-pastoralists, while the Chinese were settled, city-based agriculturalists.

This divergence between Chinese and Tartar modes of living, reckoned Martini, was reflected in their different approaches to warfare. Drawing on writings by the Ming geographer Lu Yingyang, the missionary relayed that the Tartars, valuing 'their physical strength and power, delight in theft and plunder'.[29] They were well-equipped for such activities, as their principal 'arts consist of shooting arrows with dexterity and hunting'.[30] One of the

[21]Martini, *Bello*, p. 19.
[22]Ibid., p. 19.
[23]Ibid., p. 20.
[24]Ibid., p. 20.
[25]Ibid., p. 20.
[26]Martini, *Sinicae*, p. 317.
[27]Martini, *Novus atlas Sinensis* (Amsterdam: Joan Blaeu, 1655), p. 19.
[28]Martini, *Sinicae*, p. 317.
[29]Martini, *Atlas*, p. 18, based on Lu Yingyang, *Guangyuji*, juan 27.
[30]Ibid., p. 18.

most distinctive elements of the Tartars' warfare was their indomitable cavalry, to which Martini referred across his *oeuvre*.[31] Indeed, 'fear of the Tartars had taken hold of the souls of the Chinese to such an extent that they could not even bear the sight of their horses'.[32] Beyond warfare, *Bello* alluded to the important place of these animals in the Jurchens' wider lives.[33] As Martini observed, the Tartars wear a cap decorated with horsehair; their 'sleeves end in the shape of a horse's hoof'; their boots are made of 'treated horse leather'; and they always 'ride their horses as if deep in thought'.[34]

Towards the end of *Bello*, Martini contended that even after establishing the Qing Empire – a sedentary, agriculturalist state – the Manchus maintained certain elements of steppe lifestyles in elite ceremonies and customs. As he explained, 'they carry no baggage and are not concerned with provisions: they are satisfied with the food they capture. … When other food is lacking, they devour the horses and camels they have killed'.[35] For 'leisure, they hunt and often surround entire fields or mountains; then, gradually closing in, they trap the animals in the middle and kill whichever ones they want. They also keep excellent hunting dogs and birds of prey for this purpose'.[36] Shunning 'houses, they have beautiful tents, which they set up or take down with such speed and skill that they do not delay the marching army'.[37] In sum, wrote Martini, the Tartars 'live solely for military service, making themselves tough'.[38]

Martini's ethnography resonated with Qing efforts to self-fashion their elite as martial, masculine, hunters and warriors, intimately connected to the steppe. Indeed, as Perdue explains, the 'Manchus mingled Mongolian rulership, horsemanship, and language with Chinese classical texts and Manchu kinship connections.'[39] Hong Taiji expressed concern that his subjects would lose their 'Manchuness' over time, arguing that his people ought to cultivate equestrianism, archery, hunting, and – more broadly – a steppe-inspired way of life. The Jurchen chieftain viewed the 'Chinese Way' (*Nikan-i doro*) – and its promotion

[31]On the Jurchens' many uses of horses, see Jing-Shen Tao, 'The Horse and the Rise of the Chin Dynasty', *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters*, 53 (1968), 183–89; Alexander Alexeevich Kim, 'The Horse in Bohai and Jurchen Societies – Based on Osteological Studies from the Southern Part of the Russian Far East', *Central Asiatic Journal*, 64.1–2 (2021), 155–64.

[32]Martini, *Bello*, p. 101.

[33]The role of horses in Tartars' cultures of warfare was aptly summarized by the historian Denis Sinor around fifty years ago. He noted, 'If cannons of the Renaissance could bear with justification the inscription of *Ultima ratio regis*, the horse was certainly that same *ultima ratio* of Inner Asian power'. See Denis Sinor, 'Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History', *Oriens Extremus* 19.1/2 (1972), 171–183, at p. 171.

[34]Martini, *Bello*, pp. 38–40.

[35]Ibid., p. 130.

[36]Ibid., p. 130–31.

[37]Ibid., p. 131.

[38]Ibid., p. 131.

[39]Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 128; See also Joanna Waley-Cohen, 'Military Ritual and the Qing Empire', in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, ed. by Nicola Di Cosmo (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 405–38; Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 180; Gommans, 'Warhorse'; Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 128; Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Manchus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 97.

of laziness, liquor, and leisure – as an existential threat to a newly imagined Manchu community.[40] As he declared in 1636, 'What I fear is this: that the children and grandchildren of later generations will abandon the Old Way, neglect shooting and riding, and enter into the Chinese Way!'[41] Referring back to Hong Taiji's speech, successive Qing governments promoted a largely constructed 'Old Way' (*fe doro*), and later the 'old Manchu usages' (*fe Manju-i an*), 'Manchu customs' (*Manju tacin*), 'old customs' (*fe tacin*), and eventually the 'Manchu Way' (*Manjusai doro*).[42]

It was this steppe culture, Martini reckoned, that made the Tartars 'differ from the Chinese'.[43] The former were physically tough and bellicose, while the latter 'completely conceal or disguise their inner anger and hatred, never carrying any kind of weapons as they walk through the streets'.[44] Unlike their nomadic neighbors, the Chinese 'consider it unworthy and disgraceful for men to bear arms and wage war; therefore, soldiers are held in the lowest regard and are almost despised as enemies'.[45] The abundance of cultivated goods in China, coupled with its subjects' distaste for violence, made it a prime target for nomadic Tartar raids.

In *Sinicae historiae*, Martini recounted that the first major war between China and 'the Tartars' broke out during the Han dynasty, when 'agriculture flourished among the Chinese'.[46] After skirmishes with the nomadic-pastoralist Xiongnu Tartars in 201 BCE, China adopted a policy of *heqin* ('peace and affinity') toward its northern neighbors.[47] However, that approach began to shift when 'one hundred and forty thousand Tartars, all horsemen, poured into the empire to plunder, as is their manner', during the reign of Emperor Wen (r. 180–157 BCE).[48] The Han minister Chao Cuo promptly penned a memorandum recognizing the Tartars' military advantages over the Chinese and demanded his compatriots change tack. As he warned, 'the Xiongnu horses are better than the Chinese. On dangerous roads and sloping narrow passages they can both ride and shoot arrows; Chinese mounted soldiers cannot match that'.[49] Ultimately, Chao Cuo urged the Emperor to 'use barbarians to fight barbarians' and build up the Han Empire's cavalry troops.[50] This sentiment, acknowledging the necessity of integrating 'barbarian' horses into the Chinese army was echoed by military leaders for thousands of years. The

[40]Elliott, *Manchu Way*, 9, pp. 276–84.
[41]Quoted in and translated by ibid., p. 9.
[42]Ibid., pp. 8–9.
[43]Martini, *Atlas*, p. 20.
[44]Ibid., p. 8.
[45]Ibid., p. 8.
[46]Martini, *Sinicae*, p. 288.
[47]Craig Benjamin, *Empires of Ancient Eurasia: The First Silk Roads Era, 100 BCE–250 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 69. '和親'
[48]Martini, *Sinicae*, p. 289.
[49]Quoted in and translated by Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 203.
[50]Ibid., p. 204. '以蠻夷攻蠻夷。'

eleventh-century Song politician Song Qi, for instance, argued that 'our enemies … are able to withstand China … because they have many horses and their men are adept at riding. China has few horses and its men are not accustomed to riding; this is China's weakness. … Without horses, we can never create an effective military force'.[51]

Returning to the Han Dynasty, as soon as Emperor Wen's grandson, Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE) ascended to the throne, he rescinded the *heqin* policy. However, before moving his armies into Tartar lands, he sent the envoy Zhang Qian to gather intelligence about his enemies' realms.[52] Around 138 BCE, the emissary left the Chinese capital of Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an), voyaging into the Gobi Desert, where he was almost instantly kidnapped by the Xiongnu. After nearly thirteen years in captivity, Zhang Qian escaped, fleeing westward through the Gobi until he reached the Ferghana Valley (in present-day Uzbekistan). Martini explained that this kingdom, called *Dayuan* ('the Great Ionian') by the Chinese, 'was renowned for its excellent horses and abundant in them'.[53] According to the Han Dynasty annals, upon returning to Chang'an, Zhang Qian immediately informed the Emperor of Ferghana's fantastical horses, claiming that they would sweat blood as they galloped.[54] Emperor Wu was enchanted, having recently read a prophecy in the *Yijing* (*Book of Changes*) that 'divine horses will soon appear from the northwest'.[55] Much like European nobles in Martini's day, the Chinese monarch coveted foreign horses as prized exotica that would simultaneously serve as a status symbol and consolidate his military power against mounted enemies.[56] Naming the animals '*Dayuan tianma*' ('Heavenly Horses of Ferghana'), Emperor Wu launched two campaigns to obtain them and improve China's equine stock. Defeating the Yuezhi inhabitants of Ferghana in the 'War of the Heavenly Horses', the Han state sequestered one thousand horses.[57] A few years later, the Emperor – armed with the Tartar horses – declared war on the Xiongnu, promising to 'eliminate the nomads' once and for all.[58]

Amid these wars, the Xiongnu leader Xiu Tu surrendered, and thus 'experienced the clemency of the Chinese Emperor'. As Martini recounted, Xiu Tu 'sent his son, called Ri Di, to the Emperor so that he might learn Chinese customs, letters, and

[51]Quoted in and translated by Herrlee G. Creel, 'The Role of the Horse in Chinese History', *The American Historical Review*, 70.3 (1965), 647–72, at p. 667.
[52]Benjamin, *Empires of Ancient Eurasia*, p. 71.
[53]Martini, *Sinicae*, p. 311.
[54]Benjamin, *Empires of Ancient Eurasia*, p. 73.
[55]Ibid., p. 73.
[56]On the status of horses as exotic curiosities in early modern Europe, see Dániel Margócsy, 'Horses, Curiosities, and the Culture of Collection at Early Modern Germanic Courts', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 74.4 (2021), 1220–21; Kathryn Renton, 'Breeding Techniques and Court Influence: Charting a 'Decline' of the Spanish Horse in the Early Modern Period', *Court Historian*, 24.3 (2019), 221–34. On their place in Chinese history, see Creel, 'Role of the Horse'.
[57]Benjamin, *Empires of Ancient Eurasia*, p. 85.
[58]Quoted in and translated in ibid., p. 70, from the *Han Shu* (*Annals of the Early Han*), 61, 1A.

politeness in the royal city'.[59] As expected of someone with 'Tartar customs', Ri Di 'loved horses, and kept some of the finest ones, which were unmatched even by those in the royal stables, at home'.[60] In Chang'an, Ri Di 'would ride by the palace so that he could be admired by the Emperor, [and] easily attract[ed] his affection'.[61] Due to his 'lovable dignity', Ri Di was soon invited to court by the Emperor, who appointed 'him chief of the stables and [gave] him the Chinese surname "Jin"'.[62] Gradually, the Emperor recognized Ri Di's 'excellent character, virtue, and wisdom. Consequently, he rose to the highest honours in the Empire, becoming a master not only of horses but of men as well'.[63] Despite his elevated status, the erstwhile Tartar stableboy continued to care for and breed the Emperor's most valued horses, offering his nomadic expertise for the benefit of the agriculturalist Han Empire. Indeed, 'since the Emperor greatly loved horses and the kingdom of Yuan [Ferghana] abounded with them, he ordered many of the best horses to be brought from there and given to Jin, the chief of the stables, to be cared for'.[64] As Martini's anecdote revealed, the Han Emperor recognized that for his state to truly flourish, China had to appropriate Tartar cultures of war, instrumentalizing them for its own purposes.

2. The fall of the Ming

The Ming dynasty, wrote Martini, was founded by 'a man of most humble status' named Zhu Yuanzhang, who was 'naturally noble, bold, and quick of hand and mind'.[65] When Zhu claimed to have received a Heavenly mandate to establish his new Ming dynasty in 1368, he adopted the reign title Hongwu, 'which means great warrior'.[66] Seeking revenge for nearly a century of Mongol rule under the Yuan Dynasty, the Hongwu Emperor, 'not content with the expulsion of the Tartars from China', decided to 'raid Tartary itself'.[67] In Martini's dialectical history, Zhu's belligerent character exemplified how subjugation by a weakening Tartar regime had hardened peace-loving Chinese subjects into fierce soldiers. In a series of wars that marked the ascent of a revitalized, fortified Chinese state, Zhu's Ming army 'reduced the Oriental Tartars to such dire straits that, having laid down their arms and promised tribute, they were compelled to seek peace'.[68] Over several centuries, the Jurchens turned to trade with their southern neighbors. As Martini reported, 'Every year, through the neighboring lands of Liaodong, they would enter China, admitted for trade as if they were subjects

[59]Martini, *Sinicae*, p. 319.
[60]Ibid., p. 319.
[61]Ibid., p. 319.
[62]Ibid., p. 319.
[63]Ibid., p. 320.
[64]Ibid., p. 320.
[65]Martini, *Bello*, p. 22.
[66]Ibid., p. 22.
[67]Ibid., p. 23.
[68]Ibid., p. 23.

or friends'.[69] However, he explained, 'they did not contemplate war, because they had been reduced almost to destitution'.[70]

During the late sixteenth-century reign of the Ming's Wanli Emperor, the dialectic began to shift once again. 'Gradually', wrote Martini, various Oriental Tartars 'coalesced into seven Hordes or Dynasties; and finally, after fighting among themselves, they united into … the Kingdom of Niuche [Jurchen]'.[71] The Ming government grew suspicious of the rapidly growing Jurchen coalition. Unsurprisingly, the 'fearful Chinese' had 'little trust in the ancient plunderers of their wealth'.[72] Accordingly, the state mobilized one million soldiers to keep guard at the Great Wall. Like their distant predecessors in the Han dynasty, Ming 'prefects held secret consultations among themselves' to discuss 'the containment and destruction of those [barbarians]'.[73]

In what turned out to be a woefully misguided choice, the Ming state deployed its military to further repress the Jurchens, both in China and in their own lands. In the Liaodong, for instance, Chinese officials started to arbitrarily detain Jurchen merchants, 'depriving them of their possessions'.[74] Worse still, the Ming had 'deceitfully captur[ed] and treacherously kill[ed] the King of the Jurchens, who trusting his allies, feared nothing from them'.[75] Infuriated, the deceased king's son, Nurhaci, declared war on the Ming in 1618, commencing a wave of cavalry-led assaults on Ming cities, including Liaoyang, where they would confidently defeat the musket-armed Ming in 1621.

After recapitulating the Jurchens' early conquests, *Bello* drew attention to the tension between firearms and horses as military technologies. As Martini narrated, in early 1620, the Jurchens rode to the walls of Ming Beijing. Despite their fierce reputation, however, upon reaching the capital the horsemen came to a halt. Martini explained that the Jurchens 'did not dare to attempt to storm the city', as it 'had an immense supply of artillery and a garrison of up to eighty thousand soldiers'.[76] Thus, in this case, the threat of cannon fire had deterred the nomadic invaders. Despite the Jurchens turning away from the city's gates, Beijing's residents felt 'such great fear and confusion' that even 'the Emperor was considering abandoning the capital'.[77]

A few years later, the high-ranking Christian scholar-officials 'Paul [Xu Guangqi] and Michael [Yang Tingyun] petitioned the Emperor to request

[69]Ibid., p. 23.
[70]Ibid., p. 23.
[71]Ibid., p. 24.
[72]Ibid., pp. 24–25.
[73]Ibid., p. 25.
[74]Ibid., p. 26.
[75]Ibid., p. 26.
[76]Ibid., p. 33.
[77]Ibid., p. 33.

larger cannons and expert gunners from the Portuguese' in Macao.[78] Both men had studied *xixue* (Western learning) with the Jesuit Matteo Ricci and were prominent champions of European sciences, including ballistics, at the Ming court.[79] As Martini wrote, Xu and Yang hoped 'to use this opportunity to restore … the Christian cause among the Chinese'.[80] In 1622, Xu's student Sun Yuanhua urged the state to adopt Western cannons, pointing to the extraordinary weakness of the Ming against the Jurchens.[81] As he proposed, 'At this stage the army is terrified by the enemy. … If we do not use telescopes and excellent cannon to strike first from a distance of 10 *li* or more, then the enemy will not be warded off'.[82] Sun recognized the Chinese army's physical weakness compared to the Tartars in close-range combat and urged the Ming to use superior technology to level the playing field.

The urgency of the Jurchen threat persuaded the Emperor to agree to the Christian scholar-officials' plan. A memorial by Li Zhizao, another prominent Catholic, which argued that 'large Western cannons can be used to control the barbarians', was well received and followed by an order to 'quickly put the proposal into practice'.[83] As Martini recounted, 'the Fathers, who had thus far been secretly conducting divine services, were summoned [by the Emperor]; and many new Christians were admitted [into the empire] along with the Portuguese soldiers'.[84] However, this plan backfired spectacularly when, during a demonstration in Beijing, a Portuguese cannon exploded, killing the European artilleryman and three Chinese passerby. The surviving Portuguese gunners were banished to Macao, and the Ming continued to fight the Jurchens with their limited supply of relatively ineffective firearms. Soon, however, thanks to the 'most valorous' Chinese commander Mao Wenlong, who was a close ally to the Jesuits and generally sympathetic to foreigners, the Ming got hold of some Western cannons. As Martini explained, Mao 'was from Guangdong Province, where he had learned many rudiments of military affairs from Portuguese traders'.[85] Just as importantly, the Ming commander had 'acquired numerous cannons that a shipwrecked Dutch ship had left on the shore, and with some of these he fortified the walls of Ningyuan' in the Liaodong border province.[86]

These European firearms ended up playing a very important role at the critical Battle of Ningyuan in 1626. For the first time since the Tartar War had begun, the insurgents were roundly defeated by gunpowder weapons. Indeed,

[78]Ibid., p. 36.
[79]On Xu Guangqi, see *Statecraft and Intellectual Renewal in Late Ming China: The Cross-Cultural Synthesis of Xu Guangqi (1562-1633)*, ed. by Catherine Jami, Peter Engelfriet, and Gregory Blue (Leiden: Brill, 2001).
[80]Martini, *Bello*, p. 36.
[81]Huang Yi-Long, 'Sun Yuanhua (1581–1632): A Christian Convert Who Put Xu Guangqi's Military Reform Policy Into Practice', in *Statecraft and Intellectual Renewal*, 225–59, at p. 230.
[82]Quoted in and translated by ibid., p. 230.
[83]Ibid., p. 233.
[84]Martini, *Bello*, p. 36.
[85]Ibid., p. 42.
[86]Ibid., p. 42.

recounted Martini, the Jurchens 'were driven back and lost ten thousand men, among whom was the king's [Nurhaci's] son'.[87] Nurhaci himself was badly injured and died from his wounds soon thereafter. Martini explained that Hong Taiji, Nurhaci's successor, 'changed his father's way of governing: he began to treat the Chinese better and to receive them kindly; a wise policy'.[88] Indeed, this shift had a 'good outcome, as he left his son [Fulin, the future Shunzhi Emperor] the example of conquering the Chinese more through kindness than by weapons'.[89]

Nonetheless, Portuguese cannons returned to Martini's story early in the reign of the Chongzhen Emperor – the Ming's last – as the new ruler judged foreign weapons necessary to fend off the Jurchens.[90] Despite vocal resistance from his court, the Emperor called on the artilleryman Gonçalo Teixeira Corrêa to help drive the Tartars out of China. Corrêa traveled towards Beijing with seven bronze and three iron cannons, four other Portuguese gunners, a Chinese interpreter, the senior Jesuit João Rodrigues, and around two dozen African and Indian servants.[91] During their voyage north, the entourage successfully drove away a band of Jurchen horsemen with warning shots from their cannons. Gunpowder weapons, it seemed, had finally become more effective than nomadic Tartar warfare in swaying the war's outcome.

Enthused by the Tartars' apparent fear of Western cannons, in 1636, the Chongzhen Emperor summoned Beijing's resident Jesuit priest, Johann Adam Schall von Bell, to advise his administration on the capital's fortifications.[92] A few years later, in 1642, the Emperor ordered Schall to establish a bronze cannon foundry in the Forbidden City. He demanded that the missionary design and manufacture smaller and lighter weapons, without limiting their range or power. Working with the Chinese engineer Jiao Xu, Schall published a pamphlet on firearms titled *Huogong qieyao* (The Essentials of Gunpowder Warfare) and oversaw the production of twenty cannon. Early the following year, another five hundred cannons were cast based on Schall and Jiao's model.[93] Placed atop the city walls, the Chongzhen Emperor hoped the mighty firearms would deter the Ming's growing list of enemies from attacking Beijing. Unfortunately for him, they did not. The Ming Dynasty was expelled

[87]Ibid., p. 42.
[88]Ibid., p. 43.
[89]Ibid., p. 43.
[90]Ibid., pp. 46–47.
[91]Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (London: Profile Books, 2008), p. 103.
[92]Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China, Volume V, Part 7. Military Technology: The Gunpowder Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 392; Denis De Lucca, *Jesuits and Fortifications: The Contributions of the Jesuits to Military Architecture in the Baroque Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 175–79; Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 212–16.
[93]Nicola Di Cosmo, 'Did Guns Matter? Firearms and the Qing Formation', in *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time*, ed. by Lynn Struve (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 121–66, at p. 151.

from Beijing by the peasant rebel Li Zicheng in April 1644, whose short-lived Shun Dynasty was, in turn, defeated by the Manchus in early June.

The new Qing Dynasty took several years to exert effective control over the vast Middle Kingdom. In 1646, Martini 'entered the town of *Venxui* [perhaps present-day Rui'an], which is subordinated to the city Wenzhou'.[94] However, 'the Tartars arrived soon after, and easily captured' both settlements.[95] After offering his services to the new conquerors, not only did the missionary 'suffer no harm or trouble from the Tartar soldiers, but the Tartar leader himself invited [him] and received [him] very generously'.[96] Interestingly, in Martini's narrative it was precisely as he joined the Manchus that they began to use firearms in earnest. As he explained, after the Ming 'attacked them continuously with heavy artillery' in the nearby town of Jinhua, the Manchus decided to 'bring larger artillery from the capital, with which they breached [Jinhua's] walls and ultimately occupied the city, miserably devastating it with fire and sword'.[97] Martini's narrative spoke to the fact that over the course of the Tartar War, the Manchus captured Ming artillery, gradually integrating firearms into their arsenal.[98]

That said, the Manchus' embrace of gunpowder weapons did not result in an abandonment of their steppe-inspired equestrianism. Indeed, as Jos Gommans explains, 'until the late eighteenth century, warhorses were more, or at least equally important in exercising imperial control' over the Qing Empire.[99] Indeed, recounting an attack by Jiang Xiang, a former Ming general mutinying against the Qing, *Bello* reveals just how important warhorses remained to the Manchus, even after they established the sedentary Qing Empire. Martini wrote that Jiang 'sought and obtained aid from the Western Tartars [Mongols]'.[100] This 'greatly disturbed the royal [Qing] court and the Tartar mandarins', as 'they knew that the Western Tartars' forces and troops were stronger and more numerous' than their own.[101] Worse still, the Qing 'no longer received horses, which Western Tartary had in abundance and which the [Manchus] could not purchase from elsewhere'.[102] As this anecdote suggests, nomadic martial cultures and practices

[94]Martini, *Bello*, p. 99.
[95]Ibid., p. 99.
[96]Ibid., pp. 99–100.
[97]Ibid., p. 100.
[98]Di Cosmo, 'Did Guns Matter?', pp. 156–61; See also Ma Chujian, 'The introduction of western artillery by the Jesuit missionaries and the consequent changes in the wars between the Ming and the Wing', in *Martino Martini, A Humanist and a Scientist in Seventeenth-Century China*, ed. by Franco Demarchi and Riccardo Scartezzini (Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento, 1996), pp. 307–21.
[99]Gommans, 'Warhorse', 3; See also Kenneth Chase, *Firearms: a global history to 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 170, who writes that 'the Manchus were able to use the resources of the steppe to conquer the steppe, and they never suffered from the same shortage of cavalry that plagued the late Ming'.
[100]Martini, *Bello*, p. 127.
[101]Ibid., p. 127.
[102]Ibid., p. 127.

were to remain an integral part of the Qing state's military apparatus even after the fall of the Ming.

Martini attributed much of the Manchus' extraordinary victory to their nomadic tactics. As he explained, the Tartars 'advance with the speed of lightning, hardly entering an area before it is already occupied and fortified under their control'.[103] Moreover, praising the Manchus' distinctive 'Banner System', which organized every subject into a series of military units, Martini argued that this social arrangement always kept the Chinese 'in suspense and astonished', playing an important part in the Tartars' victory.[104] The Manchus, wrote the missionary, 'always keep their horses and arms ready for battle'.[105] When needed, 'everything could be ready within half an hour. They blow a marine horn … [and] from the location and manner of the sound, they understand what number of soldiers and leaders should proceed'.[106] In short, the Manchus were able to effectively govern a sedentary state because they maintained nomadic elements in their hybridized, Sino-European-Tartar war machine.

Bello depicted a chaotic, crisis-stricken Middle Kingdom that resonated with his European readers, who were, at least in the continent's eastern states, familiar with frequent Tartar incursions. His short book imparted two crucial lessons. First, it taught that sedentary China had only succeeded against Tartars when it integrated certain nomadic cultures and practices, such as steppe equestrianism, into its military apparatus. Second, it reminded readers that while Tartar 'barbarians' were often seen as underdogs in a modernizing world, they could still outwit more heavily armed, technologically sophisticated states. Indeed, the dialectic of history would continue to shift between nomads and settlers as long as both stuck to their usual ways. To build a truly resilient settled state, one had to learn from Tartar warfare. Martini's book did not entirely repudiate progressivist Baconian narratives, recognizing the effectiveness of European cannons during the Tartar War. However, it highlighted that without strong horses and nomadic shock tactics, the Ming, despite their firearms, had been unable to extinguish the Tartar threat. Given that European polities faced a Tartar menace of their own in the mid-seventeenth century, Martini's story rung true with a great deal of readers.

3. Why Tartars mattered in Europe

Tartars had occupied a distinctive place in sedentary European imaginaries at least since the mid-thirteenth century. Over a short period, the Mongol

[103]Ibid., p. 88.
[104]Ibid., p. 130.
[105]Ibid., p. 130.
[106]Ibid., p. 130.

Golden Horde, led by Chinggis Khan's eldest son Jochi, along with Subutai, Batu Khan, and Kadan, conquered vast swathes of medieval Eurasia.[107] In 1221, Jochi sent forces westwards to the Caucasus and the Qipchaq steppe. These troops rapidly captured the lands inhabited by Georgians, Qipchaqs on the Volga-Don steppe, and Russians on the Dnieper, demolishing both Moscow and Kyiv.

In 1241, the Mongols rode into Hungary through the Verecke Pass (in present-day Ukraine) with approximately 100,000 horsemen.[108] By mid-March of that year, they reached Pest, and on April 11, the Hungarian army led by King Béla IV was emphatically defeated by Mongol cavalry at the Battle of Mohi. As the contemporary English chronicler Matthew Paris observed, the Tartars 'came with the force of lightening into the territories of the Christians'.[109] Another contemporary, the Flemish Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck, instead, drew connections between the Tartars' nomadism and their purported atheism, writing that 'They have in no place any settled citie to abide in, neither knowe they of the celestiall citie to come'.[110] The trepidation Europeans felt towards the Golden Horde was reflected in the name they called its members: 'Tartars'.[111] While one Mongol confederation was indeed called '*Tatar*', as attested to by both European and Chinese sources, medieval European writers added a medial 'r' to associate the steppe conquerors with '*Τάρταρος*', the ancient Greek hellish underworld.[112]

After the 1241 attack, Béla IV undertook comprehensive reforms over several decades, radically overhauling Hungary's military infrastructure. Prior to the Mongol conquest, Hungarian forces consisted predominantly of light cavalry. Yet, despite appearing 'oriental' to western observers, the Hungarians had largely abandoned steppe tactics by the Battle of Mohi, compounding their defeat to the swift mounted Mongols.[113] After the Mongol invasion, however, Béla IV initiated a programme of military reorganization, which included inviting tens of thousands of Cumans back into his realm. A nomadic Turkic population related to the Qipchaks, the Cumans had been expelled from Hungary shortly after the first Mongol invasion on suspicion of having let the attackers in. However, Béla IV soon recognized that Cuman horsemen, familiar with the

[107]For an overview of the Mongol conquests of Europe, see Marie Favereau, *The Horde: How the Mongols Changed the World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2021), esp. pp. 63–94.
[108]László Makkai, 'Transformation into a Western-Type State, 1196-1301', in *A History of Hungary*, ed. by Peter F. Sugar, Péter Hanák and Tibor Frank (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 26.
[109]Matthew Paris, *Matthew Paris's English History from the Year 1235 to 1273*, 3 vols. Vol. 1 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1852), p. 346.
[110]Richard Hakluyt (ed.), *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1903), vol. 1, p. 234.
[111]On medieval European attitudes to the Tartars, see Huub Kurstjens, 'The Invasion of the Christian West by the Tartars (Mongols). A Clash of Civilizations between Frederick II, Gregory IX and the Tartars', *Golden Horde Review*, 5.2 (2017), 258–75.
[112]*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Tartar (*n.2* & *adj.*), Etymology', December 2023; Hensleigh Wedgwood, 'On False Etymologies', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 2.6 (1855), 62–72, p. 72; Igor de Rachewiltz, 'The Name of the Mongols in Asia and Europe: A Reappraisal', *East Asian History*, 43 (2019), 89–94.
[113]Makkai, 'Transformation into a Western-Type State', p. 27.

Mongols' steppe warfare, were essential to protect his kingdom. The post-Mohi reforms proved somewhat effective for Hungary's defenses. When Nogai Khan, Chinggis's great-great-grandson, launched another attack in the winter of 1285–86, the Mongol army was repelled by a revitalized Hungarian heavy cavalry inspired by the Cumans' steppe equestrianism. Thus, appropriating nomadic approaches to steppe warfare, the settled Hungarians were better able to defend themselves from the Golden Horde and its fierce horsemen.

Between the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the Golden Horde gradually disintegrated into an array of disjointed blocs. The Muslim Lipka Tartars, who settled in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, were accepted into these Christian polities and granted land and certain religious freedoms in exchange for their military service. The Lipka Tartars' cavalry played a crucial role in securing the Polish-Lithuanian victory over the Teutonic Knights at the Battle of Grünwald in July 1410 and served alongside Polish and Lithuanian troops ever since.[114]

By contrast, Crimean Tartars maintained an independent Muslim state that fashioned itself as the successor to the Golden Horde.[115] Established by Khan Hacı I Giray between 1420 and 1441, the Crimean Khanate soon became a dreaded force across eastern European Christendom. The khanate was a *de jure* vassal state of the Ottoman Empire – Christian Europe's most feared foreign enemy – since its annexation by the latter's forces in 1475.[116] In reality though, the Ottomans granted Tartars near-complete political independence in exchange for their mounted warriors' military service and the right to participate in their profitable slave market at Caffa.[117] In short, the two Muslim states, one mostly sedentary and one semi-nomadic, became geopolitically and economically interdependent, and together constituted an imposing military force that terrified much of Christian Europe.[118]

Crimean khans claimed Chinggis's bloodline, and their steppe-inspired military tactics resembled those of the Golden Horde. Like their Mongol predecessors, Crimean Tartars' martial cultures revolved around shock cavalry charges, high-precision archery, and enslaving captured enemies.[119] As Khan Ğazı II Giray elucidated, his horsemen were 'to ravage, desolate, and ransack the infidels' country with their raids, and also to collect captives

[114]Anna Cieslik and Maykel Verkuyten, 'National, Ethnic and Religious Identities: Hybridity and the Case of the Polish Tatars', *National Identities*, 8.2 (2006), 77–93.
[115]Mária Ivanics, 'The Military Co-Operation of the Crimean Khanate with the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. by Gábor Kármán and Lovro Kuncevic (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 275–99.
[116]On early modern Europeans' nuanced and politicized understandings of the Ottoman Empire and its history, see Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008).
[117]Brian L. Davies, *Warfare, State and Society on the Black Sea Steppe, 1500–1700* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 7.
[118]Ivanics, 'Military Co-Operation', pp. 275–76.
[119]Alfred P. Brainard, 'Polish-Lithuanian Cavalry in the Late Seventeenth Century', *The Polish Review*, 36.1 (1991), pp. 69–82; Ivanics, 'Military Co-Operation'.

and provisions'.[120] Crimean Tartar horsemen frequently rode at the vanguard of larger Ottoman units and were thus typically the first to engage in close-range combat with the Sublime Porte's opponents.[121]

For much of the early modern period, Crimean Tartars conducted annual slave raids in Polish and Lithuanian territories. These incursions cemented the notion of the threatening nomad in settled European imaginations. The fourteenth-century Florentine humanist Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini argued that the Tartars were descended from the Scythians, whose exploits were famously chronicled by Herodotus of Halicarnassus, the 'Father of History'.[122] In the fifth century BCE, Herodotus reported that the Scythians were not 'tillers of the ground, but a pastoral race', possessing 'neither cities nor forts, and carrying their dwellings with them wherever they go'.[123] Moreover, he wrote, they were 'accustomed … to shoot[ing] from horseback', making them 'unconquerable'.[124] Thus, just as the 'unpolished' Scythians had been one of the greatest threats to the Greek colonies, the Tartars came to be seen as a major menace to Renaissance Europeans' way of life.[125]

By the end of the sixteenth century, writers across Europe were invoking Tartars as an extraordinarily bellicose people, both in political treatises and ethnographies, and in more popular entertainment. William Shakespeare alluded to the nomadic population's military prowess and alacrity in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with Robin Goodfellow exiting the stage once with the line: 'Looke how I goe. Swifter then arrow, from the Tartars bowe'.[126] A few years later instead, Giles Fletcher the Elder described the Tartars as 'the most vile and barbarous nation of all the world', identifying them with the lost ten tribes of Israel.[127] Later in the seventeenth century, the nomadic population featured in *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, who had discussed Martini's *Bello* in letters with Henry Oldenburg, as the chief enemy of Christendom.[128]

In the early-to-mid seventeenth century, a series of ferocious conflicts erupted between the Crimean Tartars, Orthodox Zaporizhian Cossacks, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[129] The Commonwealth's governing

[120]Quoted in Ivanics, 'Military Co-Operation', p. 290. Original from Mustafa Na'ima, *Tarih-i Na'ima* (Istanbul: İbrahim Müteferrika, 1734), p. 112.
[121]Brainard, 'Polish-Lithuanian Cavalry'.
[122]Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, p. 28.
[123]Herodotus and Francis R. B. Godolphin, 'Herodotus: On the Scythians', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 32.5 (1973–1974), 129–49, at p. 130
[124]Ibid., p. 134.
[125]Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, p. 35.
[126]William Shakespeare, *A Midsommer Nights Dreame* (London: James Roberts, 1600): act iii, scene ii, line 101.
[127]Richard W. Cogley, "The Most Vile and Barbarous Nation of All the World': Giles Fletcher the Elder's the Tartars or, Ten Tribes (ca. 1610)', *Renaissance Quarterly* 58 (2005), 781–814.
[128]Lu, 'Milton's Image of the Tartar'; Eric B. Song, 'Nation, Empire, and the Strange Fire of the Tartars in Milton's Poetry and Prose', *Milton Studies* 47 (2008), 119–44. For depictions of the Ming-Qing war in popular culture, see Gianamar Giovannetti-Singh, 'Chinese Heavens in European Literatures, c. 1650-1700', in *Writing the Heavens*, ed. by Aura Heydenreich *et al.*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 225–43.
[129]The following paragraph draws on the account of the Cossack Khmelnytsky Uprising from Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 167–74.

elites had appropriated huge swathes of fertile land in Black Ruthenia, gifting large agricultural estates to Polish Catholic nobles. The absentee Polish landlords appointed Jewish managers to collect rent and taxes from the Orthodox Ukrainian peasants working the fields. These productive lands along the Dnieper River were inhabited by Zaporizhian Cossacks. The Cossacks were a martial, Orthodox Christian population to whom the Polish-Lithuanian state paid an annual stipend to drive away raiding Crimean Tartars and push back against the bordering Ottoman Empire. However, only a small proportion of Cossacks were officially recognized as soldiers and thus remunerated by the Commonwealth, driving many into poverty. This sudden destitution during the reign of Władysław IV Vasa, in turn, led the Cossacks to begin raiding the Catholic-owned, Jewish-managed estates. As the *Lviv Chronicle* reported in 1637, 'in Ukraine the Cossacks rebelled and treated the Poles with contempt, killed the Germans like flies, burned towns, slaughtered the Jews like chickens, [and] some burned monks in Roman Catholic churches'.[130] Their style of warfare thus came to closely resemble that of the Tartars whom sedentary Europeans had feared for so long.

In May 1648, the Cossack hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, born into a Ukrainian minor noble family and educated at a Jesuit school in Lviv, assembled a coalition to rebel against the Commonwealth. The French commander Pierre Chevalier, who fought alongside Cossack and Crimean Tartar horsemen, described Khmelnytsky as 'a Cromwel [*sic*] reproduced in Russia, & who was no less ambitious, brave, & a Politician than that of England'.[131] The hetman was supported by Crimean Khanate's warriors under the leadership of İslâm III Giray, who helped the Cossacks with his fearsome cavalry. Their combined forces marched on Kyiv, easily defeating Polish gun-bearing soldiers on the way at Zhovti Vody and Korsuń. The very same month, however, Władysław IV died suddenly and, after a chaotic six-month interregnum, was succeeded by his half-brother, Jan II Kazimierz Vasa. The election of the new ruler by the Commonwealth's *sejm* (parliament) was welcomed by Khmelnytsky, leading to a truce between the two sides, as Jan II Kazimierz met many Cossack demands. However, the uprising soon resumed, and the Cossacks called again on the Crimean Tartars for assistance.

Here, the Chinese and European narratives begin to intertwine, for it was to Jan II Kazimierz Vasa that Martini dedicated *Bello*. The Jesuit saw evident similarities, and even connections, between the wars unfolding contemporaneously on Eurasia's opposite flanks. Martini deployed a comparatively familiar conflict

[130]Quoted in and translated by Serhii Plokhy, *The Cossacks and Religion in Early Modern Ukraine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 143. Original from Oleksandr A. Bevzo, *L'vivs'kyi litopys i Ostroz'kyi litopysets'. Dzherel oznavche doslidzhennia*, 2nd edition (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1971), p. 119.

[131]Pierre Chevalier, *Discours des Pays, Mœurs, & Gouuernement des Cosaques / Discours des Tartares Précopites / Histoire De La Guerre Des Cosaques Contre La Pologne* (Paris: Thomas Iolly, 1668 [1663]): 'Au Lecteur', p. 4. N.B., the page numbers begin again after Chevalier's two 'Discourses' on the Cossacks and Praecopian Tartars. Below, I distinguish the two texts, published within the same tome, as 'Au Lecteur', 'Dedication', *Histoire*, and *Discours des Tartares*, respectively.

– that between the Commonwealth, Cossacks, and Crimean Tartars – to sell his story to European audiences. As the war was still unfolding, Ukraine and Tartars more broadly became topics of immense interest across western Europe.[132] Indeed, popular accounts of the Khmelnytsky uprising were first published outside the Commonwealth in 1651, just three years before Martini's *Bello* hit the presses in Antwerp.[133] The story of the fearsome Cossack and Tartar rebellion was first narrated in Guillaume de Beauplan's *Description d'Ukraine* (Rouen, 1651), published in French, Latin, Dutch, Spanish, and English.[134] Other prominent accounts included the Silesian Lutheran historian Joachim Pastorius's *Bellum Scythico-Cosacicum*; the Ruthenian rabbi Nathan Hannover's *Yeven Mezulah*, whose proceeds funded the relocation of Jewish refugees; the Venetian mercenary Maiolino Bisaccioni's essays; his compatriot Michele Bianchi's (pseudonym Alberto Vimina) *Historia delle guerre civili in Polonia*; and Chevalier's *Histoire de la guerre des Cosaques contre la Pologne*.[135]

In 1672, Edward Brown, an English physician trained at Trinity College, Cambridge, added a preface to Chevalier's book that made clear that the Crimean Tartars mattered in western Europe. Describing them as 'the greatest Enemy of *Christendom*', Brown wrote that 'it is already feared, that the *Turks* or *Tartars* should make their Inroads this Summer into *Poland* through *Ukraine*, scarce a *Gazette* without mentioning something of it'.[136] He continued, noting that 'the greatest Incursions into *Europe* have been in all times through these Countreys, and whole Nations have come in upon us this way, to the destruction of our cheifest *States* and *Empires*'.[137] His concerns echoed comments by the permanent secretary of the Royal Society Henry Oldenburg, who had earlier corresponded with Milton about the publication of Martini's *Bello*. In a letter to Robert Boyle, instead, Oldenburg warned that 'The Tartars, the Cossacks, and the Turks are marching to enter Poland. They want to attack Kamianets-Podilskyi. … This poor country is on the verge of ruin. In time, if the Turks become masters of it, they will not leave Germany in peace'.[138]

[132]Frank Sysyn, 'Framing the Borderland: The Image of the Ukrainian Revolt and Hetman Bohdan Khmel'its'kyi in Foreign Travel Accounts', in *From Mutual Observation to Propaganda War: Premodern Revolts in Their Transnational Representations*, ed. by Malte Griesse (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014), pp. 127–58. See also Ksenia Konstantynenko, 'Ukraine and Cossacks in the 17th century Italian perceptions', in *The Battle of Konotop 1659: Exploring Alternatives in East European History*, ed. by Oleg Rumyantsev and Giovanna Brogi Bercof (Milan: Ledizioni, 2012), pp. 101–117.

[133]Sysyn, 'Framing the Borderland', p. 128.

[134]Guillaume le Vasseur de Beauplan, *Description d'Ukrainie qui sont plusieurs provinces du Royaume Pologne*, second expanded edition (Rouen: Jacques Cailloué, 1660).

[135]Joachim Pastorius, Bellum *Scythico-Cosacicum seu de coniuratione Tartarorum, Cosacorum et plebis Russicae contra Regnum Poloniae* (Danzig: Georg Forster, 1652); Nathan ben Moses Hannover, *Yeven Mezulah* (Venice: Giovanni Imberti, 1653); Maiolino Bisaccioni, 'Historia delle guerre civili di Polonia', in *Historia delle guerre civili di questi ultimi questi tempi*, second corrected edition (Bologna: Carlo Zenero, 1653), pp. 522–628; Alberto Vimina, *Historia delle guerre civili in Polonia* (Venice: Gio. Pietro Pinelli, 1671); Chevalier, *Histoire*.

[136]Pierre Chevalier, *A Discourse of the Original, Countrey, Manners, Government and Religion of the Cossacks, With another of the Perecopian Tartars. And the History of the Wars of the Cossacks against Poland*, translated by Edward Brown (London: Printed by T.N. for Hobart Kemp, 1672): unpaginated preface.

[137]Ibid., unpaginated preface.

[138]Henry Oldenburg, Letter to Robert Boyle, 24 September 1667. The Royal Society Library, London. EL/OB/64.

Figure 3. Balthasar Moncornet, 'Islan-Gieray'. Copperplate engraving, late seventeenth century. © bpk / Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum.

Given these pressing concerns about Crimean Tartars attacking European states, Martini's invocation of Jan II Kazimierz's Tartar War in *Bello*'s dedication made the fall of the Ming pertinent to Europeans concerned with their own

fates. Beyond Martini, other mid-seventeenth-century Europeans began to see parallels and, indeed, connections between both manifestations of a trans-Eurasian Tartar moment. For instance, the French artist Balthasar Moncornet's depiction of the Crimean Tartar Khan İslâm III Giray (Figure 3) strikingly resembles the contemporary 1661 frontispiece of Martini's book (Figure 2) – likely illustrated in-house in the Valckenier printshop in Amsterdam – which circulated extraordinarily widely in the second half of the seventeenth century.[139] The similarities between Moncornet's and Valckenier's engravings of Tartars atop horses underscore the many parallels Europeans were drawing between the two wars. Remarkably, Moncornet's caption even mentions that the Tartars were 'famous for their wars against the Muscovites, the Chinese, and also against the Mogor [India]'. Thus, like Martini, other Europeans were starting to develop a new consciousness of Tartars, broadly construed, as agents bringing about drastic political transformations across the Old World.

Martini did not only point to the similarities between the events taking place on either end of Eurasia; rather, he hinted at the existence of a vast Tartar information order stretching across the continental landmass. As he explained in *Bello*, just after the Manchus conquered Beijing in June 1644, 'vast numbers of Tartars were present not only from the kingdoms of [Jurchen] and [Nurgan], but also from ancient Western Tartary and eastern Yupi'.[140] Astonishingly, Martini even 'saw in China not a few from the Volga, whom the [Manchu] Tartars called Alga-Tartars; and among them, I found out news of Muscovy and Poland'.[141] The missionary thus informed his European readership that knowledge and information travelled with mobile Tartar intermediaries between Poland and Beijing.

This observation seemed to cause some traction in Europe. Indeed, while China was nowhere to be seen in any of the pre-1654 western European accounts of the Cossack-Tartar uprising, it appeared (albeit briefly) in several later books. Bisaccioni, for instance, explained that the Crimeans had to temporarily withdraw from the Khmelnytsky to defend themselves against 'the Kalmuks, a people more barbaric than the Tartars, inhabiting beyond the Don River'.[142] As he wrote, 'living only by plunder, for which they sometimes reached as far as China, [the Kalmuks] often went on to rob the Tartars of the spoils taken from the Poles'.[143] Chevalier, instead, noted that Tartary includes 'Cathay or Scythia beyond [Mount] Imaus, commonly known as Great Tartary, whose Khan has recently become master of China'.[144] In short, *Bello* had begun to globalize Chinese politics by demonstrating its direct relevance and

[139]Dijkstra, *Printing and Publishing*¸ pp. 70–71.
[140]Martini, *Bello*, p. 80.
[141]Ibid., p. 81.
[142]Bisaccioni, 'Historia', p. 628.
[143]Ibid., p. 628.
[144]Chevalier, *Discours*, p. 53.

connection to affairs in Europe. The missionary suggested that the tumultuous wars unfurling on either pole of Eurasia were not simply parallel events; rather, they were collateral effects of the same Tartar moment.

One of Martini's key messages was the importance of appropriating Tartar martial cultures to avoid the Ming's unfortunate fate as dictated by a dialectical history. Contemporary accounts of the Polish-Cossack-Tartar War suggest that Europeans were actively doing just this, whether influenced by Martini or driven by their own critical circumstances. The Crimean Tartars' military practices were documented in great detail by Chevalier in his *Histoire*. The French commander's ethnography of the Crimean (or, as he called them, 'Praecopian') Tartars bears striking resemblances to *Bello*, reflecting the widespread European lurid fascination with Tartars in the mid-seventeenth century. Moreover, the *Histoire* similarly revealed how settled European societies sought to adapt and incorporate the diverse military strategies of their nomadic adversaries for their own benefit.

Chevalier, who claimed to have led 2,400 Polish infantrymen during the first siege of Dunkirk against the Spanish in Flanders, dedicated his narrative to Nicolas Léonor de Flesselles, comte de Brégy, the French ambassador in Poland. As he explained, Brégy had 'engaged … a number of [Cossack] adventurers to serve' in the French army, revealing the broader trend of nomadizing settled states' militaries in the seventeenth century.[145] Chevalier noted that the Cossacks and Tartars were assisted by Ukrainian 'peasant infantry, hardened by labor and the hardships of weather, and even somewhat seasoned by the frequent raids of the Tartars in their country'.[146] Like Martini, then, Chevalier alluded to the importance of being 'hardened' into a powerful fighting force, and pointed to the role of Tartar raids in strengthening the sedentary peasants for war.

Chevalier's account also reflected Martini's observations on the importance of nomadic warhorses. As he explained, 'Tartar Cavalry … would undoubtedly be the best in the world, if it were trained and disciplined like that of Christendom'.[147] Much like the Manchus and European aristocrats, Crimean Tartars distinguished between horses based on origin, assigning a different value to each breed. Chevalier mentioned that they would even sell their fellow countrymen as slaves to Christian and Jewish merchants to obtain strong Turkish horses.[148] The Tartars, wrote Chevalier, preferred horses 'called Bacmates, [which] are long, very ugly and thin, having thick collar hair and large tails which hang to the ground: but nature has repaired the ugliness of these animals with a speed and stamina without equal'.[149] The French commander also recognized that in certain ways, the Tartars surpassed sedentary Europeans in military prowess,

[145]Chevalier, 'Dedication', pp., 4–5.
[146]Chevalier, *Histoire*, pp. 3–4.
[147]Ibid., p. 4.
[148]Chevalier, *Discours des Tartares*, pp. 60–61.
[149]Ibid., p. 64.

and urged the latter to learn from the former. As he described, the Tartars' 'usual weapons are the saber, the bow, and a quiver with about twenty arrows'.[150] Unlike settled European armies, whose weapons were typically produced by blacksmiths, the Tartars 'make these weapons themselves, the bow from horse sinews, the quiver from its skin, and they bind the arrowheads with small straps of the same animal's skin'.[151] They also used equine products 'to make their whips with a skill that is unique to them and which French and German saddlers have not yet been able to imitate'.[152]

Chevalier's ethnography, like Martini's, situated Crimean Tartars within a specific geopolitical and historical context. The French commander explained that the Tartars, along with the Arabs, were one of the 'two great peoples in the world who live in nearly the same manner, have the same religion, and at least claim to have the same origin'.[153] According to Chevalier, the Tartars 'hold all the northern regions of [Asia] … and extend into Europe'.[154] While recognizing that 'some of these peoples, more civilized than others, have cities and cultivate the sciences and the arts', Chevalier stated that 'most lead a pastoral and nomadic life, living only under tents and huts'.[155] The Tartars 'devote little [effort] to agriculture but focus on hunting, war, or rather brigandage, and have no other wealth than their herds'.[156] Like Renaissance humanist historians before him, the French commander concluded that the Tartars 'are properly the Scythians'.[157] His writings point to the striking extent to which mid-seventeenth-century Europeans were interested in the ancient conflict between nomads and agriculturalists, and understood it to resonate several key debates and concerns of their present.

4. Conclusion

The Manchu conquest of the Ming empire, despite playing out many thousands of miles away, resonated strongly with Europeans in the seventeenth century. Appearing in a context where sedentary Europe was experiencing a Tartar threat of its own, Martini's eyewitness *Bello* underscored structural similarities and connections between China and Europe. The book helped reshape early modern European understandings of political geographies, emphasizing the presence of a continuous Eurasian Tartary inhabited by nomadic peoples, which was contiguous to both Europe and China, shaping and inseparably intertwining the two polities' pasts and presents.

[150]Ibid., p. 62.
[151]Ibid., p. 62.
[152]Ibid., p. 62–63.
[153]Ibid., p. 49.
[154]Ibid., pp. 49–50.
[155]Ibid., p. 50.
[156]Ibid., p. 50.
[157]Ibid., p. 50.

Martini's narrative invited Europeans to reassess their models of civilizational change and philosophies of history. Challenging progressivist or stadial conceptions of the human past, the missionary's tale captured a seemingly eternal struggle between civilization and barbarism. Indeed, it offered an alternative, dialectical model of history. *Bello* was thus not only an engaging tale of war and heroism from a distant and exotic land. Rather, it served as a mirror in which early modern Europeans could see reflections of their own geopolitical vulnerabilities. Fears of a similar fate at the hands of Ottoman, Cossack, or Crimean Tartar barbarians underlined the importance of learning *from* the Ming's fall, and not simply about it. As emphasized by its pointed dedication to Jan II Kazimierz Vasa, *Bello* was a warning to overly optimistic Western armies amidst the growing confidence in and adoption of gunpowder technologies.

Martini's recognition of a trans-Eurasian Tartar threat highlighted the risks of complacency in the face of nomadism. Indeed, taken together, the Jesuit's *oeuvre* implied that the constant appropriation of the enemy's cultures and practices of war was necessary for survival. There was a lesson in the fact that over the course of the Ming-Qing conflict, the Manchus adapted their military cultures by integrating gunpowder weapons, while the Ming did not correspondingly develop a strong cavalry. The Manchus succeeded because they understood that the best way to break the cycle of history was to embrace hybridity.

This message resonated strongly in Europe too. As contemporary reports of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's war against the Cossacks and Crimean Tartars reveal, the best way of fighting nomadic enemies appeared to be by deploying nomadic tactics. Martini's work thus provided Europeans with a valuable model for resilience against the Tartar threat. It suggested that the ability to adapt culturally and militarily was essential for maintaining power and stability. Martini's account of the rise and fall of empires urged civilizations to learn from each other in their perpetual struggle for survival and dominance.

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