In 1206, the year of Chinggis Khan’s great quriltai, historically Chinese territory was divided under the control of three different states: Xi Xia (1038–1227), Jin (1115–1234), and Southern Song (1127–1279). The Mongol conquest of China began early in the thirteenth century with Chinggis Khan’s attacks on the Xi Xia and the Jin, two hybrid states that straddled Chinese and non-Chinese regions. Chinggis Khan himself did not live to see the final defeat and conquest of the Jin. His top priority after his campaigns in Central Asia was the destruction of the Xi Xia, which he accomplished shortly before his death in 1227. His son and successor Ögödei conquered the Jin in 1234, and thereafter the Mongol campaigns against China were prosecuted intermittently until the final Mongol triumph over the Southern Song in 1279.

The enormous wealth of the Jin and the territory that produced it were tempting targets for the Mongols. Its population was, according to its 1207 census, 53,532,151 individuals in 8,413,164 households, or 6.33 persons per household. As a conquest dynasty, it had a mixed economy of agriculture and sericulture in Chinese areas and cattle breeding, pastoral nomadism, hunting, and fishing in the north. Like many previous dynasties, it raised revenue through agricultural taxes and government monopolies on major commodities such as salt, iron, wine, and tea. It used both metallic and paper currency and introduced a commercial tax in 1180. In 1171 the annual tax revenue in grain was nine million dan, or around 540 million kilograms.

In 1208, on the eve of the wars with the Mongols, the Jin had approximately 4.6 million square kilometres of territory, extending from the Huai River in the south and north and northeastward into Manchuria all the way to the Khingghan Mountains at approximately 56 degrees of latitude. The Jin’s control of the Pacific coast extended southward to the vicinity of modern Vladivostok.

The Jin shared several characteristics with other conquest dynasties or alien states that ruled significant amounts of historically Chinese territory. They typically straddled both steppe and sown, or the pastoral nomadic world to the north and the agricultural world of the Chinese to the south, ruling over both. Imperial China had several such states, such as the (Northern) Wei (386–535) led by the Tabghach,
Map 5.1 North China in the Jin Empire
Source: Created by Mapping Specialists, Ltd.
and especially during the tenth through fourteenth centuries, when three such states (the Khitian state of Liao from 907 to 1125, the Jurchen state of Jin from 1115 to 1234, and the Tangut state of Xia from 1038 to 1227) ruled large tracts of historically Chinese territory. China’s last dynasty, the Qing (1368–1644), was also a conquest dynasty, this time led by the Manchus, the ethnic and linguistic cousins of the Mongols. Over the last 950 years of imperial Chinese history, then, from 960 to 1911, conquest dynasties ruled some or all of the historically Chinese territory for seventy percent of the time. Conquest dynasties were the norm and not the exception over the last thousand years of imperial Chinese history.

The Jin ruled China through more deliberative and less autocratic methods than the Chinese; deployed dualistic forms of government, one for the Chinese and one for non-Chinese, with legal jurisdiction assigned by ethnicity (cf. *jus sanguinis*) rather than locality (cf. *jus soli*); and endorsed and applied multiple languages in official discussions and in administrative documents. The state of Jin that the Mongols began attacking in earnest in 1211 was, then, a hybrid state in its own eyes and also those of the Mongols.

The Mongol conquest of the Jin may be divided into four distinct phases or stages. During the first, which lasted from 1208 through 1218, Chinggis Khan personally led and participated in campaigns. During this time, the Mongols suffered some defeats in their engagements with the Jin. The initial intention of this stage does not seem to have been territorial acquisition, but taking and holding territory apparently became more important, as in 1215 when Chinggis Khan left behind occupying forces after capturing Zhongdu. The second period, 1218–1223, was largely a holding operation conducted by Muqali while Chinggis Khan and his main force were campaigning in Central Asia. During the third period, from 1223 to 1230, the Mongols suspended their campaigns against the Jin. It was during the fourth period, from 1230 to 1234, that the Jin were finally overcome and annihilated.

**THE JIN AND MONGOL MILITARIES**

The Jin military’s system of organization was extensive and complicated. Separate ethnic armies included Jurchen, Khitian, Parhae, and Han. Troops were also assigned to units with separate specified functions, among them the imperial bodyguard, garrison, state farms, and city defence units. Finally, armies were divided by type, with cavalry as the Jin’s main force, but they also possessed significant infantry forces. There were also some naval and artillery units.

After 1206 Chinggis Khan organized his forces into units of ten, one hundred, one thousand, and ten thousand. As is well known, this decimal system of military organization did not originate with him but was used by the Jurchens, Khitans, and other pastoral nomadic peoples all the way back to the Xiongnu. Chinggis Khan applied the system not only to streamline his forces but also to replace old kinship ties of identity with new decimalized military ones. In so doing he succeeded at “meld[ing] an inchoate collection of tribes and confederations into a single army with a hierarchical yet responsive, command structure.” Chinggis Khan’s bodyguard or *kesbig* was an elite force charged with guarding and serving the khan as well as with various administrative and military command tasks. From its origins as the personal bodyguard of the khan, it eventually evolved into an important institution that by the time of Qubilai Qa’an (1260–1294) numbered 12,000.
Outside of the _kesbig_, the main forces in the Mongol military were the Mongol Army, the Tammachi Army, the Han Armies, and the Newly-Adhered Armies. Hsiao Ch’i-ch’ing claims that the Mongol Army and the Tammachi Army were manned by ethnic Mongols, while the Han Armies included Northern Chinese in a broad sense (Han, Khitan, Jurchen, and even Koreans), and the Newly-Adhered Armies were composed of Southern Chinese. But the actual ethnic compositions of these military units were often not so clear-cut. The Mongol Army was indeed originally composed of Mongols who had submitted to Chinggis Khan and joined his forces by 1206, but later, as the empire expanded, people from other ethnic groups, for example Tanguts, were also incorporated into the Mongol Army.

The Tammachi Army, which was instituted by 1218 at the very latest and included primarily Mongols, served as the vanguard of the advancing Mongol Army, and also sometimes as garrisoning forces. The Tammachi Army occasionally included non-Mongols, for example Han and _Semu_ people.

After Chinggis Khan’s campaign against the Jin began, many Han people from the Central Plains who had surrendered to the Mongols were organized into the Han Armies, which occasionally also included ethnic Khitans and Jurchens. Finally, after 1274, when the Mongols commenced their major campaigns against the Southern Song, people from southern China who submitted to the Mongol/Yuan cause were organized into Newly-Adhered Armies. Military units under the Mongols were in turn made up of cavalry, infantry, naval, pontoon bridge, artillery, crossbowmen, and construction corps.

**REASONS FOR JIN DEFEAT AND MONGOL VICTORY**

The Mongols, frequently described in historical materials as being vastly outnumbered by Jin forces, nonetheless prevailed against them much more often than not. The reasons for this are complex and defy monicausal or reductionist analysis. Following are several factors or causes behind the ultimate Jin demise and Mongol victory in 1234, ranked tentatively in my initial estimates of their relative importance.

The Mongols retained and brought into full play their excellence at swift mobile warfare. Their superior mobility and speed enabled them to mount and withdraw from sieges more or less at will; capture and retain control of key frontier passes; ambush Jin forces out in the field, as they did near Dengzhou and later along the way to Junzhou in the summer of 1232; and intercept and destroy reinforcements the Jin sent to besieged cities, as at Zhongdu in 1215. Because of their preference for swift and mobile warfare, the Mongols mounted sieges only reluctantly when they saw no other way of capturing a key urban centre. They generally took advantage of alternative methods that presented or suggested themselves, as they did in 1234 when they broke the dikes of the Huanghe River at Cunjindian, thus inundating Kaifeng with water and silty mud and causing massive destruction in the city. The Jin were unable to do anything even remotely as devastating to the Mongols.

The Jin waged a mostly defensive warfare against the Mongols from fixed positions, something the ancient strategist Sunzi strongly discouraged: “Those who excel at defense bury themselves away below the lowest depths of Earth, [while] those who excel at offense move from above the greatest heights of
Heaven.” But in fact the Jin had little choice but to do so because their empire was more of a city-based state than a nomadic polity in fine fighting form. The Jin had to protect their cities and did not have the extensive mobility and freedom to roam that the Mongols did. The Jin Empire was largely unable to take the fight to the Mongols and for the most part had to wage debilitating defensive warfare.

The Mongols were well-blooded, the Jin forces decidedly less so. Members of the Mongols’ cavalry and infantry forces were seasoned and hardened battle veterans, and Jin cavalry and infantry could not match the combat experience and tactical superiority of the Mongols. In 1231, when Tolui was overawed at the sight of 100,000 fielded Jin cavalry and infantry at Tongguan, Sübedei reminded him of an important fact: “These people are city-dwellers who can’t endure strenuous work. If we continuously provoke them into exhaustion, we can win the battle.” Tactical inferiority was more of a liability for the Jin than their numerical superiority in the number of men under arms was an asset.

Mongol sieges against Jin cities seem on balance not to have been the debilitating quagmires that Sunzi cautioned against. (“Thus the highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy’s plans; next is to attack their alliances; next to attack their army; and the lowest is to attack their fortified cities.”) They seem to have been mounted more to isolate cities from the outside world, cutting off their supply lines and channels of communication, than to break through their walls and put them to the sword. Isolating cities and starving them out, as the Mongols did in Kaifeng in 1234 in particular, were effective tactics. What is more, sieges on cities were not particularly costly for the Mongols in terms of casualties because many Jin cities had low numbers of defenders.

Psychological setbacks seem to have been important contributing factors to Mongol victories and Jin defeats. Strings of decisive Mongol victories were discouraging to the Jin, as were Jin defeats, such as the debacle at Tongguan in 1230 (see the following section), which greatly reduced Jin morale and fighting spirit. Defections to the Mongols, especially by Khitan and prominent Han Chinese, cannot but have been encouraging to the Mongols and conversely discouraging to the Jin. For the Mongols, their successive victories meant that they were doing the will of Heaven. They may, for example, have seen the epidemic that killed over 900,000 people in Kaifeng in 1232 as Heaven’s assistance to them.

Lastly, there remains the Song’s fateful decision in October 1233 to decline a Jin overture to ally against the Mongols. Counterfactual history now seemingly more acceptable or at least tolerable than it used to be, we may perhaps speculate that if the Song had accepted the proposed alliance, the Jin might have been saved or at least seen their doomsday clock set back a few more increments of time.

STAGE ONE, 1208–1218: FIRST CAMPAIGNS AND THE REMOVAL OF THE JIN CAPITAL

There seem to have been not one but several possible reasons for Chinggis Khan’s decision to commence hostilities against the Jin. First, after 1206 he was of course no longer interested in remaining a vassal of the Jin, regardless of how ambiguous and indeterminate this vassalage might have been in practical terms. Second was
simply the Jin’s enormous wealth, which may well have seemed to the great khan to cry out for plundering. Third was perhaps a desire to avenge the Jin’s earlier torture-slaying of Ambaghai Khan,\textsuperscript{15} Chinggis Khan’s kinsman and senior patriarch of the Tayichi’ud lineage of the Mongols. Fourth could have been Chinggis’s longing to exact revenge upon the reigning Jin monarch, who earlier had grievously insulted him.\textsuperscript{16} The first hostilities between the Mongols and the Jurchen state of Jin date all the way back to skirmishes from 1206 through 1208, with the Jin generally prevailing. Hostility between the two commenced in 1210, when Chinggis Khan broke off tributary relations with Jin, which had begun in 1195. Fighting began in earnest in 1211, after Chinggis Khan had subdued the Xia and secured commitment from it to assist in future Mongol military operations. Chinggis led armies into Jin territory, and in August 1211 his general Muqali scored a massive victory against Jin forces at Yehuling (Wild Fox Range). Chinggis and his generals then continued capturing Jin garrisons and fortifications, including the key strategic pass at Juyongguan (Chabchiyal in Mongolian), which guarded the approaches to the then Jin capital at Zhongdu (more or less modern Beijing), approximately fifty kilometres to the southeast. According to an important biography of Chinggis Khan, this campaign was quite a “gamble” for Chinggis because of how vastly the Jin’s forces outnumbered his own:

When Genghis Khan [Chinggis Khan] launched his attack the Chin [Jin] army had a nominal strength of 600,000 – some 120,000 mounted archers, which were the equal of the Mongol cavalry, and almost 500,000 infantry; Genghis Khan had probably no more than 65,000 of his own troops and an auxiliary Onggut force of 10,000. Moreover, Genghis’ position in Mongolia was not yet so secure that an uprising by the more recently subjugated tribes could be discounted.\textsuperscript{17}

Nevertheless, Chinggis Khan was supremely confident of the ultimate outcome of the contest because, he said, Heaven had promised him victory.\textsuperscript{18}

According to the \textit{Secret History of the Mongols}, the campaign against Juyongguan was led by Jebe (d. 1223),\textsuperscript{19} one of Chinggis Khan’s “four dogs of war,” his most fearsome, skilled, and trusted lieutenants.\textsuperscript{20} Seeing that Juyongguan was very stoutly defended, Jebe resorted to classic feigned retreat tactics to draw the garrisoned Jin troops out onto open terrain, where of course the Mongols would have the advantage. The Jin forces completely fell for this, and at a key ridge Jebe doubled back with his forces and defeated Jin warriors, who were so numerous that they “choked the valleys and mountains.” Forces led by Chinggis Khan then joined in the slaughter:

Chinggis Khan, following closely behind with the main body of [his army], forced the Kitads to withdraw and overcame the powerful and courageous soldiers of the Juyins of the Khitans and the Jins, slaughtering them until they were piled [like] rotten logs all the way [back] to Chabchiyal.\textsuperscript{21}

The victorious Mongol armies then reached all the way to the approaches of Zhongdu, which they plundered.
Meanwhile, by early 1212 Mongol armies had devastated vast stretches of Jin territory farther to the east:

In the two Hebei circuits and in Shandong, for several thousand li the people had been almost completely killed off, and [the Mongols] made off with everything they could get their hands on: gold, silk, boys, girls, cattle, horses, and sheep. Houses and cottages were burnt to the ground, and the inner and outer city walls were heaps of ruins. Only [the jurisdictions of] Daming, Zhending, Qing, Yun, Pi, Hai, Wo, Shun, and Tongzhou were not broken through, and this because they had forces that stoutly defended them.

But then they withdrew from Jin territory, abandoning the earlier territorial gains that they may not have originally intended to hold for long, their main purpose not being territorial conquest per se but intelligence, reconnaissance, loot, and also to feel out Jin defences. They did, however, attack the Jin again in the autumn of 1212 and in 1213, recapturing Juyongguan despite Jin efforts at reinforcing it. The Mongols then penetrated deep into Jin territory, this time reaching as far west as Shanxi.

In late 1213, the main Mongol forces withdrew once again, but this time they retained control of all key frontier passes and left forces surrounding Zhongdu to cut off its supply chains and communication lines. The unnerved Jin emperor offered gold, horses, silk, and one of his daughters to Chinggis Khan as wife in exchange for peace. The Mongols agreed to this and withdrew completely in the spring of 1214. A high official in the Jin court had apprised the Jin emperor Xuanzong (r. 1213–1224) of the desperate situation and argued that further resistance was, for the time being at least, futile:

The destiny of Heaven and Earth ordains that the time has come for a change in [the dynasty that occupies] the great throne. The Mongols have advanced in strength, overcoming the best soldiers of our powerful and courageous Juyin of the Khara-Kitads and of the Jurchens, slaughtering them all. They have also captured our trusty Chabchiyal [Pass]. If we again array our soldiers and send them forth and if the Mongols again overcome them, [our men] will scatter to their various cities.

But the Mongols and Jin were soon at war again, this time precipitated by the Jin’s refusal to allow Chinggis Khan’s ambassador to Southern Song China passage through Jin territory. A major battle took place at Tongguan, a key pass at the great eastward bend of the Yellow River approximately 375 kilometres due west of Kaifeng, one that the Jin emperor had fortified with large numbers of his best crack troops under his most skilled and trusted commanders, ordering them to hold the pass at all costs. Chinggis himself led the Mongol attack on Tongguan, along with his youngest son Tolui, who slaughtered so many “Kitads” (Jin troops; “Cathayans”) that once again they piled up “like heaps of rotten logs.” Pleased with how well Tolui had acquitted himself on the battlefield, Chinggis rewarded him handsomely. Terrified by the slaughter, the Jin emperor and his court abandoned their demonstrably vulnerable capital at Zhongdu and moved it approximately 550 kilometres...
south-southwest to Kaifeng, which was the Jin’s Southern Capital (Nanjing Kaifeng Fu). The Jin troops left behind at Zhongdu were, according to the *Secret History*, abandoned without provisions and reduced to cannibalism.  

On 26 June 1214 Chinggis Khan became so enraged at the Jin having withdrawn its capital southward towards Kaifeng that he renewed his plans to move on Kaifeng and take it. Meanwhile, he had ordered Muqali into Manchuria in order to cut off Zhongdu from Liaodong to its east. In mid-June through early July 1214, other Mongol forces captured Gubeikou (northeast of modern Miyun, Beijing), Jingzhou (Zunhua in modern Hebei), Jizhou (Jinji County in modern Tianjin), Tanzhou (Miyun in modern Beijing), Shunzhou, and other jurisdictions in quick succession. Several Mongol generals wanted to put all these cities to the sword, but their commander rejected this, reasoning that other cities would more quickly surrender if they found out that these cities had been spared. Meanwhile, in the northeast Muqali had captured three jurisdictions. The Jin commander of Tongzhou then surrendered, and his forces were combined with Mongol forces to help besiege Zhongdu. The beleaguered Zhongdu sent anxious word of its desperate extremities to Kaifeng, and in response the Jin emperor Xuanzong sent many tens of thousands of troops to its aid, most but not all of whom the Mongols intercepted and destroyed. By the summer of 1215 the situation in Zhongdu was so desperate that the Jin commander there committed suicide, and soon the Mongols entered and occupied the city. Chinggis Khan withdrew after Zhongdu’s wealth was proclaimed his and was then emptied, leaving occupying forces behind. This time his purpose seems to have been both loot and territorial conquest. Perhaps his greatest prize from his Zhongdu campaign, Fritz Mote notes, was the ethnic Khitan Yelü Chucai (1190–1243), a high-ranking Jin official, Confucian scholar, and descendant of the Khitan Liao royal family who patiently influenced the Mongols to take up Confucian administrative reforms in the areas of China they had conquered. Starting in 1218, Chinggis Khan took him into his entourage, where he remained in Chinggis Khan’s service and that of Ögödei until Ögödei’s death in 1241.

Meanwhile, in 1212 the Mongol general Jebe had captured the Jin’s Eastern Capital (Dongjing; modern Liaoning) and by 1214 had taken Jin positions along the Liao River. By 1216, a large portion of Manchuria was in Mongol hands, largely due to the defection by the Khitan leader Yelü Liuge and his forces. Both Khitan and Chinese defectors from the Jin to the Mongol cause played key roles in the ultimate victory of the latter. Some of the best-known Chinese defectors included Shi Tianze (1202–1275), who lived to see the beginning of Qubilai Qa’an’s final assault on the Southern Song in 1274, and Zhang Rou (1190–1268) and his son Zhang Hongfan. Internal strife among the Mongols prevented the completion of their conquest of Jin at this time, as did the Mongols’ campaigns against other fractious nomadic groups and also against the Khwarazmshah.

**STAGE TWO: HOLDING OPERATIONS BY MUQALI, 1218–1223**

Since the autumn of 1213, the Mongol general Muqali (1170–1223), “unquestionably one of the leading Mongol personalities and a superb leader,” had been “ferociously destroying all [Jin forces] he faced,” and by late 1216 he completed the
elimination of Jurchen Jin forces in the Liao River Valley. Pleased with his performance, Chinggis Khan then put Muqali in charge of capturing the territory remaining under Jin control. From Zhongdu (now renamed Yan) and the Western Capital (Xijing; modern Datong), Muqali launched a three-pronged attack into Shanxi, Hebei, and Shandong with a multiethnic force that consisted of Mongols, Chinese, Khitan, and surrendered Jurchen Jin troops. The centre force invading Hebei faced stiff resistance, and several cities there had to be taken by force in very bloody battles because they had refused to surrender. By 1218, after a protracted and difficult struggle, Muqali left occupying forces in Hebei and focused on Shanxi, capturing Taiyuan (the main Jin stronghold there) by the autumn of 1218. He then returned to Hebei, and the remaining Jin holdout cities there, including Daming, surrendered by the fall of 1220. In October of the same year, he also captured Ji’nan in Shandong, thus completing each of the three prongs of his campaign into the Jin realm. His conquests had been made all the easier by the Jin Empire’s extraordinarily foolish decision to launch attacks against Southern Song China even though it was being attacked on its north by the Mongols!

The Jin court sent an embassy to Chinggis Khan (then in Central Asia) for tentative peace talks, but the hostilities continued because the Jin refused to accept Mongol terms: the Jin emperor was to accept the diminished title of prince (wang) and recognize Chinggis Khan as his sovereign. Muqali ratcheted up his pressure on the Jin in mid-1221 by launching major offensives into Shaanxi and Gansu, west of the earlier offensives. His forces crossed into the Ordos with Xia assistance and support, and by the spring of 1222 he had captured major cities in Shaanxi. He then proceeded eastward to Shanxi, where Jin counter-offensives were underway. After dealing effectively with these, he returned once again to Shaanxi, where several cities remained defiant and refused to surrender.

Mongol attacks on the city of Chang’an (west of the modern city of Xi’an in Shaanxi) and on Fengxiang (approximately 140 kilometres west-northwest of then Chang’an; Fengxiang County in modern Shaanxi) in late 1222 and early 1223 both ended in failure for Muqali. On 4 December 1222, he led Mongol forces across a pontoon bridge on the Yellow River and captured Tongzhou (modern Lizhou in Shaanxi), and as a result its high-ranking Jin officials killed themselves. He also captured Pucheng (in modern Shaanxi) and then launched an attack on Chang’an but failed to take it. It was defended by a Jin army at a claimed strength of 200,000 troops. The Mongols then divided their troops, with part of them continuing to surround Chang’an and part proceeding to the west to impede possible Jin reinforcements attempting to arrive from Tongguan to relieve the beleaguered but uncaptured city. On 28 December 1222, Muqali led several hundred thousand troops in an attack on Fengxiang to the west but did not take it immediately. He attacked again on 18 January 1223 with the same failed results, and after his third assault on Fengxiang (begun on 6 February 1223) likewise ended in failure, he and his forces withdrew to fight another day.

**STAGE THREE: CAMPAIGNS SUSPENDED, 1223–1230**

It was during this crucial and difficult moment that Xia auxiliaries withdrew their support of Mongol operations in Shaanxi. Incensed at this treachery, Muqali launched
a punitive attack on the Xia frontier and then returned once again to Shanxi, where he died in the spring of 1223, but not before urging his younger brother to finish his incomplete task. With this and with Chinggis Khan’s determination to destroy the perfidious state of Xia, the Mongol campaigns against the Jin were largely put on hold for a few years. (Over these years the Jin did, however, lose their two capitals in Manchuria – the Eastern Capital or Dongdu at Liaoyang and the old Supreme Capital or Shangdu farther north, on the Sungari River.) During this interregnum, the Jin reconciled with the Xia, with peace negotiations beginning in 1224. A peace treaty was concluded in 1225 in which the status of the Xia was raised, with the Xia no longer considered or treated as a vassal to the Jin.

STAGE FOUR: ANNIHILATION UNDER ÖGÖDEI, 1230–1234

After the death of Chinggis Khan in 1227 and the quriltai of 1229 that proclaimed Ögödei the new Qa’an, Ögödei’s first order of business seems to have been the conquest of the Qipchaq steppes and the Rus’ principalities. Before this was finally accomplished, however, he also launched offensives in the Middle East and against Korea. Even so, he did not forget his father’s unfinished business with the Jin, and he commenced operations against them in 1230. It seems, however, that the Jin were still more powerful than Ögödei and his generals had anticipated, and a new and comprehensive plan for their conquest was drawn up the next year, one that once again involved a three-pronged attack southward. The left or eastern force was led by the grand old warrior Sübedei (c. 1175–1248) and assembled in Shandong, while the centre force was under the leadership of Ögödei himself and would move into Shanxi, and the right or western force would proceed into Shaanxi under the command of Tolui, Chinggis Khan’s youngest son by his principal wife.

The Persian historians Juvaini and Rashid al-Din both write of supernatural intervention on behalf of the Mongols and massive Jin reinforcements at Tongguan in eastern Shaanxi, the same key strategic pass where Tolui had fought alongside his father Chinggis almost two decades previously. Both Persian and Yuan sources claim that when Tolui arrived at Tongguan he encountered a massive force of 100,000 Jin cavalrymen. (Sübedei’s biography in the Yuan shi has it as 100,000 cavalry and infantry.) Tolui was awed by their sheer numbers, but as described previously, Sübedei assured him that as city-dwellers, they were no match for Mongol cavalry. The Jin forces had begun boasting confidently about how they would “encircle these Mongols and their king, and take them prisoner, and do this and that to their womenfolk.” According to Juvaini and Rashid al-Din, among the Mongols was a wizard who conjured up storms and winter-like chills (during the summertime) against the “Khitayan army” of the Jin. (Sübedei’s biographies in the Yuan shi simply note the snowstorm without attributing it to wizardry.) Tolui then commanded his men, “Now is the time for battle and good fame; you must be men.” His forces then “fell upon the Khitayans like lions attacking a herd of deer and slew the greater part of that army.” The Mongol forces were then ordered to “commit the act of the people of Lot with all the Khitayans who had been taken prisoner” (in other words, to sodomize them) in reprisal for their boastful talk of what they would do to Mongol women.
The debacle at Tongguan was debilitating for the Jin armies, and they were never the same again. Further, the battle at Mount Yu (Yushan, approximately 350 kilometres southwest of Kaifeng and 35 kilometres west of Dengzhou) fought in January 1232 also ended in a Mongol victory. Mongol forces led by Tolui captured Raofeng Pass (approximately twenty kilometres east of Shiquan in modern Shaanxi province), crossed the Han River, and attacked eastward from Jinzhou (Ankang in modern Shaanxi province) in preparation for the coming Mongol attack on Kaifeng, which was still a good 700 kilometres to the northeast from Jinzhou. Jin forces trying to meet and engage the Mongols as they crossed the Han River on 18 January 1232 arrived at Mount Yu, where they divided their forces and occupied strategic positions, placing infantry at the front of the mountain and cavalry at the rear of it. Tolui then sent forth small numbers of cavalrymen to feel out the strength of the Jin positions and found, at the cost of several dead Mongol cavalrymen, that they were strong. The Mongols then divided into three forces and outflanked the Jin by going around the foot of the mountain and taking up positions at its rear. There the Jin forces engaged them but were beaten back, and the Mongols then took up hidden positions to spy on the Jin forces. After the Jin forces had spent four fruitless days searching for the whereabouts of the Mongols, on 22 January 1232 they began withdrawing to Dengzhou for provisions, only to meet with an ambush and surprise attack by the Mongols, who prevailed over them and scattered them in confusion. The Jin commander concealed this defeat of his and made false reports of achieving great victories.

Tolui’s force ultimately proceeded to the south and southwest of Shaanxi and entered Sichuan, where it asked the Song governor to allow Mongol passage across Song territory to mount an attack on the Jin capital at Kaifeng. (When Song leave was denied him, he moved his forces through anyway and marched on Kaifeng in early 1232.) By summer all three forces had converged on the city, where Sübedei assumed command over them. Their combined forces opened a roadway to Junzhou, thus allowing Jin forces to escape northward. Mongol troops waiting in ambush attacked the Jin armies, massively defeating them and practically wiping out all the Jin generals. In late March through mid-April of 1232 the Mongol attacks on the city continued, with Sübedei first compelling and driving prisoners of war as well as women and children to carry firewood on their backs and fill the moats before attacking the walls. The battle raged for sixteen days and nights, but the Mongols failed to capture the city, and Sübedei withdrew his forces and encamped between the Yellow and Luo Rivers. The two brothers Ögödei and Tolui then took seriously ill and withdrew together, the former ultimately surviving and the latter dying later that year. The Secret History has shamans discovering that the two brothers had fallen gravely ill because “The spirit-lords of the Kitad [Jin] people’s lands and waters were raging violently against you [Ögödei Qa’an] because their lands and waters have been destroyed and their kinsmen plundered.” Then Tolui, not wanting Ögödei to perish because that would harm the unity of the Mongols and give the Jin the satisfaction of revenge, offered himself up to die in his brother’s place to placate the angry Jin deities. In the event, Ögödei did recover and Tolui passed away.

Sübedei later launched another strong siege of the Jin capital, one that finally began to tell, and in early 1233 the Jin emperor Aizong (r. 1224–1234) fled. The city’s Jurchen and Chinese population fiercely resisted the Mongol forces and their
Chinese allies, and in the fighting gunpowder weaponry was extensively used on both sides in mechanically hurled explosive munitions. (Neither side used propellant for rockets.) The Mongols, for their part, deployed relatively simple field mangonels, catapults, or ballistae originally designed to hurl stones. Counter-weighted trebuchets did not make the scene until the 1270s, when mechanical artillerists from the Middle East introduced them to Qubilai. The Jin defenders used bombs against Mongol men and horses to deadly effect, and another weapon called a “fire lance” that used charcoal, iron filings, sulphur, and niter to emit flames over three metres in length was also deployed against the Mongols.

At length, Sübedei’s siege of Kaifeng put the city in the direst of straits, and eventually it was cut off from communication with the outside world. The price of grain skyrocketed, and dead bodies were everywhere. Even the daughters of gentry were reduced to begging for food in the marketplace, and eventually men were eating their own wives and children. Everything made of leather was boiled and eaten, and the imposing residences of the elite were dismantled and used as firewood for cooking. In desperation the Jin reached out to the Song and proposed an alliance against the Mongols in October 1233: “The Mongols have destroyed forty states, and when they arrived at the Xi Xia, the Xia also perished. Now they have reached us [the state of Jin], and if we perish the Song will be next. ‘When the lips perish the teeth are exposed.’ This will be the natural course of things.” The Song, however, declined the proposal.

In addition to starvation, deliberate flooding of the city by Mongol forces contributed materially to its collapse in morale and ultimate surrender. Song chronicles record that in September 1233, when the Song officials Zhao Kui and Quan Zicai were in Kaifeng, the Mongols breached the dikes of the Yellow River at Cunjindian (near Kaifeng), flooding the city and drowning many Song troops. A Qing-period study of the influences topography has on military strategy and operations (written between 1630 and 1660 by the geographer Gu Zuyu [1631–1692] and finally published in 1692) also notes this deliberate flooding, as does a late Yuan-period work published in Zhizheng 21 (1361), which adds that the flood disrupted food supply chains. Almost all educated people in Kaifeng today point to this deliberate flooding of their city as one of its greatest historical tragedies.

Virulent contagion may also have contributed to Kaifeng’s already weak defences (with not even forty thousand troops to defend it) and its ultimate decision to surrender. An epidemic broke out in the city in May and June 1232, and over the course of fifty days or so, more than 900,000 people died of disease!

The desperate and demoralized capital finally surrendered to the Mongols on 29 May 1234 and opened its gates to Sübedei. It had been the previous and normal practice for the Mongols to put cities to the sword that had launched even one arrow or projectile at them in resistance. After taking over Kaifeng, Sübedei sent a messenger to Ögödei requesting approval for the general butchery of the city, pointing out that he had lost many officers and men in taking it. When Ögödei’s Khitan advisor Yelü Chucai learned of this he remonstrated with the Khan, arguing in very practical terms that ultimately proved persuasive that the Mongols had been fighting long and hard to capture Jin territory and people and that the land would be quite useless and unbeneficial without the people to work it. Ögödei then issued an edict
that the Jin royal clan was to be exterminated but that all the rest of the city’s population was to be spared.  

Meanwhile, farther to the south, the desperate fugitive Jin emperor and his skeleton retinue had been appealing to the Song court for relief and aid, but the Song, seeing in the situation an opportunity to recover territories long since lost to the Jin, rejected the overture and instead formed an expedient and opportunistic alliance with the Mongols against the Jin, an alliance that mainland Chinese military historians are fond of discussing and debating. In early 1234, combined Mongol and Song forces converged on the helpless and hapless emperor’s hiding place in Caizhou, two hundred kilometres due south of Kaifeng and approximately seventy kilometres north of the Southern Song border at the closest point. According to the basic annals section of the *Jin shi*, Aizong hanged himself at the Orchid Pavilion (*Youlan Xuan*) on 9 February 1234. When the remaining Jin court officials heard of his death, they wept and gave him the posthumous title Aizong, “Bemourned Ancestor.” The city fell before the wailing for him was even over, and his close personal attendants cremated his remains and had them scattered on the Ru River. (More than five hundred Jin officials and military officers then committed suicide by jumping into the Ru River and drowning.) Juvalini and Sübedei’s *Yuan shi* biography have Aizong perishing in Kaifeng by burning himself to death (along with his wives and children, according to Juvalini), and in so doing, concludes Juvalini, he “lost both this world and the next.” Rashid al-Din, on the other hand, more or less tallies with the *Jin shi* basic annals’ version and has the fugitive Aizong fleeing Kaifeng to a succession of several towns, ultimately to commit suicide by hanging himself outside of his provisional throne room. Rashid al-Din insists at some length that his version of the events here is correct and that the account of Aizong being burned to death is inaccurate. The basic annals section of the *Yuan shi* has Aizong hanging himself and then his body being cremated, after which Song forces retrieved his ashes and took them back to Song territory.

For its part the Southern Song, heretofore a passive observer of these events, decided to take advantage of them by attempting to make good on its revanchist ambitions. It took the extraordinarily ill-advised and ill-considered step of attacking and attempting to “recover” Henan. The Mongols easily fought the Song forces off, and nothing came of the Song’s opportunistic venture except perhaps a revelation to the Mongols of the Song’s military weakness and ineptitude.

It took the Mongols, Fritz Mote noted, twenty years to defeat the Jin, a state that by no means went quietly into the night:

Empress Aizong . . . struggled valiantly to restore his civil and military authority in order to resist the Mongol invaders. At the end his armies mostly stood their ground and fought to the death against a fearsome enemy. The last remnant of the Jin dynasty was slowly ground down to final extinction. It perished with honor.  

For his part, Ögödei viewed his conquest of the Jin as the signal achievement of his reign and first among his four great accomplishments. (The other three were non-military: establishing postal relay stations, digging wells in waterless regions, and deploying spies and garrison commanders in all cities under Mongol rule.) He
also pointed to four faults in his reign: allowing himself to be conquered by drink (first and foremost),
taking away women from an uncle, doing secret harm to one
Dokholkhu, and confining wild beasts in his own lands so that they would not
move into the lands of his brothers. His nephews Möngke and Qubilai, sons of the
brother who sacrificed himself that Ögödei might live and lead the Mongols, would
go on to add to and even outdo these accomplishments for the Yeke Monggol Ulus
by conquering the Middle East and the rest of China.

NOTES

1 Franke 1994, 278.
2 Reading 石 here correctly as dan and not shi.
3 On the Jin economy, see Franke 1994, 291–304.
4 Parhae (Balhae, Bohai, Po-hai) was a multi-ethnic state of Tang Chinese, Korean, and
Tungusic peoples founded by a successor to Korea’s Koguryŏ (Goguryeo) dynasty in 698.
7 For the keshig see Hsiao 1978, 33–50; Li 1988, 3.1807–1811; and May 2007, 88–98.
8 On the division and organization of Mongol armies see Hsiao 1978, 3–63; Li 1988,
3.1803–1816; and May 2007, 72–188.
9 Hsiao 1978, 16.
10 Li 1988, 3.1803–1807.
11 Sawyer 1994, 238.
12 YS 121.2977 (Pow and Liao 2018, 61).
14 See, for example, Tetlock 2006.
15 On the capture and execution of Ambaghai Khan, see SHM, §53, 71.
19 On Jebe, see Pow 2016.
20 The other three were Jelme (ca. 1160 –?), Sübedei (1175–1248), and Khubilai.
21 SHMO, §247.
22 Hebei East Circuit and Hebei West Circuit.
23 SSJSBM 85.950; Mote 1999, 246.
24 SHMO, §248.
25 SMMO, §251.
26 Dates converted according to Hong 2004.
27 XTJ 160.4335. Yuan 1994, 755 claims that this was simply an “excuse” or pretext for
Chinggis Khan to push his campaigns farther south, but this underestimates the fury
Chinggis Khan felt when people went back on their word to him or showed signs of dis-
loyalty, deception, or insincerity.
30 SHM, §252.
32 On Yelü Chucai, see De Rachewiltz 1993b and 1960.
33 At approximately 41.95 degrees N and 122.53 E.
34 On Yelü Liuge, see ZGZD 1.754.
35 On Shi Tianze, see Hsiao 1993A, 27–45.
36 On Zhang Rou, see Hsiao 1993B, 46–59.
37 De Rachewiltz 1993a, 7.
38 SSJSBM 85.949.
39 According to SHM 253 (SHMO, 252–253; SHMC, 188–189), the Jin emperor submitted to Chinggis Khan and sent his son to him to act as a sentry captain, and Chinggis Khan and his forces therefore withdrew through Juyongguan.
40 XTJ 162.4411–4413; Yuan 1994, 757.
41 De Rachewiltz 1993a, 7.
42 45.6 N 122.8 E.
43 Mote 1999, 246.
44 On the Mongol conquest of Korea, see Huang 2000, Ledyard 1964, and Henthorn 1963.
45 SHM, §271.
46 On Sübedei, see Pow and Liao 2018 and Buell 1993.
47 YS 121.2977 (Pow and Liao 2018, 60).
48 RAB, 36; RAT 3.223; YS 121.2977 (Pow and Liao 2018, 61).
49 YS 121.2977, 122.3008–3009 (Pow and Liao 2018, 61 and 71).
51 Approximately 33.1 degrees N and 109.3 degrees E.
52 XTJ 165.4509–4510.
53 SHMO, §272; Yuan 1994, 757.
54 Haw 2013 argues that true rockets launched by their own propulsion did not appear until 1272 and the Mongol siege on Xiangyang.
55 Tao 2003, 186.
56 SSJSBM 90.1021.
57 Chunwang chihan 脣亡齒寒, an idiom still in common use in colloquial Chinese today.
58 SSJSBM 91.1031.
59 XTJ 167.4566; SSJSBM 92.1041.
60 Gu 1692, juan 47, Henan 2. https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=576594&csearchu=%E8%9B%B6%E9%99%90%E8%99%90B5 (accessed 8 July 2020).
63 XTJ 167.4541; Franke 1994, 263–264.
65 JS 18.402–403.
66 XTJ 167.4556.
68 RDB, 40–41; RDT2, 225. Rashid al-Din then gives the exact month for when “all of the countries of Khitai” were conquered: Jumada I, 631 (2 February – 3 March 1234).
69 YS 2.33.
70 Mote 1999, 248.
71 Indeed, Rashid al-Din called Ögödei a pleasure-loving winebibber (RDB, 17; RDT2, 215).
72 On the “mysterious Mongol figure” Dokholkhu (Doqolqu), see Atwood 2015, 241–260.
73 SHM, §281.

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Sichuan Daxue Chubanshe.
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HWC, See List of Abbreviations.
JS, See List of Abbreviations.
of the Mongols.’ CAJ. 9: 1–16.
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Yuan Shi.’ JCMH. 7: 37–76.
RDB, See List of Abbreviations.
— The Mongol conquest of the Jin Empire —

RDT2, See List of Abbreviations.
SHM, See List of Abbreviations.
SHMC, See List of Abbreviations.
SS, See List of Abbreviations.
SSJSBM, See List of Abbreviations.
XTJ, See List of Abbreviations.
YS, See List of Abbreviations.