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Mongols in Armenian Manuscript Sources of the 13th–14th Centuries

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Abstract. Introduction. A significant amount of diverse and valuable information regarding the Mongols, who arrived in Armenia during their exploratory expeditions in 1220–1222 and governed the country from 1236 to 1353, has been preserved in Armenian manuscript sources. These sources contain detailed accounts of the Mongols' names, origin, homeland, appearance, food, character, customs, beliefs, weaponry, martial arts, language, and overall ethnology. This collection of insights illuminates the historical significance due to the fact that Mongols played a pivotal role in global history. The scientific importance of this material should not be underestimated, particularly for Mongolian studies and Mongolian ethnology. This significance arises from both the variety of accounts in the Armenian manuscript sources and the reliability of the majority of these reports. Many of these accounts are based either on direct observations by the authors or the information obtained from credible sources, including the Mongols themselves. It is no coincidence

that this emphasis on accuracy is regularly highlighted within the manuscript sources. The *purpose* of this study is aimed at bringing together and, for the first time, introducing into scientific circulation the ethnological material on the Mongols provided in the rich and valuable Armenian manuscript sources (historical works, minor chronicles, manuscript colophons) of the High Middle Ages (13th-14th centuries). *Materials and methods.* Among the Armenian manuscript sources addressing the ethnological characteristics of the Mongols, the historiographical works of such notable historians as Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Vardan Vardapet, Grigor Aknertsi, Smbat Sparapet, Hetum the Historian, and Stepanos Orbelian are particularly prominent. Several chroniclers and authors of manuscript colophons have echoed or even expanded upon the mentioned above accounts. The work on the Mongols by Vanakan Vardapet, the teacher of Kirakos Gandzaketsi, by Vardan Vardapet and by Grigor Aknertsi, also undoubtedly contained valuable insights into this subject. Unfortunately, this work has not survived, although Vardan Vardapet almost certainly drew upon it in his own writings. In some cases, Vardan Vardapet also compiled material about the Mongols from the works by Kirakos Gandzaketsi. The information related to the ethnology and lifestyle of the Mongols, as recorded in the Armenian sources of the High Middle Ages, is presented here through a combination of historical compilation and analytical methods for the reconstruction of the history. *Results.* The aforementioned evidence forms the basis for introducing the material from Armenian manuscript sources on Mongol ethnology into scientific discourse that will facilitate a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the ethnological characteristics of the Mongols during the period in question.

Keywords: Mongols, Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Vardan Vardapet, Grigor Aknertsi, Smbat Sparapet, Hetum the Historian, Stepanos Orbelian, Armenian manuscripts, ethnology, “Chin and Machin” chronicle.


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Монголы в армянских рукописных источниках XIII–XIV вв.

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Армянские рукописные источники эпохи Высокого Средневековья содержат обширную и ценную информацию о монголах, которые проникли в Армению во время своих экспедиционных походов в 1220–1222 гг. и управляли страной с 1236 г. по 1353 г. Эти источники предоставляют детальные описания монголов, охватывающие их имена, происхождение, родину, внешний вид, рацион, характер, обычаи, верования, вооружение, боевые искусства, язык и этнографические сведения в целом. Данный массив материалов имеет важное историческое значение, поскольку монголы сыграли ключевую роль в мировой истории. Научная ценность этого материала неоспорима, особенно в контексте монголоведения и этнологии монголов. Это обусловлено как разнообразием содержащихся в армянских источниках сведений, так и достоверностью большинства из них, которая подкреплена либо непосредственными наблюдениями авторов, либо сведениями, полученными из надежных источников, включая самих монголов. Не случайно, что рукописные источники систематически акцентируют внимание на точности изложенной информации. Настоящее исследование ставит своей целью обобщить и впервые ввести в научный оборот этнологические данные о монголах, представленные в богатых и ценных армянских рукописных источниках (исторических сочинениях, малых хрониках, колофонах рукописей) XIII–XIV вв. *Материалы и методы.* Среди армянских рукописных источников, содержащих этнографические сведения о монголах, особенно значимы историографические труды таких выдающихся историков, как Киракос Гандзакети, Вардан Вардапет, Григор Акнерци, Смбат Спарпет, Хетум Историк и Степанос Орбелян. Несколько летописцев и авторов рукописных колофонов повторили или даже расширили их труды. Работа о монголах Ванакана Вардапета, учителя Киракоса Гандзакети, Вардана Вардапета и Григора Акнерци, также, несомненно, содержала ценные сведения по этому вопросу. К сожалению, эта работа не сохранилась, хотя Вардан Вардапет почти наверняка опирался на нее в своих собственных трудах. В некоторых случаях Вардан также собирал материал о монголах из работ Киракоса Гандзакети. Информация, связанная с этнографией и образом жизни монголов, зафиксированная в армянских источниках Высокого Средневековья, представлена здесь посредством сочетания историко-сравнительного и историко-аналитического методов реконструкции истории. *Результаты.* Приведенные выше свидетельства служат основанием для введения в научный оборот материалов армянских рукописных источников по монгольской этнологии, что будет способствовать углубленному, всестороннему изучению и пониманию этнографических особенностей монголов в рассматриваемый исторический период.

Ключевые слова: монголы, Киракос Гандзакети, Вардан Вардапет, Григор Акнерци, Смбат Спарпет, Хетум Историк, Степанос Орбелян, армянские рукописи, этнография, «Чин и Мачин», летопись

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1. The ethnonym, origins, homeland, and physical appearance of the Mongols

In Armenian historiography, the Mongols are commonly referred to as Mongol, with less frequent usage of terms such as Mongol-Tatar or Tatar-Mongol. Within medieval Armenian historiography, particularly evident in the Armenian manuscript sources from the 13th–14th centuries, various designations are used to describe the Mongols.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi, who experienced Mongol captivity in 1236 and directly interacted with the Mongols, delved into their ethnology more extensively than other historians. His initial mentioning of the Mongols was: “it is a nation called Tatar, whose [king’s] name is Genghis Khan,” [Gandzaketsi 1961: 232] then added that the

latter tribe itself is “called Mughal Tatar” [Gandzaketsi 1961: 233]. After that, the historian only used the name “Mughal Tatar” once [Gandzaketsi 1961: 231]. Unlike other contemporary authors, he only referred to the Mongols, who were skilled archers, as the “nation of archers” twice [Gandzaketsi 1961: 231, 288]. Kirakos Gandzaketsi commonly called them “Tatars,” with a few exceptions [Gandzaketsi 1961: 231, 257, 263, 271, 276, 280, 281, 289, 290, 31, 312, 314, 319, 357, 364, etc.].

Regarding the homeland of the Mongols and the Tatars living there, according to him, the Tatars “are the leader of the barbarian nations... located in a distant country in the northeast, known in barbaric language as Gharaghrum, on the borders of Ghatia, with their king being named Genghis Khan” [Gandzaketsi 1961: 231–232]. This historian provided correct information about both the location of the Mongols’ homeland and the position of Genghis Khan’s tribe in the hierarchy of Mongolian tribes. Surprisingly, Kirakos Gandzaketsi did not address the question of the Mongols’ origin, unlike other authors.

Vardan Vardapet, in his writings, refers to the Mongols by the names “Mughal and Tatar,” “Tatar” and “nation of archers” [Vardapet 1862: 142, 143, 144, 152, 162; Michael the Syrian 1870: 614, 615]. In his colophon accompanying the Armenian translation of Michael the Syrian’s “Chronicle,” he provides unique etymologies for the term “Tatar,” suggesting meanings such as “sharp and light” and “tur yev tar” (“give and take”) [Michael the Syrian 1870: 614]. In the latter case, he alludes to the capture of Christians by the Mongols [Michael the Syrian 1870: 614]. This author delved into the origin and homeland of the Mongols. Referring to the vision of the Armenian Catholicos Nerses I (353–373 AD) regarding the conquest of Armenia by the “archers,” Vardan Vardapet proposed that the Mongols were a blend of descendants of Hagar, Abraham’s concubine who traced her lineage back to Shem, Noah’s eldest son, and the kin of Govg, a descendant of Torgom, the presumed ancestor of the Armenians as mentioned in the Bible. They dwell in the part of the world known as Scythia, stretching from the Itil (Volga) river to Mount Yemavon. As per his account, among the forty-three nations inhabiting this area, the Tugars are identified as the Tatars [Michael the Syrian 1870: 614–615]. Furthermore, he remarks on a separate occasion that the Mongols’ homeland is “Chin and Machin,” that is, China [Vardapet 1862: 142].

Bishop Stepanos, a chronicler who provided limited insight into the ethnological background of the Mongols, remained silent on their origins and homeland. He predominantly referred to them as “Tatars,” occasionally as “the nation of archers” or simply “archers,” and once as the “Tatar nation of archers” [Minor chronicles 1951: 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43].

Grigor Aknertsi, in his historical work titled “The History of the Tatars” distinguishes between Mongols and Tatars, considering them as separate nations [Aknertsi 1974: 47]. He consistently refers to the Mongols as “a nation of archers” [Aknertsi 1974: 17, 21, 28] three times and as “Tatars” [Aknertsi 1974: 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 67] on other occasions. Similar to Vardan Vardapet, he interprets the etymology of the name “Tatar” to mean “sharp and light” [Aknertsi 1974: 18]. Building upon Nerses I’s vision, he traces the origin of the Mongols to a violent lineage resulting from the intermingling of the tribes of Hagar, Abraham’s wife Keturah, and grandson Esau, influenced by malevolence [Aknertsi 1974: 18].

Echoing Vardan Vardapet, Grigor Aknertsi identifies Scythia as the homeland of the Mongols, extending from the Itil River near Mount Yemavon to the Caspian Sea [Aknertsi 1974: 19]. He suggests that the Tugars are the same as those referred to as “Tatars” among the forty-three nations inhabiting the region [Aknertsi 1974: 19].

The congruence in the factual accounts of Vardan Vardapet and Grigor Aknertsi regarding the origin and homeland of the Mongols raises the possibility that they drew from a common but unrecovered source. It is plausible that the overlooked work of their mentor, Vanakan Vardapet, holds the key as the most probable source, which has yet to receive attention in Armenology.

Smbat, the sparapet (commander-in-chief) of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, who undertook a diplomatic mission to Karakorum and engaged in negotiations with the great Güyük Khan (1246–1248), consistently identifies the Mongols as “Tatars,” “nation of archers,” or simply “archers” [Sparapet 1856: 226, 227, 229, 232, 233, 236, 246]. Throughout his encounters, he abstains from delving into inquiries regarding the origin of the Mongols or the exact location of their homeland, merely indicating his visit to Mongolia [Sparapet 1974: 130]. Concurrently, Hetum the Historian similarly designates the Mongols as “Tatars” [Hetum the Historian 1842: 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, 70], though acknowledging that they are simply called “Mongols” [Hetum the Historian 1842: 31]. In addressing the Mongols’ homeland and lineage, Hetum delineates a narrative where the Tatars, residing beyond the great mountain Belgena, i.e., east, initially proliferate and segregate into seven distinct nations, i. e., tribes. Notably, the principal tribe emerges as the “Tatar,” deriving its appellation from the region where they primarily dwell [Hetum the Historian 1842: 31]. The alignment of Smbat Sparapet with Kirakos Gandzaketsi becomes evident as both scholars attribute paramount significance to the tribe known as “Tatar” among the diverse Mongolian tribes.

In Stepanos Orbelian’s first mention of the Mongols, he notes that “the Lord raised up a nation of archers from the east, who were called Mughals, and according to the peasants, Tatars” [Orbelian 1910: 400]. Thus, there is a discrepancy between this author and Hetum the Historian regarding the name of the Mongols. Nonetheless, Stepanos Orbelian, a high-ranking clergyman of noble origin, predominantly refers to the Mongols as “Tatars,” occasionally as “Mughal,” “a nation of archers,” or simply “archers” [Orbelian 1910: 400, 403, 404, 405, 467, 476, etc.]. This author does not delve into the etymology of the name “Tatar,” nor does he discuss the origin of the Mongols. Concerning the Mongols’ homeland being the land of “Chin and Machin,” he aligns with Vardan Vardapet [Orbelian 1910: 400, 407], further noting its location beyond Khatastan, to the east [Orbelian 1910: 400].

Among the chroniclers, Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi [Ayrivanetsi 1860: 65, 66, 67, 68], and Ananun Sebastatsi [Minor chronicles 1956: 139], identify the Mongols as “Tatars.” The latter, akin to Vardan Vardapet and Stepanos Orbelian, designates the land of “Chin and Machin” as their homeland [Minor chronicles 1956: 137]. One of the 13th century chroniclers, priest Yohan, also refers to the Mongols as “Tatars” and “a nation of archers” [Minor chronicles 1951: 26]. An anonymous chronicler from the 14th century employs the term “Tatar” when discussing the Mongols [Colophons of Armenian manuscripts 1950: 150]. Conversely, other chroniclers from the same century prefer the epithet “the nation of archers” [Colophons of Armenian manuscripts 1950: 35, 48, 51, 65, 113, 166, 218, 331, 368, etc.].

2. Appearance, food, character and customs of the Mongols

Armenian written sources of the 13th century consistently described the appearance (anthropological type) of the Mongols, with one notable exception. According to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, the Mongols were “terribly ugly and hideous in appearance. They had no beards, but some had a few hairs on their lips or muzzles. Their eyes were narrow and sharp-sighted, their voices gentle and sharp, and they were long-lived and durable” [Gandzaketsi 1961: 271]. Vardan Vardapet contented himself with describing the Mongols as “foreign-looking and foreign language speaking” [Vardapet 1862: 142].

Grigor Aknertsi provided a more detailed and vivid description of the Mongols’ appearance. According to him, the Mongols were sinister-looking and indescribably terrifying to those who saw them. Their “head was big like a buffalo, eyes like a cub, nose short like a cat, muzzle protruding like a dog, back thin like an ant, legs short like a pig, and they lacked a beard entirely. They had the strength of a lion and their voice screeched like an eagle” [Aknertsi 1974: 22].

Bishop Stepanos described the appearance of the Mongols as unusual and terrifying [Minor chronicles 1956: 137]. A remarkable depiction of the Mongols’ appearance is preserved in the 1236 colophon of an Armenian manuscript. The author, who referred to the Mongols as “Khara Tatars,” described them as broad-backed, thick-armed, and broad-fronted, with smooth hair, narrow eyes, flat noses, and sparse beards [Colophons of Armenian manuscripts 1984: 196].

Smbat Sparapet described their appearance as “terrible,” [Sparapet 1974: XIX] but Hetum the Historian did not address it. The author of a 1315 manuscript colophon also considered the Mongols to have a hideous face [Colophons of Armenian manuscripts 1950: 113].

In contrast to the above-mentioned authors, Stepanos Orbelian, the son of a foreign mother, offered a markedly different assessment of the Mongols’ appearance. He wrote that the Mongols “were very beautiful in appearance, they had a smooth face like a woman’s face” [Orbelian 1910: 401].

This difference in perspective may be explained not only by the different nationality of Stepanos Orbelian’s mother but also by the relatively favorable treatment the Mongol conquerors extended towards his princely family, the Orbelians.

3. The food, character, customs and worship of the Mongols

Kirakos Gandzaketsi provides the most detailed and remarkable information about Mongolian food and eating culture. According to his eyewitness account, when the Mongols had enough food and alcohol, they ate and drank insatiably, but when resources were scarce, they lived a temperate life [Gandzaketsi 1961: 271]. They indiscriminately consumed the meat of all kinds of animals, both clean and unclean, as well as mice and reptiles [Gandzaketsi 1961: 250, 257, 271]. Horse meat was their preferred meat, and kumis, made from horse milk and kept in a wineskin, was their favored alcoholic beverage [Gandzaketsi 1961: 257]. Before eating, horse meat was divided into large pieces, boiled without salt or grilled, then cut into small pieces, soaked in salt water, and eaten [Gandzaketsi 1961: 271]. The Mongols prepared horse meat without salt to prevent it from hardening during boiling or grilling. They ate while kneeling or standing like camels. Food was divided equally between masters and servants. When drinking kumis or wine, someone would take the drink in a large bowl, then pour it into a smaller one, sprinkling it towards the sky and in

all directions — east, west, north, and south. After that, he would drink a little of the beverage and then serve it to the senior participant of the dinner.

If a stranger brought them food or drink, they first forced him to taste it to avoid poisoning [Gandzaketsi 1961: 272]. When a foreign guest refused to eat the meat served during the dinner because it was not holy for him, he was served his preferred portion of food and wine. Moreover, if the guest was favored by the host Mongolian senior official, he was subsequently seated closer to the host, in increasingly honorable positions at the dining table [Gandzaketsi 1961: 257].

Grigor Aknertsi initially claimed that the Mongols did not eat bread at all [Aknertsi 1974: 22], but later contradicted himself by stating that Ilkhan Hulegu (1256–1265) had ordered only bread and milk to be given to Mongols traveling for service [Aknertsi 1974: 47]. He also reported that the Mongols loved to eat mutton insatiably and drink wine to the point of drunkenness [Aknertsi 1974: 39]. Historian Hetum also noted that the Mongols lived on horse meat and milk [Hetum the Historian 1842: 70], no doubt referring to kumis, similar to Grigor Aknertsi.

The sources in question did not shy away from discussing the character traits, customs, and worship practices of the Mongols, providing us with remarkable information about them. According to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, the Mongols were “extremely cunning and ingenious” [Gandzaketsi 1961: 241] and their “greed was insatiable” [Gandzaketsi 1961: 240]. He notes that Mongolian officials, not content with eating and drinking at the expense of Armenian princes, demanded expensive clothes and horses from them, as they were particularly fond of horses [Gandzaketsi 1961: 263–264]. According to this historian, they were distinguished by their terrible mercilessness and unrestrained rage, and “they resorted to murder with joy, as if they were going to a wedding or a wine orgy” [Gandzaketsi 1961: 240]. Kirakos Gandzaketsi also notes that the Mongols took as many wives as they wanted but did not keep harlots with their wives. They were indiscriminately intimate with women of foreign nationalities. They hated theft and even brutally killed thieves [Gandzaketsi 1961: 272]. According to the same historian, the Mongols lived in tents, and when moving, the tents were transported by many oxen and horse-drawn carts [Gandzaketsi 1961: 356].

Vardan Vardapet, who was hosted by Ilkhan Hulegu (1256–1265) in Tabriz, also provided valuable information about the customs and habits of the Mongols. He wrote that, according to the order established by Genghis Khan (1206–1227), Mongols were obliged not to lie, steal, or be intimate with someone else’s wife, to love others as equals, not to swear, not to know swearing, to spare those who voluntarily obeyed them, and to honor churches and their ministers [Vardapet 1962: 160]. At the end, the historian noted that Hulegu adhered to these commandments and instructed others to do the same [Vardapet 1962: 160]. However, it is well known from the testimonies of both Vardan Vardapet and other Armenian and non-Armenian sources that the Mongols, especially after converting to Islam, did not always observe the order set by Genghis Khan.

Grigor Aknertsi, who twice referred to the Mongols as a “beastly nation” [Aknertsi 1974: 20], observed that it was a common practice among them to interrogate individuals by subjecting them to scourging. Additionally, he noted that minor offenders were often brutally beaten and then mercilessly thrown to ferocious dogs [Aknertsi 1974: 33, 37]. Aknertsi also documented the Mongolian custom of expecting to be welcomed with “bread and salt” when visiting [Aknertsi 1974: 38–39]. Moreover,

he highlighted the tradition among Mongolians of bestowing an honorable Mongolian wife upon those they esteemed, irrespective of their nationality [Aknertsi 1974: 32] — a practice also noted by Kirakos Gandzaketsi [Gandzaketsi 1961: 263]. By the way, Grigor Aknertsi, like Kirakos Gandzaketsi, noted that Mongolian officials harassed the Armenian princes, demanding a gold canvas from some, a falcon from others, and a good dog or horse from others [Aknertsi 1974: 35]. Referring to the commandments given by God to the Mongols, Grigor Aknertsi observed that they were obliged to love each other, not commit adultery, not steal, not bear false witness, not betray anyone, and to respect the elderly and the poor. Anyone who violated any of these commandments was liable to be killed [Aknertsi 1974: 19–20].

Grigor Aknertsi recounted the Mongolian custom of honoring famous wrestlers and giving them great accolades [Rashid ad-Din 1960: 60]. He shared the tale of how the Armenian prince and formidable wrestler Sadun triumphed over a wrestler widely considered invincible during the reign of Möngke Khan (1251–1259), the great ruler of the Mongolian Empire. This victory earned Sadun the sympathy and favor of Ilkhan Hulegu [Aknertsi 1974: 47–49]. Kirakos Gandzaketsi also testified that Hulegu ranked Sadun among the “first braves” [Gandzaketsi 1961: 386].

Grigor Aknertsi also referred to Mongolian women. According to him, they wore pointed hats covered with a brocaded veil, painted their wide-open faces with a killer drug, gave birth like a viper, and fed their children like wolves [Aknertsi 1974: 22]. He then reported that because they lived for three hundred years, no mortality was observed among the Mongols [Aknertsi 1974: 22]. Despite the exaggeration, it is evident that the Mongols were distinguished by their longevity. As we have already seen, Kirakos Gandzaketsi also documented this circumstance.

Bishop Stepanos called the Mongols “bloodthirsty” [Minor chronicles 1951: 26] and priest Yohan described them as a “merciless” nation [Minor chronicles 1951: 26].

The author of the aforementioned 1236 colophon described the Mongols as “beastly and merciless, a nation which shed a lot of blood.” He noted that even if he had a “fiery” tongue, he would not be able to describe the evils they committed [Colophons of Armenian manuscripts 1984: 196]. He added that if a Mongolian found food, he ate it, and if he did not find it, he did not ask for food [Colophons of Armenian manuscripts 1984: 196]. The author of a 1317 manuscript also considered the Mongols a “beastly nation” [Colophons of Armenian manuscripts 1984: 113].

Stepanos Orbelian, who, as previously mentioned, had a favorable attitude towards the Mongols, noted that they were law-abiding by nature, hated fornication and all kinds of harmful deeds, were fair to each other, and loyal and obedient to their leader, arbitral and lawful. He described them as poor and greedy in customs, exploiting and oppressing people [Orbelian 1910: 400–401]. The historian adds that later, they abandoned their natural mores and the customs of their ancestors, came under the laws of Mohammed (i.e., adopted Islam), learned all kinds of impurity and debauchery, and led a promiscuous life [Orbelian 1910: 401].

The author of the aforementioned 1315 manuscript corroborates this by testifying that the Mongols abandoned “their laws” after converting to Islam, which led to an intensified persecution of Christians [Colophons of Armenian manuscripts 1950: 113].

The information provided by Hetum the Historian about the character and customs of the Mongols is quite interesting. According to him, the Mongols do not consider murder and fornication to be sins. They take numerous women as wives, with sons

being obliged to marry their mothers and brothers being obliged to marry their brothers' widows. They give whatever they have to newcomers and also demand from others; if they are not given what they want, they take it by force. When they are weak, they are humble, but when they are strong or numerous, they become arrogant. They do not want anyone to lie, yet they lie voluntarily. But when confessing to a case of war or a crime, they confess everything truthfully [[Hetum the Historian 1842: 70](#)]. On another occasion, he observed that the Mongols used to graze animals and migrate from place to place for grazing [[Hetum the Historian 1842: 31](#)].

4. The worship, weaponry, martial arts, and language of the Mongols

According to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, although the Mongols did not practice formal worship or paganism, they often mentioned the name of their god and expressed gratitude to him, though they did not know what to call him. They believed that their god took the sky and gave the earth to the khagan. This belief included the myth that Genghis Khan's father was not a mortal man; instead, his mother conceived him through divine light that entered through the garret of their house [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 272](#)]. Thus, Kirakos Gandzaketsi was familiar with the myth about the birth of Genghis Khan.

According to this historian, the Mongols used to carry the deceased with them for many days to allow the demon inside the body to escape. Afterward, they would either burn the body or bury it in a deep pit. They buried the deceased with their weapons, clothes, gold, and silver – whatever belonged to them. For the famous and wealthy, they included a servant and a maid to serve them in the afterlife, as well as a horse, because the Mongols believed there was a fierce war in the other world [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 273](#)]. Kirakos Gandzaketsi also noted that Mongolian women were sorcerers who could predict events. No one embarked on a journey without the permission of these women and the magicians [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 273](#)]. Vardan Vardapet adds that while the Mongols “did not have a religion, but they worshiped the sun and carried felt idols for sorcery wherever they went” [[Michael the Syrian 1870: 615](#)].

According to Hetum the Historian, who briefly discussed the worship practices of the Mongols, they acknowledged one immortal god to whom they called for help but “they have no service to God, no prayers, no fastings” [[Hetum the Historian 1842: 70](#)]. He also noted that the Mongols “have neither writing nor faith” [[Hetum the Historian 1842: 34](#)].

In the examined manuscript sources, there is relatively extensive information about the weaponry and martial arts of the Mongols. This is due to the fact that these conquerors conducted military operations not only in Armenia but also in the surrounding countries during the 13th century, frequently utilizing Armenian armed forces.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi described the Mongolian army as fierce, strict, cunning, and ingenious [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 237, 241](#)]. He frequently noted that the Mongols used various siege machines, such as catapults and battering rams, when capturing cities and fortresses [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 236, 253, 258, 279](#)]. Among their weapons, he mentioned the quiver, the sword, and the bow [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 239, 275, 236](#)], and he also stated that the Mongols often used ambush tactics during battle [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 203](#)]. Grigor Aknertsi similarly described the Mongol army as cunning and provident [[Aknertsi 1974: 30, 42](#)], thereby highly appreciating their martial prowess.

Vardan Vardapet and Stepanos Orbelian did not specifically discuss Mongolian weapons and martial arts, but Hetum the Historian provided extensive details. He

wrote that the Mongols are brave and warlike instruments who are obedient to their commanders. When they go into battle, they carry many weapons. They excel in horse riding and are skilled archers, though their infantry is less agile. They are adept at capturing cities and fortresses through combat. If retreating during battle is advantageous, they do not consider it shameful. They are not reckless in their attacks. Instead, they advance against the enemy only when it is strategically advantageous and when the enemy is at a disadvantage [[Hetum the Historian 1842: 70](#)]. According to the historian, the Mongols are skilled archers, making it difficult to fight them or pursue them during a retreat. It is difficult to fight them and pursue them during a retreat, as they frequently move backward while shooting arrows from the rear. The Mongol army moves cohesively [[Hetum the Historian 1842: 70](#)].

Smbat Sparapet also attested to the Mongols' proficiency with siege machines [[Sparapet 1956: 235](#)] and their excellence as archers [[Sparapet 1974: XIX](#)]. Stepanos Orbelian, in addition, observed that the Mongols "were adept in the use of bows and arrows, and in general very nimble in warfare [[Orbelian 1910: 401](#)].

Kirakos Gandzaketsi, through his close contact with the Mongols during his captivity, had the opportunity to become acquainted with their "barbaric and unfamiliar" language [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 273](#)]. As a result, he was able to introduce some Mongolian words to his readers through Armenian translations. Here they are: 'God' was called *tangri*, 'man' was called *ere* or *haran*, 'woman' was *eme* or *apji*, 'father' was *echka*, 'mother' was *aka*, 'brother' was *agha*, 'sister' was *akani*, 'head' was *tiron*, 'eyes' were *nitun*, 'ears' were *chikin*, 'beard' was *sakhal*, 'the face' was *yuz* or *niur*, 'the mouth' was *aman*, 'the tooth' was *skhur* or *sidun*, 'the bread' was *otmak*, 'ox' was *okar*, 'cow' was *unen*, 'sheep' was *ghoina* or *ghurgan*, 'goat' was *iman*, 'horse' was *mori*, 'mule' was *losa*, 'camel' was *taman*, 'dog' was *nokha*, 'wolf' was *china*, 'bear' was *aitku*, 'fox' was *honkan*, 'rabbit' was *tablgha* or *tula*, 'chicken' was *takhya*, 'pigeon' was *kokuchi*, 'eagle' was *burkvi gush*, 'water' was *usu*, 'wine' was *tarasu[n]*, 'sea' was *naur-tangez*, 'river' was *moran-ulansu*, 'sword' was *ioltu*, 'bow' was *nmu*, 'arrow' was *smu*, 'king' was *melik*, 'lord' was *nuin*, 'great lord' was *yeqa nuin*, 'earth' was *el* or *irkan*, 'sky' was *goga*, 'sun' was *naran*, 'moon' was *sara*, 'stars' were *sargha* or *hutut*, 'light' was *otur*, 'night' was *suyni*, 'scribe' was *bitikchi*, and 'devil' was *barahur* or *elep* [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 274–275](#)].

Immediately after listing these words, the historian added, "and other such barbaric names, which were unknown to us for many years, and now we have become familiar with them unwittingly" [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 274](#)]. This implies that the number of Mongolian words known to him was not limited to those he introduced. It goes without saying that Kirakos Gandzaketsi contributed to the study of the Mongolian language in the 13th century [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 25](#)]. G. Sanzhev, who documented this fact at the time, also noted that "everything that Kirakos reports about the Mongols is extremely important for Mongolian studies" [[Gandzaketsi 1961: 25](#)]. This high assessment by the distinguished Mongologist can be unconditionally extended to the above-mentioned reports from Armenian primary sources of the 13th–14th centuries regarding the ethnological characteristics of the Mongols.

5. Conclusion

The information preserved in Armenian manuscript sources about the Mongols, who appeared in northern Armenia in 1220–1222 and ruled over Armenia from 1236–

1253, is especially valuable. Among these, the records from the 13th–14th centuries are particularly significant. Records related to the ethnological characteristics of the Mongols hold a special place. These accounts have been preserved in the works of prominent Armenian historians such as Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Vardan Vardapet, Grigor Aknertsi, Smbat Sparapet, historian Hetum, Stepanos Orbelian, and others, as well as in small chronicles and colophons of Armenian manuscripts.

A comparison of the information preserved in the Armenian manuscript sources of the 13th–14th centuries reveals that these records are largely accurate and of great scientific value [Melkonyan 2019: 41–47]. They are important for Mongolian studies in general and for understanding the ethnological characteristics of the Mongolian people of that period in particular.

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