Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 47, 2-3, 2012
doi: 10.2478/v10121-012-0007-7

THE HOLY AND THE UNHOLY IN CHAUCER'S *SQUIRE'S TALE*

ANNA CZARNOWUS

University of Silesia, Katowice

ABSTRACT

As Richard Kieckhefer once noticed, "the holy" and "the unholy" were interlocking phenomena in the medieval culture. Such a perspective on religion and magic may, indeed, be seen in possible sources of Chaucer's *Squire's tale*, John Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum* and in *Historia Tartarorum*, attributed either to Benedict the Pole, a member of the 1245 papal mission to Mongols, or to the scribe, "C. de Bridia". Perhaps Carpini and Benedict projected their Christian perception of magic as connected with religion onto the Tartar world they experienced. The Mongol beliefs they related may have been the very convictions mentioned by Chaucer in the discussion of Cambuskyan's "secte". The tale then proceeds to a discussion of magic, but the magic there is no longer "unholy", as opposed to "the holy", but technological, manmade, and unnatural. The texts portray two stages in a medieval approach to magic, which were followed by the Renaissance condemnation of magic as heretical. In *Squire's tale* magic leads to the experience of wonder, which unites the community.

In his seminal text *The holy and the unholy: sainthood, witchcraft, and magic in late medieval Europe*, Richard Kieckhefer demonstrates that the boundary separating what we nowadays deem to be utterly different, the one between religion and magic, was less distinct before the modern age. He envisages the two spheres of life, the holy comprehended here as religion and the unholy understood, as in James Frazer's monumental *The golden bough* (2009), as magic rather than irreligiousness or even immorality; the two, the holy and the unholy, were seen as closely interlocking in medieval culture, whereas the early modern times with their idea of Reformation were the period which started to define them as distinct from each other (Kieckhefer 1994: 355-386). Those two areas of experience shall be central for us in our consideration of Chaucer's *Squire's tale*, which should be scrutinized against the background

provided by the historiography texts about missions to Tartary (Cornelia 1977: 81-89). One of them, *Historia Tartarorum*, has been attributed to the Franciscan missionary Benedict Polonus, even though the scribe signed himself as the mysterious "C. de Bridia".[1] John Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum* [sic!] used to be more widely read at the time it was written, but Benedict Polonus's text was equally reliable and more correct than John's in diverse aspects, including the linguistic one. It shall not be implied here that Chaucer must have been familiar with either of them, but, according to Cornelia, "Chaucer in his customs house would not have forgotten [Tartary of his day]" as he knew it both from his life as a diplomat and from some unspecified literary sources, perhaps even Carpini's one (1977: 87).

The proto-travelogue written by Benedict, a papal envoy to the Great Khan in 1247, resulted from the mission undertaken by John Carpini, Stephen of Bohemia, Ceslaus of Bohemia (if the two were not one and the same person) (Plezia 1971: 169) and Benedict Polonus from Wrocław (which later became known as Breslau). They travelled to the Coman territory, were introduced to Batu's court, and attended the assembly near Karakorum which elected Guyuk qagan.[2] Their mission consisted in gaining more knowledge about Europe's new enemies, including detailed information about their warfare, and attempting to convert Mongols due to the alleged possibilities created by the Nestorian Christianity coexistent with other religions there.[3] John's and Benedict's reports represent the holy and the unholy as inseparable from each other in the Tartar world, while such an attitude must have undergone a marked shift before Chaucer presented the Mongol religion and magic in *The Squire's tale*.[4]

---

1 The name "Tartars", widely used in the West, was a changed version of "Tatars", which in reality designated only one ethnic group within the state mechanism known as "the Mongol empire"; in Polish the name remained to be "Tatars" [*Tatarzy*], while in the Western languages it was transformed into the term reminiscent of the ancient Greek "Tartar".

2 The context of the mission has been described by Rachevilz (1971) and Plezia (1971).

3 The terms "Tartar" and "Mongol" are used interchangeably here, as in other sources on the subject, for the sake of convenience, because the two tribes were initially different not only culturally, but also ethnically (Mongols could be fair-haired).

4 Benedict's report was really written down by a scribe signing himself as "C. de Bridia", while the vernacular equivalent of "Bridia" has not been discovered by the scholars, not to mention any other information about that person; Plezia (1970: 19) thinks that the name might be another mistake made by the scribe, while he could have originated from "Vratislavia"; Plezia considers another option, "Brzeg", as improbable, since the Polish sources relate *Breg* or *Brega* as its Latin translations.

In Chaucer's tale, Cambuskyan, the ruler residing in "Sarray" (*V*: 9)[5], exemplifies a powerful Tartar leader and a character appropriately noble for the chivalric tale[6], despite his obstinacy in religious customs:

> This noble kyng was cleped Cambyuskan,
> Which in his tyme was of so greet remount
> That ther was nowher in no regioun
> So excellent a lord in alle thyng:
> Hym lakked noght that longeth to a kyng.
> As of the secte of which that he was born,
> He kepte his lay, to which that he was sworn;
> And therto he was hardy, wys, and riche,
> And pitou and just, alwey yliche;
> Sooth of his word, benign, and honorable;
> Of his corage as a centre stable;
> Yong, fresh and strong, in armes desirous
> As any bachelor of al his hous (*V*: 12-24)[7].

The similarity that is delineated between the Tartar ruler and a Western knight appears striking, but it is implied only to be undermined by the religious aspect of Cambuskyan's reign. The chivalric image of the ruler is subtly portrayed, but it is immediately challenged by the issue of his religious beliefs. His otherness is obscured by his Western-like manners, but the statement that "he kepte his lay" (*V*: 18) in the faith into which he was born annuls the transitory impression of sameness. His religion constitutes the law by which he lives and which he imposes onto his subjects. It appears to be more than a set of beliefs: it is rather a way of life that exists as a public issue rather than an intimate, private one.

Cambuskyan's obstinacy in observing the religious customs of old gives him rather the air of an intransigent Eastern ruler and one not easily swayed by the religious impulses coming from the outside. This does not reflect the earlier religious syncretism of Mongols, which had been for long disregarded even in the studies of their systems of beliefs. Their religion was visibly syncretic, since it would incorporate other influences on contact with them if it was politically justifiable. Shamanism and animism proved powerful within their system of beliefs, but the two were hardly the cornerstones of the Tartar faith in Chaucer's

---

5 DiMarco (2002: 63) writes that Sarai is "New Sarai, which, although founded by Berke (near present-day Volgograd, on the Akhtuba branch of the Volga) only became the capital and court city of the [Golden] Horde with Özbeg's accession to the throne".

6 The tale has been identified as a composite romance (Goodman 1983: 134) characteristic due to its interlace structure (Pearsall 2002: 138).

7 All the quotations from Chaucer's *The Squire's tale* come from Benson's edition (1987) and the number of the lines is subsequently given in brackets.

times.[8] The close links connecting faith and politics in that society culminated in the atmosphere of religious acceptance prevailing in Tartary. The tolerance, ostensible in contacts with the Christian missionaries, who were even allowed to preach to Mongols, ensued from the mentality of the steppe peoples, so flexible in their beliefs that they converted mainly in order to gain political benefits (Jackson 2005: 6). In the thirteenth century, when the pope repeatedly sent Franciscan and Dominican missions to Tartars, Nestorianism proved significant there again, since by then Nestorians had ceased to be marginalised by Mongol rulers. The fifth-century Eastern doctrine, emphasizing the double nature of Jesus, the divine and the human one (with Jesus being only a "house for God" at a specific period in his lifetime, whereas at other times Jesus and God remained two persons psychologically), was consistently viewed as a heresy both in Byzantium and in the church of Rome (Szymusiak – Starowieyski 1971: 290). On closer inspection, the existence of Nestorianism in Tartary could provide a glimmer of hope about the possibility of Mongol conversion. Nevertheless, even if the missionaries managed to convert some Mongols to Latin Christianity, the Westerners could easily detect the superficial nature of those transformations, which occurred for political reasons rather than out of some heretofore unsatisfied spiritual needs. The conversion to Christianity in Tartary proved, therefore, mostly temporary and could easily be substituted with another faith, once that faith occurred to be more propitious in the domain of politics.

As for religion in Chaucer, the primary ideas of "the secte of which that he was born" (*V*: 16) must have been grounded in the distinction into "Tengri", identified as the sky-god, and "Eke Etügen" [Mother Etügen], most probably an earth divinity. In the thirteenth-century proto-travelogues, their authors clearly insisted on the sameness between the Tartar religious system and Christianity in that Tengri was introduced by them to the European audience as very much similar to the monotheistic Christian God. Benedict displays his conviction about the centrality of Tengri in the following way: "They believe in one God, creator of things visible and invisible and giver in this world of good and evil alike" (*TR*, 88);[9] the fragment is very much like the one in Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum*, with minor differences (*HM*, 9).[10] Still, Benedict adds a remark suggesting the incommensurability of Tengri with Christian God due to the religious practices sur-

---

8 The scholarly perspective focusing on shamanism has been criticized by, for example, Humphrey (1994: 191-228).

9 The quotations from *Historia Tartarorum* are taken from Painter's edition and the page numbers, preceded by the abbreviation *TR*, are given in brackets after each quotation, see Painter (1965: 54-106).

10 The quotations from *Historia Mongalorum* are taken from Dawson's edition and the page numbers with the abbreviation *HM* are given in brackets after each quotation, see Carpine (1955: 3-72).

rounding the former: "But for all they do not worship Him as is right, for they have various idols" (*TR*, 88). An allusion to the Mongol paganism and the worship of minor deities is introduced here. It has to be remembered that the letter from Guyuk to the pope started with the phrase: "In the power of the eternal Tengri", which left the addressee no illusions about any similarity between the Christian God and the one god of the Mongols that Christians discussed.[11] Importantly, even the Buddhist religious system, officially introduced in Tartary in 1566, included multiple "tengris" rather than one deity by that name (Tulisow 2007: 28), treating them as heavenly people who were able to inhabit the bodies of human children, which allowed the latter even to live till the age of 100 (Tulisow 2007: 31). This exemplifies well the inadequacy of referring to Tengri as the one god of the Tartars. Furthermore, what Benedict superficially views as monotheism appears to be an instance of a specific dualism if we read Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum*, where "Itoga", ostensibly an earth divinity to whom Tartars "offer … many oblations and the first portion of their food and drink" (*HM*, 12), features as an equally revered god.[12] Nevertheless, even Carpini does not interpret the coexistence of the two deities correctly: Tengri and Etügen should have been identified as a couple who gave rise to the whole creation, while the identification of Tengri as a sky-god stemmed from the etymological ambiguity attributing the same word to "god" and "sky" (Tulisow 2007: 48).

The belief in Tengri and Itoga/Etügen was complemented by the idols that Benedict Polonus referred to. They derived also from the sphere of politics, since Ghengis Khan's descendants commenced the practice of displaying his likenesses in diverse locations in the Mongol camps. The friars also record other religious practices pertaining to the person of Ghengis Khan as were established by his grandson Kublai Khan, since they describe what we know were eight white tents forming a moving sanctuary that commemorated Ghengis as a deity (Tulisow 2007: 44). Jerzy Tulisow (2007: 44) identifies Ghengis as the most specifically Mongol of all deities in the syncretic religious system. After all, Tartars believed in the divine provenance of their khans (Kałużyński 1978: 8). This suggests the complexity of the relations between divinity and authority in the Tartar world, where the sphere of the holy entailed consequences of political nature, while the political authority that a charismatic ruler possessed could make him enter the Mongol "pantheon". Gengis's name must have inspired the name "Cambuskyan" in Chaucer's text, as since Francis Thynne's *Animadversions* "Cambuskyan" has been thought to originate from "Camius Khan", a latinised name of Ghengis (Kingsley [1875] 1965: 54, quoted in: DiMarco 2002: 67), but it does not make the tale a narrative about Ghengis's times.

---

11 The remark about Tengri appears in footnote 1 in Painter's edition (1965: 88).

12 The name of the Earth goddess is "Etügen" in other sources (Kałużyński 1983: 93).

What Chaucer must have been aware of was the fourteenth-century politics of the Tartar rulers, which affected their religion. The context that Vincent DiMarco (2002: 56-75) supplies us with in his interpretation of the tale is the reign of khan Özbeg, who was not only Muslim himself, but who made the Golden Horde almost entirely Islamic. Like most conversions conducted for political reasons, the one Özbeg carried out in his land was mostly involuntary: he gradually enforced Islam onto his people, rightly seeing political benefits in it. That annulled the previous identity of Tartary as potentially the "third force" in the politics of the time, since still in the thirteenth century Mongols could, at least hypothetically, help Christians in combating the spreading Islam. A century later, Muslim religion was gradually assimilated by Mongols and the idea of spreading Christianity there had to be abandoned by the Westerners. Perhaps this is the political reality that Chaucer intended to conceal by fantasizing about Cambuskyan clinging to his pagan beliefs. The truth about Tartary getting more and more Islamic in his time perhaps proved too unpalatable for the poet and his audience so it had to be disguised by the myth of the pagan land whose ruler protected it against the Muslim political and cultural expansion. The myths about Özbeg's partiality for Christianity turned out, after all, to be groundless, as the ruler indeed imposed Islam onto his people (DiMarco 2002: 63).[13]

Characteristically, the accounts of the Mongol world that were prepared for Western audiences by John Carpini and Benedict Polonus in the thirteenth century presented a mixture of the holy and the unholy as typical of the Tartar beliefs. It remains a matter of conjecture what the reasons for such a presentation were. In his description of the Tartar ways in religion and magic, Benedict asserts that Tartars consider various activities as sinful and have to ask the sorcerer to undo the charm after they performed the forbidden activities, such as

> to poke a fire or touch it in any way with a knife, or to take meat from a pot with a knife, or to chop wood with an axe near a fire, because they affirm that this causes the fire to be beheaded, or to lean on the whips with which they lash their horses (for they do not use spurs), or to touch arrows with a whip, or take young birds *from a nest*, or to strike a horse with a bridle, or to urinate in a hut. If this is done intentionally, the culprit is slain; if unintentionally, he must pay a sorcerer who performs a rite of purification by making them carry their huts and property between two fires, and until this is done no one dares to touch anything in a hut (*TR*, 90).

---

[13] Islam remained the major cultural identification in that region, while other parts of the world permanently dominated by Mongols formed the political organism known as Mongolia, where Buddhist theocracy was introduced in 1911, when the country gained its independence (Tulisow 2007: 14); nevertheless, the shamanist and animistic religious beliefs entered the cultural imaginary so permanently that the ideas about the sky and earth gods continued even in modernity, in the twentieth century when anthropologists and ethnographers directed their attention to the Tartar world.

In reality the "sorcerer" who could purify what was contaminated had to be a shaman, *boë* (Kałużyński 1983: 97), whose aid was resorted to in any situation which might potentially cause misfortune. As a matter of fact, what the friars witnessed were superstitions rather than magic practices. Justifiable anxiety that Mongols experienced while living on the steppe, such as the fear of thunders which might strike whenever there was an erected pole with laundry, metamorphosed into interdictions against certain activities that were not grounded in any realistic danger. In order to avoid putting poles in the middle of the steppe, they avoided doing any laundry so as not to provoke thunders (Kałużyński 1983: 103). The last statement in the quotation above, however, "a hole is dug under his hut through which he is dragged out and instantly put to death", undoubtedly results from a misunderstanding on the part of the friars, while the frequency of errors in the relations from the missions displays relative unreliability of those reports. Ghengis Khan's code, the Yasa, includes an article on the slaughter of animals and not on the slaughter of people, so people cannot have been slain for their "sins".[14] The friars visibly confused religious faith with superstition, not even attempting to distinguish between the two. The misunderstandings resulted also from linguistic difficulties: Benedict knew Slavic languages, such as Russian, so he could only communicate with Russian clerks who acted as interpreters in Tartar khanates.

Benedict gives his readers the impression that in Tartary all religious beliefs involve magic practices. The fact that he does not comment on the unusualness of the situation may be related not only to his erroneous comprehension of the Tartar world, but also to the medieval lack of clear distinctions between the holy and the unholy in Christianity. Perhaps he viewed religion and magic as closely interconnected also in his own religion and saw no need to didactically inform his audience about inappropriateness of the mutual position of the two in Mongol mentality. Then this intermingling in the ethnographic part of his work was not conscious, but rather it may have been an act of mirroring the perspective detectable in medieval Christianity. It remains uncertain whether Benedict interspersed those two with an awareness of a similar intermingling taking place in medieval Western Christianity, where the "holy" practices of saints had the appearance of the "unholy" magic interventions, or at least they were described as such (Kieckhefer 1994: 356). Analyzing the genre of medieval romance, it also becomes transparent that, apart from religious subplots, the topic of spirituality was introduced there by inserting magic interventions into the plots. Magic was the subject available to all "authors interested in exploring social and spiritual issues", as Michelle Sweeney notes (2000: 11). In Christian culture magic, especially the white one, could freely mingle with religious issues, especially if

[14] See footnote 2 in *Historia Tartarorum* (Painter 1965: 90).

the amalgam of the two would lead to the spiritual perfection of a literary hero. What Kieckhefer (1994: 355-386) specified as the modern dyad of the holy and the unholy, following Durkheim's dichotomous thinking about religion, proved to be alien to the Middle Ages: the two could not be separated from each other either in medieval fiction or in the historiographic texts that papal envoys to the Tartars prepared.[15] Medieval Christian culture then was mostly free from labeling phenomena as either religion or magic; hence Westerners exploring other parts of the world may have projected their own Christian vision of spirituality onto what they observed in different cultures.[16]

In *The Squire's tale* religion is mentioned in passing, but the remaining part of the narrative devotes incomparable scope to the question of magic, which needs to be comprehended here as something "non-religious" rather than "irreligious". Paraphrasing Helen Cooper's ear-catching phrase, as readers we are expected to become engrossed in the subject of magic that would have worked if the tale had not been left unfinished; consequently, the magic almost entirely "does not work" in the tale, with the exception of the ring that allows Canace to comprehend the love-sick falcon (Cooper 1976:131-146). In the tale, in a manner reminiscent of the early modern idea of magic, before our eyes the marvelous detaches itself from religious issues in order to represent the object of wonder verging on the material and the technological. The experience of wonder at the magic objects presented at Cambuskyan's court was clearly expected from Chaucer's audience; it would mirror the wonder experienced by Cambuskyan's subjects in the tale. Even in the criticism the reaction found its reflection in such statements as that by Marie Cornelia (1977: 88); according to her, in *The Squire's tale* "the truth is stranger than fiction … [and] the geography of fact and the geography of fiction are inextricably mixed". This makes the unholy central to the tale, since the holy detached from magic would not have inspired such a sense of wonder. The phenomenon of wonder orders this world, making religion rather marginal, while magic, understood in a fairly modern manner, becomes central to it.

On the one hand, the tale orientalizes Tartary, romantically putting it on a par with other lands identifiable with the "Wonders of the East", "Arabe" and "Inde" (*V*: 110), but, on the other hand, it offers an understanding of the marvelous and of wonder that is close to the modern one. In her study of early modern science and the colonial imagery, Mary Baine Campbell (1999: 3) insists that wonder was "a historical phenomenon differently valenced and valued (and

---

15 Hayes (2003: xxi) briefly summarizes Durkheim's argument as holding that "one of the elementary forms of religious life is the division of the world into separate spheres of sacred and profane".

16 Plezia (1970: 18) consciously uses the word "exploration" in reference to Carpine and Benedict's mission.

experienced) in different times and places". In the Middle Ages, as Fradenburg (2004: 6) suggests, wonder existed as experience uniting communities; it was a feeling evoked by marvels and through the communal reflection on the meaning of those marvels. In Chaucer, the unholy acquires a life separate from the holy, but, similarly to religion, it gives any community a common ground for experiencing unity and for a communal observation of the outside world. The scene when the envoy of the king of Araby and India appears with magic objects well portrays the experience of wonder and awe that keeps the community together:

> And so bifel that after the thridde cours,
> Whil that this kyng sit thus in his nobleye,
> Herknynge his mynstralles hir thynges pleye
> Biforn hym at the bord deliciously,
> In at the halle dore al sodeynly
> Ther cam a knyght upon a steede of bras,
> And in his hand a brood mirour of glas.
> Upon his thombe he hadde of gold a ryng,
> And by his syde a naked swerd hangyng;
> And up he rideth to the heighe bord
> In al the halle ne was ther spoken a word
> For merveille of this knyght; hym to biholde
> Ful bisily they wayten, yonge and olde (*V*: 76-88).

The artifice of magic plays a role similar to that of religious ceremonies: it sublimates human experience, nuances the materiality of the world, and elevates feeling. The division into the holy and the unholy that is implied by Chaucer in this tale perhaps augurs the early modern tendencies visible during the reformation: to make religion more private and intimate and to reserve communal experience to the sphere of the marvelous.

As Lightsey (2007: 55-81) notes, magic objects in the narrative obviously resemble the "man-made marvels" which were produced for the courts of Europe and the Orient at the time, but they augur modern inventions. The first object is the "steede of bras" (*V*: 81) that the envoy rides in order to get to Cambuskyan's court. The steed

> … that esily and weel
> Kan in the space of o day natureel-
> This is to seyn, in foure and twenty houres-
> Wher-so yow lyst, in droghte or elles shoures,
> Beren youre body into every place
> To which youre herte wilneth for to pace,
> Withouten wem of yow, thurgh foul or fair;
> Or, if yow lyst to fleen as hye in the air
> As dooth an egle whan hym list to soore,
> This same steede shal bere yow evere moore,

> Withouten harm, til ye be ther yow leste,
> Though that ye slepen on his bak or reste,
> And turne ayeyn with writhyng of a pyn (*V*: 115-127).

Fradenburg (2004: 9) argues that technology emerged from desires which were primarily of aesthetic nature; the criterion of usefulness came second. The marvelous steed of bras plays rather the function of an object that will amaze its owners and evoke in them sensations that will replicate the primary wonder experience by them at first seeing the invention. Here it becomes transparent that the feelings provoked by the objects will differ from the experience of awe and reverence more associated with religious experience. Still, if the usefulness of an object comes second, it yet plays an important role. The impression is enhanced by other objects presented to Cambuskyan by the envoy, the mirror and the ring:

> This mirour eek, that I have in myn hond,
> Hath swich a myght that men may in it see
> Whan ther shal fallen any adversitee
> Unto youre regne or to youreself also,
> And openly who is youre freend or foo (*V*: 132-136).

Furthermore, the practical dimension of this marvelous object is increased in that a lady may inspect the heart of her lover: "If he be fals, she shal his tresoun see" (*V*: 139). This is no longer merely a fanciful idea, since the deployment of the object may bring about improvement in one's amorous life, reducing potential suffering of the one possibly betrayed. The practical dimension of the ring, or rather "the vertu" (*V*: 146) of using the object that endows one with understanding of birds' language, remains fairly enigmatic until the point when Canacee places the piece of jewelry on her finger in order to listen to the love-sick falcon narrating the sorrows associated with love, here ostensibly courtly love, which was betrayed. Nevertheless, the possible usefulness of the ring to the princess's love life or at least to her knowledge of the world cannot be undermined. Less questionable remains the practicality of the sword which inflicts such wounds that "what man that is wounded with the strook / Shal never be hool til that yow list, of grace, / To stroke hym with the plat in thilke place / Ther he is hurt …" (*V*: 160-163). In the chivalric world of the romance both the skills of managing the one you love and of successfully attacking your enemy prove useful.

The "inventions" in *The Squire's tale* stem from the sphere which provides objects both amazing and useful, but they augur the development of technology. The "man-made marvels" from real-life medieval courts are then not identical with the magic objects in Chaucer, since the former were supposed to be pri-

marily pleasing to the senses and evoking wonder, while the latter suggested future developments in the material world. Magic thus abandons its position in the dichotomy, becoming rather the marvelous (as related to marvels), the technological, and the artificial (i.e. different from the "natural magic"). As a phenomenon related to marvel, it detaches itself from religion. Characteristically, the characters in the tale openly associate magic with wonder, not even thinking about the potential irreligiousness thereof. One of the commentaries on the marvels is responds to the previously uttered suggestion that, like the Trojan horse, the steed may conceal warriors within itself:

> … He lyeth, for it is rather lyk
> An apparence ymaad by som magyk,
> As jogelours pleyen at thise feestes grete (*V*: 217-219).

The marvelous objects are not a novelty in this world apparently suffused with wonder. Yet here it is not wonder for the wonder's sake, but rather a useful means of improving people's lives. Magic is instrumentally employed so as to improve the worldly experience of people rather than add a degree of spirituality to their lives. The marvelous becomes a means of extending one's bodily capabilities and no longer is it merely another strategy of approaching the divine. Cambuskyan's daughter Canace as a wearer of the magic ring embodies the fantasy of effortless translation from one language to another and, consequently, of one culture into the cultural system of another. The magic that is performed once she speaks to the swooning falcon does not even remotely serve any spiritual role, but rather makes her communicate with the "fowel" (*V*: 435) who will teach her a lesson about losing oneself in love and about abandonment. Interestingly, the inventions provoke the observers' investigation into the nature of those marvels. When discussing the steed of brass

> They speken of sondry hardyng of metal,
> And speke of medicynes therwithal,
> And how and whanne it sholde yharded be,
> Which is unknowe, algates unto me (*V*: 243-246).

The proto-scientific commentaries show the modernity of this approach to objects evoking wonder. The marvelous here appears to be conducive to intellectual effort, which improves the community through increasing the speculative abilities of its members, while the experience of wonder renders it more cohesive.

The unholy detaches itself from the holy in Chaucer's tale, revealing its human provenance and allowing the poet to develop the "orientalist" perspective, understood as the exoticizing one, at the expense of the Tartar world viewed

more realistically, which would take into account paganism signaled at the beginning of the young man's narrative or expanding Islam. Instead of the amalgam of religion and magic, as may be found in *Historia Mongalorum* and *Historia Tartarorum* mirroring the Christian outlook on the two as interrelated, in *The Squire's tale* we face the Mongol world as if it was one of the fashionable courts of Europe, where magic and not religion illustrates the ruler's political position and makes people experience something as a community. The boundary that Kieckhefer (1994: 355-386). described as nonexistent in medieval culture becomes here subtly delineated, while no pagan religion is of consequence to Chaucer's narrative. The two types of medieval narrative, the historiographic texts and Chaucer's tale, exemplify the previous stages of this phenomenon: the Tartar magic which, as in Christianity, combines itself with religious beliefs and the magic that becomes a technologically accomplished marvel, distinct from the sphere of religiousness, but contributing to the cohesion of the community.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

Benson, Larry D.
1987 *Riverside Chaucer*. (3rd edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Carpini, John of Plano
1955 "History of the Mongols", in: Christopher Dawson (ed.), 3-72.
Dawson, Christopher (ed.)
1955 *The Mongol mission: narratives and letters of the Franciscan missionaries in Mongolia and China in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries*. London – New York: Sheedd and Ward.
Kingsley, G.H.
[1875]
1965 *Francis Thynne's Animadversions upon Speght's first (1598 A.D.) edition of Chaucer's works*. Rev. F. J. Furnivall. London: Oxford University Press.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Cooper, Helen
1976 "Magic that does not work", *Medievalia et Humanistica. Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* 7: 131-146.
Cornelia, Marie
1977 "Chaucer's Tartarye", *Dalhousie Review* 1: 81-89.

De Rachevilz, Igor
1971 *Papal envoys to the Great Khans*. London: Faber and Faber.
DiMarco, Vincent J.
2002 "The historical basis of Chaucer's *Squire's tale*", in: Kathryn L. Lynch (ed.), 56-75.
Fradenburg, L.O. Aranye
2004 "Simply marvelous", *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26: 1-28.
Frazer, James G.
2009 *The golden bough: a study in magic and religion. A new abridgment from the second and third editions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Goodman, Jennifer R.
1983 "Chaucer's *Squire's tale* and the rise of chivalry", *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 5: 127-136.
Hayes, Dawn Marie
2003 *Body and sacred place in medieval Europe, 1100-1389*. New York – London: Routledge.
Humphrey, Caroline
1994 "Shamanistic practices and the state in Northern Asia: views from the centre and periphery", in: Nicholas Thomas – Caroline Humphrey (eds.), 191-228.
Jackson, Peter
2002 *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*. Harlow: Longman.
Kałużyński, Stanisław
1978 *Tradycje i legendy ludów Mongolii* [Mongol traditions and legends]. Warszawa: Iskry.
Kałużyński, Stanisław
1983 *Dawni Mongołowie* [Mongols of the past]. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
Kieckhefer, Richard
1994 "The holy and the unholy: sainthood, witchcraft, and magic in late medieval Europe", *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24/3: 355-386.
Lightsey, Scott
2007 *Manmade marvels in medieval culture and literature*. New York – Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Lynch, Kathryn L.
2002 *Chaucer's cultural geography*. New York – London: Routledge.
Pearsall, Derek
2002 *The Canterbury tales*. London – New York: Routledge.
Plezia, Marian
1970 "L'apport de la Pologne a l'exploration de l'Asie central au milieu du XIIIe siècle", *Acta Poloniae Historica* 22: 18-35.
Plezia, Marian
1971 "Historia Tartarorum", *Studia źródłoznawcze* 15: 167-172.
Sweeney, Michelle
2000 *Magic in medieval romance from Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
Szymusiak, Jan Maria – Marek Starowieyski (eds.)
1971 *Słownik wczesnochrześcijańskiego piśmiennictwa* [A dictionary of early Christian writing]. Poznań: Księgarnia Św. Wojciecha.

Thomas, Nicholas – Caroline Humphrey (eds.)
1994 *Shamanism, history and the state*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
Tulisow, Jerzy
2007 *Starożytni Mongołowie. Mitologie świata* [Ancient Mongols. Mythologies of the world]. Warszawa: New Media Concept.