



## QUE(E)RYING MONGOLS

What might Sinor's (1973, 1975, 1983, 1989) and Jackson's (2000) review essays of Mongol Studies look like if the field were to be(come) the site of multiple theoretical interventions? How might Saunders's (1971), Morgan's (1986), and Marshall's (1994) historical overviews of the Mongol Empire be(come) altered by the insights of theorists? What might scholars working from the perspectives of postcolonialism, gender studies, queer discourse, or monster theory (to name but a few) contribute towards collections of essays edited by Schmilewski (1991) or Morgan and Amitai-Preiss (1999)? Despite Jackson's comment that 'interest in the Mongol empire has grown noticeably in recent years' (2000, 189), the field remains almost untouched by theoretical analysis (although see Burger, 2000; Lomperis, 2001).

This is perhaps due to a lack of interest in theory on the part of Mongolists, and in Mongol Studies in the case of theorists. Overlords of 'the largest continuous land empire that has so far existed' (Morgan, 1986, 5), at the height of their power during the thirteenth century the Mongols 'fastened their yoke on China and Persia and reigned from Syria and Korea and from Russia to Annam' (Saunders, 1971, 28). This paper provides some brief remarks on Mongol Studies and posits where and how theory might be useful for sustained readings of certain themes and sources. In agreement with Michael O'Rourke's introductory view that 'queer medieval studies tends to be culturally myopic,' this paper concludes by offering a few suggestions as to how interrogations of Mongol-related themes and sources might enrich the efforts of queer medievalists.

According to Paul Strohm (2000), 'a text cannot fully reveal itself, unless pressured by questions formed somewhere outside of its own orbit of assumptions' (165). He is particularly excited by the challenges posed by 'the provisionality of theoretically abetted conclusions,' because for him, theory offers 'an opportunity to return to [the past] with new analytical strategies and better-honed tools' (181). Those brandishing the methodologies of the theoretician, however, should take care to elide that sloppy theorising referred to by Frantzen (1996, 261–3), and attend rigorously to texts' historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Scholars interested in pursuing theoretical examinations must be aware of the linguistic mastery required for navigating Mongol Studies. Sources abound in Latin, Persian, Mongolian, Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Russian, Turkish, and Armenian among others, and many of them remain untranslated and scattered in diverse locations. Those eager to conduct close textual analyses should also be aware that many debates are on-going about, for example, the authorship of certain texts (Ostrowski, 1991), while new sources are only now being discovered (Guzman, 2003).

Although Mongol Studies has moved on considerably since Marsh-Ewards termed the Mongols 'atrocious, flat-faced, yellow skinned demons' (1939, 386), Saunders's *The History of the Mongol Conquests* remains, alongside Morgan's *The Mongols*, 'the ideal introduction to the field' (Morgan, Saunders's book sleeve). This is in spite of Saunders' staunchly conservative delineation between the Mongols' barbarism and Western civilization, and his many morally-imbued statements, such as 'For the rivers of blood [Chinggis Khan] shed, no forgiveness is possible' (28). Race and ethnicity studies (Hahn, 2001) will help to unearth and unhinge the normative dynamics underpinning such representations of the Mongols. Cohen's (1996), Shildrick's (2002), and Kearney's (2003) work on the monstrous, alongside Kristeva's (1982) theorising of the abject, will open up the work of Jackson (2001), Ruotsala (2001), Schmieder (1994), Klopprogge (1993), Bezzola (1974), and Connell (1973) for further analysis. Kruger's (1993), Dinshaw's (1999), and Shildrick's (2002) focus on touch and its attendant mysophobia will prove useful when interrogating the fearful panic (Sweeney, 1994) and moral revulsion invoked by the Mongols in their enemies. Such approaches will also stretch and deepen McNeill's (1977) treatment of the Mongols and changing disease patterns. Dinshaw's (1999) attention to cross-temporal inquiry will provide a useful resource to draw on for those who pursue analyses of the fears surrounding the locatability and uncontainability of nomadic Mongols and modern terrorists.

Recent collections of essays, such as *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (2000), will provide frameworks within which to develop Lupprian's (1981) and Pelliot's (1922–3, 1924, 1932) treatments of papal-Mongol relations. 'A postcolonial Middle Ages' would, according to Cohen, 'decenter Europe' (7). What new points of departure might postcolonial discourse provide for those exploring the Mongols in Persia (Morgan, 1994), India (Jackson, 1999), China (Franke, 1994), or Russia (Halperin, 1985); their drive towards ruling the world (Masson Smith, Jr., 1994); or the organization of their empire (Morgan, 1982)? Kruger's (1993, 1997) work on the con- and di-vergences between racial, religious, and sexual queerness, as applied to Jews and Muslims, is inspiring for those building on articles by Yuval (1998) and Meanache (1996), or the Mongols' engagement with, and effect on, other non-shamanistic religions (DeWeese, 1978/9; Ruotsala, 2001). Following Kruger's (1998) and Strohm's (2001) example, what might psychoanalytic criticism lend to those wishing to learn more about propagandists and travel writers than they knew about themselves?

Reading Butler (1990, 1993) will assist those interested in exploring how bodies were gendered, sexualized, and de-sexualized under Mongol rule. Recent trends in masculinity studies (Cohen and Wheeler, 1997; Lees, 1994), with its stress on multivalent masculinities always in the process of 'becoming,' will build on existing biographies of Chinggis Khan (Ratchnevsky, 1991; De Hartog, 1989), the much-maligned founder of the Mongol Empire, and his descendants (for example, Allsen, 1987). Might theoretical explorations of Christ's body by Rambuss (1998), Epp (2001), and Mills (2002) prove enlightening for delving into the iconic, near deified, status of the first Mongol great khan? And what might theoretical interventions into apocalypticism (Pippin,

1999; Giffney, 2003) tell us about nomadic corporeal embodiment and representations of the Mongols as Ishmaelites, tribes of Gog and Magog, *nuncios* of Satan, and satellites of Antichrist? Sedgwick's (1985) work on homosocial bonds and essays collected in O'Donnell and O'Rourke (2003) will provide ideas for those considering the complexity of relations between men within (subjects) and without (envoys) the Mongol Empire. Work by feminists such as Salisbury (1996) and Bennett (2000) will add to Ryan's (1998) treatment of Mongol wives and Holmgren's (1986) findings on marriage and inheritance practices. Queer theory will help us to read 'between the lines,' (Frantzen, 1996) to look at the implicit (if not explicit) references to Mongol sexual perversity and general depravity in propagandistic texts, for example those collected by Matthew Paris. Monographs by Grosz (1995), Foucault (1978), and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) will open up discussions on how desire is constructed, re-constructed, and de-constructed in, on, and through writings dealing with the Mongols by thirteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century historians. What might the essays in Dowson's 'Queer Archaeologies' (2000) or Burger's and Kruger's *Queering the Middle Ages* (2001) offer to those wishing to queer the entire field of Mongol Studies?

How might Ruotsala's (2001, 110–30), Buell's (1990), and Guzman's (1991) findings on the reputed drinking and eating practices of the Mongols be theorized by those wishing to unravel bodies and their pleasures? What might scholars of lesbian and gay histories (Murray, 1996; Johansson and Percy, 1996; Sautman and Sheingorn, 2001) take from the apparent silence in Mongol-related sources on the subject of same-sex desire between the Mongols or their subjects? Dinshaw argues that 'there was a web of cultural relations operating in Chaucer's world that we would now call heterosexuality, and that it operated as a norm' (1995, 82). How might her theory be applied, explored, or debunked by considering it in relation to the Mongol Empire? Particularly interesting in the context of the Mongols is Cohen's (2003) and Probyn's (1996) theorizing of the 'the inhuman circuit' or human/animal relations. What might Probyn's thoughts on 'becoming-horse' and Cohen's concentration on the 'chivalric circuit' bring to Sinor's (1977) and Kolbas's (2002) pieces on the Mongols and their horses? What new avenues of thought might Haraway's (1991; see also Hables Gray, 2001) cyborg theory provide when considering Mongol military techniques, and the multiple possible identities arising through the blending of the Mongols' flesh with their equipment during engagements (Masson Smith, Jr., 1993–4)? In a field renowned for its scholarly rigor and attention to detail, what might close theoretical readings of texts, such as the *Historia*, *Historia Tartarorum*, or *Tartar Relation*, bring to the work of Sweeney (1982), Guzman (1972), or Giffney (2003)?

Up until now, I have discussed what theoretical approaches might bring to Mongol Studies, but how might essays on Mongol-related topics enrich collections edited by Cohen (and Wheeler), Burger and Kruger (2001), Bullough and Brundage (1996), or Lochrie et al (1997)? What might a collection like Blackmore's and Hutcheson's *Queer Iberia* (1999) look like if it were to have the Mongols as its focus? What would reviewers be saying about Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval* (1999) or *Chaucer's Queer Nation* by Burger (2003) if they

were to have concentrated on the Mongols and not the *Canterbury Tales* (or Western texts)? Mongol-related topics would bring a welcome diversion from queer theorists' über-concentration on Old and Middle English literary texts, and tired puns on backsides and phalluses. A focus on Mongol-related themes would inject some cultural diversity, provide a pantheon of new sources and challenges, and finally loosen queer medieval studies from the umbilical cord of lesbian and gay studies (Giffney, 2003).

Michael O'Rourke concludes his paper by stating, 'We have not got (queer) medieval just yet;' I second this because, in Mongol Studies, we have not even got theoretical. How do we change this? Simply put, those in queer medieval studies, who are assembling special issues of journals or collections of essays, should cast a thought in the direction of the Mongol Empire if they wish to widen their purview, and commission a theoretically-engaged Mongol-related piece or two. Similarly, Mongolists should be welcoming of theoretically-astute criticism and be willing to engage with any new methodologies, which contribute towards bringing the past into sharper focus.

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