Baron Ungern: God of War

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Petrograd, 1920. Feliks Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky is finishing up a report for comrade Lenin:

“It seems that Ungern is more dangerous than Semenov. He is stubborn and fanatical. Clever and ruthless. He occupies key positions in Dauria. What are his intentions? To attack Urga in Mongolia or Irkutsk in Siberia? To swing around to Harbin in Manchuria, and then on to Vladivostok? To march on Beijing and restore the Manchurian dynasty to the Chinese throne? His monarchical plans are limitless. But one thing is clear: Ungern is preparing a coup. He is our most dangerous enemy to date. Destroying him is a matter of life and death.”

Dzerzhinsky attached to his report to the Supreme Soviet an excerpt from a letter that had fallen into the hands of Siberian partisans:

“The Baron pronounces the words ‘commissar’ and ‘communist’ with hatred, often adding ‘will be hanged.’ He has no favorites, he is unusually firm, adamant in matters of discipline, very cruel, and very gullible…He lives surrounded by Lamas and shamans…Out of addiction to the scandalous and unusual, he calls himself a Buddhist. It is more likely that he belongs to some far-right Baltic sect. His enemies call him the ‘Mad Baron.’”

Baron Roman Fedorovich von Ungern-Sternberg was born on December 20th, 1885 in Graz (Austria) to a family of Baltic aristocrats living in Estonia. His family can be traced back to at least the 18th century. According to reliable data, two of his ancestors belonged to the Knights of the Teutonic Order and fell at the hands of the Poles. His family members served the Order, then Germany, and, finally, the Russian Tsar and Russian Empire. According to the baron himself, his grandfather converted to Buddhism while in India, after which his father and he himself also became Buddhists. The baron graduated gymnasium in Reval (Tallinn) and attended a cadets school in St. Petersburg, where in 1909 he was sent to a Cossack corps in Chita. During an officers quarrel in Chita, the baron challenged his opponent to a duel and wounded him. The baron himself sustained a serious injury, as a result of which he would experience severe headaches throughout the rest of his life, to the point that at times he lost the ability to see.

Because of this duel, the baron was expelled from the corps in July of 1910, from then onwards beginning a journey around Siberia accompanied by only one companion – his hunting dog Misha. Somehow he ended up in Mongolia, which was destined to be his fate. This strange, desert-stretched, wild, ancient and harsh country fascinated Ungern. In Mongolia, the baron managed to get into personal contact with the living Buddha, Kutuktu, the supreme figure of Mongolian Lamaism. At the time, Mongolia was experiencing a revival of imperial sentiments and was seeking independence from China. In Urga, the Mongolian capital, the baron’s determined character was soon noticed, and Kutuktu himself appointed Ungern commander of the Mongol cavalry. Taking advantage of the unrest and revolution in China, the Mongols succeeded in expelling the Chinese occupants from their country, and in 1911 the “living Buddha” established an independent monarchy in Mongolia.

The baron’s military services for Kutuktu were duly noted, and he became a deeply revered figure in the Mongol world. Before his departure from Mongolia, Baron Ungern, accompanied by his friend Prince Djam Bolon. At the latter’s insistence, Ungern visited a clairvoyant of a most ancient and respected shamanic line. In this fateful moment, in a trance, the clairvoyant revealed to Baron Ungern the secret of his spiritual nature:

“I see the God of War…

He rides a gray horse across our steppes and our mountains. You will

Rule over a vast territory, oh white God of War.

I see blood, lots of blood…

A horse…

Lots of blood.

Red blood…

I see no more. The White God of War has disappeared.”

In 1912, Ungern visited Europe – Austria, Germany, and France. According to the testimonies offered in Krauthof’s book on Ungern, Ich Befehle (“I order”), in Paris the baron met and fell in love with the woman of his heart, Danielle. This was just on the eve of the First World War. True to his duty and on the order of the Tsar, the baron was compelled to return to Russia to take his place in the ranks of the imperial army.

Ungern set off back to the Homeland with his sweetheart, Danielle. But in Germany he was threatened with arrest for being an officer of the enemy army. The baron took an extremely risky journey on a small boat across the Baltic Sea. The little vessel was wrecked in a storm, and the lady was killed. The baron’s survival was nothing more than a miracle. From that time on, the baron would never be the same. Thenceforth he paid no attention to women. He became extremely ascetic and extremely, inhumanely cruel. In his review of Krauthof’s book, Julius Evola wrote: “Great passion incinerated all the human elements inside of him, and from then on only the sacred force that stands above life and death remained in him.”

The maelstrom of war pulled him in. The baron fought with inimitable courage against the Austrians, sustaining multiple wounds and being awarded the Cross of St. George and the Sword of Honor for his bravery and selflessness. After the Bolshevik revolution, Ungern was one of the first to engage in merciless battle with the Reds under the command of Ataman Semenov. And in this war, he distinguished himself with unbridled courage, steadfastness, and superb knowledge of military strategy.

Ungern gradually organized his own division consisting of Russian officers, Cossacks, and indigenous Siberians (especially Buryats) who remained faithful to the Emperor. Its full name was the Asian Cavalry Division. Incredible, inhuman discipline reigned in Ungern’s units. The slightest offenses were punished in the most merciless manner up to the death penalty.

Major Antoni Aleksandrowicz, a White officer of Polish origins and former Mongolian artillery instructor, wrote:

“Baron Ungern was an outstanding man, extremely complex both psychologically and politically. (1) He saw in Bolshevism the enemy of civilization. (2) He despised Russians for having betrayed their legitimate sovereign and failing to cast off the communist yoke. (3) Nevertheless, among Russians he singled out and liked ordinary peasants and soldiers while he fiercely hated the intelligentsia. (4) He was a Buddhist who was obsessed with the dream of creating a knightly order in the likes of the Teutonic Order and Japanese Bushido. (5) He strove to create a gigantic Asian coalition, with which he wanted to set off on a conquest of Europe to turn it towards the teaching of the Buddha. (6) He was in contact with the Dalai Lama and the Muslims of Asia. He wielded the title of Khan of Mongolia as well as the title of ‘bonze’, or an initiate of Lamaism. (7) He was ruthless to an extent that only an ascetic could be. The absolute absence of sensitivity that was typical of him can be encountered only among beings who know neither pain, joy, pity, nor sorrow. (8) He possessed an extraordinary mind and considerable knowledge. His ability as a medium allowed him to completely accurately understand the nature of whomever he spoke with from the first minute of conversation.”

This account of Baron Ungern, left by a man who served him, was published in 1938 by none other than René Guénon himself in the main Traditionalist organ, the journal Études Traditionnelles.

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Mongolia once again lost its independence, and its capital, Urga, was occupied by Chinese troops who actively cooperated with Bolshevik agents and provocateurs among the local population. Kutuktu, the living Buddha, was arrested. The absolutely sovereign, spiritually-incarnated, theocratic ruler of Great Free Mongolia was made into a pathetic prisoner.

The White Cause gradually lost on all fronts. After Kolchak’s defeat, only Ataman Semenov and Baron Ungern posed serious, fierce resistance in the East. Pressed on all sides by the Reds, the Asian Cavalry Division entered Mongolia. Its ranks were composed of representatives of many peoples – both European and Asia. Having lost the Russian Empire, the heroes of the Asian Cavalry Division, faithful to the Principle, marched on to restore the Mongol Empire.

Ungern gradually devised a desperate geopolitical plan to create a unique zone in Asia, or more precisely in Mongolia, free from both Bolshevik influence and the troops of the profane West. It would be a unique world in which the ancient laws of the Sacred Tradition would be in force. Ungern was familiar with the books of Saint-Yves d’Alveydre, and knew of the existence of the secret, underground country of Agarttha, where the laws of time are not in effect and where the King of the World, the Chakravarti, resides. Like the Knights Templar, who not only guarded European pilgrims from the Saracens, but also protected the great mysteries of spiritual knowledge from degenerate Catholicism and the secularizing French monarchy, Ungern aimed to create a special zone between the shrines of Tibet, where according to legend lies the entrance to Agarttha, and the rest of the world.

“The Name of Mongolia – Khalkha – means ‘Shield.’ It is the ancient homeland of Genghis Khan, the restorer of the Empire of Ram. The mission of Mongolia is to serve as an obstacle in the path of the rabid hordes of apocalyptic humanity – the Gogs and Magogs of Bolshevism, democracy, and the profane world, the freaks of the modern world…Here, and none other than here, Tradition must be restored and a fight be put up against the forces of the West, the citadel of perversion, the source of Evil. The whole destiny of my line is that of going to the East, to the Rising Sun. I have no heirs and I have reached the Eastern edge of Eurasia myself, on my own. There is nowhere further to go. From this magical point of sacred geography shall begin the Great Restoration…Khalkha – the sacred steppes, the Great Shield.”

Ungern entered Mongolia not as a leader of the last unit of an army battered by the Reds, but as a “mythological hero”, an incarnation of the God of War, as the fulfiller of the Swedish mystic Swedenborg’s testament that “only the sages of the Eurasian steppes of Tartary” – Mongolia – “can find the key to the mysteries of the sacred cycles and the original mystical manuscript long ago lost by humanity under the strange title “The War of Jehovah.”

Ungern’s troops neared Chinese-occupied Urga. On February 3rd, 1920 the baron ordered an attack on the Mongol city of Urga, defended by a Chinese garrison which greatly outnumbered the baron’s warriors. Thanks to a rapid and frantic operation in which Ungern himself took part, his men managed to free Kutuktu, the living Buddha, who was guarded by a large and well-armed Chinese unit. Afterwards, the Asian Cavalry Division, together with Mongol units that joined the baron, attacked Urga. It was a brilliant and extremely important Victory. Tradition and Order were restored in Mongolia. Kutuktu appointed the baron the absolute dictator of Mongolia. Baron Ungern became the first European to receive the title Khan of War, Khan-Chan-Chun.

The first part of this mad plan, parallels to which can only be found in the magnificent and brilliant Middle Ages, not in the “skeptical” and “cynical” 20th century, seemed to be coming true. Henceforth, the dictator of Mongolia, Khan-Chan-Chun, or simply Ungern-Khan, the cruel and noble ascetic, initiated his plan to restore the sacred meaning of Khalkha, the magical Shield of the earth.

No, this is not a fairy tale, not a hallucination. This really happened. Relatively recently.

In dark times, the purity of a hero draws such resistance from the degenerate surrounding environment that curbing and subordinating it necessitates extraordinary means. It is only a matter of course that the majority of officers and soldiers of the Asian Cavalry Division, the Russian Cossacks, and servants did not comprehend the sacred ideals of the mad baron. Kolchak and Wrangel’s failures, apathy, and fatigue all demoralized the army. Many could not resist drinking, stealing, looting, and deserting…The corrupting spirit of the decomposing emigration, the Harbin Russian saloons, and vacant spaces among Parisian taxi drivers – all with Russian tears, saliva, and sighs – all irresistibly tempted the broken fragments of Kolchak’s army.

The Khan of War had to resort to extreme measures. He organized a system of severe punishments. 18 officers, some of whom were decorated veterans personally loyal to Ungern, were thrown into the icy, stormy Mongolian river for drunkery. He spared no one and nothing. Some of those who could swim survived. Some didn’t. But the drinking stopped among them and the rest of those who saw the frozen-blue, frostbitten corpses of their comrades. Such was a kind of forced conversion of the Cossacks to shamanism – after all, swimming in the river in winter in one’s clothes by virtue of internal heat, tapas, and then drying one’s clothes on the shore with the warmth of one’s own body, is a typical shamanic practice. There could not have been more appropriate conditions for indulging in such a national custom.

Colonel Sipailov, Ungern’s shadow, nicknamed the “Thug” in the army, behaved even more grimly. Sipailov was a typical “dark twin” [to Ungern]. Such grotesque characters very often accompany the personal path of great men, embodying the dark aspects of the soul of the hero. If Ungern’s brutality was founded on high spiritual asceticism and was akin to a kind to holiness, then Colonel Sipailov was a genuinely mad sadist. For abusing a yard dog, Sipailov shot the best Cossack commander in all of Ungern’s army and put his corpse on public display. Some were beaten to death with whips for all types of faults, even the tiniest spoils. Sipailov was Ungern’s Dzerzhinsky. All the means by which Ungern imposed order in Mongolia and his army strikingly resembled the Bolshevik terror – no wonder the Bolsheviks respected Ungern more than other leaders of the White movement. Behind it all one could glimpse some kind of inner affinity, a unity of common type at that magical point where extreme right meets extreme left, where opposites coincide.

Sipailov’s atrocities were wild and senseless. Only for a short time did this “black double” of Ungern soften, when he met a girl who melted the stale heart of this sadist. For some time, the officers and soldiers sighed with relief as Sipailov, so it seemed, devoted all his time to pretty little Mashenka.

However, according to eyewitnesses, the following scene eventually took place in Ungern’s quarters. Mashenka had prepared a pie for the commanders. Ungern made an exception and allowed for some champagne to be drunk. Sipailov was extremely lively and unexpectedly kind. When the officers asked him to call Mashenka to thank her for such an amazing dish, Sipailov turned pale, went out, and came back with a strange bag in his hands. He pulled the bloody, severed head of his lover out of it and, with a yellow gleam in his eyes, dumped it on the table in front of the dumbfounded officers. He added laconically: “Bolshevik agent.”

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Mongolia was still in good hands, but the situation became increasingly ominous. The Bolsheviks were winning on all fronts. Ungern gathered his officers at his quarters in Urga:

“Gentlemen, bad news. Ataman Semenov has left Chita. The Soviet General Blücher, a Red Teutonic pig, has just occupied the city. His headquarters are in Verkhneudinsk near Lake Baikal. All of Siberia is now Bolshevik.”

“And Crimea?”

“Crimea is gone. The remnants of Wrangel’s army have fled on the ships of our Western pseudo-allies.”

The situation was as simple and deadly as the tip of a sword. The Baron summed up in one simple phrase:

“Gentlemen, there is only one combat-ready White army left: the First Asian Cavalry Division.”

“Well, we are the last ones then.”

“This is a catastrophe.”

“No, Boris Ivanovich, it is not a catastrophe. It is an honor.”

For Ungern, Honor meant Faithfulness. Or, as the profound contemporary poetess Savitri Devi Mukherji said on an altogether similar matter: “‘Faithful when all become unfaithful—while we never forget, never forgive.”

The storm clouds were gathering. Jean Mabire’s book on Baron Ungern describes Ungern’s last meeting with Kutuktu before the Khan of War left Urga forever to move North, to Siberia, where he would put up one last fight against the Bolsheviks.

“Kutuktu, the Living Buddha, took his place. His face, in black glasses, was impenetrable as always, but his terrible fatigue was felt in all its force. Only with great difficulty did the old man restrain a nervous shiver. A huge throne with a high gilded back, littered with yellow silk pillows. Ungern bowed. He glanced around. The Baron was not one to deliver long speeches, he restricted himself to an announcement of his decision:

‘In a few days I am leaving Mongolia. I am going to Baikal to fight our common enemy, the Reds. Your country is henceforth free, and its sons, scattered around the world, should return to their Homeland. Soon the Empire of Genghis Khan will be reborn. You must preserve the freedom that we have won.’

But in his [Kutuktu’s] soul, a storm raged: without Ungern’s support he was nothing, just a blind old man, too feeble and impotent to drive young revolutionaries like Sukhbaatar and Choibolsan out of the country. Kutuktu asked the Baron to follow him into his office to talk one-on-one.

The divine Kutuktu walked over to a safe oddly framed against the oriental decor of the room. He fumbled with the lock for a long while. Finally, a heavy door slowly opened…Kutuktu reached up the metal shelves for a casket carved out of ivory. Inside was a ruby ring with a solar sign, the Hackenkreuz, the symbol of ancient Aryan conquerors.

‘Genghis Khan never took this ring off of his right hand.’

Roman Fedorovich von Ungern-Sternberg stared at the jewel in a daze. As if in a dream, he extended his hand to Kutuktu. The old man was shaking and hardly managed to put the ring of the great conqueror onto the Baron’s finger. The Living Buddha blessed Ungern. Putting his hands on his head, he pronounced:

‘You will not die. You will be re-incarnated in a more perfect form of being. Remember this, living god of war, Khan to whom Mongolia is owed.’

Ungern felt as if the ring was burning his hand.

The Prince of Mongolia and loyal vicar of Kutuktu went out of the palace of Nogon-Orgo. The Lamas parted in front of him. In his resolutely ringing spurs, Ungern swiftly exited the corridor, never once turning back, and went beyond the palace, where he powerlessly collapse into the back seat of a car.

‘To headquarters’, he told Makeev.

The Baron felt the circle closing.”

Ungern’s forces once again marched onto Russian land. Now it was no longer a war they were waging, but guerrilla operations. Nevertheless, Ungern very seriously worried the Reds. He appeared where least expected, like lighting, suddenly, and would leave destruction and death in his wake. For him, the God of War, this was natural. The best units of the Red Army in Siberia were thrown at him, and General Blücher was made personally responsible for the whole operation.

But this was already agony. In the material world, everything reaches its fateful, fatal point. Ungern, however, was submerged in another reality, where he saw pictures of triumph and victory and the realization of a cherished dream. His being imperceptibly passed on to another, subtle plane which began to interfere with ordinary reality. His subordinates increasingly came to understand that their commander was insane.

Ungern rose, brought out maps, and unfurled them. Laying them out on the grass, with a bamboo cane he traced an imaginary route. He told his faithful assistant, General Rezukhin:

‘More fantasy, Boris Ivanovich! We go up to Selenga. It’s worse with Urga. We need to choose. Remnants of the White armies are hiding in western Mongolia. They will start to flock to us. Not all the Atamans and Cossacks have died. Together we will go further to the west. Now we are in Altai amidst mountains, caves, gorges, and shepherds who still believe in the incarnated god of war. We can easily cross the border of western Turkestan.’

‘In Xingjiang the Chinese will arrest you.’

‘We’ll deal with them quickly and head further south. We have to go through China. Does such a possibility scare you, Boris Ivanovich? The country is falling apart, revolution is in full swing. The only people we’ll come across are cowardly looters and deserters. All together it’s some thousand kilometers, and we are in an impregnable fortress. And we can start everything all over again. Absolutely everything.’

‘Tibet?’

‘Yes. The roof of the world. The Dalai Lama, the highest priest of Buddhism, is in Lhasa. Kutuktu occupies the third tier in the hierarchy compared to him. I made a mistake in the very beginning: the center of Asia is not in Mongolia. Mongolia is only the outer circle, the Shield. We should go to Tibet.’

The baron slapped the map with his bamboo stick right on the mountain chain of the Himalayas.

‘There, among the peaks, we will find people who have not forgotten their Aryan ancestors. On the dizzying border of India and China, my empire will be reborn. We will speak Sanskrit and live according to the principles of the Rig Veda. We will gain the law that Europe has lost. And once again the light of the North will shine. The eternal law, dissolved in the waters of the Ganges and Mediterranean, will prevail.’

The baron rose. His eyes shined. His voice broke into a rasp. A light stubble covered his sunken, fatigued cheeks. He threw back his hair, revealing an enormous forehead. He was the lone and fragile commander of a people absorbed by the shadow of centuries. He continued:

‘My Order will be on the mountain tops. Between Nepal and Tibet, I will open a school where I will teach strength, which is needed more than wisdom.’

With feverishly shining eyes, he shouted:

‘Everything is ready! They are waiting for me in Lhasa! I will reveal the secret of the runes that came from the North and hidden in the secret caches of temples. My Order of warrior-monks will be transformed into an army the likes of which have never been seen before. Asia, Europe, and America will tremble.’

‘No’, Rezukhin said.

For the first time, a little general had dared to stand up to Ungern. But this time, it was beyond his own power. He could no longer obey unconditionally. He forgot about discipline and friendship. His hands trembled, his eyes filled with tears. He repeated:

‘No, Roman Fedorovich, no.’

The Baron winced and looked at him. It was as if the word “no” had suddenly destroyed his dream, as if a runaway avalanche had swept away his Buddhist temple perched on a cliff and he flew into the abyss with his mills for prayers and bonzes in saffron robes.

‘I don’t understand your plans’, Rezushin, ‘I know only one army – the Tsarist. And one religion – Christianity. But that is not the point. The point is that we will never make it to Lhasa. Look at the map. We can’t cross Chinese Turkestan. And Manchuria is just a stone’s throw away. It’s enough to just head East.’

‘Never!’, the Baron cried out, ‘Only Tibet!’

Ungern was almost alone, if not for the lot of those who had not been killed and who remained loyal, who had Honor, like him, and Faithfulness too. Ungern rode across the Altai highlands on his favorite filly, Masha, and visions overcame him.

“Here on the fortress monastery flies a banner with the golden horseshoe and solar sign of Genghis Khan. The waves of the Baltic Sea break against the mass of Tibet. The ascent, the eternal ascent to the roof of the world, where there is light and force. Ascent…”

The grey horse stumbled on a stone. The dream disappeared, absorbed by mirage that enveloped the sweltering earth.

The dreams of the God of War were a premonition of what is sure to happen – not now, but on another turn of the Eternal Return. He who is truly alive will never know death.

1921. The end. Betrayal. Ungern was captured by the Reds. General Blücher had ordered that Ungern be treated like a Soviet officer. The Red Guards took him to the company command post of the revolutionary military committee of the Yenisei.

Blücher personally met Ungern and proposed that he join the Bolsheviks. Both spoke in German. Blücher spoke of Eurasianists, National Bolshevism, and a special line in the Soviet leadership, a national one, which was merely superficially covered with “Marxist phraseology”, and which was striving to build a gigantic, continental, Traditionalist state not only in Mongolia, but throughout all of Eurasia. Blucher promised the Baron full amnesty and a high position. At the same time, in a secret department of the OGPU, headed by the Martinist Gleb Boki, plans were being developed for an expedition to Tibet, for the transformation of spiritual Bolshevism into a new kind of spiritual reality.

The Baron refused all the offers. Or at least that’s what official history maintains. On September 12th, 1921, Baron Ungern-Sternberg was shot. The God of War was dead.

But do Gods die? If you are asking this, you are absolutely right. They can go away, but they cannot die.

To this day, a legend circulates through Mongolian and Buryat religious circles: “From the North came a white warrior who raised the Mongols, called on them to break the chains of slavery fettering their free land. This white warrior was the embodiment of Genghis Khan, and he predicted the coming of an even greater one…”

The “even greater one” is the Tenth Avatar, the Avenger, the Triumphant, the Fearsome Judge. All Traditions call him by different names. But the essence does not change. The defeat of “ours” is only an eschatological illusion. To embrace it is immoral. Our duty is to stand to the end. It does not matter if we lose every last one and everything losable. Our Honor is in Faithfulness.

To challenge the doom of the dark ages – this gesture itself already harbors the highest reward.

And then a little later the avengers will catch up…the Last Battalion…the Wild Hunt of Odin. “Our” forces – with a golden banner flaunting the black rune UR, the sign of the Cosmic Midnight, the personal standard of the God of War, Baron Roman Fedorovich Ungern-Sternberg, harbinger of the Avatar.

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