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Mongol Conquest of Northern Rus in 1237–1238

The Mongol conquest of Northern Rus in 1237–1238 was part of a larger scheme—the conquest of Europe—devised by Genghis Khan's successors at a Great *Kuriltai*, or Council, in 1235. Led by Batu Khan, the Mongols, using Chinese technicians and Turkic manpower, encountered little or no opposition from the feuding princes of Rus. They captured and devastated the cities of Riazan, Moscow, Suzdal, Vladimir, and Tver. They took some of the inhabitants captive, massacred others, and forced those who survived to pay tribute. This conquest inaugurated a period in Russian history known as the "Mongol Yoke" that technically was to last until 1480.

It happened in 1237. That winter, the godless Tatars, under the leadership of Batu, came to the Riazan principality from the East through the forests. Upon arriving they encamped at Onuza, which they took and burned. From here they despatched their emissaries—a woman witch and two men—to the princes of Riazan demanding a tithe from the princes and complete armor and horses from the people. The princes of Riazan, Iurii Igorevich and his brother Oleg, did not allow the emissaries to enter the city, and [together with] the Murom and Pronsk princes [they] moved against the Tatars in the direction of Voronezh. The princes replied: "When we are gone, everything will be yours." . . . The princes of Riazan sent a plea to Prince Iurii of Vladimir, begging him to send aid or to come in person. Prince Iurii, however, did not go; neither did he listen to the plea of the princes of Riazan, as he wanted to fight the Tatars alone. . . .

The princes of Riazan, Murom, and Pronsk moved against the godless and engaged them in a battle. The struggle was fierce, but the godless Moham-medans* emerged victorious with each prince fleeing toward his own city. Thus angered, the Tatars now began the conquest of the Riazan land with

great fury. They destroyed cities, killed people, burned, and took [people] into slavery. On December 6, [1237] the cursed strangers approached the capital city of Riazan, besieged it, and surrounded it with a stockade. The princes of Riazan shut themselves up with the people of the city, fought bravely, but succumbed. On December 21, [1237] the Tatars took the city of Riazan, burned it completely, killed Prince Iurii Igorevich, his wife, slaughtered other princes, and of the captured men, women, and children, some they killed with their swords, others they killed with arrows and [then] threw them into the fire; while some of the captured they bound, cut, and disemboweled their bodies. The Tatars burned many holy churches, monasteries, and villages, and took their property.

Then the Tatars went toward Kolomna. From Vladimir, Grand Prince Iurii Vsevolodovich sent his son, Prince Vsevolod, against them; with him also went Prince Roman Igorevich of Riazan with his armies. Grand Prince Iurii sent his military commander, Eremai Glebovich, ahead with a patrol. This group joined Vsevolod's and Roman Igorevich's forces at Kolomna. There they were surrounded by the Tatars. The struggle was very fierce and the Russians were driven away to a hill. And there they [the Tatars] killed Prince Roman Igorevich Riazanskii, and Eremai Glebovich, the military commander of Vsevolod Iurievich, and they slaughtered many other men. Prince Vsevolod, with a small detachment, fled to Vladimir. The Tatars [then] went toward Moscow. They took Moscow and killed the military commander Philip Nianka, and captured Vladimir, the son of Prince Iurii; they slaughtered people old and young alike, some they took with them into captivity; they departed with a great amount of wealth.

When Grand Prince Iurii Vsevolodovich heard about this . . . he entrusted the rule of Vladimir to a bishop, Princes Vsevolod and Mstislav, and his own military leader Peter Osljadiukovich, while he himself went toward the Volga with his nephews—Vasilko Konstantinovich, Vsevolod Konstantinovich, and Vladimir Konstantinovich. They made their camp on the Siti. There the Grand Prince awaited the arrival of his brothers—Prince Iaroslav Vsevolodovich and Prince Sviatoslav Vsevolodovich—with their soldiers, and he himself began to collect an army; while he appointed Zhiroslav Mikhailovich his military commander.

On Tuesday February 3, [1238] . . . the Tatars approached Vladimir. The inhabitants of Vladimir, with their princes and military commander, Peter Osljadiukovich, shut themselves up in the city. The Tatars came to the Golden Gate, brought with them Prince Vladimir, the son of the Grand Prince Iurii Vsevolodovich, and inquired: "Is the Grand Prince Iurii in the city?" But the inhabitants of Vladimir began to shoot at them. They, however, shouted: "Do not shoot!" And, having approached very close to the gates, they showed

From *Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisei* (Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles) (St. Petersburg: 1885), vol. 10, pp. 105–115. Translation mine. Words in brackets are mine.

*Rus medieval sources refer to all non-Christian believers as "godless."

the inhabitants of Vladimir their young Prince Vladimir, son of Iurii, and asked: "Do you recognize your young Prince?" As a result of privation and misfortune, his face was sad and he looked weak. Vsevolod and Mstislav stood atop the Golden Gates and recognized their brother Vladimir. Oh, how sad and tearful it is to see one's brother in such a condition! Vsevolod and Mstislav, with their *boyars* and all the inhabitants, wept as they looked at Vladimir. And the Tatars departed from the Golden Gates, circled the entire city, examined it, and encamped at Zremany in front of the Golden Gates and about the entire city; and there were many of them. . . .

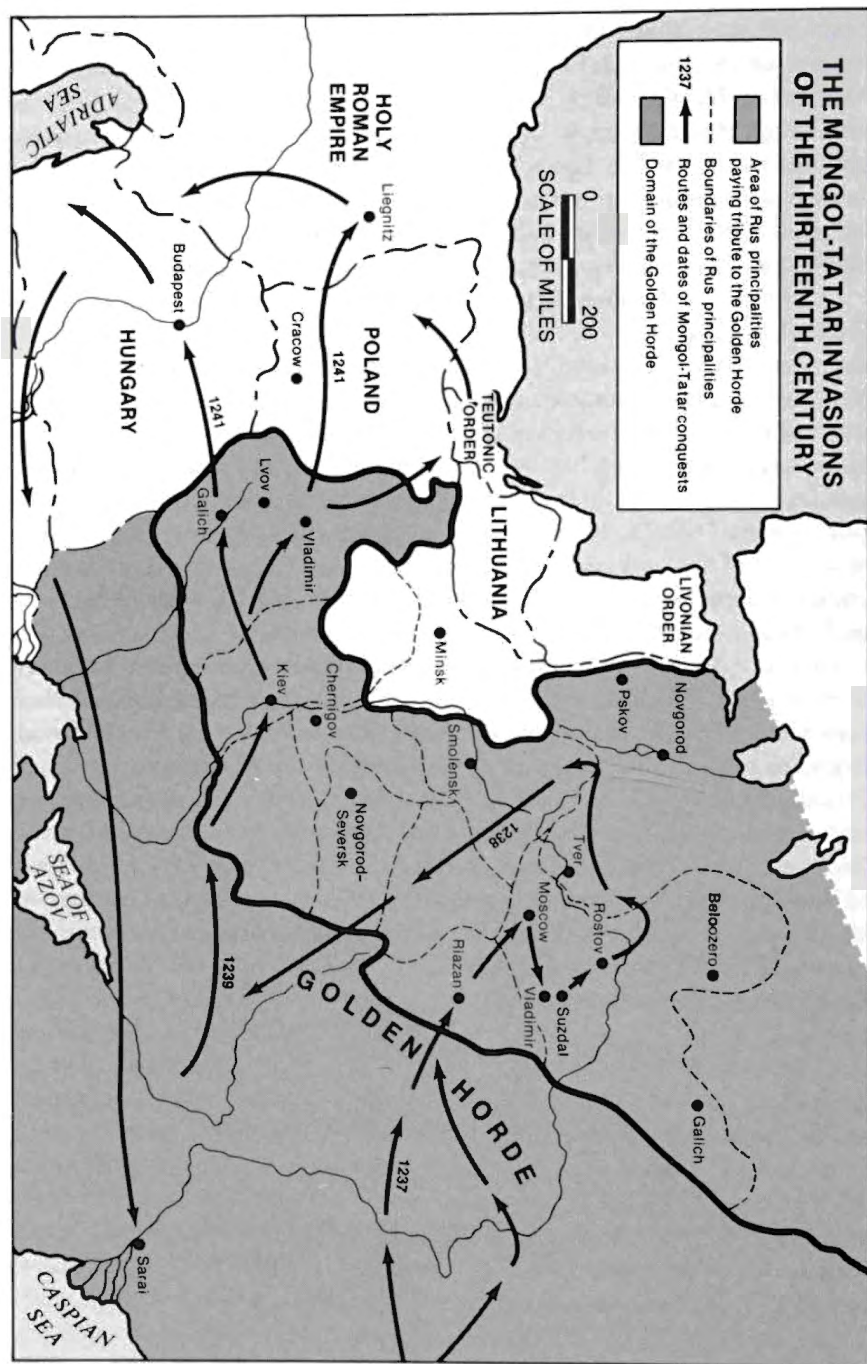
After they made camp around Vladimir, the Tatars went and occupied the city of Suzdal. . . . They brought a multitude of prisoners into their camp, approached the city of Vladimir on Saturday, and from early morning till evening they built scaffolds and set up rams, and during the night they surrounded the entire city with a fence. In the morning, the princes, Bishop Mitrophan, military leader Peter Osladiukovich, and all the *boyars* and the people realized that their city would be taken and they all began to weep. . . . On Sunday, February 8, [1238] . . . early in the morning the Tatars approached the city from all sides and began to hit the city [walls] with rams, and began to pour great stones into the center of the city from far away, as if by God's will, as if it rained inside the city; many people were killed inside the city and all were greatly frightened and trembled. The Tatars broke through the wall at the Golden Gates, also from the Lybed [side] at the Orininy and the Copper Gates, and from the Kliazma [direction] at the Volga Gates, and in other places; they destroyed the whole city, threw stones inside, and . . . entered it from all sides like demons. Before dinner they took the new city which they set on fire; and there they killed Prince Vsevolod with his brother, many *boyars* and people, while other princes and all the people fled into the middle city. Bishop Mitrophan and the Grand Duchess with her sons and daughters, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, *boyars*, and their wives, and many people fled into a church, locked the church gates, and climbed inside the church to the choir loft. The Tatars took this city too, and began to search after the princes and their mother, and found that they were inside the church. . . . The Tatars broke the gates of the church and slaughtered those who were inside and resisted. And they began to ask the whereabouts of the princes and their mother and found they were in the choir loft. They began to entice them to come down. But they did not listen to them. The Tatars then brought many fire logs inside the church and set it on fire. Those present in the choir loft, praying, gave their souls to God; they were burned and joined the list of martyrs. And the Tatars pillaged the holy church, and they tore the miracle-making icon of the Mother of God.

From here the Tatars advanced against Grand Prince Iurii; some went

toward Rostov, while others went toward Iaroslavl, which they took; some went along the Volga and toward Gorodets and burned everything along the Volga up to Merski Golich. Some went toward Pereiaslavl and took that city and slaughtered the people. And from there they set the entire countryside and many cities on fire: Iuriev, Dmitrov, Volok, Tver, where they also killed Iaroslav's son; and there was not a town till Torzhok which was not occupied by the Tatars. In February [1238], in the Rostov and Suzdal principalities alone, they took fourteen cities in addition to villages and churchyards.

At the end of February [1238], a messenger brought the news to Grand Prince Iurii Vsevolodovich, his brother Sviatoslav Vsevolodovich, and their nephews Vasilko, Vsevolod, and Vladimir Konstantinovich, that the city of Vladimir had been captured, the bishop, grand dukes, princes, and all the inhabitants had been burned and some slaughtered. "And they killed your eldest son Vsevolod, and his brothers, inside the city and now they go toward you." . . . Iurii waited for his brother Iaroslav, but he did not come. And the prince ordered that his military leader strengthen his people and prepare them to fight, and sent a brave man, Dorofei Semeonovich, with 3000 men, to gather information about the Tatars. But hardly had he left when he returned with these words: "Lord! The Tatars have surrounded us."

When he heard this, Prince Iurii with his brother Sviatoslav and his nephews—Vasilko, Vsevolod, and Vladimir—and with their men, mounted their horses and advanced against the heathens. Grand Prince Iurii Vsevolodovich began to organize his regiments when suddenly the Tatars arrived at Siti. Prince Iurii forgot all about fear and advanced to meet them. Regiments met and there ensued a major battle and fierce slaughter; blood flowed like water. Because of God's will, the Tatars defeated the Russian princes. Grand Prince of Vladimir, Iurii Vsevolodovich, was killed then as were many of his military leaders and *boyars* and soldiers. The Tatars took his nephew, Vasilko Konstantinovich of Rostov, into captivity and brought him to the Sherenskii Forest. They also encamped there.



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Mongol Capture of Kiev in 1240

The Mongol conquest of Northern Rus removed a possible threat to their westward progress. In 1240, after two years of rest, Batu Khan ordered his forces west. Employing tactics of siege and massive assault, the Mongols overran Pereiaslavl and Chernigov and took Kiev in December of 1240. Mongol capture of Kiev was important for two basic reasons: it cleared the road through Galicia and Poland to central and western Europe, though actually they reached only the city of Liegnitz, near Breslau; and it symbolized the end of the Kievan state, which had been on the decline for quite some time.

In this year [1240] Batu Khan approached and surrounded the city of Kiev with a great multitude of soldiers. The Tatar force besieged it and it was impossible for any one either to leave the city or to enter it. Squeaking of wagons, bellowing of camels, sounds of trumpets and organs, neighing of horses, and cry and sobs of an innumerable multitude of people made it impossible to hear one another in the city. The entire country was overflowing with Tatars. The Kievans then captured a Tatar by the name of Tavrul, and he named all the great princes who were with Batu, and spoke of his innumerable strength. And he had with him the following of his brothers and of his strong military leaders: Urduy, Baydar, Biriuy, Kaydar, Bechar, Mengay, Kailug, [and] Kuiuik; but he [Kuiuik] returned [to Mongolia] when he learned of the death of the [Great] Khan. [The Great] Khan did not belong to the Batu family, but was his first and great leader. Batu Khan mourned him because the latter liked him very much. Other military leaders [of Batu Khan at Kiev] and great princes included: Butar, Aydar, Kilemet, Burunday, Batyr, who captured the Bulgar and Suzdal lands, and a great number, countless, other military leaders. Batu ordered that many wall-destroying rams be brought to Kiev and placed near the Polish Gate, because that part was wooded. Many rams hammered the walls without interruption day and night and the inhabitants were frightened, and there were many killed and blood

flowed like water. And Batu sent the following message to the inhabitants of Kiev: "If you surrender to me, you will be forgiven; if, however, you are going to resist you will suffer greatly and will perish cruelly." The inhabitants of Kiev, however, did not listen to him, but calumniated and cursed him. This angered Batu very much and he ordered [his men] to attack the city with great fury. And thus with the aid of many rams they broke through the city walls and entered the city, and the inhabitants ran to meet them. It was possible to hear and see a great crash of lances and clatter of shields; the arrows obscured the light and because of this it was impossible to see the sky, but there was darkness from the multitude of Tatar arrows, and there were dead everywhere and everywhere blood flowed like water. [Kiev's] military leader Dmitrii was severely wounded and many strong men were killed. The inhabitants [of Kiev] were defeated, and the Tatars climbed on the walls and because of great exhaustion they remained there. The night came. During the night the inhabitants [of Kiev] built a new fortification around the Church of the Virgin Mary. When morning came the Tatars attacked them and there was a bitter slaughter. Some people fainted and [some] fled to the church steeple with their possessions; and the church walls collapsed from the weight and the Tatars took the city of Kiev on St. Nicholas Day, December 6, [1240]. They brought the wounded military leader Dmitrii before Batu, and Batu ordered that he not be killed because of his bravery. And Batu began to inquire about Prince Daniel [of Galicia], and they told him that the Prince had fled to Hungary. Batu left his own military leader in Kiev and he himself went toward Vladimir in Volyn.

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*John of Pian de Carpine's
Journey to Mongolia
in 1246*

The Mongol conquest of all of northern and central Asia and of eastern Europe made a very strong impression in western Europe. In 1245 Pope Innocent IV sent a monk, John of Pian de Carpine, on a mission to Mongolia to determine whether the Mongols could be converted to Christianity. Brother John set out from Lyons on April 16, 1245 via Prague, Galicia, and Kiev, and delivered the Pope's letter to Emperor Kuiuk Khan near the Mongol capital of Karakorum. Although the mission failed to accomplish its main purpose, Brother John left an interesting description of his efforts to reach his destination. As the first west European to travel to the capital of the Mongol Empire at its peak, unfamiliar with the language and geography of the area, Brother John's account is vague and unclear in several places. Taken as a whole, however, the story of his journey is rich in description of medieval travel hazards, of the vastness of the Mongol Empire, and of customs and practices of Mongol officials. Some of these practices were later adopted by Russian princes and thus became an integral part of Russia's cultural heritage.

When therefore we had arranged, as has been already stated elsewhere, to set out for the (land of the) Tatars we (left Lyons on the 16th April, 1245, and after travelling through Germany) came to the King of Bohemia. And having asked his advice, for we were personally acquainted with this lord [Wenceslaw I] from of old, which was the best road for us to go by, he answered that it were best, it seemed to him, to go by Poland and Rus [Galicia]; for he had relatives in Poland, with whose aid we could enter Rus; so having given us his letters and a good escort to take us through Poland, he caused also money to be given us to defray our travelling expenses through his lands and cities

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The Court of Batu Khan in 1253

The Mongol appearance in eastern Europe aroused the interest of the political as well as the religious leaders of western Europe. In 1253, the French king, Louis IX, sent a Franciscan monk, William of Rubruck, on a mission to Mongolia to seek an alliance against the followers of Islam in the Near East and North Africa. The assignment took Brother William to the Mongol capital of Karakorum. This mission, like that of John of Pian de Carpine, was a failure in its main task, but Brother William left an interesting account of his impressions of the Court of Batu Khan and his audience with the ruler of the Golden Horde. The account of Brother William, like that of Brother John, ranks as high as Marco Polo's report in the literature of medieval travel.

When I saw the *ordu* of Batu, I was astonished, for it seemed like a great city stretched out about his dwelling, with people scattered all about for three or four leagues. And as among the people of Israel, where each one knew in which quarter from the tabernacle he had to pitch his tents, so these know on which side of the *ordu* they must place themselves when they set down their dwellings. A court is *orda* in their language, and it means "middle," for it is always in the middle of the people, with the exception, however, that no one places himself right to the south, for in that direction the doors of the court open. But to the right and left they may spread out as they wish, according to the lay of the land, so long as they do not bring the line of tents down right before or behind the court.

We were first taken to a certain Saracen, who gave us no food. The next day we were taken to the court, and they had a great awning spread, for the dwelling could not hold all the men and women who had come thither. Our guide cautioned us to say nothing until Batu should have bid us to speak,

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and then to speak briefly. He asked also whether you had already sent ambassadors to the Tatars. I said that you had sent to Keu Khan [that is, the mission of Friar Andrew in 1249], but that you would not even have sent envoys to him and letters to Sartach if you had not believed that they were Christians. Then they led us before the pavilion, and we were warned not to touch the ropes of the tent, for they are held to represent the threshold of the door. So we stood there in our robes and barefooted, with uncovered heads, and we were a great spectacle unto ourselves. (Friar John of Pian de Carpine) had been there; but he had changed his gown, fearing lest he should be slighted, being the envoy of the Lord Pope. Then we were led into the middle of the tent, and they did not require us to make any reverence by bending the knee, as they are used to do of envoys. We stood before him the time to say: "*Miserere mei, Deus,*" and all kept profound silence. He was seated on a long seat as broad as a couch, all gilded, and with three steps leading up to it, and a lady was beside him. Men were seated about on his right, and ladies on his left; and where the room on the women's side was not taken up by them, for there were only present the wives of Batu, men occupied it. A bench with *cosmos* and big cups of gold and silver, ornamented with precious stones, was in the entry of the tent. He looked at us intently, and we at him, and he seemed to me to be about the height of my lord John de Beaumont, may his soul rest in peace. And his face was all covered at that time with reddish spots. Finally he bid me speak, and our guide told us to bend the knee and speak. I bent one knee as to a man, but he made sign to me to bend both, which I did, not wishing to dispute over it. Then he bid me to speak, and I, thinking I was praying to God, having both knees bent, began my speech by saying: "Oh lord, we pray God from whom proceedeth all good things, and who gave you these worldly goods, to give you hereafter celestial ones, for the former without the latter are vain." And as he listened attentively, I added: "You must know for certain that you shall not have the celestial goods unless you have been a Christian; for God saith: 'He who shall have believed and have been baptized, shall be saved, but he who shall not have believed shall be condemned!'" At this he quietly smiled, and the other Moal began clapping their hands, laughing at us, and my interpreter stood dumbfounded, and I had to reassure him that he be not afraid. Then silence being reestablished, I said: "I came to your son, because we had heard that he was a Christian, and I brought him letters from the lord King of the French. He (Sartach) it is who has sent me here to you. You must know the reason why." Then he caused me to rise, and asked your name and mine, and that of my companion and of the interpreter, and he had it all written down, and he also asked against whom you were waging war, for he had heard that you had left your country with an army. I replied: "Against the

Saracens who are profaning Jerusalem, the house of God." He also asked whether you had ever sent envoys to him. "To you," I said, "never." Then he made us sit down, and had us given of his milk to drink, and they hold it to be a great honor when anyone drinks *cosmos* with him in his dwelling. While sitting there I was looking down, but he bid me turn my face up, either wishing to see me better, or on account of their sorcery, for they hold it to be a bad omen or sign, or as portending evil, if one sits before them with face turned down as if in sorrow, and especially so if he rest his chin or his cheek in his hand. Then we went out, and after a little while our guide came to us, and while conducting us to our lodging said to me: "The lord King requests that you remain in this country, but Batu may not do this without the permission of Mangu Khan. So you and your interpreter must go to Mangu Khan. As to your companion and the other man, they will go back to Sartach, where they will await your return." Then the interpreter Homo Dei began to lament, deeming himself lost, and my companion to declare that they might sooner cut off his head than separate him from me; and I said that without a companion I could not go, and moreover that we really required two servants, for should one happen to fall ill, I could not be left alone. So he went back to the court and told Batu what I had said. Then he commanded: "Let the two priests and the interpreter go, and the clerk return to Sartach." He came back and told us the decision; but when I wanted to speak about the clerk, that he might come with us, he said: "Say no more about it, for Batu has settled it, and I dare not go again to the court." The clerk Gosset had twenty-six *yperpera** of your alms and no more; of these he kept ten for himself and the boy [a slave boy called Nicholas, bought at Constantinople], and he gave the sixteen others to Homo Dei for us; and so we parted from each other with tears, he going back to Sartach, and we remaining there.

*According to Mr. Rockhill's calculations, 24 *yperpera* equalled £14 and 12s. in 1900.

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Prince Daniel of Galicia's Relations with the Mongols

Mongol conquest had a devastating effect on all principalities of Kievan Rus. Yet it should be remembered that the conquest affected each principality differently. Because it was located on the western periphery of Mongol domains, the principality of Galicia-Volyn enjoyed some degree of freedom, and Mongol rulers treated it as a vassal state.

This indirect control offered its princes, Daniel and Vasilko, an opportunity to take full advantage of their new status. In their respective principalities they tried to fortify their cities and they also founded new towns, including Lvov/Lviv, to serve both as defensive outposts against possible renewed Mongol attacks and as centers of urban trade, craft, and commerce. Abroad, both Daniel and Vasilko established good relations with Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, and the Teutonic Order. Daniel also established friendly contact with Pope Innocent IV, who, in 1253, bestowed on him the title and crown of King of Galicia-Volyn. Obviously, those changes did not escape the notice of the Mongol masters. They forced Daniel and his brother Vasilko to tear down their fortifications and to break up their new alliances.

In 1250 the mighty Khan [Batu] sent his envoy to [Prince] Daniel [of Galicia] and [to his brother] Vasilko [of Volyn]. At the time both princes were in the town of Dorogovsk. [Batu's envoy said:] "Surrender Galicia!" [Prince Daniel] was in grave danger because he had failed to fortify his towns. He conferred with his brother [Vasilko] and left for Batu's camp saying: "I will not surrender half of my patrimony. Instead I will go to Batu in person. . . ."

He arrived in Pereiaslav where he was met by Tatar [officials]. From there Daniel travelled to [the camp of one of Batu's military leaders named] Kuremsa. He did not see much that was worthwhile among the Tatars. . . . From there he reached Batu's [camp] along the Volga [River] in order to pay homage to him. There Daniel encountered a man named Songur, [an alleged] confidant

From V. I. Lebedev, et al., eds. *Kbrestomatia po istorii SSSR. S drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XVII veka*. (A Source Book on the History of the USSR. From Ancient Times to The End of the XVII Century), 3rd ed. (Moscow: Ministry of Education, 1949), vol. I, pp. 142-146. Translation mine. Words in brackets are mine.

him and responded to Vasilko [as follows]: "Go away! You are not related to your brother [Daniel] as you claim. You are his enemy." The Tatars who heard these words went away and reported them to Burundai. They also informed him of what Vasilko told Kholm citizens and what they said to him.

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Mongol Rule and the Orthodox Church

The Mongol or Tatar Yoke (1237–1480) had a profound impact on all Rus principalities. Initially, the most visible feature of that yoke was savage physical destruction. Except for Novgorod, Pskov, Polotsk, and Smolensk, most cities lay in smoldering ruins. So, too, did the countryside. Subsequently, Mongol treatment of Rus principalities was never uniform. It varied from one principality to another and from one *khan* to another. The most fortunate in treatment received was the distant northwest region (Novgorod-Pskov), followed by the southwest (Galicia-Volyn). The most unfortunate was the central region (Kiev-Pereiaslav-Chernigov), followed by the northeast (Vladimir-Suzdal-Riazan-Tver). These principalities suffered tremendously because of their geographic proximity to Sarai, capital of the Golden Horde.

But while Mongol-Tatar masters subjected towns and the countryside of Rus to countless abuses (such as the payment of tribute, recruit levies, obligatory work assignments, and the like), the Orthodox Church fared rather well during that period. Its good fortune came in 1267, when Khan Mangu-Temir granted the church an immunity *iarlyk* (charter). By its terms the church was exempted from the Mongol census (and associated obligations) in return for offering prayers for the ruling *khan* and his family. Also all church and monastery estates, and all people who worked for them, were freed from the payment of taxes and from performing military service. Moreover, Mongol and Rus tax agents were forbidden, under penalty of death, to seize church property or to demand

services from church people. Those who did not heed this injunction, or who defamed or vilified the Orthodox faith were liable to capital punishment. In 1357, Khan Berdibek reaffirmed these privileges to Metropolitan Alexei.

The iarlyk [Charter] of Khan Mengu-Temir to Metropolitan Theognostos, August 1, 1267

By the power of Eternal Heaven and by the Will of Eternal Heaven! [Khan] Temir hereby issues the following instruction to all of his people, officials, princes and high-ranking military commanders as well as to all tax collectors, office secretaries, circuit envoys, falconers, and officials in charge of hunting.

Emperor Ghengis Khan had once decreed that there be no collection of tribute or of food provisions from those [subjects of the Mongol rule] who genuinely prayed to God for us and for our nation and who gave us their genuine blessings. Subsequent [Mongol] emperors have respected this injunction and have bestowed favors on priests and monks [of all other faiths]. [This injunction applies to the collection of] tribute as well as anything else, including a tax on trade goods, a tax on ploughshares, postal fees, recruit levies, and whatever may be requested. We have agreed to reconfirm these original benefits [to the Orthodox Church] and hereby are making them known to everyone. And, invoking God's name, we are not amending any former existing charters.

Consequently, regardless of his position or status [no Mongol official] may request or collect from them [that is, officials of the Orthodox Church], any tribute, or ploughshare tax, or transport obligation, or food provisions. The same rule applies to the collection of postal fees, recruit levies, and a tax on trade goods. Likewise, no one should appropriate anything that belongs to the Orthodox Church, such as their buildings, land holdings, water resources, orchards, flour mills, winter homes [and forests], and summer lodges [and pastures]. And those who may do so are hereby required to return it back [to the church]. Also no church craftsman, or a falconer, or any other church employee may be either taken away [by local Mongol official] or be subjected to a close supervision. Moreover, whatever legally belongs to the Orthodox Church and is duly registered in their records, should be neither occupied, expropriated, alienated, or destroyed. And anyone who would dare to blaspheme their [Orthodox] faith will be guilty of committing a crime and will be executed.

Priests [of the Orthodox faith] who may live in the same home or whose brothers or sons have committed themselves to priesthood are entitled to the same [existing] benefits and protection as long as they are actively involved

From L. V. Cherepnin, ed. *Pamiatniki prava perioda obrazovaniia russkogo tsentralizovannogo gosudarstva, XIV-XV vv.* (Legal Documents From the Period of the Formation of the Russian Centralized State, XIV-XV Centuries) (Moscow: Gosizdat Iuridicheskoi Literatury, 1955), pp. 467–470. Translation mine. Words in brackets are mine.

in it. However, once they leave the profession, they must pay the required tribute and do whatever is requested from them. Priests, who have received benefits from our earlier *iarlyks*, and who pray for us and bless us are to continue to enjoy their rights. Those, however, who fail to say prayers or who do not express their genuine feelings are hereby considered sinners and they will be punished accordingly. Finally, those individuals who are not priests, but who pray to God in our behalf, will also enjoy these benefits.

We have granted this charter to Metropolitan [Theognostos]. Those who may see or hear the content of this charter are hereby prohibited from collecting any tribute or anything else from priests or monks [of the Orthodox Church]. Consequently, any Mongol official, or a secretary of the prince, or a tribute collector, or a collector of trade dues, or any one who may try to collect or requisition anything that is contrary to the intent or the letter of this imperial *iarlyk*, which is based on Ghengis Khan's original injunction, will be guilty of a very serious crime and will be executed.

This *iarlyk* was issued in the steppe on the first day of the hunting season [August 1, 1267].

*The iarlyk [Charter] of Khan Berdibek to
Metropolitan Alexei, November, 1357*

By the Might of Eternal Heaven, by the Will of Eternal Heaven, and in accordance with the terms of the [*iarlyks*] that have been previously issued by the father and the grandfather of [Khan] Berdibek, [the following] instruction is hereby given to all Tatar officials of the Golden Horde, all military commanders, all princes, all local customs officials, all office secretaries, tax collectors, frontier guards, and all other officials, falconers, officials in charge of hunting, provisioning, river transport, and those responsible for all other activities—indeed to all officials and people [of the Golden Horde].

Emperor Ghengis Khan and his successors, our forefathers, have received prayers from the entire priestly community [of the Orthodox Church]. As a result [of their prayers], they [Orthodox Church officials] are hereby freed from all tribute, taxes and all other obligations as long as they offer their prayers. [In accordance with this long established policy] we are granting them this [beneficial] *iarlyk*. All of our predecessors have also granted them the same kind of *iarlyks*. Moreover, in no way have we altered the content of the *iarlyks* of our previous *khans*. As long as he occupies the Metropolitan See of Vladimir and prays to God for us and for our nation, we have granted Metropolitan Alexei the following privileges:

We hereby decree that no tribute or taxes be collected from them [that is, the Orthodox Church], that no transport obligations be imposed on them,

that neither food, drink, nor any special provisions be requisitioned from them, and that they not be subjected to any abuse or humiliation. Furthermore, no one should expropriate any church structure, estates, waters [that is, lakes and rivers], gardens, orchards or flour mills, nor do any damage to them. Whoever has in the past or would try to expropriate [these church properties] in the future must return them [to the church]. Moreover, regardless of their status, all people [belonging to the Orthodox] church should not be required to perform any obligation [that are performed by all non-church people] and in no way should they be abused. And whoever will compel them to do these things or violate [these provisions] commits a sin and therefore is liable to receive a death sentence.

And you, Metropolitan Alexei, and your entire ecclesiastical personnel, are hereby informed what benefits we have granted you regarding church buildings, estates, waters, gardens, orchards, and people belonging to the church. You also are hereby authorized to issue any [internal] regulations regarding taxes and other matters. Finally, you have full authority to punish anyone who may cause violence or theft, or who may tell a lie or commit any crime [on church property or its jurisdictions. In return for these privileges] we only ask that you pray for us and for all of our ancestors. . . .

✠ 28 ✠

*The Anti-Mongol Uprising
in Tver in 1327*

The "Mongol Yoke" describes the period from 1238 to 1480 in Medieval Rus history. It was a bitter experience for the population. The most depressing immediate feature of this "Yoke" was the physical destruction of the country. Subsequently the burden of tribute, and the abuses and arrogance of Mongol officials, emerged as prime factors in popular discontent. How the people felt about the Mongols is very difficult to ascertain because contemporary records are incomplete and references to or descriptions of discontent are few. An exception to this generalization is

the Chronicle's description of a violent anti-Mongol riot that took place in Tver in 1327. The importance of this riot lies not in the slaughter of Mongol officials but in the fact that this action eliminated Tver's chances to become the leader in Northeastern Rus—the position that went to Tver's chief rival, Moscow.

This happened in the year 6835 [1327]. On September 15, two princes [of Rus], Prince Dmitrii Mikhailovich of Tver and Prince Alexander Novoselskii, were killed in the [Golden] Horde. [Both were killed] on the same day and in the same place—on the banks of the Kondrakliia River. That same year the foundations of the Uspenskii Cathedral in Moscow [that subsequently was completed in the reign of Ivan III (1462–1505)] were laid. That same year Prince Alexander Mikhailovich [of Tver] received [from the Tatars] the title of Grand Prince [of Rus], and when he returned from the [Golden] Horde he began to rule as Grand Prince [of Rus]. Then a few days later, on account of a multitude of our sins, God allowed the devil to instill evil thoughts into the [minds of] godless Tatars and to counsel their lawless Tsar [Khan Uzbek] in the following manner: "Unless you destroy Prince Alexander [of Tver] and all other Princes of Rus you shall never be able to rule them." The leader of this evil was the cursed and lawless Shevkal [Chol-khan, first cousin of the ruling Khan Uzbek], the destroyer of Christianity. He opened his foul mouth and began to speak in a devil-like manner: "Tsar, my Lord, allow me to go to Rus to destroy their Christian faith, to kill their princes and to bring you their wives and their children." And Tsar [Uzbek] allowed him to do this.

The lawless Shevkal, the destroyer of Christianity, went to Rus with many Tatars. He came to Tver, drove the Grand Prince from his court and entrenched himself there with great haughtiness and violence. He inaugurated great persecution of the Christians, [using] force, pillage, torture, and abuse. Constantly offended by the infidels, city inhabitants complained repeatedly to their [deposed] Grand Prince, asking that he protect them. While he saw the injustice done to his people, he could not defend them and only counseled them to be patient. The suffering people of Tver waited patiently for an opportune time [to strike against the Tatars].

As the fair opened in the morning of August 14 [1327], a certain deacon of Tver, named Dudko, led a young mare to the Volga to water her there. When the Tatars saw her [the mare], they took her away from him. The deacon complained [at first] and [when that failed] he began to shout [for help] crying: "Oh, men of Tver, do not forsake me!" And soon fighting developed between them [the Tatars and the Tverians]. Using their full authority, the Tatars started beating up [everybody]. The people [of Tver] came out to the streets and great confusion emerged. Some rang the [church] bell

and a *veche* was called [into session by this action]. The entire city assembled and the uprising was in the making. The Tverians cried out and began to kill the Tatars wherever they found them until they killed Shevkal and the rest [of his men]. They missed killing the messengers who were with the horses that grazed in the meadows [outside the city]. They [the messengers] saddled their best horses and swiftly galloped to Moscow and from there to the [Golden] Horde, where they brought the news of the death of Shevkal.

✧ 29 ✧

Moscow's First Successful Challenge of the Mongols, 1380

Until about the middle of the fourteenth century Moscow's princes were, outwardly at least, the most loyal subjects of the Golden Horde. The major by-product of this "loyalty" was the rise of Moscow's military power. The strength of the principality became so formidable that by 1380 Moscow was in a position to challenge openly the military might of the Golden Horde. The challenge took place at Kulikovo Pole near the headwaters of the Don River. Led by Prince Dmitrii Donskoi (1359–1389), Moscow's armies inflicted a major defeat upon the once invincible Mongol forces. While this victory proved to be a short lived affair (since the Mongols recovered, regrouped, and overwhelmed Moscow's armies in 1382), the successful challenge of the Mongols in 1380 nevertheless elevated Moscow to the leading principality in northeastern Rus and to prime "gatherer of Russian lands."

That year [1380] Prince Mamai of the [Golden] Horde, accompanied by other princes and all the Tatar and Polovtsi forces, and joined by such mercenaries as: the Turks, Armenians, Genoese, Cherkessians, Burtasians, and supported by [Grand Prince] of Lithuania Jagello and [Prince] Oleg of Riazan, advanced against Grand Prince Dmitrii, and on September 1, made a camp

on the bank of the Oka River. Oleg supplied everything to Mamai and to Iagello through Epiphan Koreev. Grand Prince [Dmitrii] was informed about all this in August [1380]. Following this, Oleg, like Judas, informed the Grand Prince about Mamai's preparation against him. Having learned this, the Grand Prince went to the Church of the Mother of God, where he prayed for a long time; after he had finished he sent for all the Russian princes, *voevodas*, and all the people, and having collected his own force of 100,000, excluding those of the Russian princes and local *voevodas*, he went to Kolomna. There never was such a mighty Russian army, for all forces combined numbered some 200,000. With him, [Dmitrii] was Andrei Olgerdovich [Prince of Pskov] with his people and [Andrei's brother] Dmitrii [Prince of Briansk] with his people. Mamai's camp was in a meadow, not far from the Don where, with all of his forces he awaited for about three weeks the arrival of Iagello. To the Grand Prince, Mamai sent [a message] demanding the tribute which had existed during the reign of Dzhani-bek Khan [1342-1357]. The Grand Prince wanted to give him a tribute from the Christian force, but this he did not want to accept. Oleg, however, paid him a tribute and also sent to him some of his forces. Grand Prince Dmitrii offered a prayer at the Church of the Holy Virgin, received a blessing from Bishop Herasim, left Kolomna on August 20, and upon arriving at the mouth of the Lopastra River [left tributary of the Oka] he received information about the heathens. There at last he also received Prince Vladimir Andreevich [his half-brother] and Timofei [a *voevoda* from Vladimir]; here they crossed the river a week before St. Simeon's Day and a week later, on September 6, they reached the River Don. Then he [Dmitrii] received a letter from the Reverend Abbot Sergei [founder of the Troitsk Monastery] urging him to fight the Tatars; Dmitrii, however, ordered his troops to put on their native garments while he himself waited for a long time, contemplating. Some said, "Let us go beyond the Don"; but others opposed it saying, "If we do, our enemies will increase, from the Tatars to the Lithuanians and to the people of Riazan." When Mamai learned of the arrival of the Grand Prince at the Don . . . he said, "Let us move toward the Don before Iagello arrives there." The Grand Prince ordered bridges built across the Don and a search by night for fords, and early Saturday morning, on September 8, he told his troops to cross the river and go to the meadow. At first there was a heavy fog but when it later disappeared everyone crossed the Don; there was a real multitude of troops as far as one could see, extending all the way to the mouth of the Nepriadva River. At six o'clock in the morning, the godless Tatars appeared in the field and faced the Christians. There was a great multitude of both; and when these two great forces met they covered an area thirteen *versts* long. And there was such a great massacre and bitter warfare and great noise, such as there never had been in Russian principalities;

and they fought from six to nine, and blood flowed like a heavy rain and there were many killed on both sides. At nine o'clock God took mercy on the Christians; many saw an angel and saintly martyrs helping the Christians; even the godless [that is, the Tatars] saw regiments moving in the air and hitting mercilessly. Shortly thereafter the godless fled and the Christians pursued them, hitting them until they reached the Mecha River; regiments of the Prince pursued the Tatars to their camp, where they took all of their wealth and their cattle, killing many and trampling others. It was here that many Russians lost their lives. . . .

The Grand Prince himself was very fortunate, for, although he had fought the Tatars from the very beginning, he received no wounds to his body. His *voevodas* told the Prince, "Lord, do not stay at the front; go either to the rear or to the side, or to a safe place." He, however, replied: "I will neither protect my face nor hide in the rear, but let us all brothers fight together. I want to die for Christianity ahead of anyone else, with deed as well as word, so that all others who see it will become bold." He did what he said. He fought ahead of everyone else, striking to the right and to the left, killing many; he himself was surrounded by many [Tatars] and was hit many times on his head and his body but God protected him from everything. Lithuanian Prince Iagello came to Mamai's aid with all of his Lithuanian and Latvian forces one day too late; when he heard what had happened to the Tatars and that Mamai had fled, he [Iagello] fled back with all of his force. The Grand Prince remained overnight at the Tatar-deserted camp, which was full of their bodies, where he, together with his troops, thanked God [for victory]; in the morning he departed for his land. There he was informed that Prince Oleg of Riazan had sent his force to aid Mamai, that he had destroyed bridges across the rivers and that he had robbed and stripped of everything all those subjects of the Grand Prince who crossed his land [Riazan]. The Grand Prince wanted to send an army [against Riazan]. But at about that time the *boyars* from Riazan came to him and told him that Prince Oleg had fled from his principality with his wife and children; and the *boyars* paid homage and prayed him not to attack them. He accepted them and sent his governors to Riazan.

Mamai, angered, arrived in his territory with his few remnants and began collecting a new force in an effort to undertake a new expedition against Rus. He received news, however, that Khan Tokhtamysh from the Ak-Orde was advancing against him from the east. Mamai went to meet him and both forces met at the River Kalka and began to fight. Mamai's princes dismounted from their horses and joined Tokhtamysh. When Mamai saw this he fled, but Tokhtamysh ordered a pursuit. He fled to Kafa [in Crimea], where he asked protection, which he received. He took much gold, wealth, and silver with him, and after a period of flattery ended, the people of Kafa killed him.

Khan Tokhtamysh advanced, took his [Mamai's] camp and his wives, and divided his treasury among his troops. He sent his ambassadors to Rus, to the Grand Prince, and to all Russian princes, informing them that, having defeated Mamai, he had ascended the Khanate of the Golden Horde. They received his ambassadors with dignity, and in the spring they sent to him their own ambassadors with many gifts.

☞ 30 ☞

*A Letter from a Tatar Leader, Edigei, to
Moscow's Grand Prince Vasilii I, 1409*

Technically, Mongol domination of northeastern Rus principalities lasted from 1237 to 1480. Actually, the domination ended in 1380 when, assisted by other Rus princes, the armies of Moscow's Grand Prince Dmitrii Donskoi defeated the forces of Khan Mamai of the Golden Horde. That victory at Kulikovo Pole, immortalized in an epic poem *Zadonshchina* (Beyond the Don), elevated Muscovy to the foremost power among the northeastern principalities of Rus and set in motion the disintegration process of the once mighty Empire of the Golden Horde into several warring units. And while these units, individually or collectively, were still capable of inflicting severe damage on Rus principalities (and they often did), the former power and threat of the Golden Horde was never the same. It was further weakened by spectacular victories of Tamurlane, who inflicted near-total destruction of the Horde's economic foundation.

After Tamurlane's death in 1405, the fortunes of his empire, which now included former domains of the Golden Horde, fell into the hands of Edigei, one of the most capable of Tamurlane's military commanders. In a series of spectacular campaigns, Edigei brought all of Central Asia under his control and then turned to and laid siege to Moscow. Although

his armies devastated the countryside, they failed to capture the city. Muscovy's ruler Vasilii I (1389–1425) successfully defied Edigei's claim to suzerainty and, to annoy him, granted political asylum to rivals of Edigei.

[A.D. 1409,] The prince of the [Golden] Horde, Edigei, sent [a letter] to Grand Prince Vasilii Dmitrievich, saying thus: "We have heard that the children of Tokhtamysh are with you, and for this reason we have come in war; and we have also heard that you act wrongfully in the towns: the tsar's [*khan's*] envoys and merchants come from the Horde to you, and you ridicule the envoys and merchants, and moreover they are subjected to great injury and persecution from you. This is not good; for in the past this was the tsar's [*khan's*] domain [*ulus*] and he held power; you respected the ancient customs and the tsar's envoys, and merchants were treated without persecution and without injury; and you should ask the old men how this was done in the past. Now you do not do this; but is this [change] good? Temir-Kutlui became tsar, and you became sovereign of your domain, and since that time you have not visited the tsar in the Horde; you have not seen the tsar with your own eyes, nor have you dispatched any princes, or elder *boyars*, or younger [*boyars*], or anyone else, nor have you sent a son or a brother with any message. Then Shadibeg ruled for eight years, and you did not visit him either, or send anyone with any message. And the reign of Shadibeg likewise came to an end, and now Tsar Bulat-Saltan [Pulad] has become tsar, and this is already the third year of his rule, and you have likewise failed to visit him yourself, or to send a son, or brother, or elder *boyar*. You are the eldest, the grand prince, over such a great domain, but all your deeds are evil and wrongful. . . . It would be well for you . . . to observe the ancient customs, and then you will live safely and rule in your domain. Whenever you suffer any harm, either from Russian princes or from Lithuania, each year you send complaints to us against them, and you ask us for charters of protection from them, and you give us no respite on this account; and you say that your domain is destitute and that there is no means of paying tribute. Heretofore we have never seen your domain with our own eyes, but only heard reports of it; but as for your messages and letters which you have sent to us in the Horde, you have lied to us everywhere; and as for the [tribute of] one *ruble* per two *sokhi* ["plows" taxation units] which you have collected from each region of your realm, where is that silver? It would be well for you to acknowledge this, [to give over] what was given over honestly in the past, lest evil befall your domain, and Christians meet their final doom, and our anger and war be upon you."

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