

Part III

To the East and Back: Exchanging Objects, Ideas, and Texts

Chapter 8

GIFT-GIVING IN THE CARPINI EXPEDITION TO MONGOLIA (1246–1248 CE)¹

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ABSTRACT

In his article, Adriano Duque examines the dynamics of gift-giving during the Carpini expedition to Mongolia in 1246. Drawing from current theory by Derrida and Mauss, the article analyzes the personal and political expectations generated by gifts and how they allowed Christian friars and Mongolian rulers to articulate relations of reciprocity and power.

Keywords: Mongolia, Carpini, travel, maps, gifts

ON APRIL 16, 1246 Pope Innocent IV sent three Franciscan friars (Lawrence of Portugal, John of Plan Carpini, and Benedict the Pole) on an expedition to Mongolia. While it is plausible that Lawrence of Portugal did not complete the trip, Carpini and Benedict completed the journey with alleged the purpose of converting the Tartars to Christianity and to ask them to cease all attacks against Christians.² Along the way, the friars encountered a series of local chieftains who inquired about their mission. In order to be granted access, the friars had to deliver a number of gifts that served as tolls. However, when they arrived at the Mongol camp, they refused to present any gifts to the great khan. This objection caused a significant delay in their mission. After witnessing the coronation of Güyük (1246–1248) as the third great khan of the Mongol Empire, they were admitted into the court, where they received a dispatch from the great khan to the pope.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Mongolia Society Annual Meeting in March 2014. I am indebted to Agnes Moncy and several members of the Mongolia Society for their input in writing this essay. All mistakes remain my own.

² “Regi et populo Tartarorum viam agnoscere veritatis,” *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae saeculi XIII* (Berlin, 1887): 2:75.

Gift-giving occurred in Christian and Mongol societies, but its significance depended on the economic and symbolic value that each culture placed on the gift.³ For Christians and Mongols alike, gift-giving was used to circulate goods and to promote ties and bonding among individuals. Gift-giving was articulated in the different stages that required varying degrees of involvement from the giver and from the receiver: giving, receiving and reciprocating. In this sense, gift-giving was not a one-way action. Moreover, it invariably placed the receiver in a situation of indebtedness and obligated him to acknowledge a social difference that could not be resolved until the gift was returned or reciprocated. The meaning of the term “gift” is further clarified by the use that Benedict and Carpini make of the word *munera* instead of *donum*. In a recent article on amatory love in the works of Plautus, Netta Zagagi defines *munus* as a “specific kind of *donum*” characterized by a sense of obligation. A denial of *munus* could be seen as a breach of contract, inasmuch as it disregarded the obligation which the receiver had of corresponding the donor.⁴ The word *donum*, on the other hand, entailed notions of generosity and liberality and excludes the need of remuneration.⁵ The term *munus* excluded any idea of reciprocity, and acknowledged instead a sense of acknowledgement.⁶ Unlike *donum*, *munus* marked “the gift that one gives, not the gift that one receives” and indicated the contractual obligation between two parties.⁷

From this point of view, it is possible to say that gift-giving in the Carpini expedition involved a “ritual practice through which the current value of a relationship may be communicated and maintained.”⁸ When Christian friars delivered their gifts to the Mongol rulers, they were in fact attempting to create a social bond which Mongol rulers invariably interpreted as a demonstration of fealty.⁹ Taking on this idea, the following pages will examine how the expeditionaries to Mongolia used gifts not only as a means of negotiating their passage across territories but also as a way of negotiating their own presence vis-à-vis Mongol society. After considering the idea of the gift as a diplomatic tool, the article will go on to examine the Mongol perception of gift-giving. Finally, it will focus on the knowledge that the Christian ambassadors had of the practice of gift-giving among Mongols and how they used it to their own benefit.

Gift-giving in the Carpini expedition is predicated on the dynamics of contractual exchange that took place in the Middle Ages. According to Marcel Mauss, acts of

3 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions Of Exchange In Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967).

4 Netta Zagagi, “Amatory Gifts and Payments: A Note on Munus, Donum, Data in Plautus,” *Glotta* 65 (1987): 130.

5 Zagagi, “Amatory Gifts and Payments,” 131.

6 Florin Curta, “Merovingian and Carolingian Gift-Giving,” *Speculum* 81 (1006): 678.

7 Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy (Posthumanities)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), x.

8 Helmuth Berking, *Sociology of Giving* (London: Sage, 1999), 5.

9 See Jacques Godbout, *The World of the Gift*, trans. Donald Winkler (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1998), 20.

gift-giving in the Middle Ages were mediated by a “necessary generosity” between magnates and kings, dependants and protectors, retainers or lords. Far from being interpreted as a ritual, reciprocal gift-giving is seen as “the main form of expression of relations between peers based on mutual trust.”¹⁰ The gift, however, was not a stable entity, but reconfigured the relation between givers and receivers, opening the door for a model of monetary exchange.¹¹ The arbitrariness of Carpini to either give or refuse to give certain gifts when prompted has an interesting correlation in the expedition of William of Rubruck in 1253. On that occasion William of Rubruck refused to give a gift to the great khan, causing great distress among Mongols. In his analysis of this episode, A. J. Watson has explained that William was in fact avoiding the obligations of gift-giving, but also avoiding a declaration of fealty.¹² By offering no gifts, William of Rubruck would in fact be offering a true gift of self, a gift that demanded nothing in return, and that excluded an action of self-interest.¹³

Gift-Giving in Diplomatic Exchange

Relations between Christians and Mongols in the Carpini expedition are expressed mainly through acts of gift-giving in contexts of diplomatic exchange. According to Adam of Salimbene, by September 1247 the friars were back in Cologne, where they led vast gatherings to tell their stories and to show the presents which the great khan had given to the pope. These gifts included a wooden cup with numerous nodes representing the faces of a woman, and a *capella* (possibly a dalmatic or chasuble for celebrating mass). He compared them to the wonder caused by a walnut tree in Apulia where the face of Christ had already appeared and which was inextricably linked to Frederick II:

Iste ostendit michi et aliis fratribus unam cuppam ligneam, quam portabat, ut daret domno pape; in qua cuppa erat in fundo cuiusdam pulcherrime regine ymago, ut vidi oculis meis, non artificialiter seu opere pictorio ibi depicta, sed ex virtute constellationis ibi impressa. Et si in centum partes secta fuisset, semper impressionem illius ymaginis habuisset. Et ne hoc alicui ad credendum impossibile videatur exemplo alio possumus demonstrare et fidem astruere. Nam imperator Fridericus in Apulia donavit quandam ecclesiam fratribus Minoribus, que erat antiquissima et destructa et ab omnibus derelicta; et in loco ubi altare fuit prius immense magnitudinis creverat arbor nucis, que secta in qualibet asside domini nostri Iesu Christi crucifixi habebat ymaginem. Et si cencies secata fuisset, totiens crucifixi ymaginem habuisset. Quod, quamvis

¹⁰ Florin Curta, “Merovingian and Carolingian Gift-Giving,” 675.

¹¹ J. A. Galloway, “One Market or Many? London and the Grain Trade of England,” in *Trade, Urban Hinterlands and Market Integration c. 1300–1600*, ed. J. A. Galloway (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2000), 23–42.

¹² A. J. Watson, “Mongol Inhospitability, or How to Do More with Less? Gift-Giving in William of Rubruck’s *Itinerarium*,” *Journal of Medieval History* 37 (2011): 90–101.

¹³ John Milbank, “The Ethics of Self-sacrifice,” *First-Things* 91 (1999): 33–38.

ex miraculo hoc demonstraverit Deus, eo quod in illo loco nata sit nucis arbor, in quo agni immaculati passio representatur in hostia salutari et sacrificio reverendo, tamen ex virtute constellationis tales impressiones posse fieri aliqui asseverant. Item idem frater Iohannes dixit nobis, quod pulcherrimam capellam portabat ad donandum domno pape. Et appellabat capellam, ut nobis exposuit, omnia pontificalia paramenta, que ad missam celebrandam diebus sollemnibus necessario requiruntur.¹⁴

[He showed me and the friars a wooden cup that we had brought as a present for the pope, in the bottom of which I saw with my own eyes the image of a beautiful queen not painted but formed or made in any artificial way, but “by the influence of stars.” And if you cut it a hundred times, it would still keep the same image. And so that no one may fall in disbelief, I can give you another example, and maintain credibility. For Emperor Frederick had given to the Brothers Minor in Apulia a very old church, all ruined and deserted; and in the space where the altar had been, there had grown up a nut-tree of incredible size. Cut lengthwise, each section presented the face of Christ, and if you had cut it a hundred times, a hundred times would the image have appeared. Which even God demonstrated with a miracle but which the tree having grown in that place where was wont to be renewed the Passion of the spotless Lamb in the saving host and venerable sacrifice. Yet there are some of the firm opinion that it may have been caused by the influence of a constellation. In addition, Father John told us that he was carrying a beautiful cape as a present to the pope. As he told us, they call cape any papal robe required to celebrate mass on solemn days.]¹⁵

Neither Carpini nor Benedict mention these gifts. The meaning of the friars' visit to Cologne is further complicated by the fact that a few weeks later, on October 3, the people of the German city would celebrate the declaration of William II of Holland as king of Germany, in detriment of Frederick II who had been excommunicated on Palm Sunday, 1239. Either reflecting or forging a coincidence, Adam of Salimbene saw the arrival of the friars as an opportunity to make his case against the emperor and described the wonder of the Mongolians gifts as a mockery of Frederick's lack of piety and common sense.

Comparing the marvel of the gifts to the prodigies that had appeared in a church reconstructed by Frederick II in Apulia, Adam of Salimbene attributed them to an *opus stellarum*, an act of sorcery. This declaration played well with the reputation that Frederick II had of being highly superstitious.¹⁶ The lack of evidence as to these prodigies seems to support this point. Having hinted at Frederick's ability to distinguish magic from reality, Adam of Salimbene was quick to stress the importance of Mongol gifts as

¹⁴ Adam de Salimbene, *Cronica fratris Salimbene de Adam ordinis Minorum. Monumenta Germaniae Historia. Scriptores (in Folio)*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, vol. 32 (Hannover, 1913), 206.

¹⁵ All translations in this essay are my own.

¹⁶ Giovanni Crocione, *Le tradizioni popolari nella letteratura italiana* (Florence: Olschki, 1970), 111. The term *opus stellarum* was widely attributed to Ptolemy. Roger Bacon later included it in his works: “anima sapiens adjuvabit opus stellarum, quemadmodum seminator fortitudines naturales, unde et nociva potet repellere, et utilia promovera” (a wise soul will help the work of the stars, just

vital elements of diplomacy and a living proof of the papal expedition to Mongolia. Drawing this on scriptural authority, Adam of Salimbene explained the meaning of these presents as indications of Mongolian acquiescence, and used two biblical passages from the Book of Proverbs to explain that the gifts were a diplomatic present (*Donum hominis dilatat viam ejus / et ante principes spacium ei facit* [A gift opens the way / and ushers the giver into the presence of the great])¹⁷ and a sign of submission (*Multi colunt personam potentis / et amici sunt dona tribuentis* [Many seek the favour of a generous man, / and everyone is a friend to a man who tributes]).¹⁸

Gift-Giving from a Mongol Perspective

A look into papal records reveals that even though the wooden cup may have been an exceptional piece, silk capes were not an uncommon gift to Christian friars during their expeditions to Mongolia. A look into the inventory of the papal treasure made by Boniface VIII in 1295 reveals among other objects a *panno tartarico* or dalmatic in light green (1540), and a wooden cup with a silver rim, reminiscent of the Mongolian burlwood tea bowls (1619).¹⁹ Authors like Thomas Allsen and Lauren Arnold have identified the *panno tartarico* with the *nasij*, a silk cloth to which golden ornaments are added, usually on the weft. The *nasij* was so desired by the Mongols for wearing and gift-giving that they enslaved whole villages of Muslim weavers of the cloth.²⁰

The presence of numerous samples of *panno tartarico* in royal treasures and inventories around Europe suggests that the *panno tartarico* was undoubtedly a diplomatic gift.²¹ The meaning of this gift can be inferred from a passage in Benedict the Pole's *Relatio*. According to Benedict, the friars saw over five thousand men who paid homage

as one who sows facilitates the forces of nature, and this allows him to reject harmful things and to promote useful ones) (Roger Bacon, *Opus maius ad Clementem IV, Pontificem Romanum*, (London, 1733), 247.

17 Prov. 18:16. All biblical texts in this essay are taken from the *Bibliba Vulgata Clementina*, ed. Michael Tweeddale (2005).

18 Prov. 19:6.

19 Arch. Seg. Vat. Indice 4, fol. 50. Cf. Émile Molinier. "Inventaire du trésor du Saint-Siège sous Boniface VIII (1295)," *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes* 49 (1888), 226–37. Marco Antonio Boldetti lists a dozen dalmatics that Pope Boniface VIII donated to the church of Anagnina. Marco Antonio Boldetti, *Osservazioni sopra i cimiteri de'santi martiri ed antichi christiani di Roma* (Rome, 1720), 306.

20 Lauren Arnold, *Princely Gifts and Papal Treasures: The Franciscan Mission to China and its Influence on the Art of the West, 1250–1350* (San Francisco: Desiderata Press Art, 1999), 36; Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3. The *capella* was possibly related to the Mongolian *deel*, a loose calf-length tunic made of one piece of material. It has long sleeves, and changes in colour and material from one group to the other: Paula L. W. Sabloff, *Modern Mongolia: Reclaiming Genghis Khan*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 76.

21 Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*, 22. Cf. Susan Wise Bauer, *The History of the Medieval World: From the Conversion of Constantine to the First Crusade* (New York: Norton, 2010), 37.

to the great khan, clad in luxurious robes to attend the festivities: “inter quos dicti fratres numerabantur, induti et ipsi desuper tunicas suas baldakino, prout necessitas urgebat, quia nulli nuntiorum nisi adcurate vesti vultum regis electi et coronati licuit intueri” (those among which the friars were included, were dressed with an honour cloth over their robes, according to the demands of the situation. Because none of the ambassadors were allowed to see the face of the newly elected and crowned king unless they were properly dressed).²²

To the Mongols, the acceptance of gifts implied a diplomatic acknowledgement on the part of the Europeans of their submission to Mongol rule.²³ In fact, the act of giving luxury presents responded not to an act of kindness, but to a necessity of a society basing its power not on territorial possession but on “the acquisition and retention of followers.” According to Allsen, these gifts were necessities in their political culture:

For the Mongolian rulers, as for many others, the creation of a following required a sustained system of what might be called conspicuous redistribution. And once started, such presentations, like the Roman bread and circuses, essentially expenditures on legitimacy and loyalty, could not be halted or even significantly reduced, and typically became a permanent and heavy drain on the treasury. Indeed, for the nomads at least, the imperial treasury was essentially a mechanism or the redistribution of luxuries, most especially cloth and clothing.²⁴

The meaning of gift-giving in Mongolian society was further supported by the fact that Mongols used the same word to denote the ideas of “peace” and “subjection.” According to Peter Jackson, Mongols embraced an ideology of universal subjection. Every ruler was *de iure* subject to the Mongols, and whoever opposed them was a rebel. “In fact,” writes Jackson, “the Turkish word for ‘peace’ was also used to express subjection (il/el): there could be no peace with the Mongols in the absence of subjection.”²⁵ Consequently, the meaning of the presents must be interpreted, at least from the point of view of the Mongols, as an act of sovereignty that was consistent with the tone of the letter that Great Khan Güyük sent to the pope. In this letter, Güyük demanded that the pope come to him and prove that his desire for peace (i.e. submission) was a genuine move. This in turn would comply with the divine support that had allowed the conquest of the Mongols:

From the rising of the sun to its setting, all the lands have been made subject to me. Who could do this contrary to the command of God? Now you should say with a sincere heart: “I will submit and serve you / Thou thyself, at the head of all the Princes, come at once to serve and wait upon us! At that time I shall

22 Benedictus Polonus, “Relatio de itinere fratrum minorum at Tartaros,” in *Relation des Mongols ou Tartares*, ed. M. D’Avezac (Paris, 1838), 381–82.

23 Arnold, *Princely Gifts and Papal Treasures*, 119.

24 Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*, 104.

25 Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), 46.

recognize your submission. If you do not observe God's command, and if you ignore my command, I shall know you as my enemy."²⁶

The disparity of interpretations of the Mongol gifts points, on the other hand, to a problem of meaning. As the Salimbene rendition tells us, presents are not mere exchanges of gifts, but call for a categorical representation of social relations where the gift is merely a commodity capable of eliciting social forms of discourse. In his effort to interpret the meaning of Güyük's letters, Salimbene did not hesitate to associate him with the perceived weakness of Frederick II, and connect it with a number of popular traditions often dismissed as forms of popular superstition. Eliciting a correct interpretation of the gift would thus guard Christians against the perils of irrational fear and credulity.

The Purification of Gifts

Likewise, for Mongolians the gift was a vehicle for spiritual power and had the potential to destroy the person who received it. In order to cast away all evil, gifts had to go through a process of ritual purification involving the passing between two fires. Fire-worship is well attested in the thirteenth century.²⁷ There is little doubt that while for the Mongols the crossing of fire was intended to drive away any spirits occupying their guests, the Christian friars excluded such a perception.²⁸

The exact meaning of this ritual remained unknown to Christian envoys, who nevertheless insisted on narrating it as a key element of their interaction with Mongol chieftains. Furthermore, the way in which the Carpini and Benedict narrative was written suggests that Benedict would provide a lengthy oral explanation on this passage. Both Carpini and Benedict consider purification as an act of superstition. Both authors locate the episode upon their encounter with Batu, at the beginning of their journey, just as they enter Mongol territory:

Ministri itaque Bati, postulata ab eis receperunt munera, scilicet quadraginta pelles castorum et octoginta pelles taxonum; quae munera portata sunt inter duos ignes ab eis sacros, et Fratres coacti sunt sequi munera, quia sic mos est apud Tartaros expiare nuncios et munera per ignem.²⁹

[And Bati's subordinates, having demanded gifts from them, that is forty beaver skins and eighty badger skins, they passed the gifts between two fires, and demanded that the Friars follow the presents, for this is a custom among Tartars, to purify ambassadors and presents through fire.]

²⁶ Christopher Dawson, *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the 13th and 14th Centuries* (London: Sheed Ward, 1980), 85.

²⁷ Walter Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, trans. Geoffrey Samuel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 69.

²⁸ Michael Burgan, *Empire of the Mongols* (New York: Infobase, 2009), 88.

²⁹ Benedictus, "Relatio de itinere fratrum minorum at Tartaros," 379.

In his explanation of this episode, Carpini presented the circulation of gifts between fires as part of the superstitions of the Mongols, comparable to their alleged veneration of the moon and their natural fear of fire:

Solem etiam dicunt esse matrem luna, eo quod lumen a sole recipiat. Et vt breuiter dicam per ignem credunt omnia purificari. Vnde cum nuncii veniunt ad eos, vel principes, vel qualescunque persona, oportet ipsos et munera qua portant per duos ignes transire, vt purificentur. Item si cadit ignis de coelo super pecora, vel super homines, quod ibidem saepe contingit, siue aliquid talium euenerit eis, per quod immundos seu infortunatos se reputant, oportet similiter per incantatores mundari. Et quasi omnem spem suam in talibus posuerunt.³⁰

[They say that their mother is the moon, receiving her light from the sun. And to abbreviate I will say that they believe that everything can be purified with fire. Hence when the ambassadors come to them, or even princes, or anybody, they make them cross between two fires, so that they get purified. Likewise, if fire comes from the sky on their cattle or on a man, something that happens quite often, they consider themselves soiled or unfortunate, and magicians must cleanse them. And so they rested all their beliefs in such things.]

Purification by fire was no simple matter, and it also required the involvement of the gift-giver. From what we can read in the Carpini and Rubruck accounts, the ritual of gift purification required the giver to also pass between fires, a religious ritual that Christian envoys invariably perceived as an offence. One of the clearest explanations comes from Philip IV of France's expedition to Arghun in 1289. In his response, Arghun expressed surprise over the delegates' refusal to kneel before him, as he was no Christian ruler, and he said that "if this was by the king's wish he had nothing to say, and that everything that pleased the king would please him also, but he desired that he send him envoys in the future who would salute him in the fashion customary at his Court, without crossing fire."³¹

Another to encounter a similar situation was William of Rubruck. Travelling a few years after Carpini (from 1253 to 1255), it was told how when Andrew of Longjumeau too arrived at a Mongol camp, he was asked to pass the gifts between two fires, as were his men. On that occasion, William was spared the ritual because he himself was carrying no gifts:

Unde hoc fuit duplex causa quare oportuit fratrem Andream et socios eius ire inter ignes: tum quia portabant exennia, tum quia illa spectabant ad illum qui iam defunctus fuerat, scilicet Keuchan. A me nichil requisitum est de talibus quia nichil portavi.³²

30 Carpini, Giovanni Plan, "Historia Mongalorum," in *Relation des Mongols ou Tartares*, ed. M. D'Avezac (Paris, 1838), 61.

31 Henry Howorth Hoyle, *History of the Mongols from the 9th to the 19th century*, vol. 3 (London, 1876), 352.

32 William of Rubruck. *Itinerarium. Relation des voyages de Guillaume de Rubruck, Bernard le Sage et Saewuld*, ed. Francisque Michel (Paris, 1839), 167.

[This was the reason why Friar Andrew and his companions had to pass through fires; they bore presents, and they were destined for one who was already dead, Keu Chan. Nothing of the sort was required of me, because I brought nothing.]

The Giver's Worth

William's explanation of the ritual purification act indicates to what extent the gift influenced the giver's worth and was perceived as a valid interlocutor. The act of gift-giving asserted the friar's status as an ambassador but demanded a proportionate value congruent with existing social standards. In this sense, the Franciscan friars were encouraged to use their social capital. The performative excellence of gift-giving became the procedural drive, key to the emergence of the friars as respected men among Mongols. The value of the gift hovered over the Franciscan friars as a constant reminder of their obligation as gift-bearing representatives of the Christian pope.

A major way in which the Franciscan friars were instructed to exhibit their worth was by producing lavish gifts for Mongol rulers. A look into the papal delegations to the Mongols reveals, in fact, that gift-giving was not an unusual feat, but caused frequent misunderstandings. According to the sources, we know that Pope Gregory X sent presents to Qublay around 1275 and that Pope Nicholas IV did the same around 1291. Likewise, Pope Benedict XII sent Giovanni de Marignolli with a horse to Emperor Shundi, a gesture that the Mongol perceived as a favourable omen, making an artist paint the animal at once.³³ We also know from Rubruck that Andrew of Longjumeu travelled in 1249 with expensive gifts and treasures from the pope. His gifts included a chapel tent, lined with scenes representing the Annunciation and other events of sacred history, "pour leur montrer et enseigner comment ils devaient croire" (to show and teach them how they should believe).³⁴ Longjumeau was sent back to Louis IX with the more customary letters of ultimatum demanding further tributes. After such a reception, Louis IX and Innocent IV were keen not to reinforce this impression with future envoys.³⁵

While crossing territories involved toll-paying, upon their encounter with the Mongol rulers the Franciscan friars were encouraged to produce gifts congruent with their status and the importance of the ruler who had sent them. One of the clearest examples occurs upon Carpini's encounter with Corenza or Curoniza, a commander of troops among the Kalmuks, which Carpini describes as lord of all those Tartars camped in front of the people of the west.³⁶ Having arrived at his camp, the friars were first asked what they would produce in terms of presents. They replied that the pope was sending no presents, but they offered to give them some of the possessions they were bringing for their own personal use. They were then met with disbelief and stupor: if they came from such a great man, how was it that they produced such insignificant presents?

³³ Arnold, *Princely Gifts and Papal Treasures*, 95

³⁴ Jean de Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, ed. Natalis de Wailly (Paris, 1874), 133.

³⁵ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 30.

³⁶ Henry Hoyle Howorth, *History of the Mongols: The So-Called Tartars of Russia and Central Asia*, vol. 2 (London, 1880), 69.

Tertia die pervenerunt at ducem unius exercitus qui prefecture erat octo milibus armatorum; cuius ministri postulantes et recipients munera ipsos at ducem suum Curoniza perduxerunt. Insuper multa munera tam a principibus quam ab illis maioribus et minoribus petuntur ab eis, et si non dantur vilipendunt eos, imo quasi pro nichilo habent eos; et si a magnis viris mittuntur, nolunt ab eis modicum munus habere, sed dicunt: a magno homine venitis, et tam modicum datis? Unde accipere dedignantur: et si nuncio bene volunt facere facta sua, oportet eos dare maiora.³⁷

[On the third day eight thousand of the armed ones came to the duke belonging to the army of one of the prefectures, whose legates after demanding and receiving presents led in front of the chief Curoniza. Moreover, they asked for presents from the principal ones but also from the rich and the poor, and if they did not produce them, they were despised, and they considered them to be of no importance. And if they encountered great forces, they would not accept a modest gift, saying: you come from a great man and you give so little? Whereas they refuse to accept: and if the legates want to carry on their mission, they must give them better presents.]

The stupor of the Mongolians of Curoniza underscores the idea that a gift was never voluntary, and that gifts were given and reciprocated in set ways. Marking the transition from an economy of gift exchange to a monetary system, gift-giving allowed the establishment of relations of mutual trust in which prestations were exchanged for gifts. For Georges Duby, the society of this system was founded on “an infinitely varied network for circulating the wealth and services occasioned by necessary generosity: gifts of dependents to their protectors, of kin folk to brides, of friends to party-givers, of magnates to kings, of kings to aristocrats of all of the rich to all of the poor.”³⁸ Conversely, the gifts made to the rulers were not also an expression of their recognition, but also a guarantee of prosperity for their entire people.³⁹

The ritual of gift-giving is again repeated when the friars arrive at the court of the new great khan. According to Carpini, the ceremony of coronation involved a complex ritual where the over four thousand subjects of the great khan produced a variety of gifts. The coronation of Güyük lasted four days and included a deliverance of gifts to all those whom the great khan sought to please. In keeping with its solemnity, Güyük's enthronement on was attended by a large number of foreign ambassadors: the grand duke of Moscow, Yaroslav II of Vladimir; the incumbents for the throne of Georgia; the brother of the king of Armenia, Sempad the Constable; the future seljuk sultan of Rum, Kilij Arslan IV; and ambassadors of the Abbasid caliphate and of the Delhi sultanate.⁴⁰

³⁷ Carpini, “*Historia Mongalorum*,” 275.

³⁸ Georges Duby, *Guerriers et paysans (VII–XIIe siècle): Premier essor de l'économie européenne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 62.

³⁹ Florin Curta, “Merovingian and Carolingian Gift-Giving,” 374.

⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Roux, *L'Asie centrale, histoire et civilization* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 312.

The ritual of gift-giving played an important role in the ceremony and was perceived as part of a submission ritual. At a conceptual level, gift-giving reinforced the idea of ritual veneration and allowed attendees to Güyük's coronation to express the terms of their relation to the newly invested great khan. This is expressed by Carpini in no uncertain terms when he writes: "Cum autem pervenissemus ad ipsum, fecit longe a se nobis ponere stationes, et misit ad nos servos suos procuratores, qui quererent a nobis cum quo eidem inclinare vellemus, hoc est dicere, quemvis ei munera dare" (As soon as we reached him, he ordered us to place our tents far away from him, and he sent his commissioners so that we could tell them what was it that we wanted to bow with, that is, giving what presents).

Perhaps driven by this conviction, the friars refused to grant any gifts to the great khan. Citing his own words before Corenza, Carpini explains that he had no presents (*munera*) from the pope, as he himself had decided to send the friars. Following suit, he acknowledges that he produced some presents to their representative Eldegay, establishing a clear distinction between a possible tribute and the acknowledgement of a toll that would allow them to proceed with their mission:

Cui respondimus ut prius Corenze dixeramus, scilicet quod dominus Papa non miserat munera, sed nos de hiis que habebamus, de gratia Dei et domini Pape pro expensis, ipsum, sicut possumus, volumus honorare. Datis muneribus et acceptis, interrogavit a nobis procurator ipsius, qui Eldegai appellatur, causam adventus nostri.⁴¹

[To whom we responded what we had already said to Corenza, that the pope had not sent any presents, but that we would be happy to oblige with those that we had by the grace of God and at the expense of the pope. Having given and accepted the presents, the agent—whose name is Eldegai—asked us the reason for our journey.]

Refusing Gifts

Gift-refusal was rooted, as we have seen, in a careful distinction between toll and tribute. Unlike the tributes that the friars refused to pay, tolls were always made in species and involved the action of an intermediary with limited powers over his territory. This aspect is made clear upon their encounter at the camp of Batu, at which point they produced forty beaver skins and eighty badger skins. The fact that Batu is presented as a gate-keeper in the Volga justifies the payment of gifts and constitutes also a recognition of status. From there on, the friars will be assured free entrance to Güyük's camp.

Toll payment in the Carpini expedition constituted an acknowledgement of the power which will insure the favourable outcome of the mission. As they narrated their encounter with different chiefs, the Franciscan friars were careful to establish the relation that they bore with the great khan. Marking a principle of authority, these

41 Carpini, "Historia Mongalorum," 348.

genealogies allowed the friars to establish principles of legitimacy and to justify toll-paying to certain groups over others. This aspect gains special relevance in the proximity of Kiev. Having come across some men who pretended to be there on behalf of Corenza, the friars accused them of lying and of trying to acquire gifts which the friars were carrying along.

Ipse enim miserat contra nos in Kioviam quosdam satellites suos, mendaciter qui nobis dicerenret ex parte Corenze quos essemus nuncio et quod veniremu, ad ipsum; et hoc ideo faciebat quamvis non esse verum, ut posset a nobis munera extorquere.⁴²

[Indeed it was him who sent against us some of his attendants, to lie to us and say that they were coming from Corenza and to ask whom we were representing and what we came for. And even this was not true. They did it so that they could extract gifts from us.]

The payment of tolls or the act of gift-giving constituted, as we have seen, a sign of recognition, but it clashed with the friars' refusal to produce any papal gifts.

In a recent article on gift-giving in Rubruck's *Itinerarium*, Anthony Watson has studied William of Rubruck's unsuccessful attempts to negotiate his way through the Mongol hierarchy with gifts of food. Using Rubruck's account of his journey, Watson analyses the utility of gifts of food across different cultural contexts and concludes that Rubruck ultimately gained status among the Mongols through his 'gift of self,' demonstrating how social standing can be negotiated through finding the appropriate cultural grammar for gift-giving.

The friar's refusal of gift-giving rested on the Christian doctrine of papal submission and the need to acknowledge earthly limitations of power. Refusal of gift-giving has a clear scriptural precedent in the book of Isaiah, where the acceptance of a gift engages the need of retribution: "Omnes diligunt munera, sequuntur retributiones" (they all love bribes and chase after gifts).⁴³ Unlike an act of gift-giving, the refusal to grant a gift denied the recipient the right to dispose of the gift and the meaning associated with it. By refusing to give gifts to the Mongol ruler, the Franciscans acknowledged a lack of meaning in their mission and established themselves as the only valid interlocutors. They were henceforth the only ones who could explain the intentions of the pope.

For Jean Luc Marion, the refusal of the gift interrupts the normal succession of events and constitutes a primary way to find the pure gift.⁴⁴ If one of the agents refuses to reciprocate or accept the gift, the archaic cycle of gift-giving is broken. In this sense, the "gift of self" granted by the friars revealed an effort to gain social status among Mongols and was predicated as an attempt to obliterate the obligations of gift-giving.

⁴² Carpini, "Historia Mongalorum," 346.

⁴³ Isaiah 1:23.

⁴⁴ Jean Luc Marion, *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 74–78.

Conclusion

Reaching beyond the scope of this article, it would be important to position the friars’ approach in the context of gift-giving in medieval Europe. The point is that the Franciscan friars seemingly were unable to produce a different perspective on gift-giving, one that might combine the rituals of vassalage coming from the gift-giver—as was customary in Western societies—with the Mongolian rituals of lordship signalled by the lavish expenditure of the great khan. As reflected in this essay, gift-giving in the Carpini expedition provides important insights into the development of Christian–Mongol relations in the mid-thirteenth century and a useful tool to channel social and diplomatic relations. Inasmuch as it evoked related social practices, gift-giving also expressed the need to grapple with cultural meaning and understanding. The meaning and use of gifts resided not in a unitary form of exchange, transaction, or tribute, but in a metaphorical process that exposed relations of dependency and fealty.

When the Franciscan friars refused to give gifts to the great khan, they brought gift-giving to the forefront and enabled their relationship with Mongol rulers to come under review. Negotiation within the ritual of gift-giving suggests finer nuances of meaning in Christian–Mongol relations that go beyond mere cultural differences. Gift-giving in the Carpini expedition helped portray the Franciscan friars as neither subjects nor dominating persons. As such, the Mongolian notions of gift-giving were increasingly challenged by more flexible, differentiating and contextualizing approaches conducted by the Franciscan friars that searched for new ways to contextualize the difficult and complex relationship between East and West. In that sense, the unacknowledged developments of gift-giving and the relative sacredness of this act may be taken to confirm the paradoxical features of gift-giving, and the puzzling ability of gifts to challenge existing relations.

Gift-Giving

	Carpini	Benedictus
Gift as sign of submission	• Mongol subjects give to image of the emperor (224) • Gifts as tribute (286) • The great khan receives presents (286) • Presents are to be given to the great khan (306) • The legitimate child of the great khan receives tributes (309) • Giving presents is like bowing (348) • The subjects give presents to the great khan (360)	• Gifts are tributes given by subjects to the great khan (381)

Gift as safe conduct	• Friars give presents to Mongols, who pass them between two fires (306) • The friars have to give presents if they want to continue their business (341) • The friars cannot continue unless they produce gifts (342)	• Ministers pass gifts between two fires (379)
Required gifts	• Mongols demand presents from everyone. A big person gives great gifts (274) • The great khan demands presents from his subjects (306) • The friars are told they need to give presents (310) • The friars are extorted (342) • Corenza's men require gifts (379)	• Ministers demand gifts and receive them (379)
