Map 14.0 The Mongol Empire circa 1300
The Jochid Ulus was established in 1224/5 when Chinggis Khan decided to reward his eldest son for a successful campaign (1218–22) against the eastern Qipchaqs and the Qangli and the conquest of Urgench. Jochi was awarded an appanage (the ulus) comprising the territory west of the Irtysh River, “as far as the hoof of Tatar horse had advanced” (the territories subjugated by the previous Mongol attack, led by Jebe and Sübe’edei between 1220 and 1224). Thus, Jochi began to rule in the lands that he had conquered, but he was expected to continue territorial expansion in the west. Nevertheless, Jochid military forces were faced with the fierce resistance of the Qipchaqs in the interfluve of the Yaik River (Ural River) and the Volga, and they were able to continue the offensive only after they received support from the supreme ruler of the Mongol Empire, Ögödei Qa’an (r. 1229–41). This happened later, during the reign of Jochi’s son, Batu (r. 1227–56), who headed the ulus after the death of his father in 1227. In the spring of 1235, Ögödei Qa’an decided to mobilize the military forces of the Mongols, who were to come to Batu’s aid. During the ensuing six-year military campaign (1236–42), a Mongol army led by Batu subdued the Russian principalities and western Qipchaqs who lived in the steppes between the Yaik and the Danube rivers.

As a result of twenty-five years of military conquest, the Jochid Ulus became the largest part of the Mongol Empire, with lands extending from the upper reaches of the Irtysh River to the Lower Danube, which were divided into three parts. The eastern part (often referred to as the Blue Horde, although a number of researchers question the validity of using this term) of the Ulus stretched from the Yaik River to the upper Irtysh. This part, in turn, was divided into two parts. Its eastern part stretched from the Irtysh River in the east to the Sari Su River in the west and was headed by the descendants of the eldest son of Jochi, Orda (d. 1251). Its western part, stretching from the Yaik River to the north of the Aral Sea, was governed by the descendants of the fifth son of Jochi, Shiban (d. 1266). The rulers of these regions recognized the primacy of the heirs of Jochi’s second son, Batu, who preferred to nomadize in the Lower Volga region, that is, in the central and most fertile region of the Ulus. The steppes between the Volga and the Lower Danube were also subordinated to the successors of Batu and were divided into appanages that were ruled by the closest relatives of the Jochid khans. In addition to the western...
Map 14.1 The Jochid Ulus (Golden Horde)
Source: Created by Mapping Specialists, Ltd.
steppes, the Russian principalities also submitted to the Jochid khans, although the Rus' princes retained significant autonomy within the Ulus.

The sources gave different names to this new power. Apparently, the Mongols called it Ülus-un Jochi (the Ülus of Jochi), but a number of other names are found in the sources. Just like the Latin authors, Persian and Arab sources called it by the name of the ruling khan: “Batu’s house”, “Berke’s land”, “Uzbek’s empire”, etc. However, the Islamic chroniclers often preferred to call it “Dasht-i-Qipchaq” (Qipchaq steppe) or simply “Qipchaq”, as if pointing out that the Qipchaqs, that is, its native inhabitants, represented the bulk of the Ulus’s population. Probably this was only partially true, since the Mongol conquests led to the migration of new Mongol and Turkic tribes to the conquered territories. These tribes incorporated the subordinate Qipchaqs, and therefore the Russian chronicles ceased to call the Qipchaqs by their former tribal names (Burchevichi, Toksobichi, Etebichi, Kulobichi, etc.). After the Mongol conquest, the Russian chroniclers called the Ulus’s nomads by the collective name “Tatars” and preferred to call the Jochid Ulus the “Horde”. By this term, the Russian authors had in mind its center of power – the camp (ordu) of the Jochid khan.  

In addition to the Jochid territories themselves, local rulers of Transcaucasia also recognized the supremacy of Batu during the period of the Mongol Empire’s unity. Perhaps Chinggis Khan considered these lands subordinate to Jochi’s authority when he encouraged his eldest son to continue the conquests in the west. It was more likely, however, that this region became subordinated to Batu’s power only in the last years of his rule, when his status as aqa (that is, of the senior ruling descendant of Chinggis Khan) was not questioned after the death of Güyük Qa’an in 1248. In any case, Möngke (r. 1251–59), who became the Qa’an in 1251 thanks to Batu’s military support, recognized the subordination of these lands to the Ulus. Therefore, Batu and his successors considered themselves legitimate rulers of Transcaucasia, even after the rule over this region actually passed to Möngke’s brother, Hülégü, which inevitably led to a protracted conflict between two related Mongol dynasties.  

**SEPARATION FROM THE EMPIRE AND WAR IN THE CAUCASUS**

Like the rulers of other uluses in the Mongol Empire, the Jochids were subordinated to the qa’ans in Qaraqorum in the period of its unity and gained independence only after its dissolution in 1260. The grandson of Batu, Möngke-Temür (r. 1267–82), was the first Jochid ruler to call himself a qa’an, that is, an independent ruler, and who began to mint coins with his name and generic familial sign (tamgha) from the very beginning of his reign. Nevertheless, the actual separation of the Ulus occurred under his predecessor, Berke (r. 1258–66), who did not allow himself to be called a qa’an but pursued an independent foreign policy. In particular, Berke entered into a military conflict with the brother of the deceased Möngke, Hülégü (r. 1260–65), who founded his own ulus in Persia. During this conflict, Berke pursued his own goals, not caring about whether his interests coincided with the interests of Möngke’s successor, Qubilai (r. 1260–94), or other Mongol rulers. 

Berke initiated the war, claiming that the Ilkhan took advantage of the dissolution of the Empire in order to illegally claim the Transcaucasian region. In the summer of 1262, the Jochid prince Noqai (d. 1299) then invaded Hülégü’s domain through
the Caucasus and plundered the region of Shirvan (in northern Azerbaijan). Hülegü managed to defeat the Jochids, and at the beginning of the next year (1263), his army invaded the Jochid territory in Daghestan, where it soon suffered a heavy defeat in a bloody battle on the Terek River. Two years later in 1265, Noqai again invaded Shirvan and fought the Hülegüid army on the Aksu River in Azerbaijan. At its end, both armies settled on the opposite banks of the Kura, not daring to continue the battle. The Jochid army returned home only the following year, after the sudden death of Berke.  

Major military action in the Caucasus dwindled, but the tension on the border of both uluses did not weaken over the next century. Hostilities in the Caucasus remained relevant for the Jochid rulers due to the relative parity of forces among the hostile Chinggisid uluses. The Jochid Ulus needed an ally to break the Ilkhanate’s resistance. Therefore, Berke took the unprecedented decision to conclude a military alliance with a non-Mongol ruler against his cousin, Hülegü, showing that he put the interests of his de facto independent ulus above family ties within the Chinggisid dynasty. In 1262, Berke sent his first diplomatic embassy to Egypt, proposing a military alliance with the Mamluk sultan, Baybars (r. 1260–77). Baybars, who was extremely hostile to the Ilkhanate, gladly accepted Berke’s proposal and sent a reciprocal embassy to the Jochid ruler to consolidate the alliance and strengthen friendly relations.  

The Mamluk author ‘Abd al-Zahir (d. 1293) reproduced the report of the head of this diplomatic mission, amir Sayf al-Din Qusharbek, who did not hide his surprise that he had not met a single town between the Crimea and the Lower Volga region, but only “the plain on which there were tents and flocks of sheep”. In his report, Solkhat – the future capital of the Crimea – was still a village populated by the “Qipchaqs, Russians and Alans”, while Sarai on the banks of the Volga was still devoid of permanent structures and consisted of portable tents. Berke received the ambassadors in a large tent and listened favorably to the sultan’s message to continue the war against Hülegü in the presence of fifty local amirs. Before sending a reply message, Berke detained the ambassadors in his ordu for almost a month, so that they could tell him in detail about the Mamluk sultanate. 

In the future, the exchange of diplomatic embassies between Cairo and the Jochid rulers took place on a regular basis and continued even after the reconciliation of the Mamluk sultanate with the Ilkhanate in 1323. Although they did not translate into a joint military campaign, these diplomatic exchanges contributed to cultural interaction and trade relations between the Jochid Ulus and Egypt.  

**INTERNAL CONFLICTS**

After the invasion of the Ilkhanid forces in 1263, the Jochid Ulus was not seriously threatened for more than a hundred years, and only feuds between the Jochid rulers disturbed its inner well-being. The Ulus suffered major internal turmoil for the first time during the last two decades of the thirteenth century because of a conflict between the Jochid khan and Prince Noqai, who ruled the western regions of the Ulus between the Dnieper and the Lower Danube and greatly strengthened his authority during the reign of Möngke-Temür Khan. With the ascension of the weak-willed Töde Möngke Khan (r. 1280–87), Noqai began to claim primacy in the Ulus’s administration, but his ambitions came up against the resistance of Töle Buqa Khan (r. 1287–91). Noqai’s relations with the ruling khan deteriorated sharply during a raid on Poland the following
year, during which Noqai led independent military operations and deprived Töle Buqa’s troops of their due spoils. In view of the further deterioration of relations with Töle Buqa, Noqai, who did not dare to openly clash with the ruling khan, organized a palace coup that ended with the execution of Töle Buqa and the ascension of his cousin, Toqta (r. 1291–1312). Initially completely subordinated to Noqai’s will, Toqta gradually united his supporters and challenged Noqai’s hegemony in the seventh year of his reign. As a result of the new conflict, a bloody civil war began in the Ulus, lasting two years. In the autumn of 1297, Toqta suffered a defeat in the first battle of the Don. However, the ruling Khan did not accept defeat and assembled a new army, successfully luring to his side the tribal nobles who had supported Noqai before. In the next clash, Toqta’s army outnumbered Noghai’s. In 1299 Toqta attacked Noqai’s territory (on the bank of the Kogalnik River, between the Dniester and the Danube) and soundly defeated Noqai, who died at the end of the battle. Thus, Toqta managed to eliminate the threat and stabilize the internal situation.8

THE PERIOD OF PROSPERITY

After the removal of Prince Noqai, Toqta enjoyed undivided power. However, following his death in August 1312, a fierce struggle began in the Ulus between several candidates for the throne. The nephew of the late Toqta, Uzbek (r. 1313–41), emerged victorious in this struggle and executed two dozen hostile Jochid princes after his enthronement. Despite such radical suppression of the opposition, Uzbek distrusted the surviving Jochid princes, who could challenge his authority at any convenient opportunity. In this context, Uzbek considered it appropriate to gradually remove them from the leading administrative positions and entrust the administration of the steppe appanages to representatives of the tribal nobility who did not have the right to the throne and therefore, from Uzbek Khan’s point of view, did not pose a threat to his power.9

Thus, the local government of each ulus underwent significant changes. At the beginning of its existence in 1246, the papal legate John of Plano Carpini only met the Chinggisid princes on his way across the Ulus. In turn, the famous Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta (d. 1377), who visited the Ulus in 1334, mentioned only the non-Chinggisid amirs who ruled these regions as their own appanages. Local amirs enjoyed broad administrative autonomy in their appanages and established their own courts, with officials responsible for the military organization of the appanages, their taxation and jurisdiction.10

Uzbek’s reform contributed to the internal stability of the Ulus, which experienced its heyday during his long reign. Uzbek, who converted to Islam before or during his enthronement, promoted the wide dissemination of the religion in his domain, and during his reign a number of mosques and madrasas were built in the Ulus’s cities, such as Solkhat and Sudaq in Crimea, Upper and Lower Djulat in the North Caucasus, Old Orhei in modern Moldova, Urgench in modern Turkmenistan and Sauran in the south of modern Kazakhstan. Ibn Battuta praised the huge size of Sarai, the Ulus’s capital, and claimed that there were thirteen mosques in the city. Although we know that Uzbek had his palace in Sarai, the khan preferred to nomadize in the steppe with his ordu, which resembled, according to Ibn Battuta, “a vast city on the move with its inhabitants, with mosques and bazaars in it, the smoke of the kitchens rising in the air (for they cook while on the march), and horse-drawn wagons transporting the people”.”11

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Despite his personal confessional sympathies, Uzbek continued to adhere to the policy of religious tolerance, traditional for the Chinggisids, providing equally benevolent protection to Christians in his domain. The khan’s protection facilitated a large influx of merchants into the urban markets of the Ulus, where Muslim merchants made profitable deals with Italian, Armenian and Jewish merchants, paying due taxes to the khan’s fiscal officials. Apparently, the taxation of merchants became the main article of the khan’s income at this time.

The development of trade led to a natural expansion of existing cities and the emergence of new ones. Among the 140 known cities, thirty were located in the Lower Volga region. Important and crowded urban centers were also located in Khwarazm, the Middle Volga region, the North Caucasus, all along the eastern and northern coast of the Black Sea and especially in Crimea, whose population grew significantly due to the resettlement on the peninsula of Anatolian, Central Asian, Italian and Armenian migrants. Probably, nomads continued to be a major part of the population in Uzbek’s domain. However, cities became its main economic base, contributing to the prosperity of the Ulus.12

THE EASTERN ULUS

Despite its formal submission to Batu and his heirs, the eastern part of the Ulus was practically independent. The eastern Jochid rulers did not participate in political events in the west, and therefore the written sources contain extremely poor information about eastern events. As for Shiban’s domain (which stretched from the Yaik river to the north of the Aral Sea), we know only the names of the heirs of Shiban (Bahadur, Jochi-Buqa, Badaqul, Ming-Temür, Pulad, Ibrahim and Arabshah).13 Written sources begin to abound in information about Shiban’s domain only from the third quarter of the fourteenth century, that is, when the descendants of Shiban entered the struggle for power in the Lower Volga region (as will be discussed in the following pages).

As in Shiban’s domain, the population of Orda’s domain (which stretched from the Irtysh River in the east to the Sari Su River in the west) consisted mainly of nomads. According to Marco Polo, in Orda’s domain, there were “no towns, nor castles” and its inhabitants lived exclusively on “milk and meat of cattle”. However, recent archaeological research has shown the existence of sedentary agricultural areas along such large rivers as the Syr Darya, Irtysh, Chu and Ishim. In addition, nomads traded with neighboring uluses. According to the same Marco Polo, the fur export of “ermines, squirrels, sables and black foxes” from southern Siberia (to Mawarannahr and China) brought great income to the local rulers.14

Written sources contain more references to Orda’s domain (in contrast to the descendants of Shiban), since their rulers took part in political events of neighboring Mongol uluses. In 1252, Orda’s son, Qongqiran (d. circa 1275), rendered substantial military support to Möngke Qa’an during the destruction of Möngke’s rivals – the descendants of Ögödei and Chaghadai (d. 1242). Orda’s grandson, Qonichi (d. circa 1299), in turn, rendered military support to Ögödei’s descendant Qaidu (d. 1301 or 1303) against Qubilai Qa’an (d. 1294). He also granted asylum to the Toluid princes who rebelled against Qubilai in 1277 but were defeated two years later and were forced to flee from eastern Mongolia to Qonichi’s domain. However, around 1282, Qonichi preferred to make peace with Qubilai and receive annual gifts from him.15
After Qonichi’s death around 1299, his eldest son, Bayan, was to become his heir. However, his brother, Mumkqiya, and two other Ordaid princes, Kupalak and Kushtai, challenged his right to the throne. A long and bitter struggle began among Orda’s descendants, and each of Bayan’s opponents occupied Orda’s throne for some time in the course of this struggle. During this conflict, Bayan tried to deprive his rivals of the material and military support that they received from the neighboring co-rulers of the Chaghadaid Ulus, Chapar (r. 1301 or 1303–7) and Du’a (d. 1307). Bayan received aid from Temür Öljeitü Qa’an (r. 1294–1307), Ilkhan Ghazan (r. 1295–1304) and Toqta Khan, who forced Chapar and Du’a to recognize Bayan as Qonichi’s legitimate heir in 1304. Chapar and Du’a not only ceased to support the rebels but agreed to cease hostilities against the Yuan Empire. Thus, Bayan’s diplomatic initiative influenced the entire Mongol Empire, whose rulers concluded a short-term truce with each other (the term *Pax Mongolica* was established in historiography under the influence of this event). Nevertheless, even after the loss of Chapar’s and Du’a’s support, pretenders to Qonichi’s throne continued their struggle with Bayan, who was able to assert his authority only after Toqta Khan sent him military assistance in 1310/11. 16

In exchange for Toqta’s military support, Bayan probably recognized his direct dependence on the ulus’ khans, who began to interfere in the internal political developments of the eastern domain. Bayan’s son, Sasi-buqa (r. 1318–21), and his grandson, Irzan (r. 1321–41), were approved at the head of the domain by the order of Uzbek Khan. When the rebellious Jochid prince Mubarak Khwaja challenged Irzan’s power in 1328, Uzbek sent troops to the east led by his eldest son, Temür. After Irzan’s death in 1341, the second son of Uzbek, Tinibeg, again invaded the eastern domain to establish Irzan’s son, Chimtai (d. 1361), on the throne. During Chimtai’s rule, the internal situation in Orda’s Ulus was temporarily pacified on the eve of the upheavals that shook the unity of the whole Ulus (as discussed in the following pages). 17

**RUSSIAN PRINCIPALITIES**

The Mongols subdued the Russian principalities during two major military campaigns led by Batu in 1238 and 1240. However, Batu did not appoint Chinggisid rulers in the conquered principalities, leaving them under the autonomous control of the representatives of the Rurik dynasty. In 1243–45, major Russian princes visited Batu’s *ordu* in order to obtain confirmation (*jarliq*) of their office. Later, between the second half of the thirteenth and the middle of the fourteenth century, the *ordu* of the Jochid khans was most frequently visited by those princes who were claiming the title of great prince, the holder of both the throne of Vladimir-on-Klyazma and the prerogative of collecting annual tribute owed to the khan from all the minor princes. Other princes were exempted from visiting the *ordu*, although in the event of a dispute over the rule of any principality, the Russian pretenders to power went to the *ordu* to present their case to the khan. 18

Thus, the subordination of Russian principalities was expressed in the initial need to receive approval for their appointment by a visit to the *ordu*. The payment of the annual tribute reflected the second aspect of subordination. The size of this tribute ranged from principality to principality. The Kiev region was already subject to the
census in 1245 when its population had to pay a poll tax from every male person, regardless of age. The Mongols carried out the census in the East Russian principalities and Novgorod in 1257–59, where only adult males had to pay a poll tax. The West Russian principalities escaped the Mongol census but paid tribute on the basis of a treaty concluded in the same period. The special Mongol officials (basqaqs) supervised the collection of tribute, but in the 1280s, this function was entrusted to the great princes and their confidants. 19

Another form of submission was expressed in the duty to perform military service, but the Jochid khans used auxiliary Russian troops only in rare attacks in Poland and Hungary and in some campaigns in the Caucasus. Nevertheless, the Russian troops rendered extremely important support when the Jochid khan intervened in Russian affairs. This happened in 1252, when Batu supported Alexander Nevskii in his fight against his brother, Andrei, and in 1293, when Toqta rendered military support to Alexander Nevsky’s son, Andrei, against his brother Dmitri. 20

Russian church chronicles are the main written sources for the Mongol rule of Rus’. Their attitude towards Russian submission to the Jochid khans was twofold, if not paradoxical. On the one hand, Russian church authors could not reconcile themselves to the subordination of the Orthodox people to “pagan Tatar” authorities and often compared this subordination to the Babylonian captivity of God’s chosen people. On the other hand, these same authors recognized Mongol domination as a fait accompli – accomplished by the will of God. They did not question the legitimacy of the supreme authority of the Jochid khan and invariably called him the tsar – the title previously reserved for the Byzantine emperor. Russian chroniclers continued to show respect to the khan’s power even during its weakening, and they allowed themselves to question its legitimacy only in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, when the Muscovite prince Ivan III (r. 1462–1505) decided to openly rebel against Jochid domination. 21

JANIBEG’S REIGN AND THE ULUS’S DECLINE

Uzbek’s son Janibeg came to power in 1342 after the murder of his elder brother, Tinibeg (r. 1341–42), and the gradual decline of the Jochid Ulus occurred during his reign. Janibeg Khan began his reign with an unsuccessful war with the Italian colonies in his domain, the reason for which was a clash between Christian and Muslim residents in Tana (at the mouth of the Don). Janibeg, in all likelihood, found the Italians guilty in this conflict and expelled the Venetian and Genoese merchants from Tana. However, he did not stop there and decided to expel all Italians from his domain by sending troops in the next year to lay siege to the largest Genoese colony in the Ulus – Caffa, located on the south-eastern coast of Crimea. The siege of Caffa was unsuccessful, as were two subsequent attempts to take the city in 1345 and 1346. The khan’s rash adventure cost him not only a temporary loss of income from the taxation of Italian trade, but also a certain decline in authority in the eyes of his subjects. In the end, Janibeg forced the Italians to make concessions and allowed the Venetians to return to Tana in 1347 on the condition of an increase in the commodity tax (which was probably his main and primary aspiration). However, the traffic of Western merchants and their investments significantly decreased as a result of uncertainty about the future intentions of the
khan, and because of the parallel disaster that affected not only the Jochid Ulus, but the entire Middle East and Europe. In 1346 the Black Death struck the whole western part of the Ulus after having already ravaged its eastern territory for several years. According to Russian, Latin and Arab sources, the loss of the local urban population amounted to hundreds of thousands of residents. Caffa did not escape the tragic fate of other Jochid cities and was struck by an epidemic at the end of the same year. After that, the plague-infected Genoese merchants brought an epidemic to Messina in Sicily in 1347, from whence it spread to Genoa and across Europe, destroying, conservatively, a third of the European population. Apparently, the loss of population in the Jochid Ulus was just as significant, and the Black Death struck the Ulus once more in 1353.

Undoubtedly, the decline in trade and a sharp decrease of the urban population led to a noticeable economic decline in the Ulus. Although one should not exaggerate the catastrophic consequences of the plague, Italian and Central Asian merchants immediately returned to the Ulus at the very first news of the weakening of the epidemic, although they did so in a much smaller quantity. Despite the upheavals, Janibeg’s power remained unshakable until the end of his reign, and the troubles that followed his death were the logical consequence of his father’s reforms. Like Uzbek Khan, Janibeg continued to confer the prerogatives of administration on the tribal nobility by granting its representatives entire appanages to rule autonomously. Over time, the strengthened amirs began to be burdened by the authoritarian power of the khan, and each of them was ready to take advantage of the first chance presented in order to elevate his protégé to the Jochid throne. Thus, the reform of Uzbek Khan, aimed at centralizing the power of the khan, ultimately led to its weakening, which immediately affected the internal situation in the Ulus.

TIME OF TROUBLES

The short-term conquest of Azerbaijan in 1356 was probably the only achievement of Janibeg Khan, who took advantage of the death of the local puppet khan to defeat and execute the de facto ruler of Azerbaijan, an amir named Malik Ashraf. However, the Jochid occupation forces led by Janibeg Khan’s eldest son, Berdibeg (d. 1359), left Azerbaijan in the following year after the Khan’s death in order to take part in the power struggle in the Ulus. After coming to power in 1357, Berdibeg Khan immediately executed twelve of his closest relatives, and after his sudden death two years later the Jochid throne was deprived of a legitimate heir. There were a certain number of Batu’s descendants in the Ulus, but their rights to the throne could be challenged by any other competitor who received more weighty support from the amirs, each of whom, in turn, used the split in the Ulus to strengthen his power. As a consequence, a long and bloody internecine war, which lasted for twenty years, began in the Ulus. During this struggle, the throne in Sarai was alternately occupied by more than twenty khans, whose names can only be identified on the basis of numismatic material because of their frequent change and the brevity of their rule.

The first clashes between the Tatar amirs and their puppet khans began in 1360 in the center of the Ulus. The Lower Volga region split into several warring regions.
Soon the descendants of Shiban and Togha-Temür (respectively, of the fifth and youngest sons of Jochi), who ruled in the eastern part of the Ulus, joined the struggle for the throne in Sarai. The situation was also complicated by the sharp increase in the influence of the Kiyat tribe in the western part of the Ulus. Their chief representative, amir Mamai, who by 1362 controlled Crimea and the steppes to the east of the Dnieper, moved with his troops to the Lower Volga region and put one of Batu’s descendants named Abdullah on the throne in Sarai. However, in the same year, Mamai was forced to leave the Lower Volga region and return to the west, as he was concerned about the invasion of the great Lithuanian prince Algirdas (r. 1345–77) in the Kiev region. Abdullah was immediately expelled from Sarai by his rivals. Later, Mamai made several more attempts to conquer Sarai but each time lost control of the capital of the Ulus.25

By 1370, Mamai established firm control over the western part of the Ulus, despite his inability to gain a foothold in the Lower Volga region. However, from that moment his influence began to weaken because of a new threat from the east. A descendant of Togha-Temür, Urus Khan, brought almost the entire eastern part of the Ulus under his control and began an offensive to the west. In 1374, Urus Khan conquered Sarai, but the following year he was forced to leave the Volga region because his relative, Toqtamish (d. 1406), who received military support from Tamerlane (1336–1405), tried to take advantage of his absence to declare himself head of his domain. Urus Khan returned to the east and successfully repulsed several joint attacks of Toqtamish and Tamerlane, but after his death in 1377, Toqtamish subordinated the former domain of Urus Khan.26

For their part, the princes of eastern Rus’ took advantage of the prolonged civil strife in the Lower Volga region and decided to secede from the Ulus. In 1374, the Russian princes, led by the Muscovite Prince Dmitri Ivanovich (r. 1363–89), gathered for a congress in Pereyaslavl (in the modern Yaroslavl region) and concluded an agreement on mutual assistance in the struggle against amir Mamai and ceasing tribute payments to him. Occupied at this time with the struggle against Urus Khan in the Lower Volga region, Mamai was able to invade Rus’ only in 1378. However, his troops suffered a heavy defeat in the battle of the Vozha River (in the modern Ryazan region). Nevertheless, Mamai did not accept this defeat, and again invaded Rus’ but suffered a crushing defeat on the Kulikovo field (between the rivers Oka and Don) on 8 September 1380. In turn, Toqtamish, who seized Sarai by the end of 1378, took advantage of the victory of the Russian princes by defeating the remnants of Mamai’s military forces in a clash on the Kalka River, north of the Sea of Azov, at the end of 1380. Thus, Toqtamish became the unchallenged ruler of the Jochid Ulus.27

TEMPORARY UNIFICATION OF THE ULUS AND THE INVASION OF TAMERLANE

Twenty years of turmoil in the Jochid Ulus was an obvious consequence of the tribal nobility’s rise to power as they used puppet khans to strengthen their power. However, the tribal amirs did not seek to split the Ulus into independent khanates, and their efforts were for the most part aimed at capturing Sarai in order to establish their puppet khan at the head of the reunited Ulus. Most of the
Ulûs’s subjects, tired of the disruptive internal conflicts, were ready to submit to the ruler who guaranteed internal order by uniting the entire Ulûs under a solid centralized power.

Toqtamish Khan, who proclaimed an official program for the restoration of the Ulûs’s greatness and paid special attention to both stimulating domestic and foreign trade and regulating monetary circulation and taxation, fully met these demands. Toqtamish’s need for financial means to stabilize the economic situation inevitably led to a conflict with the Moscow principality, whose ruler, Prince Dmitri Ivanovich, inspired by the military triumph over Mamai, refused to pay tribute to the new khan. In 1382, Toqtamish’s troops unexpectedly appeared in his principality and burned Moscow, as well as a number of other cities belonging to Prince Dmitri. After this defeat, the Muscovite prince renewed the payment of tribute, which regularly went to the treasury of Toqtamish throughout his reign.28

Thus, Toqtamish had absolute power and worked to maintain the united Ulûs. However, he had the misfortune to rule at the same time as Tamerlane’s conquests, and, more importantly, Toqtamish considered it his duty to hinder Tamerlane’s expansion in the territory of the former Ilkhanate. Upon learning that Tamerlane had defeated the ruler of Tabriz (1385), Ahmad Jalayir (r. 1382–1410), Toqtamish sent his troops to Transcaucasia. They thoroughly plundered Ahmad’s territory, including his capital, Tabriz. Toqtamish evidently wanted to show that any attempt by Tamerlane to gain a foothold in Transcaucasia would be met by a Jochid invasion. The following year, Tamerlane’s army, engaged in the devastation of Georgia, was attacked by Toqtamish’s troops. However, the clash at Derbend resulted in the defeat of the Jochid forces. After this victory, Tamerlane hastened to conclude a peace with Toqtamish, hoping that the Jochid khan would no longer hinder his expansion in the Middle East. Toqtamish in turn, pretending to accept the terms of peace, decided to strike at the central regions of Tamerlane’s empire.29

In 1387, Toqtamish’s army invaded Mawarannahr through the modern southern Kazakhstan and, after having pillaged Tashkent and Qarshi, began the siege of Bukhara and Samarqand. Tamerlane, who was at that time engaged in military operations in Iran, hastily led his army to the aid of the capital of his empire and defeated Toqtamish’s troops near Samarqand. Toqtamish’s attempt to invade Tamerlane’s domain the following year was just as unsuccessful. Toqtamish’s repeated attacks assured Tamerlane that he could not continue the conquests of the Middle East without destroying the military might of the Jochid Ulûs.30

After lengthy preparations, in 1391 Tamerlane raided deep into Toqtamish’s territory through the steppes of modern central and western Kazakhstan and destroyed Toqtamish’s army in a bloody battle on the River Kondurcha (in the east of the modern Samara region). However, Toqtamish managed to regroup after Tamerlane’s return to Mawarannahr. The Jochid khan even managed to conclude a military alliance with the Ottoman and Mamluk sultans to conduct joint military operations against Tamerlane. In turn, Tamerlane, risking a simultaneous attack from the west and north from three powerful enemies, was forced again to attack the main initiator of this alliance. In 1395, Tamerlane crossed the Caucasus and defeated Toqtamish in a bloody three-day battle waged on the banks of the Terek. After that, Tamerlane invaded the Jochid Ulûs and stayed in its territory for almost a year, engaged in the systematic devastation of its main cities.31
THE PERIOD OF AMIR EDIGÜ AND ULUGH MUHAMMAD KHAN

Before leaving the Jochid Ulus in 1396, Tamerlane did everything possible to both ruin its most important regions and prevent the subsequent revival of its former military might. The devastation led to many years of famine, the outbreak of plague and, more importantly, the migration of significant nomadic populations to marginal but more secure regions of the Ulus. The main consequence of this migration process was a marked increase in the role of the Manghit tribe, whose pastures between the Yaik and Emba rivers (in modern western Kazakhstan), located at a safe distance from Timurid armies and in close proximity to the central region of the Ulus (in the Lower Volga region), were significantly replenished by large groups of migrating nomads. Due to the sharp population growth and the corresponding increase of its military potential, the Manghit tribe began a leading role in the domestic policy of the Ulus throughout the fifteenth century, and the leaders of the Manghits, in turn, occupied key administrative posts in almost all regions of the Ulus. 32

The head of the Manghits, amir Edigü, was the primary figure during the first two decades of this period. He used Toqtamish’s unpopularity after Tamerlane’s invasion to elevate one of Togha-Temür’s descendants, Temür Qutlugh Khan (r. 1396–99), to the head of the Ulus. For his part, after several unsuccessful attempts to regain power, Toqtamish turned for help to the Lithuanian Prince Vitautas (r. 1392–1430), promising to give him the administration of the eastern Russian principalities in the event of success. Tempted by Toqtamish’s offer, Vitautas assembled a huge army, mainly consisting of Tatars and his western Russian subjects and equipped with cannons (“pushki”) transported on carts, sent it to the conquest of Sarai. Edigü defeated this army at the Vorskla River (the left tributary of the Dnieper) on 12 August 1399. 33

Edigü’s military triumph contributed to a sharp increase in his power, reinforced by the general stabilization of the economic situation in the Ulus. Thereafter, Edigü could afford to change khans in the Ulus at his own discretion. Temür Qutlugh Khan was dismissed almost immediately after the battle of Vorskla and replaced by the more pliable Shadi-Bek Khan (r. 1399–1407). Edigü was relatively successful in suppressing any attempts to limit his authority; he only lost power during the short reigns of Temür Khan and Jalal al-Din Khan between 1411 and 1413. The Lithuanian Prince Vitautas represented a much greater threat, as he refused to direct attacks on the Jochid Ulus after the defeat on the Vorskla but willingly sheltered all Edigü’s opponents. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania became the haven of Toqtamish’s sons, whom Vitautas equipped to seize power in Sarai. They were regularly defeated, until one of them, Kadir-Birdi, managed to defeat the Manghit amir in a battle on the Yaik River in 1419. Edigü died while running from the battlefield, although Kadir-Birdi himself was also mortally wounded in this battle. 34

As a result of many years of internecine struggle, which erupted after Edigü’s death, Ulugh Muhammad Khan (a descendant of Togha-Temür, like his predecessors) came to power in Sarai. He managed to subordinate to his control the entire western part of the Ulus in 1427, after having received support from Edigü’s son, Nawruz. Ulugh Muhammad’s ascension contributed to the stabilization of the internal situation in the Ulus, and the new khan even managed to temporarily establish friendly
relations with the new Lithuanian ruler, Svitrigaila (1370–1452). However, in 1433, Ulugh Muhammad’s troops rashly plundered the Kiev region, and Svitrigaila chose to support the distant relative of the khan, Sayyid-Ahmad, allowing him to establish his horde in the steppes to the west of the Dnieper. Having accumulated strength, Sayyid-Ahmad went on the offensive against Ulugh Muhammad and defeated him in 1436, which allowed Sayyid-Ahmad to occupy Crimea. A year later, amir Nawruz with his Manghits, who had always supported Ulugh Muhammad before that, unexpectedly deserted and elevated another pretender to power, Kichi Muhammad, who gave Ulugh Muhammad a final defeat. 35

Ulugh Muhammad was the last Jochid ruler to subjugate the entire western territory of the Ulus to his power for a short period of time. His overthrow in 1437 led to the disintegration of the Ulus and the emergence of several khanates, whose rulers for some time tried to unite the Ulus under their authority but soon began to defend the independence of their domains. Ulugh Muhammad, who founded a new khanate in the far north, was the first example in this respect.

THE KAZAN KHANATE

Expelled from the steppe in 1437, Ulugh Muhammad moved to the north-west, in the Middle Volga region, where he founded a separate khanate with its capital in Kazan. However, he, in all likelihood, considered Kazan his temporary shelter and hoped to regain his throne in Sarai after having accumulated enough strength for this purpose. As a result of his activities, his son, Mahmud (r. 1445–c.1465), inherited vast areas of the Middle Volga. These territories were inhabited by the descendants of the Volga Bulghars and other Turkic peoples who migrated there in the middle of the thirteenth century and became subordinated to the local Tatar nobility. The Tatar nobility professed Islam, but a numerous pagan population also inhabited the region: the Chuvash, Mari, Udmurt and Mordovians. In addition, the power of the Kazan Khanate extended to the Vyatka land and the Great Perm (modern Kirov and Perm regions), from where the Khanate obtained expensive furs, sold at a summer fair near Kazan in a large quantity. However, control over Vyatka and Perm was challenged by the Great Principality of Moscow. Several bloody wars between Kazan and Moscow lasting one century occurred, culminating in the conquest of Kazan by the troops of Ivan the Terrible (r. 1547–84) in the autumn of 1552. 36

THE EASTERN ULUS IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

After the death of amir Edigü (1419), the eastern part of the Ulus experienced a period of continuous struggle between various contenders for power. One of them, a descendant of Shiban, Abu’l-Khayr (r. 1430–68), proclaimed himself khan in Chimgi-Tura (modern Tiumen) in 1430, and his people were known as the Uzbeks. The following year, he defeated his distant relative, Mahmud Khoja Khan, in the battle on the Tobol River, which enabled him to unite under his rule the lands of south-western Siberia. Abu’l-Khayr spent the next fifteen years in unceasing wars against his rivals, and by 1446 he was able to unite under his authority almost the entire territory of the eastern part of the Ulus, moving his capital to Sighnaq (in the
middle reaches of the Syr Darya). However, his khanate disintegrated immediately after his death in 1468.

Abu’l-Khayr’s grandson, Muhammad Shibani (d. 1510), was able to hold Sighnaq, but his attempts to reunite all Abu’l-Khayr’s domain were unsuccessful. During the first half of the 1480s, Muhammad Shibani directed all his energy to regular raids on Khurasan and the retention of the Syr Darya lands from the unabated expansion of the Kazakh Burunduq Khan (r. 1480–1511). Finally, in 1486, he suffered a defeat from Burunduq Khan and, having lost Sighnaq, Muhammad Shibani migrated with his tribes to the Otrar region, proceeding to the gradual conquest of Mawarannahr, which was crowned in 1501 by the capture of Samarqand and the formation of the Uzbek Empire. In turn, the eastern part of the Ulus was destined to become a Khanate of Kazakhs.37

THE CRIMEAN KHANATE

Like the Kazan Khanate, the Crimean Khanate appeared at the end of Ulugh Muhammad’s reign. The Khanate emerged at the behest of the tribal nobility (headed by the Shirin clan) of the peninsula, who instigated an uprising in 1441 against the authority of Sayyid-Ahmad (who will be discussed in the following pages) and invited a descendant of Togha-Temür, Hajji Girey (r. 1442–66), to rule. Thus, Hajji Girey was elevated to the Crimean throne by the local nobility without the participation of the Ulus’s khan. The independence of the new Khanate was emphasized by Hajji-Giray’s new policy towards other Jochid rulers: the first Crimean khan refused to participate in the internal quarrels of the Jochids, perceiving his Khanate as independent of the Ulus, and instead paid all his attention to strengthening its defenses.

After Hajji Girey’s death (1466), his son and heir, Mängli Girey (r. 1469–75, 1478–1515), was able to occupy the Crimean throne with the military support of the head of the Shirins, Mamaq. However, his rule was characterized by the weakness of the khan’s power and permanent conflicts with the tribal nobility, which sharply escalated after the death of Mamaq in 1472. The conflict between the khan and Mamaq’s brother, Eminek, prompted the latter to turn to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1451–81) for help. The Sultan sent a fleet to Crimea during the summer of 1475, seized all the coastal towns and captured Mängli Girey. Although temporarily deprived of power, the Crimean khan was restored three years later. Thus, the Crimean Khanate fell into official dependence on the Ottoman Empire, retaining de facto independence in its foreign policy and successfully using the Ottoman protectorate in subsequent conflicts with the Great Horde.38

THE GREAT HORDE DURING THE REIGN OF KICHI MUHAMMAD

Despite the dissolution of the Ulus into several independent khanates, all of their rulers recognized the seniority of its central Khanate, called the Great (that is, the Greater) Horde in Russian sources. The Great Horde gradually lost its central territories between the Volga and the Ural Rivers, ceding them to the Manghits during the last quarter of
the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the vast steppes to the north of the Caucasus and the Azov and Black Seas remained at the disposal of the Great Horde. The khan’s power in the Great Horde was severely limited by the influence of the tribal nobility, among which the most important were the representatives of the Manghit tribe, who had to reckon with the interests of other tribes (such as the Naimans and Alchins).

Kichi Muhammad (r. 1437–59) became the first khan of the Great Horde after ascending the throne at the end of 1437. He ruled in the steppes between the Don and the Volga, but he was forced to recognize the co-rule of another descendant of Togha-Temür, Sayyid-Ahmad (r. 1437–55), who established his control over the steppes between the Don and the Dnieper. Possessing significant military potential, Sayyid Ahmad’s Horde carried out an extremely aggressive policy towards its northern neighbors, namely the Grand Duchies of Lithuania and Moscow. However, it was subjected to an unexpected blow from the south, from which it could not recover. In 1453, the Crimean Khan Hajji Girey suddenly attacked Sayyid-Ahmad and inflicted a crushing defeat on him. Two years later, Hajji Girey struck again, leaving the Great Horde in tatters. The khan himself surrendered to the Lithuanians, ending his days in captivity in Kovno.39

AHMAD KHAN AND THE END OF THE GREAT HORDE

After Kichi Muhammad’s death in 1459, the power of his son and heir, Ahmad (r. 1459–81), was weakened by a prolonged conflict with Ahmad’s brother, Murtaza. The weakening of the Great Horde inspired the Moscow Prince Ivan III (1462–1505) to refuse to pay tribute, which provoked a reaction from the Tatars: in 1472, Ahmad sent his troops to the north. However, Ivan III was properly prepared for the attack, and the ruin of the small town of Aleksin on the Oka River was the Tatars’ only success. After that, Ahmad’s troops retreated to the steppe. Ahmad’s repeated attempt to return the Great Principality to obedience had even greater consequences for the Great Horde. In 1480, the Tatar army met the Moscow forces on the banks of the Ugra (the Oka’s tributary), but neither Ahmad nor Ivan III dared to initiate battle. After standing for several months in inaction in front of the enemy forces, Ahmad ordered the retreat to the Volga region, where the following year he was suddenly attacked by Ibrahim (r. 1464–95), the khan of Chimgi-Tura (modern Tiumen), who personally killed Ahmad. After these events, Moscow became officially independent of the Great Horde, and Ivan III used the title tsar, equal in status to the khan, in his diplomatic correspondence with foreign rulers.40

The last two decades of the Great Horde’s existence were characterized by a marked economic deterioration caused by drought and famine in the steppe, which led to a sharp decline in the number of the Great Horde’s subjects, who migrated to the more fertile steppes of the Dnieper region and Crimea. Finally, in May 1502, the Crimean Khan Mängli Girey defeated the last ruler of the Great Horde, Shaykh-Ahmad (d. 1528), at the confluence of the Sula River and the Dnieper. After this defeat, the Great Horde ceased to exist, and further attempts to unite the western regions of the Jochid Ulus under the rule of the Crimean or Astrakhan Khanate had no success.41
NOTES

1 On the meaning of this term, see an informative article by Jackson 1999.
6 Tizengaun 1884, 63–64.
10 Pochekaev 2016b, 246; Fedorov-Davydov 1973, 89–103; Safargaliev 1960, 69–70.
11 Gibb 1962, 482.
12 Kramarovsky 2016, 437; Egorov 1985, 79–141.
19 Mys’kov 2003, 68; Allsen 1981, 36–45; Safargaliev 1960, 64.
31 Uskenbai 2016, 83–84; Mircagalev 2003, 109–135; Roemer 1986, 70–73.

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