

## **The White God of War: Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg (1886 – 1921)**

*"I shall die a horrible death but the world has never seen such a terror and such a sea of blood as it shall now see..."*, with this dark prophecy the so-called "Mad Baron" said farewell to Ferdinand Ossendowski, a Polish expatriate fleeing from the Red Terror of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, who met Robert Nikolaus Maximilian Freiherr von Ungern-Sternberg, known as Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, in Urga, the capital of Mongolia, a few months before the Baron was betrayed by his own men, captured by the Red Army, tried as "war criminal" and executed as one "enemy to the people".

Yes, the Baron was quite right in his last words to Ossendowski. His death was anything but glorious and heroic. He died at the hands of his sworn mortal enemy, the Bolsheviks and their Red Army, who seized power in Russia a few years earlier and ever since hunted their adversaries, the remaining Monarchists and Anti-Bolshevik White forces, deep into the dense woods of Siberia and far away plains of Mongolia. It was the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, 1921, when Baron von Ungern-Sternberg was shot dead after a tribunal lasting for seven hours. He died alone, far away from his ancestral home and also removed from the kingdom that he ruled for a brief time and where he was hailed as the wargod incarnate. But for the Bolsheviks he was just one of many renegade officers formerly serving in the army of Czarist Russia; an insurgent taking up arms against the new powers-that-be and attempting to roll back the Communist, the Red Revolution in Sankt Petersburg and Moscow. He would no doubt be long forgotten by now, like so many other White officers fighting in vain against the Soviet Union, but he is not. Today we still remember, and talk about, this extraordinary man and his brief yet epic life and struggle. Oswald Spengler, the herald of the Decline of the West, mentioned the Baron in a speech he held in Würzburg three years after the death of Ungern-Sternberg: *"Around 1920, in Central Asia, there appeared as a free corps leader the Baron Ungern von Sternberg who managed to gather, in a short period of time, an army of allegedly 150.000 men fiercely loyal to him, trained skillfully and willing to go wherever the Baron commanded them to be. This man was killed by the Bolsheviks not long after, but if he'd succeeded we couldn't tell what events would have unfolded in Asia and how the world map would have been re-shaped today."*

Who was this mysterious man once deemed more than fit to change the course of history and to reshape the world? In his death, we'll find no answer to that. It is said that he refused to acknowledge the tribunal that sentenced him to death, because in his opinion, it was just as illegitimate as the new powers-that-be in Moscow. He was accused to be the agent of hostile powers, funded and armed by foreign adversaries of the Bolsheviks for the sake of sabotaging the Red Revolution and stir unrest and civil war in the Far East. Hence he was believed to be the enemy of the ordinary Russian people, of the workers' and peasants; a villain who wished to impose the yoke of aristocracy upon them, once again. Already during his lifetime, the reality of his life and actions started to blur with the assumptions and anticipations of admirers and adversaries alike.

### **Birth and childhood**

It is surely true that the Baron was one descendent of age-old noble families from Hungary and Germany, but unlike so many others in his day and age, he wholeheartedly despised anything decadent and he rather joined his low-ranking men at the frontline instead of indulging in the worldly pleasures provided to his own social class. It is said that the lifestyle of the Baron, in particular when he was living in the Far East, resembled the ascetic exercises to be found in a monastery and he equally imposed this stern discipline upon his own men, as well.

The families of Ungern and Sternberg are said to have participated in many historic conquests and crusades, until they settled in the Baltic territory where some may have joined the Teutonic Knights Order and helped Christianize the pagan tribes from Lithuania and Estonia. From the Baltic, some family members started to sail the seas as merchants and privateers. Also alchemists and mystics are

said to have been among the Ungern-Sternberg family members, according to Baron von Ungern-Sternberg himself.

Born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1886 in Graz, a city located in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Baron was soon moving with his mother and her new husband to their ancestral holdings in Estonia. Hermann Graf Keyserling, the renowned German-Baltic philosopher, used to live in the same neighborhood and in his "Voyage through the Time", he recollects his earliest memories of the young Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, a distant relative of himself whom he met when he was teenager, portraying him as predatory in appearance and character, with bright eyes reminding him of the sparrow hawk – a bird said to enjoy killing and mauling his prey.

By all accounts, we are told that the young Baron was a wild and unruly child, rebelling against his teachers and not caring much for their attempts at educating him. According to Keyserling, the Baron was not one to contemplate anything, because, in his view, contemplation equals cowardice, and so he was not used to communicate his thoughts, either. Quite to the contrary, the Baron was an intuitive genius but with stark animalistic instincts and this intrinsic character put him at odds with rules and regulations imposed on him by institutions like school or, as it turned out not long after, the military academy.

As a boy, Ungern-Sternberg had an extreme pride in his ancient, aristocratic family; but despite his German origin, he identified himself very strongly with the Russian Empire. After his stepfather secured a place at the naval academy in Sankt Petersburg for the young Baron, hoping in vain that there he could finally be disciplined, Ungern-Sternberg learned to appreciate the Russian national soul in all her unrestrained vastness and deep mysticism. At this time, he felt more at home among the Russians than to be back at the German-Baltic estate of his family, where his mother died in 1907, thus making his grandmother the only remaining relative he cared about. Prior to his mother's death, he was expelled from the naval academy in 1905 after beating a superior officer. Without perspective, the Baron decided to join the Russian army as a private serving in the Russian-Japanese war that lasted from 1904 until 1905 and ended with a sound defeat of the Russians at the hands of a superior Japanese military force. Although the Baron came too late to the frontlines for more than a few combat experiences, he was promoted corporal until the war ended. He returned deeply impressed by the Far East and, in particular, by the military prowess of the Japanese army.

## **Military School and World War Experience**

After returning home in 1906, the Baron was admitted to the Pavlovsk Military College in Sankt Petersburg, where he joined the Cavalry. It is said that during this time, he, who had already converted to Russian-Orthodox Christianity at this point, encountered Buddhism for the first time and was introduced into Occult studies, as well. However, the Baron also told Ossendowski that one of his grandfathers, who sailed the Indian Ocean looting British cargo, became a Buddhist and introduced Ungern-Sternberg in this religion. Be that as it may, he graduated from the Military College and asked to be transferred to a Cossack Cavalry Regiment in Siberia where he served as an officer in the 1st Argunsky and then in the 1st Amursky Cossack regiments, where he got used to the lifestyle of nomadic peoples such as the Mongolians and Buryats. Ungern-Sternberg had specifically asked that he be stationed with a Cossack regiment in Asia, as he felt drawn to the Asian peoples and wished to learn more. But still, his irritability and flaring temper caused him problems once more; at one point he brawled with a fellow officer, what almost got him court-martialed this time. It was probably his kinsman, the General Paul von Rennenkampff, who helped to avert the worst for Ungern-Sternberg. However, at the same time he became an excellent horseman earning the respect of the Mongolians and the Buryats due to his skill at riding and fighting from a horse, being equally adept at using both a gun and his sword. In 1913, at his request, he was transferred to the reserves.

Ungern-Sternberg travelled to Outer Mongolia with the plan to assist the Mongolians in their struggle for independence from China, but the Russian officials declined his request to join the garrison of the Russian consulate there. He later arrived in the town of Khovd in western Mongolia where he served as out-of-staff officer at the Russian consulate. Because he didn't have much else to do, he used his time by learning the Mongolian language and customs. That is the official story of his travel there, but Keyserling tells this of Ungern-Sternberg's adventures in the Far East: *"For months he lived as a hermit having visions, until he was possessed by a wild lust for plunder and pillage. Then he looted monasteries, probably killing the monks too. When his possession faded off, he became a dreamer once more. And as a dreamer he accomplished much of what he did, even if he looted, if he killed or performed heroic deeds all on his own."* In early 1914, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg left Mongolia and returned to his ancestral home in Estonia.

On 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1914, Ungern-Sternberg was back at active duty in the outbreak of World War One. He took part in the Russian offensive in East Prussia and was fighting in Poland and Galicia until 1916, when he also participated in rearguard-action raids on German troops and was injured four times. Throughout the war on the Eastern Front he gained a reputation as an extremely brave - but somewhat reckless and mentally unstable - officer, a man with no fear of death who seemed most happy leading cavalry charges or being in the thick of combat. He was decorated with several military awards during his time in active combat, but despite his many awards, he was eventually discharged from one of his command positions for attacking the adjutant of the Russian governor of Chernivtsi in a brawl, in October 1916, an incident for which he was detained for two months.

After his release from military prison in January 1917, Ungern-Sternberg was again transferred to the reserve and sent to Vladivostok, just to be fighting in the Caucasian theatre of the conflict not long after, where Russia was confronting the Ottoman Empire. The February Revolution that ended the rule of the House of Romanov was an extremely bitter blow to the monarchist Ungern-Sternberg, who saw the revolution as the beginning of the end of Russia that he knew. In the Caucasus, Ungern-Sternberg met again Cossack Capt. Grigory Mikhaylovich Semyonov, whom he already knew from his time in Poland. The friendship of Semyonov and Ungern-Sternberg would soon become decisive for the future of the latter. Together they started to organize a volunteer military unit composed of local Assyrian Christians, but then Semyonov departed for Siberia in March 1917, joined by Ungern-Sternberg, and the Kerensky government officially approved their plan to raise a regiment among the local Buryat population for the war in Europe.

## **Joining the White Counter-Revolution**

However, the Bolshevik-led October Revolution of 1917 would soon see Russia depart from the Western theatre of war and turn to civil war hostilities instead. Semyonov and Ungern-Sternberg declared their allegiance to the Romanovs and vowed to fight the revolutionaries. In late 1917 Ungern-Sternberg, acting on orders from Semyonov, and a small Cossack-detachment crossed the border on a train and they peacefully disarmed the 1500 men-strong Russian garrison of Manzhouli in Manchuria, who had rebelled against their officers. The soldiers were put on a train and sent to the West. For a time the occupied railway station of Manzhouli served as stronghold of Semyonov and Ungern-Sternberg in their preparations for war in Transbaikalia, a region of strategic importance to all war parties. They started to enroll volunteers in a Special Manchurian Regiment, which became a nucleus for anti-communist forces led by Semyonov. Ungern-Sternberg and his local Buryat fighters would soon proceed to disarm the Russian troops in Manchuria, but the Chinese became increasingly afraid of his rising power and they captured him and his men eventually. In response, Semyonov sent an armored train into Chinese territory and thus Ungern-Sternberg was released, at last.

From March to July 1918, the Special Manchurian Regiment repeatedly attempted to seize and occupy Russian territory along the border with Manchuria, but they were soundly defeated on July

13<sup>th</sup> and had to retreat deep into Manchurian territory. However, when Japanese troops and weapons arrived in August 1918, Semyonov and Ungern-Sternberg were back on the offensive and this time, they managed to conquer all of Transbaikalia where Semyonov, in Chita, declared himself Ataman. He promoted Ungern-Sternberg to the rank of major general, and appointed him with guarding the strategically important railway station at Dauria, southeast of Lake Baikal.

It was here when Ungern-Sternberg started to act independently and as a commander in his own right. He kept enrolling new troops under his command, forming the Asiatic Cavalry Division, but at the same time his regime over Dauria became more severe and violent. Nearby villages as well as trains in transit were terrorized, with Ungern-Sternberg's wrath directed at anyone Non-Russian but at Jews in particular. He blamed the Jews for the Bolshevik revolution and the murder of the royal family; hence Jews were ushered off the trains and executed at once. His hatred for Jews went so far that he is said to have contemplated genocide among them once the Bolsheviks were defeated and all of Russia liberated by the armies of the White counter-revolution.

Although the tensions between Semyonov and Ungern-Sternberg kept increasing, because the latter complained about the corruption, squandermania and philosemitism of the former, Ungern-Sternberg was awarded the St. George's Cross 4th class and promoted to Lieutenant general in March 1919. Baron von Ungern-Sternberg was taking care of the dirty work Semyonov would rather not take responsibility for; for instance, captured soldiers of the Red Army were transferred to Dauria where Ungern-Sternberg had them summarily executed. The Asiatic Cavalry Division was quite a motley crew which included Russians, Buryats, Tatars, Bashkirs, Mongolians, Chinese, Japanese, Polish exiles and many others. This Division likely resembled a band of medieval "Landsknechte", mercenaries, and without the unconditional loyalty to their commander, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, and the discipline he enforced on his troops, it is hard to imagine how else they'd fought together instead of fighting one another. The Baron reinforced the train station at Dauria, turning it into a fortress from which his troops launched attacks on Red Army forces.

## **Liberator of Mongolia**

During 1920, the military situation for the White counter-revolutionaries became increasingly difficult. Admiral Kolchak, the internationally recognized leader of the Anti-Bolshevik forces fighting in Russia, was defeated and ultimately murdered by the Bolsheviks, also General Wrangel was forced to retreat from Crimea, and that left Transbaikalia to be the only Russian territory still under control of White troops. Ungern-Sternberg anticipated the coming offensive of the Red Army and he started looking for a place where he and his men could find a new safe haven for their operations against the Bolsheviks. Already in 1919, taking advantage of the weakness of Russia's government caused by revolution and civil war, the nationalist Chinese government sent troops to end the autonomy of Outer Mongolia and rejoin it with China. This violated the terms of a tripartite Russian-Mongolian-Chinese agreement signed in 1915, which secured the autonomy of Outer Mongolia under the rule of the Bogd Khan, who was the spiritual as well as political leader of Mongolian Buddhism. When the Chinese returned in 1919, he was removed from power and put under house arrest. The Bogd Khan sent a letter to Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, urgently asking for help against the Chinese occupation. Ungern-Sternberg complied with this request, and he and his soldiers - said to have numbered no more than 1500 men - crossed into Mongolia in an attempt to drive the Chinese out of there. After first attempts failed, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg decided to wait through the winter before he'd march on the capital of Mongolia, Urga, where the Chinese had deployed 7000 men, with artillery and machine guns, in fortified positions. The local Mongolians started to aid Ungern-Sternberg and his men with food, horses, new recruits and more weapons. The Bogd Khan sent his blessings and prophesied a victory over the Chinese in the coming spring. Baron von Ungern-Sternberg asked Mongolian astrologers and seers to counsel him in his decisions, and the Mongolians supported him all the more, because they understood his earnest desire to become their liberator and protector.

It was also in 1920 when Baron von Ungern-Sternberg revoked his former allegiance to Semyonov, who was eventually defeated by the Red Army and forced into exile, because he wanted to pursue political ambitions far exceeding the agenda of the White counter-revolution in Russia. Ungern-Sternberg wished to reinstate and strengthen monarchy everywhere, starting in Asia where he dreamed of a Great Empire akin to the one ruled by Genghis Khan, but also in Russia and all of Europe too. He fervently believed in the divine right of Kings and Emperors, whom he considered a bulwark against the decline of civilization. The Jews, on the other hand, were to him the root of all unrest, anarchy and civil war that he witnessed in Russia and elsewhere. Woe to any Jew who found himself in the dominion of Baron von Ungern-Sternberg! Basically all the Jews in Mongolia, with only a few exceptions, were killed after Urga fell to the Asiatic Cavalry Division.

On January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1921, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg ordered the assault on Urga. Despite heavy losses and initial setbacks, his troops eventually defeated the Chinese occupation forces and drove them out of the city. The Bogd Khan was rescued from his house arrest, and the capital city was finally taken on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February. After the battle, Ungern-Sternberg's troops began plundering Chinese stores and killing Russian Jews who were living in Urga, but a few days later he ended the looting and enforced discipline among his soldiers, once again. The Chinese were not yet expelled from Mongolia, though. A string of subsequent battles outside of the capital had the remaining Chinese troops retreat to Northern Mongolia, from where they hoped to reach China by rounding the Mongolian capital to the West. However, they were soon overtaken by their Russian and Mongolian pursuers and after a final battle raging from March 30<sup>th</sup> until April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Chinese were routed and chased across the Southern border of the country. Thus Mongolia was liberated from Chinese occupation, once again. Already on March 13<sup>th</sup>, Mongolia was declared an independent monarchy with the Bogd Khan as head of the state. The Bogd Khan identified Baron von Ungern-Sternberg as incarnation of the *Begtse*, the lord of war and in origin a pre-Buddhist war god of the Mongols. When the Bogd Khan was crowned as Khan of Mongolia, he made Ungern-Sternberg a Khan too. The Bogd Khan presented Ungern-Sternberg with a ring depicting a swastika, a treasure that was believed to have been passed down all the way from Genghis Khan himself. Furthermore, the Baron was promoted to the rank of General. Ever since this day, he would be dressed in the yellow coat of Mongolian princes. It was a dream come true! In effect, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg became the dictator of Mongolia for a short period of time. Even though his regime was ruling with terror and intimidation once more, Ungern-Sternberg also attempted to modernize Urga by imposing street cleaning and sanitation, promoting religious life and tolerance in the capital, introducing a national currency and attempting to reform the economy of the Mongolian kingdom.

## **Betrayal and Death**

In Spring 1921, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg crossed back into Russia and raided several Red Army outposts, but during his absence from the capital, Red Army detachments, together with the Mongolian People's Army, captured Urga and ended the rule of the Bogd Khan in favor of a secular, pro-Communist regime. Although he made initial territorial gains in his crusade up North, his hope to get help from his former ally Semyonov and the Japanese government turned out to be in vain. When the Red Army sent large forces to counter his offensive, Ungern-Sternberg decided to retreat to Mongolia but many of his formerly loyal soldiers wished to escape to Manchuria and put an end to the fighting which they considered a hopeless cause by now. The Baron vowed to keep fighting, and he hoped to make it all the way to Tibet from where he wanted to realize his vision of a Pan-Asiatic Empire, at long last. His troops however mutinied and tried to assassinate him. With nowhere to go, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg was hunted down by the Red Army and ultimately betrayed by a Mongolian prince, who turned him over to his pursuers on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1921.

Some sources say that he was offered amnesty if he joined the Red Army, but he refused to betray his ideals and before he was shot dead in the prison yard of Novosibirsk, he managed to swallow the

St. George's Cross so it could not be defiled by his enemies' hands. His swastika ring, however, was taken from him and is rumored to have ended up in the possession of the legendary Red Army Marshal Zhukov, in 1936.

## **From the Man to the Myth**

The life of Baron von Ungern-Sternberg lasted not much longer than 35 years but it is nothing short of extraordinary, to say the least, and there is so much more to it than what meets the eye. According to Ferdinand Ossendowski, Roman von Ungern-Sternberg once told him: *"My name is surrounded with such hate and fear that no one can judge what is truth and what is false, what is history and what myth."*

Hermann Graf Keyserling believed that for the most part of his life, Roman von Ungern-Sternberg was a severely divided personality, who could either be holy or be cruel or be both in the starkest expression, but who'd be unable to reconcile the tension caused by opposing forces in one and the same personality. Roman von Ungern-Sternberg's biological father is said to have been committed to a mental asylum once, and to some observers this would explain that he too was mentally unstable, but by all accounts no hard evidence of any hereditary madness could ever be found in the family history of the Ungern-Sternberg. Roman von Ungern-Sternberg surely was called the "Mad Baron" or "Bloody Baron" for the violence and bloodshed he has inflicted upon others, with torturing those suspected to be "Red Spies" as well as executing even his own soldiers for the slightest offense. However, the instances of arbitrary killings and mass-murder in the Russian civil war can hardly be deemed exclusive to Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, so there must be something else but violence and murder that set him apart from any other warlord on either side of the battlefield; something out of the ordinary that prompted many of his contemporaries to deem him insane.

## **Age of Empires**

When Baron von Ungern-Sternberg joined the Russian army on the eve of World War One, he was one of many from among the ranks of German-Baltic aristocracy who pledged allegiance to the Russian Czar and had no qualms fighting their German kinsmen with whom they shared language, culture, and bloodline. It was still the age of Empires, where the notion of nationality was yet to be conceived, and shifting loyalty determined by the allegiance to one crown or the other was anything but uncommon among the nobles. Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, however, would refuse to turn his back on the Russian Czar even after his whole family was slain by the Bolsheviks; and monarchy, for all practical purposes, was dead in Russia and Europe too. Not so for Ungern-Sternberg. He became obsessed with monarchy, to the point that this idea would set him at odds with every other leader of the White counter-revolution who'd see no point in returning to a status quo ante before royal rulers were replaced by national governments pretty much everywhere in Europe and Asia; like it already happened in February 1917 when the Czar abdicated, the Romanov dynastic rule in Russia ended and was replaced by the newly formed Russian Provisional Government. Contrary to the spirit of the time, the "Zeitgeist", Baron von Ungern-Sternberg considered monarchy to be the only legitimate form of government for any people. Needless to say, but out there in the Far East he was all alone with this sentiment: In Russia, the Bolsheviks had murdered the Romanov royal family and in China, already in 1912 the rule of the Qing dynasty was ended by revolution and a nationalist government took over. Only in Mongolia, of all places, the monarchist agenda of Baron von Ungern-Sternberg could align with the political aspirations of a local ruler: The Bogd Khan, also known as "Living Buddha". He was the third most important person in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy, below only the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama.

## Warrior and Ascetic

Hermann Graf Keyserling mentioned that Ungern-Sternberg was very curious from his teenage years onward with *"Tibetan and Hindu philosophy"* and often spoke of the mystical powers possessed by *"geometrical symbols"*. Although we have no record showing when the Baron actually converted to Buddhism, notwithstanding that Ferdinand Ossendowski said of Ungern-Sternberg that he became a Buddhist in childhood, his long-lasting fascination for this religion cannot be denied. He lived in Mongolia prior to World War One; he spoke Mongolian, he dressed in traditional Mongolian clothes, and he stayed in touch with local dignitaries after his departure. Hence the Bogd Khan could be certain that Baron Ungern-Sternberg would be receptive to his plea for help, when he asked for his assistance to overthrow the Chinese occupation of Outer Mongolia. When Ungern-Sternberg left Russia to aid the Mongolians in their struggle for independence, for all practical purposes he turned his back on the White counter-revolution in Russia. After 1920 Baron von Ungern-Sternberg became a warlord of his own, accountable to no one but himself and his God. In this he reminds of the Conquerors and Conquistadores from times of yore, which sailed forth into a New World to make a name for their own; to find fabled treasures, discover ancient cultures, meet a sudden death, and become immortal legend thereafter.

Baron von Ungern-Sternberg was a brave man; for all we know, even daring to the point of tempting and defying death. From his early time as a soldier and officer, whether in the Far East or later in Galicia and Poland, he could be found in the heat of the battle or volunteering for dangerous missions that took him behind enemy lines. When he commandeered his own troops in Transbaikalia, Ungern-Sternberg used to lead by example. He would ride and fight with his soldiers, share their meals and sleep together with them under the same roof. Unlike other White officers like Semyonov, for instance, Ungern-Sternberg practiced an ascetic lifestyle that would even have him avoid drinking alcohol any longer. He is said to have been a heavy drinker once, a habit that apparently contributed to his lack of discipline which caused him so many troubles in his early years as a student and soldier. With his stern attitude, the Baron was feared as well as revered by his soldiers who'd knew that any misbehavior on their part would carry heavy-handed penalties but loyalty and bravery would be rewarded likewise. It was his liberation of Urga, the capital of Mongolia, against all odds that echoed in Western newspapers and made many aware of his name for the first time ever. How he was able to expel the Chinese occupation force from Mongolia, even though badly outnumbered and outgunned, certainly deserves the respect from any military strategist. Needless to say, but the reports from Mongolia became all the more exaggerated and twisted the farther they travelled, hence the legend of the "Mad Baron", who ruled with iron first in an exotic and remote kingdom, could easily seize the imagination and fantasy of a Western audience receptive to tales from far-away places and daring adventurers.

## Clairvoyant and Mystic

Keyserling called Ungern-Sternberg *"one of the most metaphysically and occultly gifted men I have ever met"* and believed that the Baron was a clairvoyant who could read the minds of the people around him. We know from the travel report of Ferdinand Ossendowski that the gaze of Baron von Ungern-Sternberg was very unsettling, to say the least. When they met for the first time, Ossendowski recalls, his *"eyes were fixed upon me like those of an animal from a cave"*. Ossendowski witnessed how a bunch of prisoners were brought to Ungern-Sternberg who would stare at them for a long time until he finally proclaimed who, from among them, must be commissars of the Communist party, and as it turned out, documents proving their espionage activities were found on the two prisoners he had singled out. They were beaten to death on his command.

That Baron von Ungern-Sternberg is believed to have been the incarnation of a pre-Buddhist god of war, recognized by the local spiritual leader as a descendant of the fabled Genghis Khan and thus

being one of the last Khans of Mongolia himself, quite certainly must be considered the most intriguing aspect to his legend. This was the moment when Baron von Ungern-Sternberg became immortal in his lifetime already. He was prophesied by Mongolian seers that he would only have 133 days more to live, as he told Ossendowski when they met in Urga. He expected to die, not as the victor but as the vanquished, yet he feared not: He knew that his death was meant to be the ultimate sacrifice from which the myth, transcending the ages, would blossom and rise forth. Only the myth can conquer death and hence his death, as gloomy as it was, could only add to the legend of his life: Betrayed by the last of his men, captured by his mortal enemy but remaining defiant until the very end. Not surrendering, ever, and never once asking for mercy or begging for his life. He died the same way that he lived – as a true enemy to the world that he hated and wished to tear asunder, so his vision of a New World could ultimately manifest in reality. When the bullets of the Red Army firing squad hit him, he truly lived up to the words of Ernest Hemingway: *“But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated”*.

## **From Nihilism to Numinous**

The life journey of Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg took him all the way from the Baltic Sea to Outer Mongolia; from Lutheran Protestantism via Russian Orthodoxy to Mongolian Buddhism; from being a soldier to becoming a wargod. It is surely noteworthy that the Baron moved from a religion that only knows a rather abstract concept of a God who doesn't reveal himself to Man, via a religion that knows many Saints touched and blessed by God, towards a religion where Man can become one with the Godhead. The closer he came to Mongolia, the closer he came to embrace the Numinous. In light of Heidegger's contemplation of religion and metaphysics, of which we read in his Contributions to Philosophy (*“Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)”*) for instance, it does not come as a surprise that Baron von Ungern-Sternberg could never have accomplished his Magnum Opus if he'd stayed put in the West. Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, in Europe at least, and Heidegger agreed. Where God is dead, he is absent. The notion of the absent God means that there is no god visible for Man; there is nothing that gathers man and things together. The world has become groundless. No trace is left of the holy, explains Heidegger in his essay *“What are poets for?”* (*“Wozu Dichter?”*). Confined to the West, a man like Baron von Ungern-Sternberg would have remained forlorn in a world without God. Also Julius Evola explains why the Baron turned to the East, because the *“East was faithful to the own spiritual traditions and willing to stand together with those who were able to revolt against the modern world.”*

Ungern-Sternberg turned his back on the nihilism he experienced in the West and he started to seek epiphany in the East. We can barely imagine the agony he must have felt when the Bolshevik Revolution started to tear his beloved Russia apart, manifesting all the horror of spiritual degradation he loathed so much. Just like Ungern-Sternberg himself, so was Ferdinand Ossendowski an eye-witness to the Bolshevik revolution and her aftermath in Russia. In his book *“The Shadow of the Gloomy East”*, he describes how madness and murder, in the name of Revolution, have flung the gates of hell wide open. This hell of own making did not come as a surprise to Ossendowski, though. He knew that in Russia, no one but the ruling upper class was educated and civilized in the image of Western culture, whereas the vast majority of spiritually illiterate masses was *“inclined to dark and gloomy mysticism (...) which took crude, primitive, unchristian and anti-civilized forms.”* Where else but here could the Antichrist have manifested in our world, he wondered? *“Already he has dispatched his servants to ruin and break up the richest of all countries and nations – Russia and the Russians. (...) The people are bending beneath its horrors. (...) For although men may still feel capable of fighting men, they cannot reasonably fight against the Power of Evil...”*. There was but one man willing to take up arms and fight against the Evil of his time: Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg!

## Apocalypse Now

Ossendowski also reveals to us some amazing insights that help to shed light on the religious doctrine upheld by Ungern-Sternberg in his final days, even though it is hard to determine how much of it we can take for granted. According to his own account, Buddhism was introduced into his family by his grandfather who is said to have been a privateer in the Indian Ocean. Ungern-Sternberg spoke to Ossendowski about the *“war between the good and evil spirits”*, by which he meant his relentless war efforts fighting against the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. *“Revolution is an infectious disease”* that does *“blot out culture, kill morality and destroy all the people”*. Religion, on the other hand, guides humanity *“upward toward higher ideals”* and thus Baron von Ungern-Sternberg apparently believed in a dichotomy of Religion and Revolution, of Spirituality and Materialism; the latter removing man farther *“from the divine and the spiritual”*. From his point of view, the revolution in Russia was that one grave cataclysm spoken about in the holy scriptures of Christianity and Buddhism alike. *“It appeared, turned back the wheel of progress and blocked our road to Divinity”*, Ungern-Sternberg is being quoted. He considered the whole of Russia and Europe in imminent danger, because a day of divine reckoning would now be inevitable: *“(F)amine, destruction, the death of culture, of glory, of honor and of spirit, the death of states and the death of peoples.”* He already could see this *“dark, mad destruction of humanity”*.

If we consider this to be true, then Baron von Ungern-Sternberg was an apocalypticist more than anything else. He was motivated by the notion that he is living through the end times, already witnessing the end of the world and it is up to him to save mankind from the ultimate undoing. Apocalypticism, or Eschatology, is integral to any major religion in the world. In Christianity, we are familiar with the Revelation of Saint John the Divine that tells of the rise of Satan, laying waste to the world until he is ultimately defeated in the second coming of Christ. Fundamental to Eschatology is the belief in the cyclic nature of history. History is divided into *“ages”* and each age lasts for a certain period of time. The transition from one age to the next is believed to re-shape the reality of the world as we know it; altering our way of living, thinking, being. Usually it is a major crisis, like a global conflict or war, which marks the end of one age and ushers man into a new reality. Buddhism too does have a tradition of eschatology, because Buddha himself predicted that his teachings would disappear five thousand years after his passing, when mankind would degenerate in a period of greed, lust, violence, impiety, sexual depravity and physical weakness all culminating in the collapse of society that would erase the memory of Buddha. However, there will be a new era in which the next Buddha Maitreya will appear. He is said to be *“fully awakened, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, an Exalted One”*. Every apocalypse knows a savior, a messiah who will lead the faithful from the darkness into the light of a New Dawn. Theosophy, the esoteric doctrine said to have inspired the German Thule Society, among others, teaches that Maitreya previously incarnated as Krishna, of whom we read in the ancient Vedic text of Bhagavad Gita; a mythological figure imprinting itself on the Buddhism of one Baron von Ungern-Sternberg too. It is sometimes suggested that Baron von Ungern-Sternberg was interested in theosophy, and although we cannot confirm as much with certainty, it is still obvious by his own words that he was no stranger to the concept of a messianic figure appearing in the end times, either. In his farewell speech to Ossendowski, he explicitly mentions the *“King of the World”* who shall rise from his *“subterranean capital”*, **Shambala**, at the end of time.

## Dharmic Destruction

Much has been said and made of Baron von Ungern-Sternberg’s cruelty, because he inflicted severe punishment upon his own soldiers for the slightest transgressions, he would indiscriminately kill Jews and Communists, and he took no prisoners when he defeated the enemy on the battlefield. Allegedly he was insane, a *“bloody mad Baron”*, but it is far more likely that he just appeared to be out of his

mind to any but the most insightful observer. In the West, it is widely presumed that Buddhism is a pacifist and non-violent creed. Everyone is familiar with images of the praying Tibetan monks who appear to be so detached from mundaneness that they couldn't care less for the primal inclinations making man to be the wolf of his fellow man. How could Baron von Ungern-Sternberg have been Buddhist if he was so prone to violence? But if he was a Buddhist who inflicted pain and suffering on others, does this coincidence not show his confusion? Western perception of Buddhism more often than not is flawed and ignorant of the different theological lineages that have Buddhism – like any other of the major religions – split up into various local distinctions. The Mongolian culture was (and remains to be) a nomadic one, and like any other nomadic tribe, men were warriors first and foremost. Under the rule of Genghis Khan and his successors, the **Tibetan Buddhism** of the **Sakya-school** became the de-facto state religion of the Mongolian Empire. The Sakya-school is heavily influenced by tantric doctrines from India. **Tantra** denotes the esoteric traditions to be found in Buddhism and Hinduism alike, and it is from this angle that Baron von Ungern-Sternberg's personal approach to Buddhism becomes so much more plausible.

One of the most important Vedic texts of Hinduism is the **Bhagavad Gita**. It tells of a battle, where the warrior Arjuna feels defeated and unmotivated to fight because his enemies are his family, so either way he feels he will lose; either he will die or he must kill his family. In this moment appears Krishna, as personification of the Godhead, and he tells Arjuna that all these warriors are already dead, for they are all subject to the laws of time, whereas the Self is eternal and free from this delusion. Krishna tells Arjuna to fight, either win and conquer the earth, or lose and attain heaven, but either way one must not hesitate to fight. Indecision is caused by selfish desires, which Krishna stresses are hidden within. By performing service for the world, one can act with the benefit of all creatures, thereby imitating the divine act. The American occultist Joseph Kerrick calls this the "quaternary thought" - in his essay "The Second Coming of Q", he writes about it as *"the full 'humanist' awareness of the spiritual unity of friend and foe, and even, in Buddhist terms, of all sentient beings. But it is able to attain a negation of this on a higher level, a greater enlightenment which does not deny oneness but subsumes it, in order ... to carry on the necessary work of the Universe. This is called, in Sanskrit: Dharma. It carries the implication of 'duty' in the highest spiritual sense, and of 'destiny'."*

It is now safe to say that Ungern-Sternberg did embody the essence of quaternary thought as it was originally formulated in the ancient Aryovedic culture, and can still be found in the Bhagavad Gita. He was not motivated by primal urges, he was not bloodthirsty and cruel for the sake of inflicting suffering upon others, but he felt compelled to do what he deemed absolutely necessary to do in face of the spiritual darkness that he witnessed engulfing Russia and Europe alike. He aligned himself with the Divine, he has become one with Godhead, *"from whom all things come and who is in all"*, as it is said in the Bhagavad Gita. *"In every specific situation there is a specific work to be done, the dharma indeed, the work of the will of God"*, Joseph Kerrick tells us in his essay. Like the ancient noble warlord Arjuna, of whom we read in the Bhagavad Gita, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg understood that he too has to carry out the will of God even if it means to kill relentlessly and without mercy, because it is just like Krishna told Arjuna on the eve of his battle against his own kin: *"I am all-powerful Time which destroys all things, and I have come here to slay these men. Even if thou dost not fight, all the warriors facing thee shall die."*

## **Dynamic Equilibrium**

In this regard it is also interesting how Hermann Graf Keyserling was reflecting on the transmutation of Baron von Ungern-Sternberg after he liberated Mongolia and was welcomed by the Mongolians as one of their own. Whereas Ungern-Sternberg seemed to oscillate between *"Holiness and Bloodlust"* hitherto, as Keyserling observed, making him appear like a completely different person depending on his prevailing mood, it was only there and then that he reconciled his conflicting soul and was made

whole, to be more than the sum of all his apparently antagonistic personality traits. Keyserling attributes this to the particular atmosphere in Mongolia that translated Ungern-Sternberg's *"Holiness and Bloodlust"* into a *"dynamic equilibrium"*, thus enabling him to commit the vilest atrocity in a mental state of decency and purity. *"He probably wanted to purge the inferior mankind and felt good with that,"* Keyserling tells us. *"However, he didn't want to torment any individual man for his own sake. If he let someone be beaten to death or be burned alive, he likely felt just like Jehovah who scorched the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone."*

## Saints and Soldiers

Last but not least, it is noteworthy that Baron von Ungern-Sternberg wished, in his own words to Ossendowski, to found an *"order of military Buddhists in Russia. ...For the protection of the process of evolution for humanity and for the struggle against revolution"*, because he was *"certain that evolution leads to Divinity and revolution to Bestiality"*. He said he introduced the *"condition of celibacy, the entire negation of woman, of the comforts of life, of superfluities"* according to the teachings of Buddhism. On the other hand, he said he also allowed the *"limitless use of alcohol, hasheesh and opium"* in his Buddhist order, substances known for inducing dionysian rapture and shamanic trance. We are reminded of the Teutonic Knights' Order that ruled the Baltic when Ungern-Sternberg's ancestors settled there, a Germanic offspring of the ill-fated Templars' Knight Order in which monastic life went hand in hand with battle prowess and initiation into the Arcane by means of a secret rite of passage no outsider should ever know about; and it is remarkable that Baron von Ungern-Sternberg wished to emulate this ideal of European saintly knighthood under the auspices of militant Buddhism. However, it makes perfect sense in light of the utmost fanaticism that Ungern-Sternberg knew would be required for banishing the spiritual darkness suffocating the enlightenment of the West. His cruelty appeared arbitrary and shocking even to contemporaries who were used to human suffering, but was it not a cathartic rite of passage that would strip him and his disciples off all-too-human weakness and fallacy? Is it not required to relinquish humanity when you approach the Numinous? All priesthood, all saints and seers, who commune with (the) God(s), have sacrificed some or other worldly attachment. But unless you sacrifice your compassion for fellow men for the sake of your love of man, you cannot truly embrace the Numinous and transcend beyond good and evil. But it is there, at this distant point so far removed from our humanity, where the **Hyperborean**, the *"Übermensch"*, appears. He is the last to make a final stand in our Dark Age, and the first to behold the New Dawn of a Golden Age reborn.

## Conclusion

Baron von Ungern-Sternberg travelled a long way from the center of Europe into the heartland of Asia; he was crossing as well as burning all the bridges between the West and the East for the sake of forging their union; and he turned into the White God of War who swept across central Asia like *"a bloody storm of avenging Karma"*, as Ossendowski had observed in awe. In the Far East the Baron von Ungern-Sternberg met his fate and fulfilled his destiny, but his eyes were firmly set on the Western horizon from where he once emerged and wished to return one day: As a Soldier as well as a Saint; to be a Scourge just as much as a Savior.

The decline of the West is a reality, now more than ever, but after two devastating world wars it is not there on the old continent where we can find once more the strength to turn the tide and carry on with the Reconquista started by that *"mad, bloody Baron"*. In the West we find all the ancient wisdom and ancestral knowledge that would no doubt help to guide us on our path upwards to Divinity, but it is in the East where we find this untamed power and untainted virtue required to cleanse our path of all the degeneration, debris and decay that block the way of our sacred evolution as the Hyperboreans-to-be.

Like Baron von Ungern-Sternberg turned to the East to find strength in his crusade against Communism in the West, we too must turn eastward to find new strength in our own crusade against Cultural Marxism in Europe and North America too.

Let the Reconquista begin here and now, my dear friends and fellow comrades;  
**today the East, and tomorrow the West!**

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