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XVIII.20 On the Tartars' law of nations

- The Spirit of Law - Book XVIII. On laws in their relationship to the nature of the terrain -

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Among themselves, the Tartars appear gentle and humane, and they are very cruel conquerors : the city dwellers they take are put to the sword ; they consider they are showing them mercy when they sell them or distribute them to their soldiers. They have destroyed Asia from the Indies to the Mediterranean ; all the land that makes up the east of Persia, as a result, remains wilderness.

Here is what seems to me to have produced such a law of nations. These peoples had no cities ; all their wars began spontaneously and impetuously. When they hoped to win, they fought ; when they did not, they went to join the army of those who were stronger. With such customs, they found it was counter to their law of nations for a city which could not defend itself against them to stop them. They did not consider cities as an assembly of inhabitants but as places serving to evade their authority. They had no art for besieging them, and were very exposed when they did : they avenged in blood all the blood they had just shed.