CHAPTER NINE

THE MONGOL CONQUEST OF RUS’

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By necessity brief, this essay cannot hope to give a detailed or exhaustive description of the Mongol conquest of Rus’ or to consider and evaluate all the facts currently known to modern historical science. For this reason, we will have to address only those issues that are most important for explaining our own understanding of the events connected with the Mongol invasion as reflected in the sources available to us, particularly the Old Russian chronicles. The information about the Mongols, whom the Russians usually called Tatars, is incomplete and often contradictory, and it generates considerable disagreement among researchers. Some controversial and unresolved questions with regard to the history of the Mongol conquest of Rus’ will therefore also be discussed in this essay.¹

BATTLE OF THE KALKA RIVER (1223)

The Battle of the Kalka River is usually perceived as the first clash between the Russians and the Mongols, serving as a kind of prologue to the conquest of Rus’ that followed a decade and a half later. It is important to take into account, however, that contemporaries regarded the campaign of 1223 differently: the invasion by the tumens of Jebe and Sübedei into the steppes of Eastern Europe was rather understood as the final episode in the Mongol conquest of the Khwarazmian Empire.

Al-Nasawi, the secretary and biographer of Sultan Jalal al-Din, the heir to Muḥammad II Khwarazmshah, writes the following:

Qipchaq tribes were connected with the house of the Khwarazmshahs by friendship and love, as both in the old days and now they have only had children born to mothers proposed as wives and introduced to this house from [the house of] the Qipchaq lords. Therefore, Chinggis Khan and his sons did everything they could to totally destroy the Qipchaqs, as they were the backbone of the Khwarazmshahs’ force, the root of their glory and the basis for the numerosness of their troops.²
Most probably, the military expedition led by Jebe and Sübedei was, first and foremost, a scouting mission. Their mobile corps was also supposed to destroy the remaining Qipchaq (called Polovtsy in the Rus’ sources) groups and then return to Khwarazm; fighting against the Rus’ princes or pursuing any large-scale military operations in the steppes between the Dnieper and the Volga was not part of the Mongol plans at that time.

According to Ibn al-Athir, the Mongols, after crossing the Caucasus Mountains, faced the combined forces of the Alans and Qipchaqs. Appealing to their shared ethnic origin, the Mongols managed to convince the Qipchaqs to abandon their allies. When the Alans, left alone to face the enemy, were defeated, the Mongols suddenly attacked the Qipchaqs, inflicting heavy losses on them. Looking for military assistance, the Qipchaqs turned to the Rus’ princes.

The Russian take on the first encounter with the Mongols is represented in The Tale of the Battle on the Kalka, created in south Rus’ shortly after the events described in it. The original version of The Tale came down to us as part of the senior summary of the Novgorod First Chronicle, where it was probably incorporated as early as the mid-1220s.

In response to the request for help from the Qipchaqs, a coalition of Rus’ princes headed by the three strongest princes of south Rus’ – Mstislav Mstislavich the Daring of Halych, Mstislav Romanovich of Kiev and Mstislav Svyatoslavich of Chernigov – marched to meet the Mongol army that had entered the Azov steppes. On the way, the Rus’ princes encountered the Mongol ambassadors, who said:

"We are not going to take your land, neither your towns, nor your villages, because we have not come here against you, but we, by the will of God, have come here against our slaves and horse-keepers, the infidel Polovtsy; and you should have peace with us."

The princes ordered the ambassadors to be executed and continued their march. Despite the first successes of the Rus’ advance detachments, the Rus’ and Qipchaq army was defeated, suffering heavy losses in the decisive battle on the Kalka River (probably a tributary of the Kalmius River, which flows into the Sea of Azov to the west of the Don). According to the generally accepted chronology, the battle took place on 31 May 1223, although other dates could be suggested as well. It was probably during one of the first clashes with the Qipchaq that the Mongol general Jebe Noyan was killed.

The story produced by the Novgorod chronicler is filled with eschatological motifs: the Rus’ people suffered punishment for their sins before God, with the Mongols serving as God’s chosen instrument. Another version of the same theme can be found in the Laurentian Chronicle: ‘the all-merciful God wished to destroy and punish the godless sons of Ishmael, the Polovtsy, in order to avenge Christian blood.’ Thus, according to God’s design, the Mongols were to become an instrument of punishment not for the Russians but for the Polovtsy, who were guilty of spilling the blood of Christians. Through the words of the Tatar ambassadors, the chronicler invites the Rus’ princes to join the punishers of the Polovtsy. Not recognizing God’s intention, the Rus’ princes reject the offer of the Tatars, taking the side of the Qipchaqs. As a result, God punishes the Russians for making the wrong
choice. In this later interpretation, we can see how the chronicler belatedly regrets that the Rus’ princes, who knew nothing about the Mongols, inadvertently took the dangerous path of military confrontation with them. The eschatological explanation of the Mongols’ origin presented in *The Tale of the Battle on the Kalka* and based on a new interpretation of the seventh-century Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius, known to Russian scribes since the beginning of the twelfth century, became widespread in the west among the Latin authors, trying to explain the devastation of Eastern Europe in 1237–1242 by a hitherto unknown people, the Mongols.

**MONGOLS IN NORTHEAST RUS’ (1237–1238)**

In 1235, the Mongol rulers, led by their Qa’an, Ögödei, decided on a military expedition to conquer lands in Europe (The Great Western Campaign). After invading Volga Bulgharia (1236), the Mongol armies led by Chinggis Khan’s grandson Batu came to the borders of Rus’.

One of the most disputable questions here is the number of Mongolian troops that took part in the invasion of Rus’ lands. The real strength of their armed forces was a military secret of the Chinggisids, and it was prohibited to be disclosed under pain of death. Today this number can be established only by way of logical reasoning, using indirect data and taking into account the mobilization capabilities of the Mongolian empire. In our opinion, the total number of Mongol armies marshalled against Rus’ did not exceed 60,000 people.

Northeast Rus’ (the Principalities of Ryazan and Vladimir-Suzdal) did not constitute the strategic goal of the Western Campaign. The Hungarian Dominican friar Julian, who visited Suzdal in the autumn of 1237, learned from Grand Prince Yuri Vsevolodovich and other informants that the Hungarian kingdom was the most important goal of the Mongol invasions in the west: ‘Many report as correct, and the Prince of Suzdal conveyed in words through me to the Hungarian king that the Tatars, day and night, confer together on how to come and conquer the kingdom of Hungarian Christians.’ Consequently, the plans of the Mongols to go to war against Hungary were known in Rus’. The source of this information – the ultimatum letter of the Mongolian Khan to the Hungarian king, quoted by Friar Julian – leaves no doubt about its reliability. Around this time, King Béla IV of Hungary granted refuge to the Qipchaqs, whom the Hungarians called Cumans, who had refused to recognize the power of the Mongols, which caused the anger of the Khan and, probably, his decision to attack Hungary.

At the same time, before embarking on their invasion of Europe, the Mongols obviously sought to secure their northern flank and rear and also to increase their material and human resources. This explains the demands of the invaders that seemed so shocking to the people of Rus’: coming to the borders of the lands of Ryazan (in late autumn of 1237), the Mongols, through envoys, demanded ‘a tenth share of everything: people, princes, and horses.’ Thus, the people of Ryazan were given a chance to submit peacefully through mobilization of their people and livestock to the Mongolian army, as well as providing hostages from among the princes. According to the information of John of Plano Carpini, the papal ambassador to the Mongols, such an ultimatum was usual practice with the conquerors, who in
exchange for peace demanded that their opponents should give ‘a tenth of everything, both in people and in property.’

The princes of Ryazan responded with a definitive refusal, possibly underestimating the military strength of the Mongols or hoping that people from the steppe would not be able to conduct effective military operations in the forest zone during the winter period. The Russian winter and severe frosts, however, turned out to be an important advantage for the Mongols. The lands of northeast Rus’, covered with dense forests and marshes, were difficult to traverse for large cavalry units at any time of the year except for winter, when the rapid movement of the mobile Mongolian armies over the frozen river courses became possible.

After their conquest of China, the Mongols started using incendiary projectiles, containing coal, sulphur and saltpetre. Such incendiary projectiles, launched by catapults, were widely used during assaults on Rus’ urban settlements and showed their effectiveness during winter frosts. The low temperatures typical of Russian winters made extinguishing fires more difficult due to lack of water and increased oxygen concentrations in the atmosphere. On 21 December 1237, after a seven-day siege followed by an assault, the burning Ryazan was taken by the Mongols. Many other Rus’ cities shared the same fate.

In the posthumous panegyric to the Vladimir-Suzdal Grand Duke Yuri Vsevolodovich, the Laurentian Chronicle also mentions the peace proposals made by the Mongols: “The blood-thirsty villains sent their envoys to him, calling on him: “Make peace with us.” He did not want that, as the prophet says: “A glorious war is better than a shameful peace.”

Apparently, the story of Yuri’s contacts with the Mongols, which we find in the Chronicle, was changed and polished over time; as a result, the account telling us about the Mongolian envoys acquired a new meaning: the Prince rejected the Mongolian peace proposals, since he had discerned their deceitful nature. However, there is another phrase in the Chronicle before the words just mentioned, which directly concerns the contacts of Yuri Vsevolodovich with the Tatars: ‘he sent the godless Tatars away, after presenting them with gifts.’ This fragmentary comment indicates that Prince Yuri, most likely, accepted the Mongolian peace proposals, agreeing to all their demands.

Believing the promises of the Mongolian envoys, Yuri Vsevolodovich hoped, until the last minute, that if he did not interfere in the war of the Mongols in the south, be it against the Qipchaqs or Ryazan, he would be able to avoid the invasion, safely sitting it out in the forests beyond the Oka River. Whatever the case, it seems that the Prince of Vladimir-Suzdal did everything he could to avoid a direct confrontation with the Mongols. The departure of the Prince from Vladimir the day before the Mongolian assault on the capital city was perceived by his contemporaries as fleeing from the fight: the Prince ‘left Vladimir and fled towards Yaroslavl.’ Yuri’s further plans apparently did not include fighting a major battle with the enemy; in any case, we cannot consider the clash with one of the Mongolian detachments on the Sit’ River, in which Yuri died ingloriously, as such a major battle (4 March 1238).

If Prince Yuri Vsevolodovich of Vladimir-Suzdal indeed had some negotiations with the Mongols and reached an agreement with them, accepting their conditions, what could have caused the invaders to attack northeast Rus’ and massacre both the
Grand Prince himself and his sons? It seems that the sources provide an opportunity
for us to answer this question.

It is very likely that Batu’s wrath was provoked by the unexpected confronta-
tion between the Mongols and the people of Vladimir near Kolomna (early January
1238). The Prince of Ryazan’s brother Roman Igorevich with his retinue, pursued
by the Tatars, withdrew towards the border of Ryazan and Vladimir-Suzdal. In
Kolomna, Roman met with a detachment sent by Prince Yuri Vsevolodovich of
Vladimir-Suzdal, which, however, was sent there not to help Ryazan but only to
protect the borders of the Principality of Vladimir. This outpost unit waited near
the border to observe the outcome of the fight between the people of Ryazan and
the Tatars. Somewhere near the city, a battle took place, in which Roman Igorevich
and the Vladimir commander Eremei Glebovich were both killed. The son of Grand
Prince Vsevolod Yurievich, who led the Vladimir army, was not injured in the battle
and returned safely to his father.25

The battle at Kolomna had another consequence, which seems to have played a
fatal role for the future of the whole northeast Rus’. If most researchers are correct
in thinking that Rashid al-Din’s Compendium of Chronicles mentions Kolomna
under the name Ika/Eka (i.e. Town on the Oka River), then Kölgen, the youngest
son of Chinggis Khan, was killed there. Immediately after the capture of Ryazan,
the Mongols ‘took the town on the Ika also. Kölgän was wounded there and died. ’26
The death of Chinggis Khan’s son in the confrontation at Kolomna could not have
been left without consequences by the Mongols, and these consequences were cata-
strophic for the whole of northeast Rus’.

The sources indicate that the death of Chinggis Khan’s family members was
always punished by the Mongols with extreme cruelty. In such cases, retaliation,
which was obviously ritual in nature, came upon the heads not only of those who
ruled the lands fighting against the Mongols, but also upon all the inhabitants of the
lands and towns where a Chinggisid was killed – such towns along with the entire
population were subjected to total destruction and slaughter.27

It is no coincidence that after the battle at Kolomna, chroniclers started reporting
cases of indiscriminate slaughter when recording the devastation of Russian cities by
the Tatars. The first such case took place during the capture of Moscow – the closest
city to Kolomna of Vladimir-Suzdal – since its residents also took part in the ill-fated
Kolomna battle. After taking Moscow (circa 20 January 1238), the Tatars killed the
governor (voïvoda) and captured the prince, ‘and the people were killed, from the
elder to the infant.’28

Punishment also befell Grand Duke Yuri Vsevolodovich, who, according to
Rashid al-Din, was not looking for a chance to give the Mongols a decisive battle
(as stated by some Russian chroniclers) but, on the contrary, tried to hide from them
inside deep forests: ‘The emir of that province, Yeke-Yurgu (Yuri Vsevolodovich),
fold into a forest; he too was captured and put to death.’29 This conclusion is indir-
ectly confirmed by the Russian chronicle, which states that Yuri, hiding in a safe
place, did not expect the Mongols to appear and was caught by surprise.30 Another
chronicle reports that Yuri’s beheaded body was found on the site of the battle and
buried, while his head was found and put in the coffin later.31

John Fennell suggested that Yuri could have been killed by his own people who
had betrayed him.32 It is important to bear in mind, however, that decapitation
was a common form of punishment widely practiced by the Mongols with regard to hostile foreign rulers. Around the same time, the sons of the last ruler of the Khwarazmian Empire, Duke Henry the Pious of Silesia and Rus’ Prince Mikhail Vsevolodovich of Chernigov were executed in the same way. After the execution of Yuri Vsevolodovich, the Mongols evidently considered their mission in northeast Rus’ accomplished and soon withdrew their troops back to the steppe.

Based on the reports of Russian chronicles, only one town can be positively identified as having shown resistance to the Mongols – Vladimir-on-Klyazma. After its fall (7 February 1238), any organized resistance in the northeast of Rus’ had practically ceased. The invaders split into relatively small detachments and, within a short time, captured and plundered several other towns of the Vladimir-Suzdal principality. It looks as though the chroniclers of Vladimir and Novgorod merely listed the major towns of Suzdal without having any idea as to which, if any, of them was in fact attacked, sacked or even by-passed by the Tatars.

At the same time, residents of the frontier towns of the neighbouring Novgorod and Chernigov lands put up a fierce resistance. The sources record information about the stout resistance of the residents of Torzhok, which eventually was taken after a two-week siege (5 March 1238), and about the heroic seven-week resistance of the residents of Kozel’sk.

The stubborn resistance of the residents of Kozel’sk to the main forces of the Mongols, led by Batu and Sübedei, seemed to have impressed the Mongols and was reflected in sources from the Mongolian tradition of historical writing. According to Rashid al-Din, Batu did not have sufficient forces to capture Kozel’sk and required considerable reinforcements: ‘In passing, Batu came to the town of Kosel-Iske (Kozel’sk). He laid siege to it for 2 months but was unable to capture it. Then Qadan and Büri arrived and they took it in three days.’ This episode was presumably also recorded in the official biography of Sübedei, included in Yuan Shi.

In 1237–1238, the Mongols did not seek to conquer other political centres of north Rus’, in particular Novgorod. The raid undertaken by one of the Mongol detachments in the direction of Novgorod, which occurred after the capture of Torzhok, was apparently a reconnaissance mission.

MONGOLS AND RUS’ PRINCES (1239)

The spring of 1239 saw the beginning of the Mongol conquest of south Rus’. The scanty and contradictory accounts of the Russian chronicles make it impossible to get a complete and reliable picture of the events. It is clear, however, that the consequences of the Mongol invasion for south Rus’ were more devastating than for the northeast.

The first southern Rus’ town to be taken by storm and burned down, under unknown circumstances, was Pereyaslavl-Yuzhniy (3 March 1239). The Novgorod chronicles of the first half of the fifteenth century provide some information about the defeat of the Russian troops near Chernigov, the capture of the city after a brutal assault (October 18, 1239), and subsequent reconciliation between the Rus’ princes and the Mongols. The source of this account is undoubtedly the South Russian version of The Tale of Batu’s Invasion, reflected also in the Hypatian (Galician-Volhynian) Chronicle. In the latter, however, the text related to the description of
the assault on and the capture of Chernigov, probably due to the confusion with the sheets and oversight by a later scribe, was divided into separate parts and attributed to different events.41

Describing the storming of Chernigov by the Tatars, the chronicler speaks of stone-throwing machines, which destroyed the city walls and thus determined the outcome of the battle. Contemporaries seemed to be stunned by their use. The scribe characterizes the event as something unprecedented and almost unbelievable: stones launched by the terrible machines were too heavy to be lifted even by four strong men, and those huge stones were able to cover a distance that was one and a half times farther than the range of an arrow shot from a usual bow.

The Mongols were armed with heavy trebuchets capable of releasing projectiles weighing 100 kg at a distance of 275 metres or more.42 The heavy lever trebuchets, similar to those used during the assault on Chernigov, were up to 8 m high and weighed 5 tons; about 50 to 250 soldiers were required to bring these machines into action.43 The regular use of heavy trebuchets and combat incendiary agents by the Mongols during their assaults on Rus’ towns was one of the factors that ensured their success. Most fortifications and houses in Russian cities were built of wood, which made them particularly vulnerable to Mongolian incendiary bombs. The Rus’ people did not have the ability to effectively confront these weapons and had to seek reconciliation with the Mongols, perceiving them as a superior force.

The account from the Novgorod chronicles of the first half of the fifteenth century about the Mongol conquest of Chernigov, which we have discussed above, ends with a record about reconciliation between the invaders and three Rus’ princes – Mstislav Glebovich of Chernigov, Vladimir Rurikovich of Smolensk and Kiev, and Daniil Romanovich of Halych-Volhynia: ‘From there they came to Kiev in peace and reconciled with Mstislav, Vladimir and Daniil.’

The widespread opinion often found in academic works that the information about a peaceful agreement between the Rus’ princes and the Mongols in 1239 was, in fact, in reference to the 1234–1235 feud between the princes should be considered erroneous.44 The conditions of peace proposed by the Mongols to the princes of south Rus’ were obviously similar to the conditions previously proposed to the Ryazan and Vladimir-Suzdal princes. In any case, during the Mongol invasion, Daniil of Halych also tried to avoid military confrontation with the invaders, just like Prince Yuri Vsevolodovich of Vladimir-Suzdal did several years before that.

The Hypatian Chronicle also contains information about peace negotiations between the Mongols and the Kiev Prince Mikhail Vsevolodovich after the fall of Chernigov:

Möngke Khan came to look at the city of Kiev. He stood on the other side of the Dnieper, near the Hillfort on the Sand; when he saw the city, he was surprised at its beauty and size; he sent his ambassadors to Mikhail and the townspeople; he wanted to beguile them, but they refused to listen to him.

Mikhail had to flee from Kiev soon afterwards.45

When explaining the reasons for Mikhail’s flight, some chroniclers report that he ordered Möngke’s envoys to be murdered. Historians have repeatedly suggested that the assassination of Mongolian envoys should have been the main reason for the
murder of Mikhail himself a few years later. However, a thorough analysis of the sources shows that the assassination of the envoys is first mentioned in the Moscow chronicles of the second half of the fifteenth century and that the information was taken from the Life of Mikhail Chernigovskiy, a document which glorified him as a martyr for the faith. Early sources do not contain such information.

If Mikhail Vsevolodovich did not order the murder of the Mongolian envoys, then what could have been the reason for his flight from Kiev? The plans of the Mongols in the autumn of 1239 hardly included taking Kiev by storm. The peaceful nature of Möngke's mission is confirmed by the words in the chronicle stating that he left his army on the opposite side of the Dnieper at the Hillfort on the Sand.

Therefore, Mikhail's flight from Kiev could have been caused by political rather than military reasons. One such reason could have been an alliance of the Mongols with Vladimir Rurikovich and Daniil Romanovich – the main rivals of Mikhail Vsevolodovich in his struggle for Kiev, a fact that became known to Mikhail during his negotiations with Möngke. After the capture of Chernigov, the Mongols apparently decided to give Kiev to one of their new allies, Vladimir Rurikovich, and after his sudden death, to Daniil Romanovich, who in turn handed Kiev over to his commander (captain of a thousand) Dmitri.

Mikhail Vsevolodovich, who fled to Hungary and then to Poland, attempted to join the forces of Duke Henry the Pious and fight the Mongols in the Battle of Legnica (9 April 1241). Mikhail's attempt to offer armed resistance to the Mongols cost him his life: he was executed by the order of Batu in September 1246.

THE CONQUEST OF KIEV AND SOUTH RUS' (1240)

It took the Mongols only a few weeks to capture the main political centres of south Rus' – Kiev, Halych and Volodymyr Volynskyi. The absence of any prolonged resistance can be explained by the fact that at the time of the invasion the strongest south Rus' princes, Daniil of Halych and Mikhail of Chernigov, had already fled abroad, taking their families with them. Nevertheless, some towns, above all Kiev, mounted armed resistance to the Mongols.

The description of the siege and storm of Kiev by the troops of Batu, found in the Galician-Volhynian Chronicle, was most probably taken from the account of an eyewitness who was close to the commander Dmitri and thus emphasized his role in the events. Afterwards, this account, just like other chronicle records related to the Mongol invasion, underwent a certain literary adaptation and polishing. However, the story of the fall of Kiev has not lost its value as a source of reliable historical evidence. The information contained in it – the use of heavy trebuchets and encirclement of the city with a wooden wall (protecting the attackers and their siege technology from enemy assaults and preventing the latter from escaping the encirclement) – corresponds with other sources on the history of the Mongol conquests, including the assaults on such Rus' towns as Ryazan, Vladimir, Torzhok and Kozel'sk.

The account from the chronicle about the capture of Kiev contains a list of Tatar commanders who gathered under the walls of the Rus' capital, written down in accordance with the oral information provided by a Tatar captive named Tovrul; this list mentions, among other names, Güyük and Möngke. According to Rashid al-Din, both of them went to Mongolia after the spring of 1240, being recalled...
there by Ögödei Qa’an.51 For this reason, some researchers believe that Güyük and Möngke could not have taken part in the siege of Kiev, which began in the autumn of the same year.52

In *The Secret History of the Mongols*, however, we find the text of Güyük’s report regarding his glorious victories in the west, from which it follows that he, along with other princes, took part in the capture of Kiev and other Rus’ towns: ‘Batu, Büri, Güyük, Möngke and several other princes . . . ravaged and brought under submission . . . Mankerman Kiwa (Kiev) and other cities . . . and returned home.’53 The possibility of Güyük and Möngke’s participation in the capture of Kiev is also confirmed by the *Yuan Shi*. Here we find the exact date of ‘the imperial decree to Güyük to withdraw troops for rest and replenishment,’ namely, the winter of the twelfth month of the twelfth year of Ögödei’s government (December 1240). In addition, it also follows from the same source that in the spring of 1240 Güyük sent a report to Ögödei from the march and did not personally come to Qaraqorum.54

Güyük and Möngke were obviously recalled from the army of Batu after the capture of Kiev and, therefore, both princes must have taken part in the siege and assault led by him. This circumstance adds credibility to the information found in the Russian chronicle about the assault on Kiev by the Mongols.

The *Hypatian and Novgorod First Chronicles* do not contain any definite information that would allow us to determine the exact date when Kiev was captured. Among all the sources that preserved the early accounts from the chronicles concerning the Mongol invasion, only the *Laurentian Chronicle* provides an indication of the date when Kiev was conquered: ‘This misfortune happened on the day of St. Nicholas before the Nativity of the Lord.’55 St. Nicholas Day, observed on December 6, was indicated as the date of the fall of Kiev in the chronicles that in some way used the *Laurentian Chronicle* or, more precisely, the information from the Rostov chronicles of the third quarter of the thirteenth century.56

A different chronology can be found in the chronicles dating back to the Pskov Codex compiled at the turn of the 1460s-1470s, which records the day when the siege began, the time of its total duration and the day when Kiev was captured: ‘The Tatars came to Kiev on 5 September and stood for 10 weeks and 4 days, and only captured it on 19 November, on Monday.’57 At the same time, the *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris (middle of the thirteenth century) contains a letter from a certain Hungarian bishop to an unnamed Parisian bishop (possibly Guillaume III of Overno). The author of the message writes:

I am replying to you about the Tartars, that they came to the very border of Hungary in five day crossings and approached the river called Deinphir, which they could not cross in the summer. And wanting to wait for the winter, they sent forward a few scouts to Rus’.58

Another version of this document is found in the Annals of Waverley Abbey.59

Most researchers date the letter of the Hungarian bishop as 1239–1240 and positively identify the river Deinphir with the Dnieper.60 Unable to cross the water-abundant river immediately, the Mongols postponed the crossing until the onset of winter frosts when a strong ice cover would be formed on the river. In the meantime,
they left for the east. Similarly, the next year, while already in Hungary, the Mongols had to wait for winter frosts in order to cross the ice of the Danube.

The story from the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle* about the siege of Kiev by the Mongols contains one remarkable detail. When Batu and his troops encircled the city, a terrible noise arose, and the besieged residents could not hear each other because of the constant rattle of cart wheels, the roar of the many camels and the neighing of horses. This means that the Mongols arrived to Kiev with a multitude of livestock and their portable dwellings mounted on carts, household goods and families. In addition, the army of Batu had heavy battering rams and trebuchets, which enabled them to destroy the walls of Kiev in just a few days.

It would be reasonable to assume that such an army could have been taken across the Dnieper only after winter frosts started and a strong ice cover formed on the river. Taking into account the climatic features of the Middle Dnieper region, it is conceivable that the Mongols were unable to establish an ice crossing over the Dnieper towards Kiev until mid-November. All these details confirm the date for the capture of Kiev provided by the *Laurentian Chronicle*, namely 6 December.

According to Rashid al-Din, after capturing Kiev, the Mongol troops split into tümens and, using raid tactics, conquered all the towns of Uladmir (Avladimir), meeting resistance only at the town of Uch-Oghul Uladmir, which withstood a three-day siege. Phonetically, Uladmir/Uladimir corresponds to the Russian princely name Vladimir. However, having failed to find a suitable candidate among the Rus’ princes at the time of the Mongol invasion, the translators of Rashid al-Din decided that the proper name Uladmur referred to the town of Volodymyr Volynskyi and extended to other towns of Volhynia.

In the case of such interpretation, however, we will have to look for a town called Uchoghul among the Volhyn settlements, with the name having not even a vague phonetic correspondence to any old Rus’ place-names known today. In addition, as it has been observed many times before, ‘uch oghul’ in Turkic languages literally means ‘three sons,’ but it does not seem possible to find any historical foundation for a Rus’ geographic name with this meaning.

It was characteristic of Rashid al-Din and his Turkic-language source to pay attention not only to the names of the lands and towns conquered by the Mongols, but also to the personal names of the defeated rulers, which were used as geographic landmarks. This tendency can be seen, for example, in the descriptions related to the conquest of the Rus’ Principality of Vladimir-Suzdal: in just five days the Mongols captured ‘the city of Makar (probably Moscow – A.M.) and killed the prince of [this] city, named Avlaitimur (probably Vladimir – A.M.); or ‘the city of Pereyaslavl (?), the native region of Vezislav (probably Vsevolod – A.M.), they altogether took in five days.’ It is noteworthy that in his account of the capture by the Mongols of Vladimir-on-Klyazma, the capital of northeast Rus’, Rashid al-Din does not at all mention the name of the town and confines himself to indicating just the name of the prince: ‘Laying siege to the town of Yurgi the Great, they took it in eight days.’

It is not surprising, therefore, that when describing the conquest of south Rus’, Rashid al-Din and his Turkish-language source cite the name of the Rus’ prince associated with the *towns of Vladimir* captured by the Mongols and the *town of Vladimir’s three sons*. At the beginning of the Mongol invasion of south Rus’, Vladimir Rurikovich still remained the legitimate Prince of Kiev. He had reigned in Kiev, though not continuously,
Map 9.1 The Mongol Empire 1230–1240
Source: Created by Mapping Specialists, Ltd.
for more than ten years. The capture of Kiev by Mikhail Vsevolodovich in 1238 was regarded in Rus’ as illegal: Mikhail is not mentioned in the list of Kiev princes placed at the beginning of the Hypatian Chronicle. The Pskov Chronicles, when recording the death of Vladimir Rurikovich (as 1239), name him the Prince of Kiev.⁶⁴

Vladimir Rurikovich was perceived as the legitimate Prince of Kiev by the Mongols as well, since, as we have seen, in the autumn of 1239, they concluded a peace treaty with him, as well as with Daniil Romanovich and Mstislav Glebovich, after which Mikhail Vsevolodovich had to leave Kiev. The fate of Vladimir Rurikovich after that is not quite clear. For some reason, he had to leave Kiev at the end of 1239 and soon died. Perhaps the prince died in Smolensk, defending his hometown from the attack of the Lithuanians.

Thus, reporting on the capture of all the towns of Vladimir after their conquest of Kiev, the Mongolian source, as we believe, means the towns under the rule of Vladimir Rurikovich or, more precisely, his sons. One of them we see on the pages of the Galician-Volhynian Chronicle. Subsequent to the information about the return of Daniil Romanovich to Volhyn after the departure of the Mongols, we read: ‘Rostislav Vladimirovich came to Daniil in Kholm.’⁶⁵

The ‘three sons of Vladimir’ mentioned by Rashid al-Din and his Turkic-language source are the only princes of south Rus’ who mounted some resistance to the invaders. For three days they defended their town, the name of which did not seem to interest the Mongols at all. This was possibly the town of Kolodyazhin, mentioned in the Galician-Volhynian Chronicle; to capture this town, Batu had to use a wall-breaking machine (just like he did during his assault on Kiev).⁶⁶

CONQUEST OF VOLHYN AND GALICIA (1240)

Daniil Romanovich, Prince of Volhyn and Galicia, did not wait for the beginning of the enemy invasion but fled to Hungary and then to Poland; he went back to Volhyn only after receiving the news about the departure of the Mongols from Rus’. This probably explains why the chronicler of Prince Daniil Romanovich gives only a brief and somewhat passing description of the unprecedented invasion by the steppe people, concentrating all his attention on how the prince and his family succeeded in escaping the dangers.⁶⁷

When Daniil and Vasil’ko Romanovich returned to Volhyn, which had been devastated by the Mongols, the first town on their way was Berestie. The chronicler says: ‘Daniil and his brother came to Berestie and could not go out into the field because of the stench from the many dead bodies.’⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that those ‘many dead bodies’ were found not in the town of Berestie itself, as might have been expected, but somewhere in its vicinity. The town itself did not just stand undestroyed but, as far as we can judge, did not suffer any significant damage.⁶⁹

To give a clearer picture of the tragic events that occurred outside the walls of Berestie, we should look at some well-known facts from the history of the Mongol conquests in Central Asia and the Middle East, which help to illustrate the regularly used methods of subjugating cities and dealing with the conquered population. When a town mounted any, even if minor, resistance before surrendering to the Mongols, its disarmed citizens were taken outside the town walls and killed. Such a fate, for instance, befell the citizens of Balkh, Fanakat (Banakat), Nasa and Baghdad.⁷⁰
Even if the town surrendered to the Mongols without any resistance, its inhabitants had to go out into the field without weapons and humbly accept their fate. In such cases, however, there was no mass slaughter; the settlements were plundered, while young male inhabitants were taken captive and sent to serve in the Mongol army, and more precisely, in the auxiliary troops (the *hashar*), which were used to perform the most dangerous tasks, for instance, storming the towns and fortresses.71

We can see that before storming fortified towns, the Mongols offered their inhabitants the opportunity to surrender and leave the town unarmed as a sign of obedience. In such cases, no promises or guarantees of security were respected: the subdued population was often doomed to either be killed or taken captive. Only if the city surrendered without any resistance could its inhabitants save their lives and freedom. The towns that were taken without a fight were subjected to intensive plunder, but, as a rule, they managed to avoid large-scale destruction.

In light of the facts cited above, the slaughter of the inhabitants of Berestie by the Mongols outside the city walls suggests that at the beginning of the siege the citizens mounted some resistance but then were forced to submit to the invaders and, unarmed, went out into the field where they were killed. The fact that the bodies of the victims remained unburied for several months – probably until April 1241, when the princes could return from Poland after the departure of the Tatars – suggests that all this time there was no one to bury them: the inhabitants of Berestie were either killed or taken to the *hashar*.

It is reasonable to assume that the Mongols captured other cities of the Volhyn land, including Volodymyr, under similar circumstances. Like Berestie, the capital city of Volhyn became almost completely deserted. When Prince Daniil arrived there after the departure of the Tatars, ‘not a single living person remained in Volodymyr.’ This time, however, the prince found the unburied bodies of the dead citizens not in the field outside the city but in the city churches: ‘the church of the Holy Virgin was filled with corpses; other churches were full of corpses and dead bodies.’72 This tragic picture, as well as the information from the chronicler that Volodymyr was ‘taken with a spear,’ apparently supports the idea that the Mongols stormed and captured the city. Archaeological evidence seems to confirm this conclusion.

It appears that Volodymyr Volynskyi is the only place where more or less obvious traces of resistance to the invaders have been found. In the 1930s, a mass grave with a multitude of skeletons, lying in disorder, with broken skulls, severed limbs and arrowheads in their spines, was accidentally found during excavation works on the market square near the Kiev Gates; weapons damaged in battle were also found there.73 It is highly probable that these finds represent material evidence of the assault on Volodymyr by the Mongols in December 1240. However, the circumstances under which the evidence was found make precise dating impossible.

At various times, human skulls with large iron nails hammered into the crown of the head and temporal bones were found in the territory of Volodymyr. In the academic literature we find widespread belief that these skulls appeared as a result of mass executions by the Mongols of the defenders of Volodymyr Volynskyi.74 However, a more plausible explanation of the origin of the ‘Volhyn skulls’ was suggested a while ago. Piercing the skull of the deceased with a nail or an iron spike is a well-known custom for dealing with ghouls and the undead, especially widespread among the Ukrainian population and in particular in the Volhyn and Carpathian regions. Some new evidence on the origin of the ‘Volhyn skulls’ as resulting from the
ancient custom of dealing with the undead by the local population has recently been presented. The nature of the damage to the skulls clearly indicates that it was caused after the deaths of their owners.75

The suspicious silence about the fall of Halych in the Old Russian chronicles and the absence of any mention of such conquest in Mongolian sources makes us think that the capture of the town was an unremarkable event, which provided no grounds for recording the heroism of its defenders or the valour of the Mongolian generals.

Apparently, the capture of Halych by the Mongols, like in the case of other southwest Rus’ towns, led to the loss of a significant part of its population, who were either killed or taken to the hashar. Later we see these Rus’ captives taken from Volhyn and Galicia in the vanguard of Mongolian troops during their military operations in Poland and Hungary. According to Jan Długosz, for instance, the Rus’ units marched across the Polish lands in front of the Mongolian troops, showing the way to the invaders: ‘Their movement was guided and their way was shown to them by some Ruthenians, who are very hostile to the Poles.’76 Archdeacon Thomas of Split reports that a Ruthenian defector warned the Hungarians before the decisive battle with the Mongols on the Sajó River that the enemy was planning a surprise night attack (11 April 1241).77

NOTES
1 See also Maiorov 2016b, 473–499.
2 Nasawi 1996, 213; Nesawi, 286.
5 KFTR, 220–221, 223.
7 Gippius 1997, 14, 34–36.
8 NL, 62.
9 Yamaguchi 2003, 1–11; Tsyb 2009, 217–222.
11 LL, 446.
12 Rudakov 2009, 33.
13 NL, 61; LL, 445–446.
15 For more detailed arguments, see Sabitov 2010, 55–73.
16 Dörrie 1956, 177–178.
17 EMC, 136–141, 158.
18 NL, 74.
20 Shkoliar 1980, 190, 339; Gänster 2009, 133.
22 LL, 468.
23 Rudakov 2009, 73.
24 NL, 75.
25 NL, 75; LL, 460, 515–516; IL, 779.
26 RDB, 59; RDT, 327; Rashid al-Din 1960, 38–39.
28 LL, 461.
29 RDB, 60; RDT, 327; Rashid al-Din 1960, 39.
30 IL, 779.
31 LL, 467.
32 Fennell 1983, 80–81.
33 Maiorov 2017, 254–256; see also Amitai 2011, 89–91.
34 Fennell 1983, 80.
35 N1L, 76; IL, 780–781; see also Dimnik 2003, 345–346.
36 RDB, 60; RDB, 327.
37 Pow 2018, 63–64.
38 Ianin 1982, 146–158.
40 Sl1, 300–301; NKL, 115; N4L, 222–223; see also Dimnik 2003, 349–353.
41 Maiorov 2012.
43 Kirpichnikov 1976, 75; see also Roldbaatar 2007, 233–239.
45 IL, 782.
48 Maiorov 2017, 237–256.
49 Tolochko 2014, 101–118.
50 IL, 784–785.
51 RDB, 61; Rashid al-Din 1960, 40.
52 Kargalov 1967, 117; Staviskii 1991, 193; Tolochko 2014, 103.
53 SHM, §274; De Rachewiltz 2006, 960, 989, 1009; Anonymous 1941, 194, 314, 513.
55 IL, 470.
56 Maiorov 2016a, 702–714.
57 LA, 51; P3L, 81.
58 CM, 75.
59 AMW, 325.
60 Bezzola 1975, 54; Klopprogge 1993, 163; Gießauf 2006, 153.
61 IL, 784.
62 RDB, 69; RDT, 331; Rashid al-Din 1960, 45.
63 RDB, 59; RDT, 327; Rashid al-Din 1960, 39.
64 Maiorov 2015a, 169–181.
65 IL, 788–789.
66 IL, 786.
68 IL, 788.
69 Lysenko 2007, 28.
71 HWC, 88–90, 98–100; RDT, 243, 245–247; Rashid al-Din 1952, 200, 204–205; see also Jackson 2017, 78, 113, 156–157, 173, 176.
72 IL, 788.
73 Terskyi 2010, 46, 96.
75 Mazur 2010, 302–317.
76 Długosz 1975, 13; Długosz 2009, 13.
77 HBSS, 262–263; Splitskii 1997, 107.
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AMW, See List of Abbreviations.


CM, See List of Abbreviations.


EMC, See List of Abbreviations.


HBSS, See List of Abbreviations.

HWC, See List of Abbreviations.


IL, See List of Abbreviations.


LA, See List of Abbreviations.

LLL, See List of Abbreviations.


N1L, See List of Abbreviations.

N4L, See List of Abbreviations.


Nesawi, See List of Abbreviations.

NKL, See List of Abbreviations.

P3L, See List of Abbreviations.


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