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# The Role of Nogai in the Golden Horde: A Reassessment

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper offers a reexamination of the role of Nogai (c.1237–1300) in the Golden Horde. Commonly portrayed as an almighty khanmaker appointing the Jochid khans at will, I argue that this is a creation of the secondary literature. Instead, based on a rereading of the relevant primary sources, I argue for a far more limited role of Nogai within the Horde's politics. While influential as both a military commander (first as *beylerbeyi* and then *tammachi*) and as the elder member of the Jochid lineage (*aqa*), Nogai's power over the Horde was never as great as the scholarship has consistently portrayed.

**KEYWORDS**

Nogai, Golden Horde, Möngke-Temür, Töde-Möngke, Toqta, Rashīd al-Dīn, Mongol successions, Mongol-Mamluk relations

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For the late thirteenth-century Golden Horde, the westernmost khanate of the fractured Mongol Empire, no individual is as infamous as Nogai (*c*.1237–1300). A man of prestigious lineage, Nogai was a great-grandson of Jochi (d.1225) and thus a descendant of Chinggis Khan. Yet, he never ruled as khan of the Jochid *ulus*. From the start of the 1270s until his death in 1300, Nogai was

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the Horde's key intermediary in Europe, controlling an expanding realm along the lower Danube bordering the Black Sea. Over his life he interfered in the Rus' principalities, Bulgaria, Serbia, the Byzantine Empire, the Hungarian kingdom, the Polish duchies, and the Golden Horde itself. He undertook diplomacy with the Mamluk sultans of Egypt, the Mongol ilkhans of Iran and representatives of the Venetian republic. It was under his command that Mongol armies returned to Hungary and Poland in the 1280s, that Mongol authority was asserted over the Balkans, Moldova and Wallachia, and the threat of his horsemen forced the Byzantine emperor to marry off a daughter to him for peace. His influence by the end of his life was vast, directly ruling from the Iron Gates of the Danube, from Thrace to the Dnieper and the Crimean Peninsula.

Yet he remains most infamous for his role as a kingmaker. Modern descriptions of Nogai make him the primary power behind the Jochid throne, appointing and deposing khans of the Golden Horde as it suited him. Such actions are mirrored in Europe, where he made the Bulgarian *tsars* his puppets and enforced his might over neighbouring kingdoms. Nogai's appearance as a khanmaker has been the central viewpoint from which the historiography has investigated his career, painting all his actions as constantly undermining khans to assert his own supreme power. The standard description will often go as follows: with the death of Möngke-Temür Khan in 1280, Nogai appoints successively Töde-Möngke (r.1280–1287), Tele-Buqa (r.1287–1291) and finally Toqta (r.1291–1312) as khan. In the dramatic conclusion, Nogai finds himself challenged by Toqta and failing to replace him, Nogai declares himself khan and goes to war. The old dog is finally overcome and killed by Toqta after a brief civil war, leading to the dissolution of Nogai's 'khanate.'

Additionally, modern literature will often also give Nogai control over the Golden Horde's diplomacy with foreign powers and reduce the khans to puppets within the Golden Horde itself. Often, he is also presented, somewhat contradictory, being near or totally independent, his territory along the lower Danube (Dobruja, Wallachia, today's eastern Romania and Moldavia) being described as his khanate, a Nogayid *ulus*. Hence, he will be styled as 'Nogai Khan.' Altogether, these three trends –1) appointing and deposing khans 2) reducing khans to figureheads 3) his independence– I collectively term the *khanmaker description*. The khanmaker model has been accepted by broad swathes of the scholarship, and in different fields, from history, archaeology and oriental studies.[1] Three often utilized historical encyclopedias/dictionaries of the Mongol Empire perhaps best exemplify these historiographic assumptions of Nogai's life. In Buell's *Historical Dictionary of the Mongol World Empire* (2003: 74–75), Nogai took on a dominant role during the reign of Möngke-Temür, was a co-ruler during the reigns of Töde-Möngke and Tele-Buqa, grew tired of the latter and had him removed, and 'remained the power behind the throne,' during Toqta's reign. Atwood in the *Historical Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (2004: 406–407) has Nogai beginning his own diplomacy with the Mamluks, Byzantines and others during Möngke-Temür's reign, and openly opposing Möngke-Temür's successors. And May's section on Nogai in his *The Mongol Empire: A Historical Encyclopedia* (2017: 24–25) fully embodies the model. After describing Nogai as 'practically autonomous' by the time of Berke's death, May writes:

[1] The following is but a few examples: Curta 2019: 713; Kovács 2016: 51; Favereau 2021: 191–192, 194–196; May 2018a: 289–291; Pochekaev 2017: 229–231; Stănică 2018: 252; Tanase 2004–2005: 277; Vásáry 2005: 86–88.

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> Tode-Mongke's failure as a ruler and his inability to make difficult decisions led him to abdicate under pressure from Nogai. Nogai replaced him with Tele Buqa (r.1287–1290). Nogai essentially became the coruler through this arrangement. During this period Nogai's appanage was independent, with the Golden Horde Khan having no authority over his actions. Even subjects within the empire were confused over the identity of the true ruler. Many Russian princes believed that Nogai was the ruler. They may have simply recognized the reality of the situation.

I, however, believe the khanmaker model is largely a production of the secondary literature with little support in the primary sources. As I have argued elsewhere, we can observe a transformation in Nogai's role in secondary literature over the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.[2] Whereas nineteenth century historians like d'Ohsson (1834–1835: 750–751) and Howorth (1888: 1012–1018) portray Nogai as influential and only taking part in the removal of Tele-Buqa Khan, over the twentieth century Nogai's power both within and without of the Horde grew exponentially. By the twenty-first century he became totally responsible for removing and appointing every Jochid khan following Berke's death. This is particularly noticeable once Veselovskij's 1922 biography on Nogai became popularized in English historiography as Nogai's 'classic study,' to quote Halperin (2009: 85, see note) and remains commonly cited today.[3] Veselovskij, in an effort to stand out against contemporary Russian language historiography where Nogai was an independent figure who took the title of khan, instead put forward that Nogai never took the title and could not be independent as his power and legitimacy was directly tied to the Golden Horde itself. Veselovskij therefore suggested that Nogai was the power behind the throne, operating through figurehead Chinggisids in the manner of Emir Temür (d.1405). Veselovskij stated that Nogai was therefore removing and appointing khans, though notably could only specifically describe how this was done in the case of Tele-Buqa (Veselovskij 1922: 1, 22–23, 37–40, 51–52). Vernadsky (1953) and Spuler's (1965) influential works on the Golden Horde advanced Veselovskij's arguments, with Vernadsky emphasizing Nogai's place as co-ruler (going as far as to describe Nogai being entitled as Khan of the Manghit in the 1280 *quriltai* which enthroned Töde-Möngke) while Spuler presented Nogai as master of the Horde's diplomacy with foreign powers and a veritable *Hausmeier*.

However, as I will demonstrate, this is not what appears in the primary sources. There, I argue, Nogai's role is much more limited, and I believe most of his actions can be perfectly explained through his status, first, as *tammachi* of the Jochid forces on the Danube, and secondly as the *aqa*, or senior member, of the Jochid lineage. The three pillars of the khanmaker model–the removal of khans, reducing the khans to figureheads, and his independent state on the Danube– are not present in the thirteenth and fourteenth century sources. In order to fit Nogai into the status of later Golden Horde khanmakers like Mamai and Edigü, the single overthrow of a khan Nogai was involved in – a fact agreed upon by all of the extant primary sources – has been overemphasized and the rest of his life and actions forced into an understanding that he was a khanmaker, or at

[2] See Wilson 2022.

[3] For reliance on Veseloskij in more modern scholarship, see Ciocîltan 2012: 254; Halperin 2009: 85 note; Jackson 2018: 168 note 13: Spuler 1965: 64; Vernadsky 1953: 164, 174.

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least undermining the khan's authority in some manner.[4] While some scholars like Uzelac (2017: 272) have accurately pointed out that Nogai was not involved in the removal of khans, none have, to my knowledge, sought to totally remove this khanmaker expectation. When doing so, we can revisit and totally reevaluate Nogai's career without that baggage and arrive at a new, and more nuanced, understanding of the late thirteenth century Golden Horde. In this article, I will focus on the first two pillars of the khanmaker model, the matter of removing khans and reducing them to puppets and will demonstrate that not only do the sources not portray Nogai removing khans, but the evidence usually cited for his overwhelming power is far from unequivocal.

## 2. OVERTHROWING KHANS

I will begin with what the relevant primary sources say regarding Nogai's involvement in the four successions of Golden Horde khans following Berke's death in 1266. Our most detailed and well-informed accounts come from Islamic authors, of which two stand preeminent as the main contemporaries and sources for later writers medieval and modern. First is Rashīd al-Dīn (d.1318) in his famous *Jāmi' al-tāwarīkh*, the great vizier and historian of the Ilkhanate. From the Mamluk Sultanate comes Baybars al-Mansūrī (d.1325), the high ranking *dawadar* and *nā'ib al-salṭana,* whose *Zubdat al-Fikra* formed the basis for almost every succeeding Mamluk authors' writings on the Golden Horde (Amitai 2000: 33; Porsin 2015: 30; Richards 2000: 37–38). These two sources provide the bulk of our knowledge of Nogai's life and were among the most well informed of all surviving sources on events within the Jochid *ulus*. Rashīd al-Dīn's place at the top of the Ilkhanid bureaucracy and knowledge of the Mongolian language gave him an unparalleled position for looking at Mongol affairs and collected his information from Ilkhanid government documents and Jochid envoys. He notes that Kelmish-Aqa, a granddaughter of Tolui and one of the highest-ranking women in the Golden Horde, often sent messages to the Ilkhans with kind greetings but also told them of events happening in the Jochid lands. Given that her husband Salji'udai Güregen was closely involved in the final struggle between Toqta Khan and Nogai, it stands to reason that, if Rashīd al-Dīn had access to these letters (a strong possibility given that he became vizier two years before Nogai's death) then his information would be reliably sourced, if biased against Nogai (Atwood 2020: 53, 82; Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 160; Rashiduddin 1998: 358, 376).

While Rashīd wrote for a state antagonistic to the Jochids, and often presents their rulers and Nogai negatively, Baybars al-Mansūrī provides a useful contrast by not only writing for a state officially allied to the Golden Horde but collecting his information independent of Rashīd al-Dīn. As a top-level bureaucrat dealing with foreign correspondence, al-Mansūrī had access to letters sent by Nogai to the Mamluk Sultanate as well as, in Porsin's opinion, information from a first-hand observer of Nogai's final years. Indeed, Porsin suggests that al-Mansūrī's informant was associated with Nogai's daughter Togulja and her husband Taz (Porsin 2015: 36). And yet, al-Mansūrī's account largely aligns with that of Rashīd al-Dīn's, supporting their reliability in forming the main narrative for the Golden Horde's internal politics as relating to Nogai's life.

[4] In but one example, Vásáry (2009: 84) wrote 'during Temür-Qutlugh's reign and the first two decades of the fifteenth century, Edigü, whom we can consider the third great king-maker of the Golden Horde, similar to Noghai and Mamai, emerged.'

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Additional information comes from the Rus' chronicles, the Byzantine historian Pachymeres, and an assorted collection of Latin Christian sources, including Marco Polo, whose coverage of the war between Nogai and Toqta Khan makes up the final pages of his *Description of the World*; the first edition was written while the war was still ongoing. As will be demonstrated, while these sources offer much less detail on Nogai's life and internal Horde affairs than the Islamic accounts, they agree in one major aspect: only in the coup against Tele-Buqa Khan in 1291, did Nogai affect the succession between the Jochid khans.

### 2.1 Berke to Möngke-Temür, 1266

Nogai's first appearance in the historical sources is as commander-in-chief (*beylerbeyi*, as Rashīd al-Dīn says) of Berke's forces in the war against Hülegü Ilkhan in the early 1260s. Nogai is assumed to be approximately in his early twenties at the start of the conflict, and it seems his rise to military prominence can be credited to his likely association with Berke's court, and perhaps accompanied him in converting to Islam.[5] The fact that his first-cousin Tutar was one of the Jochid princes Hülegü killed sometime after the sack of Baghdad seems to have factored into Nogai's appointment; Rashīd notes specifically that revenge for Tutar's death was the main reason for Nogai's involvement in the war (Rashiduddin 1998: 514).[6] The war did not go well for Nogai, who lost several battles and an eye, before Berke himself succumbed to illness in 1266 (Rashiduddin 1998: 506–508, 514; Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 123; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 110, 152). Nogai had no discernable role in the transition after Berke's death in 1266, which saw the accession of Berke's grand-nephew Möngke-Temür as khan. The first fully independent khan of the Golden Horde, Möngke-Temür minted coins in his own name, conducted a census, granted tax exemptions to the Rus' church and set out his own foreign policy (Allsen 1981: 45–51; Favereau 2021: 171–182; Zenkovsky 1986a: 54; Trepavlov 2017: 141; Vásáry 2009: 78).

The mechanics of Möngke-Temür's succession to Berke are unclear. Berke left no surviving sons, leaving it to the *quriltai* to determine his successor. Despite the claims of Vernadsky, there is no evidence the childless Berke 'probably would have designated Prince Nogay,' as his heir (Vernadsky 1953: 163–164). Möngke-Temür appears the favoured choice and the sources make no mention of Nogai in the process. As a grandson of Berke's older brother Batu, the well-regarded master of the Jochid *ulus* until 1255, Möngke-Temür was a prime candidate. Batu's initial successors were his sons Sartaq and Ilagchi who died early in their reigns, possibly by Berke's hand. Berke's rule was something of an aberration, and Möngke-Temür (likely the oldest and most prominent descendant of Batu) was therefore returning the throne to the line of Batu. At least one source, the fourteenth century Mamluk historian al-Mufaḍḍal, explicitly describes Möngke-Temür as Berke's designated heir, leading Pochekaev to suggest this was an official agreement

[5] Uzelac (2015: 123) suggests a date of birth around 1237, the year of the Dog in the Inner Asian animal calendar, and the meaning of Nogai's name in Mongolian.

[6] Sometimes it is erroneously stated that Tutar was Nogai's father (see for example Favereau 2021: 154; Jackson 2017: 194 as well as my own MA thesis). This is because Nogai's father had the very similar name of Tatar. Given that nothing is known of Nogai's father beyond his name, it is easy to conflate him with the more notable Tutar. However, Rashīd is quite detailed in his family tree and clearly makes Tutar a son of Tatar's brother, Mingqudar, and had a son of his own, Kirdi-Buqa. See Rashiduddin 1998: 349 and Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 113, for the relevant family trees.

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to gain the support of Batu's descendants for Berke's rule (Pochekaev 2017: 226; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 193; Uzelac 2013: 17). Perhaps indicative of this, Rashīd al-Dīn and the Mamluk historians record no internal issues surrounding Möngke-Temür's ascension, simply mentioning the fact of his enthronement after Berke's death. Rashīd al-Dīn (1998: 356; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 153, 510), for instance, laconically states, 'when Bärkä died, Möngkä Temür was enthroned.' Only the Rus' chronicles hint at a more complicated process. In an entry for 1266, the year of Berke's death and Möngke-Temür's ascension, the *Volynian Chronicle* states 'a revolt took place among the Tatars themselves. They slaughtered [as] many [of their own people] as there are grains of sand in the seas,' (Perfecky 1973: 84). While it may indicate that Möngke-Temür fought off rivals for the throne, it may also have been how the Rus' interpreted rumours of the Berke-Hülegü war and Berke's death. Regardless Möngke-Temür securely held the Jochid throne by 1267 with no source providing Nogai any role in his ascension, or support for Vernadsky's suggestion that Nogai was a claimant, or that Nogai backed another contender. As one of the most prominent military leaders under Berke, it seems probable that Nogai, and most of the Jochid elite, simply backed Möngke-Temür in the *quriltai.*

## 2.2 Möngke-Temür to Töde-Möngke, c.1282

The death of Möngke-Temür Khan is commonly seen as a turning point in Nogai's life, the time from which he began to act in defiance of Sarai, usually with a remark that Töde-Möngke ascended the throne with the backing of Nogai.[7] On Möngke-Temür's death Nogai was left the *aqa,* the senior member of the Jochid lineage. A 1283 letter from Ilkhan Ahmad Tegüder to Mamluk Sultan Qalāwūn refers to Nogai as *aqa*, literally 'elder brother,' a respectful address for senior men and commanders (Pfeiffer 2006: 189). For instance, Chagatai during the reign of his younger brother Ögedei Qa'an was referred to as Chagatai *aqa* (Cleaves 1962–1963: 64–81). As a powerful member of the Jochids with respectable military backing and experience, it is easy to assume Nogai interfered with the succession after Möngke-Temür and put the late khan's brother Töde-Möngke on the throne. Töde-Möngke's rise goes unmentioned in Rus' and Byzantine sources, leaving us to rely again on Islamic authors. While giving sparse detail to Töde-Möngke's enthronement, they again make no mention of Nogai. Rashīd al-Dīn only states that after Möngke-Temür's death in 1282, Töde-Möngke ascended the throne that same year (Rashiduddin 1998: 356).[8]

The Mamluk authors offer more information. Baybars al-Mansūrī and al-Nuwayrī specify that Möngke-Temür died of botched surgery to address a throat abscess. Unlike Rashīd al-Dīn, both Mamluk authors remark that Töde-Möngke did not immediately replace his brother. Rather, Möngke-Temür left behind nine sons who tried to claim the throne themselves only to be outmaneuvered by their uncle Töde-Möngke, who then exiled them (Cook 2020: 297; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 154–155). The Mamluk authors were best informed of the matter and indicate it was not a seamless transition of power, but a perhaps expected level of bickering in the election pro-

[7] See for example Atwood 2004: 407; Buell 2003: 406; Favereau 2021: 191; May 2018a: 209; Saunders 1971: 161; Uzelac 2018: 272; Vásáry 2005: 69, 86; Vernadsky 1953: 174; Veselovskij 1922: 22.

[8] While 1280 remains the most common date for Möngke-Temür's death in scholarship based on some primary sources (such as al-Nuwayrī), others (such as Rashīd al-Dīn) put it to 1282. There are also coins minted in the name of Möngke-Temür up until 1282. See Uzelac 2015: 149. Töde-Möngke was certainly khan by 1282, when a Mamluk embassy found him on the throne.

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cess to choose the new khan, hardly unique in a *quriltai*. Neither was it unusual for the succession to pass brother-to-brother before going to the next generation. Berke himself had succeeded his brother Batu after the short reigns of Batu's sons, and in the Chagatai Khanate the six sons of Du'a Khan (d.1307) all succeeded each other (Biran 2002: 749). Presumably Möngke-Temür's sons were too young and lacked military backing to push their claims, allowing the older Töde-Möngke to take it after months of arguing, bribery, and threats. There is simply no mention of Nogai in the ascension of Töde-Möngke, and no need for his interference. Nothing in the little detail provided indicates anything particularly unusual in Töde-Möngke's ascension, and we can presume that Nogai was simply one of many of the Jochid military commanders who backed Töde-Möngke over Möngke-Temür's children. Vernadsky's claims that Nogai attempted to put his own name forward after Möngke-Temür's death and was instead proclaimed khan of his own 'Mangkyt Horde,' or that Nogai was made an official 'co-ruler' with Töde-Möngke, can be disregarded (Vernadsky 1953: 174–175). There is no evidence that Nogai had any influence on the outcome of the *quriltai.*

### 2.3 Töde-Möngke to Tele-Buqa, 1287

Töde-Möngke's reign was troubled, and it seems by the middle of the 1280s he began to abandon his royal duties, judging by the fact the sources make no indication of his involvement in the inception of the 1285 attack on Hungary. In Mamluk accounts, after initially making Jijek-Khatun his regent, in 1287 Töde-Möngke abdicated for his nephew Tele-Buqa and spent the rest of his life a hermit (Cook 2020: 328; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 105–106, 109, 155, 381, 436). Whereas the Mamluk version may reflects an 'official' justification Tele-Buqa's representatives told the Mamluks, the account of Rashīd al-Dīn is less glowing and, judging from the fact it is mirrored 200 years later in Ötemish Hajji's *Qara-tāwarīkh*, was perhaps the version spread by Tele-Buqa's allies within the Golden Horde itself (Hajji 2017: 36–39).[9] Here Tele-Buqa, his brother Könchak and two of Möngke-Temür's sons, Alghui and Toghrilcha, declared Töde-Möngke insane and deposed him (Rashiduddin 1998: 741; Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 124). Evidently Töde-Möngke's rule was found wanting with either his insanity or genuine religious devotion sufficient excuse for the princes to remove him. Regardless, once again neither Rashīd nor the Mamluks record Nogai being involved or convincing Tele-Buqa to undertake the coup.

As noted by Spuler (1965: 63) neither Töde-Möngke or the coup is mentioned in the Rus' sources. Only in Marco Polo's *Description of the World* is a version of the overthrow presented. Marco Polo inverts the event, making Töde-Möngke depose Tele-Buqa with the aid of Nogai. As per Yule's (1903: 496) translation:

> You must know there was a Prince of the Tartars of the Ponent called Mongotemur, and from him the sovereignty passed to a young gentleman called Tolobuga. But Totamangu, who was a man of great influence, with the help of another Tartar King called Nogai, slew Tolobuga and got possession of the sovereignty. He reigned not long however, and at his death Toctai, an able and valiant man, was chosen sovereign in the place of Totamangu.

[9] The *Qara-Tawarikh* implies episodes of instability rather than a constant infirmity, with Töde-Möngke still leading armies on campaign. Perhaps he suffered an inconstant condition, which worsened and became permanent over the course of his reign, thereby requiring Jijek-Khatun's regency by the middle of the 1280s.

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Polo's account, written a little over a decade after the coup from his Genoese prison cell, confused the names of Töde-Möngke and Tele-Buqa. This is not unique in Polo's manuscripts. When introducing the Golden Horde, Polo presents an order of the khans which features Batu twice and leaves out Tele-Buqa, and elsewhere gives an incorrect order of the Great Khans (Polo/Moule 1938: 477; Polo/Yule 1903: 490).

A key part of Polo's version is that Tele-Buqa's sons went to Khan Toqta to avenge their father, the impetus for war between Nogai and Toqta. However, in several Polo manuscripts, the name of the father of the sons is transposed: after describing how Nogai assisted Töde-Möngke in overthrowing Tele-Buqa, some Polo manuscripts will then have the sons of Töde-Möngke want revenge against Nogai for overthrowing their father (Polo/Moule 1938: 41, 484 note 1; Polo/Yule 1903: 496–497).[10] This is the closest a contemporary source comes to Nogai overthrowing Töde-Möngke, and is almost certainly explainable through the confusion of Polo, his ghostwriter Rustichello, and the manuscripts' many editors' and copyists' trouble with Mongol names. In face of the Islamic accounts, it cannot be taken as evidence for Nogai's involvement in the fall of Töde-Möngke.

Yet Polo maintains a key detail. Like Rashīd al-Dīn, the Rus' sources and the Mamluks, Polo agrees that Nogai assisted another prince (Toqta in the Islamic and Rus' sources, Töde-Möngke in Polo's version) in overthrowing Tele-Buqa Khan. During Polo's writing the war between Nogai and Toqta was still ongoing and certain versions of *the Description of the World* end with Nogai's premature victory over Toqta. For Polo and Rustichello, the vengeful sons of the khan that Nogai helped overthrow was perfect story material to explain the conflict.[11] Further, Polo's notice of sons wanting revenge may likewise have been true. Given that Töde-Möngke had outmaneuvered Möngke-Temür's sons for the throne and apparently exiled them *c.*1282, it seems that Tele-Buqa succeeded in rallying Möngke-Temür's sons to join him in overthrowing Töde-Möngke in 1287. Almost all Möngke-Temür's sons are mentioned, if not in the initial coup of 1287, then aligned with Tele-Buqa by 1291. Möngke-Temür's sons, desiring the throne after being denied it, and Tele-Buqa's own ambition and military efforts (explored further in this article) form greater motive for overthrowing the ineffectual Töde-Möngke Khan than ever assigned to Nogai. It is no surprise that the scholarship has often assigned totally contradictory motivations when trying to explain why Nogai removed Töde-Möngke.[12]

[10] The 'F' manuscripts switch the names. 'F' is perhaps the oldest and best preserved of the Polo manuscripts, written in Franco-Italian, the likely language of the lost original written by Rustichello for Polo. Most translations will 'correct' it to Tele-Buqa's sons to retain the internal continuity. Yule's 1903 edition is one of the few to maintain Töde-Möngke's sons desiring revenge against Nogai. They proclaim to Toqta: 'Good my Lord Toctai, I will tell you to the best of my ability why we be come hither. We are the sons of Totamangu, whom Tolobuga and Nogai slew, as thou well knowest. Of Tolobuga we will say no more, since he is dead, but we demand justice against Nogai as the slayer of our Father; and we pray thee as Sovereign Lord to summon him before thee and to do us justice.'

[11] Yule's translation (Polo/Yule 1903: 499) ends with Nogai victorious, and no hint of Toqta's final victory. Other manuscripts have a short, hastily added epilogue of Toqta and 'Tolobuga's sons' returning, killing Nogai, and avenging Tele-Buqa (Polo/Moule 1938: 489).

[12] Pochekaev (2017: 231) was aware that Rashīd al-Dīn and Mamluk sources do not ascribe the removal of Töde-Möngke to Nogai, but to Tele-Buqa, Pochekaev attempted to combine the primary sources with the literature depiction: 'Nogai, who was outraged even by Khan Tode Mongke's tentative attempts at limiting his power and influence, soon established friendly relations with the pugnacious [Tele-Buqa] and soon persuaded him and several of his brothers and cousins to carry out a coup d'etat. In 1287, the tsareviches declared Tode-Mongke insane and removed him from the throne (with his own permission, according to the official historiography). The next in line to be declared khan was Tula-Buga, Nogai's associate [...] However, Nogai believed him to be too hot-tempered and

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### 2.4 Tele-Buqa to Toqta, 1291

As will be detailed in section 3.3, Tele-Buqa's short reign (1287–1291) saw a string of inconclusive or outright disastrous military expeditions. I believe his attack on Hungary in 1285 came from a need to build his military reputation in order to succeed his uncle Töde-Möngke; a plan which went awry with the famous disaster his army suffered in the Carpathians on the withdrawal. Feeling denied his military glory, he decided to overthrow Töde-Möngke by force, rather than through 'legal means' (i.e., a *quriltai*). Thus, his reign began on rather illegitimate grounds with the usurpation of power. He could have hoped further victories would have given him security, but here too he floundered. His Polish campaign of 1287-88 was ineffective and resulted in raiding his own subject Galician territory. Both European campaigns saw Tele-Buqa grow envious of Nogai, who accompanied him in both attacks yet suffered no comparable failures (Cook 2020: 328, 353; Długosz 1997: 229–230; Perfecky 1973: 96–98; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 106). In 1288 and 1290 he ordered attacks on the Ilkhanate, the latter of which resulted in hundreds of his forces being killed and several Jochid princes captured (Boyle 1968: 370; Rashiduddin 1998: 356, 563, 569; Amitai-Preiss 1995: 89).

For a Mongol khan to face such consistent defeats, it may have looked dangerously like he lacked divine support for his rule – a rule he only had due to his seizure of the throne. An unnerved Tele-Buqa decided to strike against those he considered his greatest threats within the Horde, a fact agreed upon by Rashīd al-Dīn and the Mamluks. Rashīd al-Dīn records that Tele-Buqa moved first against Toqta, a prominent son of Möngke-Temür Khan singled out as a rival. Learning of Tele-Buqa's scheme, Toqta fled to Nogai for shelter. Nogai agreed to assist Toqta when the young prince promised loyalty to him (Rashiduddin 1998: 357; Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 124–125). The Mamluk depiction differs in that Nogai was Tele-Buqa's first target. Learning that Tele-Buqa planned to lure him on pretext of needing his advice and kill him, Nogai began gathering allies in secret, including Toqta, while answering Tele-Buqa's summons (Cook 2020: 353; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 107, 156–157).

Both traditions agree that Tele-Buqa began plotting against Nogai first, the result of a long simmering antagonism, and that Nogai did not initiate the conflict. Both Rashīd al-Dīn and the Mamluks have Nogai contact Tele-Buqa's mother to convince her son to come to him unarmed with only a small party, as the *aqa* had only peaceful intentions and wished to advise him. Rashīd al-Dīn adds that Nogai feigned illness, appearing to be on his deathbed and wished to make final amends. An unsuspecting Tele-Buqa and his allies walked right into the trap, where they were killed by Toqta's men (Cook 2020: 353–354; Rashiduddin 1998: 357; Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 125–126; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 107–108, 156–157, 382). The Rus' sources do not note the previous successions, but for 1291 the *Nikonian Chronicle* and *Chronicle of Novgorod* record 'tu-

pugnacious, so he forced him to share supreme power with his brother Kunchek and cousins Algui and Tughril, sons of Mongke-Temur, at the insistence of the beklyaribek, who was in fact the temporary ruler of the Golden Horde.' A totally conflicting version was put forth by May (2018a: 291) in his overview of the Mongol Empire. In May's version, the cause of Töde-Möngke's removal was not a flimsy attempt to reign in Nogai, but instead a *failure* on the part of Töde-Möngke to exert any power. 'Tode-Mongke, however, failed as a ruler and lacked the ability to make difficult decisions, which led him to abdicate after a brief civil war, while the Rus' princes who had fallen from favour with the Jochid court took refuge with Noghai. The fact that Noghai forced Tode-Mongke to abdicate indicates that Noghai was, at least initially, looking for more than a puppet. As Noghai rose to power during the reigns of two very strong rulers in Berke and Mongke-Temur, he may have sought a similar ruler before settling onto his new modus operandi.'

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mult among the Tatars,' and that Nogai and Toqta had 'killed Tsars Telebeg and Algui,' (Zenkovsky 1986a: 80; Michell and Forbes 1914: 111). Even Marco Polo's version is reminiscent of the event, with Nogai and another prince (in Polo's account, Töde-Möngke) working together to kill Tele-Buqa. Evidently this transition stood out in comparison to the previous successions, the violent overthrow of the khan shocking even local authors and reinforces the fact Nogai was uninvolved in previous depositions.

### 2.5 Was Nogai's war with Toqta an effort to overthrow him?

With the murder of Tele-Buqa and his allies in 1291, Nogai had finally taken part in the removal of the khan. This last decade of the thirteenth century has been portrayed as Nogai sitting the young Toqta on the throne and overpowering him until the mid–1290s when the frustrated Toqta pushed back. When Nogai sought to replace Toqta, the result was a civil war and Nogai's death by 1300. Some scholars include the added detail that Nogai declared his independence from Sarai, making himself khan.[13] In light of my reading of the same material I do not believe such presentation is supported by the primary sources. They do not clearly state that Toqta was an appointee of Nogai, or that their relationship was defined by Nogai's domination. Rather, their alliance in 1291 was one of convenience in the face of a common enemy, Tele-Buqa, and in the aftermath both began to ignore the requests of the other. Toqta believed himself master due to his status as khan, and Nogai desired to maintain his long built-up autonomy on the Danube. When war finally came it was not a result of Nogai seeking to replace Toqta or make himself ruler.

The most detailed primary sources on the 1291 coup from the Ilkhanate and Mamluk Sultanate do not agree Toqta was simply Nogai's appointee. Baybars al-Mansūrī wrote of Nogai 'entrusting the kingdom' to Toqta, in some sort of cooperation with Toqta's brothers Burliuk, Saraybuga and Tudan, while al-Nuwayrī had him 'elevate [Toqta] to the throne of kings,' (Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 108, 157). Both authors then have Nogai return immediately to the Danube. Rashīd al-Dīn's version has Toqta much more forceful. In this account, Nogai returns to his territory after the murder of Tele-Buqa, and Toqta consolidated his own position without Nogai's assistance. Yet when he had earlier fled to Nogai, Toqta promised Nogai some sort of obedience:

> My cousins are trying to kill me, and thou art the *aqa*. I will take refuge with thee so that thou mayst preserve me and prevent the hand of their oppression from reaching me. As long as I live I shall be commanded by my *aqa* and shall not contravene thy will. (Rashiduddin 1998; 357: Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 124–126).

This is the single strongest statement from the sources of Nogai having an influence over the reigning khan and does indicate Toqta promised to serve as Nogai's close ally. Nogai must not have left before Toqta was secured on the throne in order to ensure the transfer of power. However, this was done out of their mutual agreement, rather than Toqta being selected among the princes by Nogai.

[13] See variously: Curta 2019: 713; Favereau 2021: 201; May 2018a: 292–292; Vásáry 2009: 77; Vásáry 2005: 88, 90–91.

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Toqta was annoyed by disrespect which he felt from Nogai (see below, section 3.4) that aggravated other tensions contributing to their war. Rather than Nogai wishing to remove Toqta to appoint another puppet or himself as khan, or Toqta intentionally seeking to overthrow Nogai, the Islamic sources that provide the only detailed accounts of the war's outbreak have the origins more familial. The final conflict sprang, according to Rashīd al-Dīn, from a marriage. Toqta's grandfather Salji'udai Güregen requested that Nogai's daughter Qiyan marry his son Yaylaq. After the marriage Qiyan converted to Islam, which antagonized her Buddhist husband. When her husband began fighting and mistreating her, Qiyan contacted her family. Angered, Nogai demanded justice for his daughter and requested that Toqta send Salji'udai to him. Toqta refused to hand over his own grandfather despite two separate embassies from Nogai. In reaction, Nogai sent a wife Chubei and his sons Chaka, Teke and Büri to convince several of Toqta's commanders in the west to revolt and do violence, with a number welcomed to Nogai's court and one marrying Nogai's daughter. When Toqta demanded Nogai hand over the rebellious commanders, Nogai refused unless Toqta sent over Salji'udai and Yaylaq. In Rashīd al-Dīn's account, this is the cause for war the following year (1298) (Rashiduddin 1998: 357–358; Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 126–127).

As Rashīd al-Dīn noted that Kelmish-Aqa, Salji'udai's wife, informed the Ilkhans of events within the Golden Horde, her messages may have been the source for the story and played up her family's role and Toqta Khan's love for his grandfather Salji'udai (Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 160). Baybars al-Mansūrī's account differs in the details but maintains the familial aspect. Here one of Nogai's wives, also named Yaylaq, feared Nogai's sons Chaka and Teke. She fled to Toqta Khan, who she then incited against the boys (what this entailed is unmentioned). Soon after this, in a detail shared with Rashīd al-Dīn, several commanders revolted against Toqta and were rewarded at Nogai's court. When Toqta demanded the return of these commanders, Nogai refused. Toqta then sent a plow, an arrow, and a pile of earth to Nogai as a riddle, which Nogai determined was Toqta's declaration of war (Tiesenhausen 1884(2005): 110). Later Mamluk accounts follow Baybars' description. As Uzelac (2017: 517) notes though, these are the only accounts of the origin of the conflict; all other sources only discuss its outcome or the course, rather than the inception.

The origins of the conflict stemmed from the fact that their roles and relationship following the 1291 coup had not been clearly defined. From their agreement Nogai believed he was owed services from Toqta when he demanded it, and Toqta carried this out on occasion, as when he killed emirs on Nogai's order. But the reciprocity only went so far. Nogai was angered when Toqta refused to hand over Salji'udai, as was Toqta when Nogai ignored his messengers. This is clearly outlined by Rashīd al-Dīn, who has Nogai tell Toqta's envoys:

> It is known to all the world what toil and hardship I have endured and how I have exposed myself to the charge of perfidy and bad faith in order to win for [Toqta] the throne […]. And now Saljidai Küregen has authority over that throne. If my son Toqta wishes the basis of our relationship to be strengthened between us, let him send Saljidai Küregen back to his yurt, which is near Khwārazm (Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 126).

If Nogai had taken part in the removal of earlier khans, the conspiracy against Tele-Buqa would not have been what marked him out as 'perfidious.' Not only did Toqta refuse to hand over the man who allowed the abuse of Nogai's daughter, but from Nogai's point of view, Salji'udai had greater influence over Toqta than he. Rather than a clear hierarchy with Nogai as the master, both saw themselves in the position of influence, and both were aggravated when the other did

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not recognize it. When Nogai encouraged the revolt of certain Jochid commanders in response (hoping to pressure Toqta into cooperating), it looked like open rebellion, which Toqta could not abide. The conflict, as outlined in the primary sources, was more personal than the common kingmaker/puppet dynamic usually suggested.

It should be noted that Baybars al-Mansūrī does have a single passage seemingly indicating Nogai deposing and appointing khans in the build-up to the war between Toqta and Nogai:

> In the same year (697), Khan Toqta, son of Möngke-Temür, khan of the Tatars, went to war against Nogai and his sons when they showed resistance to him and opposed him as enemies, and this happened because Nogai had for a long time ruled the kingdom, had unlimited control over the descendants of Berke, removed khans whom he didn't like, and raised those he himself chose, as we said above, but he wanted to continue in this way so that he (Nogai) remained the ruler of these countries. But Toqta did not like being subservient to him: he tried to fight him and sought a war with him (Tiesenhausen 1884(2005): 110–111).[14]

Here al-Mansūrī has contradicted himself. His previous paragraphs before this simply do not have Nogai removing khans in this manner except for the 1291 coup. Al-Mansūrī's reference to 'removing khans' may in fact be reference to Tele-Buqa and his allies who had divided the Golden Horde between them, as each was a son of Möngke-Temür, and thus all a 'khan.' And as Nogai had taken part in the coup that led to all their deaths, it was technically the removal of several khans. If in this case al-Mansūrī was using *khan* as a synonym for a prince, it could also have been a reference to other princes loyal to Tele-Buqa that Nogai had urged Toqta to kill in 1293 and 1294 (Cook 2020: 361–362; Tiesenhausen 1884(2005): 108–109, 157–158). Or it may have been hyperbole on al-Mansūrī's part, playing up the stakes before the confrontation between Nogai and Toqta. As evidence for Nogai removing khans it is unspecific and thin, contrasting with al-Mansūrī's specific portrayals of the other Jochid successions.

It can be questioned too, if once war began, Nogai's intention was to depose Toqta. After his first victory of Toqta, Nogai chose not to pursue the weakened Khan and instead turned back to his home territories (Tiesenhausen 1884(2005): 111). Nogai sent his grandson Aqtaji into the Crimean Peninsula to demand tribute from the local Italian colonies. The plan may have been two-fold: denying the peninsula's valuable revenues to Toqta would harm the Khan while giving himself great strategic influence over the region, given how much of the Golden Horde's trade funneled through the Black Sea. But it seems even here Nogai did not intend on annexing Crimea, given that when Aqtaji was murdered by the Italians, Nogai invaded the Peninsula, sacked some cities but quickly withdrew, freeing his captives (Ciocîltan 2012: 161–162; Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 127). The action prompted a revolt among his commanders who felt denied their Crimean loot (Rashiduddin 1998: 359). It suggests that at the height of his military power, having sent Toqta

[14] 'В этом же (697) году царь Токта, сын Менгутемира, царь Татарский, отправился на войну против Ногайа и сыновей его, когда они выказали ему сопротивление и выступили против него врагами, а это (произошло) оттого, что Ногай долгое время правил царством, неограниченно распоряжавшимся Берковичами смещал тех из царей их, кто ему не нравился, и ставил (тех), кого сам выбирал, как мы уже сказали выше, да хотел, чтобы это так продолжалось (и впредь) и он (Ногай) оставался правителем этих стран. Но Токте не понравилось быть подвластным ему.'

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fleeing back to Sarai, even then Nogai did not imagine his actual *ulus* truly incorporating Crimea. The effort to collect its revenues overextended his army.

While obviously we cannot know Nogai's mind on the matter the fact that firstly, he chose not to pursue Toqta to Sarai, and secondly, did not attempt to annex Crimea, suggests to me two things. Either Nogai had no intention of exerting his control so far west of the Dnieper or was aware that he would be unable to do so. Nogai's intentions in either scenario would suggests his intention was not to remove or replace Toqta, but perhaps merely humble him. By seizing the Crimean revenues, Nogai would have had a means to put pressure onto Toqta and make him more compliant. The failure of this plan however, provided Toqta a chance to regroup his forces to defeat and kill Nogai.

The sources are unanimous, and show no ambiguity, in placing Nogai in the removal of Tele-Buqa Khan in 1291. The Mamluk and Ilkhanid accounts are corroborated by the Rus' and Marco Polo: only in 1291 did Nogai take part in bringing down a Jochid khan (Tele-Buqa) and assist in Toqta's rise to the throne. Any other role given to Nogai in any of the transitions between khans finds no support from the historical sources and is a creation of secondary literature. Nogai's hope in the final war with Toqta may have been to put himself in the position of influence he felt he deserved but had been denied by Salj'udai.

## 3. REDUCING THE KHANS TO FIGUREHEADS

Beyond the replacement of khans, the second part of the khanmaker model relies on Nogai effectively assuming the authority of the khan, or at least usurping much of it. The evidence for this is usually cited as his control over the Golden Horde's foreign policy, in terms of diplomacy with neighbouring powers, war, and in some internal matters, such as interfering in interactions in the Rus' principalities. Here too, I will demonstrate that the evidence for this point of view is slim and can likewise be reinterpreted.

### 3.1 Diplomacy

#### *3.1.a Mamluks*

Perhaps the most consistently cited piece of evidence for Nogai usurping the khan's position in diplomatic matters comes soon after Nogai's arrival to the lower Danube *c.*1270, when he sent a letter to the Mamluk Sultan Baybars al-Bunduqārī. Broadbridge, for example, wrote that Nogai wanted to present himself to Baybars as a favourable Muslim alternative to the tengriist Khan Möngke-Temür, who around that time had also made a peace treaty with the Mamluks' sworn enemies, the Ilkhanate (Broadbridge 2008: 59–60).[15] The letter from Nogai is framed as a part of his aspirations, an effort to establish a personal relationship with the Mamluks. To better understand this letter, it must be placed into its context. Recorded in the *Zubdat al-fikrah* of Baybars al-Mansūrī, the letter reached Cairo in late 1270 or early 1271. The text of letter is as follows:

[15] For other examples of similar interpretations, see DeWeese 1994: 88; Favereau 2021: 192; Tanase 2004–2005: 274–277.

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> This letter was sent from Isa-Nogai to [Sultan Baybars]. I praise Allah Almighty for the fact that he included me among the faithful and made me (one) of those who follow the obvious faith [...]This message was sent for two purposes: the first is greetings and congratulations from us to you. The second is because of what we heard from Arbuga: to consolidate our alliance with our father Berke Khan, he [Sultan Baybars] wished to have information about the sons and relatives of [Berke] and who of them converted to Islam. When this was communicated (to us), we [Nogai] sincerely fell in love with [Baybars], who is true to his word, and said: his knowledge about us (comes) only from his zeal for Islam and the sincerity of his striving to strengthen alliances. We sent this message with the assistance of Ur-Temür and Tukbug to notify (you) that we entered Islam and believed in Allah, in what came from Allah, and in what was revealed by Allah. What we have said is trustworthy; we follow along the path of our father Berke Khan, follow the truth and avoid lies. Let the sending of letters (between us) not stop. You and I are like the tips of the fingers on a hand: we act in concert with those who agree with you, and we resist those who oppose you (Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 101–102).[16]

Nogai's letter focuses on his conversion to Islam, his connection to the late Berke and the need for maintaining the relationship already established with Sultan Baybars, with whom Nogai desired to continue correspondence. Baybars' reply was courteous, congratulated Nogai on his conversion and urged him to continue battling the unbelievers (the Ilkhanate) (Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 102). There is however no support for claims Nogai was using this letter to build an alternative power base to the Jochid khan or start an independent foreign policy. Notably, Nogai points out the letter was not written from his own ambition. He notes that Arbuga, a man who had served as an envoy from Berke to Sultan Baybars, told Nogai of the Sultan's interest in learning who else among Berke's family had converted to Islam. Nogai's letter was a response to this inquiry by Baybars. Then Nogai wrote that the letter was only written in assistance with two other members of the Mongol elite, Ur-Temür and Tukbug. Both were commanders of Mongol detachments stationed in Crimea, with Tukbug, like Nogai, only having been recently transferred to the region by Möngke-Temür Khan (Uzelac 2015: 133–134). Nogai in 1270 did not have influence in Crimea, so these men were not his subordinates but equals in the khan's service.

It was also not merely the prerogative of the khan to undertake diplomacy with foreign powers. Throughout the Mongol conquests, there are numerous examples of *tamma* commanders

[16] 'Отправлено это письмо ИсуНогайем ал-Малик аз-Захиру. Хвалю Аллаха Всевышнего за то, что он включил меня в число правоверных и сделал меня (одним) из тех, которые следуют вере очевидной." Затем (следует): Это послание наше заключает в себе две цели: одна из них - привет и поздравление от нас тебе, другая та, что от Арбуги услышали мы: для скрепления союза своего с отцом нашим, Берке-ханом, он (султан) пожелал иметь сведения о сыновьях и родственниках его (Берке) ио том, кто из них принял ислам. Когда это было (нам) сообщено, то мы искренне полюбили ал-Малика аз-Захира, который верен своему слову, и ска-зали: осведомление его о нас (происходит) только от усердия его к исламу и искренности стремления его к укреплению союзов. Мы написали это послание при содействии Уртимура и Тукбуги для оповещения (тебя), что мы вступили в ислам и уверовали в Аллаха, в то, что пришло от Аллаха, да в ниспосланного Аллахом. То, что мы сказали, заслуживает доверия; мы идем по пути отца нашего Берке хана, следуем за истиной и уклоняемся от лжи. Да не прекратится пересылка писем (между нами). Мы с тобой, как кончики пальцев на руке: действуем заодно с тем, кто с тобой в согласии, и противимся тому, кто тебе противится.'

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contacting states, usually to demand their submission.[17] If Nogai was a *tammachi,* as I believe, then Nogai contacting the Mamluks was not an act which itself violated the khan's authority. The fact that Nogai sent the letter after being in touch with other Jochid commanders and diplomats likely indicates the letter was done with some amount of approval from Sarai. While Nogai's letter was sent, it is true, after Möngke-Temür came to a truce with Abaqa Ilkhan *c.*1268, in 1272 Möngke-Temür's envoys to Sultan Baybars renewed the military alliance against the Ilkhan (Broadbridge 2008: 60). In my opinion, if Nogai's letter was sent with the knowledge of Sarai, then it could have been Möngke-Temür's means of testing Baybars' thoughts to continuing the alliance. It was perhaps conceived after Abaqa Ilkhan's victory over the Chagatai Khan Baraq at Herat in July 1270, upon which Möngke-Temür sent gifts to congratulate Abaqa, while personally being alarmed at the Ilkhan's military strength and the failure of the Chagatayids to pose him any threat (Rashiduddin 1998: 531). Having initially been tepid regarding Baybars' offer of continuing the alliance, Möngke-Temür may have desired a slightly less overt means of probing Baybars' opinion, from which Möngke-Temür could distance himself if the embassy was received poorly or intercepted. Finding that Baybars' response to Nogai was keen on the promise of future military cooperation with the Jochids, Möngke-Temür then sent an official message to Baybars renewing the alliance, which the Sultan received gladly.

Certainly, Nogai's letter did not set off a flurry of correspondence between him and the Mamluk Sultans. No further contact between him and Sultan Baybars is recorded. Of the 27 recorded embassies between the Mamluks and Golden Horde from 1262 (the beginning of contact) until 1300 (Nogai's death), Nogai is only known to have reached out to the Mamluks twice: the aforementioned letter in 1270, and once during the reign of Sultan Qalāwūn (r.1279–1290) (Broadbridge 2019: 280–284; Cook 2020: 153; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 67, 69).[18] Nogai was the recipient of at least three embassies from the Mamluks, usually alongside the Jochid khan, and was listed among the princes of the Horde who received gifts from Mamluk embassies (Broadbridge 2019: 282–284; Cook 2020: 297–298; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884) 67, 69).[19] This is not an indication that Nogai had an exceptional relationship with the Mamluk sultans or received special treatment among the Jochid princes beyond his status as *aqa* and the respect that entailed. Nogai certainly did not take over diplomacy with them as Möngke-Temür from 1267 until his death in 1280/1282 sent a recorded five embassies to the Mamluk sultans, and almost always received a response. In this same period, Nogai's only recorded letter was in 1270 (Broadbridge 2019: 281–284). The evidence for Nogai conducting his own diplomacy with the Mamluks rests entirely on two mentions of his letters and embassies arriving in Cairo, much rarer than those of Möngke-Temür or his successors.

[17] For example, *tammachi* Chormaqan and his successors as chief Mongol commander in the Middle East, Baiju and Eljigidei, partook in extensive diplomacy. Most of southern Iran submitted to Chormaqan diplomatically rather than through conquest, while Baiju exchanged letters with and took the submission of the Seljuq Sultan, and received the Dominican embassy headed by Friar Ascelin in 1247. Eljigidei sent an embassy to King Louis IX of France while he was in Cyprus in 1248. See Dashdondog 2011: 60–61, 63; May 2016: 22–25; Rubruck, 1990: 31, 33–37.

[18] Ibn al-Furat gives a date of 1282 for Nogai's second embassy, while the anonymous *Biography of Sultan Qalawun* gives 1286-7. This is described as his ambassadors arriving 'at the highest court' along with an ambassador of the Byzantine Emperor. Its purpose is not mentioned.

[19] In the *Biography of Qalawun*, for example, the embassy sent to Möngke-Temür Khan in 1282 brought gifts for him, as well as for his brother Töde-Möngke, the wives of the Khan, and other top princes, which included the head of the Blue Horde, the son of Seljuq Sultan 'Izz ad-Din and for Nogai.

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Even the often 'feeble' Töde-Möngke sent embassies to Sultan Qalāwūn, which bear no indication of being done on Nogai's efforts (Broadbridge 2019: 283). In fact, Jackson hypothesizes that Töde-Möngke employed a rather dramatic strategy in his Mamluk contacts and suggests his much-remarked conversion to Islam may have begun as a diplomatic tool. The first Mamluk embassy to Töde-Möngke in 1282 makes no reference to him being a Muslim. Yet when the new Khan sent an embassy to the Mamluks in 1283, his conversion made up the letter, telling Sultan Qalāwūn he had established *sharia* law in the Golden Horde and asked for an Islamic name and standards from the sultan and his puppet caliph (Broadbridge 2019: 269; Cook 2020: 303; Jackson 2017: 343: Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 68). The sudden eagerness to stress his religion, Jackson suggests, came not necessarily from a deep personal conversion, but an attempt to outmaneuver Ahmad Tegüder, enthroned as Ilkhan only a few months after Töde-Möngke's ascension. Ahmad was the first Muslim khan of the Ilkhanate and contacted Töde-Möngke and the Mamluks soon after becoming Ilkhan (Cook 2020: 50; Pfeiffer 2006: 183–184). Perhaps worried that Ahmad Tegüder's faith threatened rapprochement between the Ilkhanate and Mamluks, Töde-Möngke may have hoped to 'out-Muslim' Ahmad Tegüder and appear the more sincere of the two, thereby encouraging the Mamluks to maintain the alliance (Jackson 2017: 343). If correct it suggests, at least initially, Töde-Möngke's Islam was in part a tool to maintain the Jochid position and only later became a more sincere belief. Regardless, Nogai never took control of contacts with the Mamluk Sultan, though he did participate in them.

### *3.1.b Byzantium*

Due to his proximity to Constantinople, it seems natural to assume that Nogai took over contacts with Byzantine Empire from the Jochid khans. First raiding Byzantine Thrace at the beginning of the 1270s, Nogai was 'bought off,' through a marriage to Emperor Michael VIII's illegitimate daughter, Euphrosyne.[20] From that point on, scholarship tends to portray Nogai and Byzantine relations as occurring independent of the Jochid khan.

I believe though that the union of Nogai and Euphrosyne should not be seen as an independent alliance of his own organization, but more likely something done with the approval of Möngke-Temür, a reward for Nogai's effectiveness in enacting the khan's will. In the thirteenth century it was not unknown for the khans to award royal wives to prominent commanders: both Sübe'etei and *tammachi* Chormaqan were awarded Chinggisid princesses in the 1230s (Atwood 2004: 461: Atwood 2010: 620; Dashdondog 2011: 52; Pow and Liao 2018: 60). Generally, foreign princesses were married directly into the Mongol imperial family. Chinggis Khan, for instance, upon the capture of the Khwarezm-shah's harem dispersed the Shah's daughters amongst his primary sons with Börte and many of his lesser sons and relations (Broadbridge 2018: 92–100). In a letter to Pope Alexander IV, King Béla IV reported that the Mongols had offered to marry his son to a Mongol princess, or one of his daughters to a Mongol prince, and through this method earn his submission (Berend 2001: 167). For Nogai as a prominent military commander to marry

[20] It is sometimes stated that Nogai partook in an early 1260s attack on the Byzantine Empire. However, Vásáry and Uzelac have conclusively shown this is not the case. And as indicated by sources on the Berke–Hülegü war, Nogai stayed on the Ilkhanid frontier from 1262 through 1266. It makes little sense for Berke to have removed his top commander from his most important front, for a rather minor raid on Byzantium. For Nogai's whereabouts, see Uzelac 2017b: 380; Uzelac 2013: 14; Uzelac 2015: 136–137; Vásáry 2005: 73, 75.

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royalty was hardly impossible but would have needed approval by the khan. Yet it also suggests that Nogai's apparent illegitimacy – the focus on the supposed concubine status of his mother or grandmother – has been overstated by the scholarship (Halperin 2020: 34–35). That is, that Nogai was not merely seen as a member of the military, but a full member of the Chinggisid royal family (and indeed, this seems indicated by his status as *aqa*). He was therefore eligible for marriages with royal powers, but with the permission of the Golden Horde khan. Möngke-Temür is not recorded taking any exception to the marriage and may have felt it pulled Michael away from his Ilkhan connection, given that Michael had married a daughter to the Ilkhanid royal family in 1265 (Cabrera Ramos 2017: 220). If Möngke-Temür, as far as is known, did not see Nogai's action as an act of rebellion or independence, then there is little basis to assume it was done counter to his wishes.

Even after the marriage of Nogai to Euphrosyne, we know the khan in Sarai continued to send his own embassies directly to Constantinople. Möngke-Temür did so throughout the 1270s, well after Nogai's movement to the lower Danube (Zenkovsky 1986a: 63).[21] There is not sufficient information on contacts after Möngke-Temür's death to conclusively assert Nogai took total control over relations with Constantinople. Pachymeres does indicate that Michael VIII and Andronikos II dealt directly with Nogai at least when it came to their shared Balkan frontier, rather reasonable given the distance to send any messengers to the khan on the Volga Steppe. In a famous anecdote, Pachymeres records Emperor Michael's habit of sending fine gifts directly to Nogai, gifts which Nogai did not quite appreciate (Pachymeres 1984: Part 2, V.4). Nogai's raids on Bulgaria, contributing to the uprising of Ivaylo in 1277, resulted in the Tsar's death and Michael attempting to put his own candidate on the Bulgarian throne. Nogai's armies, apparently on the encouragement of Michael VIII, continued to ravage Bulgaria. In the end the Bulgarian *boyars* raised one of their own, Giorgi Terter, to the throne in 1280, and Ivaylo and the Byzantine candidate fled to Nogai, who had Ivaylo executed before allowing the candidate to return home (Ciocîltan 2012: 258; Madgearu 2018: 262–265; Pachymeres 1984: Part 2, VL.18–19; Uzelac 2017b: 381–382; Vásáry 2005: 79).

While this episode has been presented with Nogai as a defender of Byzantine interests and providing himself with links to a power outside of the Golden Horde, I do not believe this to be necessarily true (Uzelac 2017b: 382). The sources do not expressly indicate that Nogai's military cooperation with Michael VIII was done without the knowledge or approval of the khans in Sarai. As Möngke-Temür likely saw the Byzantines as his vassals, then Nogai was a regional *tammachi* cooperating with local vassals, not dissimilar to what the non-Chinggisid Burundai had done in Ruthenia and Poland in 1259 during the reign of Berke (Perfecky 1973: 76–79).[22] And given that Möngke-Temür had sent Nogai to southeastern Europe to shore up their frontier there, the khan would have little issue with Nogai weakening their neighbours for the eventual conquest, one of the primary duties of the *tammachi*. Neither was Nogai acting in total concert with Michael VIII, for he only allowed the Byzantine candidate for the Bulgarian throne, Ivan Asen III, to leave

[21] In 1279 Möngke-Temür and Cyril, the Metropolitan of Kyiv, sent Theognost, the Bishop of Sarai, as an embassy to Constantinople. *The Nikonian Chronicle* (1986: 63) states that in 1279 'he came for the third time from the Greek land.'

[22] Burundai is also known as Boroldai. In the fifteenth century chronicle of Jan Długosz, Nogai and Tele-Buqa are erroneously given command in Burundai's campaign, which Długosz conflated with Nogai and Tele-Buqa's 1287 attack on Poland. This is the source for modern claims of their presence in this campaign. *The Galician-Volynian Chronicle* never places either prince on the 1259/1260 attack.

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his *ordu* alive on the intervention of his Byzantine wife Euphrosyne (Pachymeres 1984: Part 2, VI.18–19).[23]

Nogai's relationship with Michael's successor, Andronikos II, was much poorer and raids on Byzantine territory resumed in the 1280s. Diplomatic contacts stagnated until Andronikos II promised a daughter in marriage to Toqta Khan at the end of the 1290s (Pachymeres 1999: Part 3, IX.27). Current knowledge does not suggest Nogai took over contacts with Byzantium from the khans, especially during Möngke-Temür's reign, and his contacts he did have were for local affairs in south-eastern Europe, rather than on behalf of the Golden Horde itself.

### *3.1.c Ilkhanate*

Given Nogai's initial hostility against the Ilkhans, it may seem surprising that some scholars have argued for Nogai engaging in his own independent diplomacy with the heirs of Hülegü (Buell 2003: 406–407; Favereau 2021: 192, 196). Evidence for this relies on two episodes recorded by Rashīd al-Dīn, but likewise I find this evidence suspect.

Rashīd al-Dīn records that in April 1288, Nogai sent an embassy bearing Buddhist relics to Ilkhan Arghun.[24] This embassy occurred shortly before Tele-Buqa's first attack on the Ilkhanate in May or October 1288.[25] Perhaps learning of Tele-Buqa's plans, Nogai pre-emptively sought to remind the Ilkhans of the nearly twenty years of peace since the reign of Möngke-Temür and hoped to preserve efforts at Chinggisid unity. Yet the fact that the embassy occurred before Tele-Buqa's attack cannot be ignored. Perhaps in cooperation with Tele-Buqa, Nogai's embassy tried to put Arghun at ease to make him less suspecting of the belligerent new Jochid khan. Certainly, Nogai did not forewarn Arghun. Rashīd al-Dīn (1998: 356) indicates Arghun was setting out from his winter quarters in Azerbaijan and had to unexpectedly turn back to meet the oncoming foe, whom he succeeded in repelling. While the timing is certainly suspicious, it does not actually indicate cooperation between Nogai and Arghun.

The other episode mentioned by Rashīd al-Dīn is that during the reign of Abaqa Ilkhan (r.1265–1282), Nogai sent a wife, Chubei, and son, Büri, to the Ilkhanate asking for a daughter of Abaqa in marriage for Büri. In this account, Abaqa gives an unnamed daughter and hosts Nogai's family in honour (1998: 359; 1971: 129). But Rashīd al-Dīn's own chronicle casts doubt on the story. For in another chapter he provides a genealogy of Abaqa and his children, recording his two sons and seven daughters as well as their marriages. Abaqa's third daughter Malika is recorded as marrying a son of Nogai, albeit a *different* Nogai from the Jochid prince. Rather, she

[23] This is the only anecdote of Euphrosyne after her marriage to Nogai. It is noticeably similar to how *tammachi* Baiju's wife intervened to prevent his executing Dominican envoys in the 1240s. *Simon of St.Quentin*, bk. 32 chp. 44. Accessed May 20th, 2021.

[24] 'On [April 11, 1288] envoys came from Noqai's ulus, and on the banks of the New Canal they presented a sharil (relic). Among idolators it is believed that when [the Buddha] was cremated, a translucent bone like a bead from in front of his heart remained unburned. They call it a sharil and claim that when anyone who has reached an exalted degree like [the Buddha] is cremated, his sharil does not burn. In any case, when they brought it, Arghun Khan went out to meet them, scattered gold over it, and rejoiced. Several days were given over to banqueting and revelry.' Rashiduddin 1998: 563.

[25] Rashīd al-Dīn (Rashiduddin 1998: 356, 563) gives two different dates for the attack. Either two distinct attacks in 1288, or simply an error on one of them. Details differ slightly, but not enough to confidently say these were different attacks.

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marries Toghan Buqa, son of Nogai Yarghuchi (Nogai the Judge) of the Baya'ut, a non-Chinggisid and a member of the Ilkhanate's military elite (1998: 512). Further complicating matters, in another section Rashīd al-Dīn provides a genealogy of Nogai Yarghuchi which does not list Toghan Buqa among his sons, though the fact he was related to one of Abaqa's wives is mentioned (1998: 89–90).[26] This is not the only place where Rashīd al-Dīn gave contrasting family trees, as Kamola (2019) noted that Rashīd al-Dīn made four conflicting genealogies for the Chagatayids. It appears Rashīd al-Dīn confused Nogai of the Jochids with Nogai Yarghuchi.

The Mongols practiced a reciprocal type of marriage alliance between two families called a *quda*. In a *quda*, Nogai Yarghuchi would provide relations to marry into Abaqa's family, and in turn Abaqa would provide relations to marry Nogai Yarghuchi's family (Broadbridge 2018: 35). As Nogai Yarghuchi already had marriage ties with Abaqa's family, it is likely that this was the Nogai family that Rashīd intended as marrying Abaqa's daughter. In addition to the commonness of Nogai as a name among the Mongols, Rashīd al-Dīn also records Chubei and Büri fleeing to Ghazan Ilkhan after Nogai's death (1998: 618).[27] Their flight to the Ilkhanate *c.*1300 may have been confused during the lengthy editing of the *Jāmi' al-tāwarīkh* with an earlier journey, and alongside the confusion of the names of the two Nogais, accidentally transformed into a marriage in the reign of Abaqa.[28] Therefore, I argue there was no marriage alliance between Nogai's family and the Ilkhanid dynasty, and neither do I believe there is sufficient evidence to suggest he took over diplomacy with the Ilkhans from the Jochid khans.

## 3.2 Rus' Principalities

Another area in which Nogai is regularly seen as competing with the khans is the Rus' princes. To deal with that matter in appropriate detail requires more space than can be provided in this paper, but two commonly used details can be addressed here. The first relates to Rus' relations under Töde-Möngke Khan, and the well-known anecdote with the Basqaq Ahmad.

### *3.2.a The Granting of Yarliqs to Princes in the reign of Töde-Möngke*

Since the conquest of Batu, the Rus' princes depended on the khan for legitimacy. While it was not until the reign of Özbeğ (r.1313–1341) that the Jochid khan was the ultimate arbitrator of Rus' disputes and succession, the tradition of each prince 'going to the Horde,' to receive a *yarliq* confirming his enthronement was already established (Martin 2009: 187, 193; Vásáry 2009: 78,

[26] Nogai Yarghuchi was a descendant of a man named Sorghan, a loyal servant of Chinggis Khan in his early days. Rashīd al-Dīn in this genealogical section lists Nogai Yarghuchi's sons as Tuq Temür, Alghu, and Esän Buqa, and that 'the Bulughan Khatun who was Abaqa Khan's wife, [was the cousin] of Noqai Yarghuchi.' Nogai Yarghuchi, descendant of Sorghan, and Nogai descendant of Jochi are clearly identified as different individuals by Rashīd al-Dīn

[27] Thackston's translation of Rashīd al-Dīn alone references six distinct individuals named Nogai.

[28] Rashīd al-Dīn began the project during the reign of Ghazan Ilkhan (r.1295–1304) and edited it until copying began in 1314. Over that time dozens of figures worked on the manuscripts (of which only four survive) and numerous revisions were made. Oversights are to be expected in a document as large as the *Jāmi' al-tāwarīkh*. Writing of marriage between a minor princess to the son of the wrong Nogai during the 20-year long reign of Abaqa Ilkhan, perhaps 30–40 years earlier, is an easy mistake to make. Rashīd al-Dīn left the date of the marriage blank in the text, having been unable to identify it.

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80). Not only could a *yarliq* be granted, but it could be rescinded on the khan's will. Such was the case for the dispute between two of Alexander Nevskii's sons, Dmitri and Andrei, for the title of Grand Prince of Vladimir. Andrei, angered by his brother, went in 1281 to the khan for military aid to overthrow Dmitri. Convinced of Dmitri's malfeasance, Töde-Möngke provided troops to assist Andrei in ousting Dmitri. Dmitri fled before Andrei and the Mongols, and according to the *Nikonian Chronicle,* sought refuge with Nogai, here called khan (Michell and Forbes 1914: 108–109; Zenkovsky 1986a: 66–69).[29] In 1284 Dmitri marched on Novgorod 'in the company of Tatars,' and wreaked much devastation, retaking his position by force. While the secondary literature commonly states that Nogai provided military forces for Dmitri, as well as a *yarliq* to counter Andrei's *yarliq* from Töde-Möngke, this is not explicitly outlined in either the *Nikon Chronicle* or *Chronicle of Novgorod.*[30] Neither chronicle specifies the origin of the Tatars in Dmitri's service for this attack, and while Dmitri retook Novgorod it is not stated that he was granted a new *yarliq* courtesy of Nogai.[31]

While Dmitri had sheltered with Nogai, on his return in 1283 the *Nikon Chronicle* states that 'the same year Grand Prince Dmitrii Aleksandrovich came from the Horde, from the Khan (Nagai) and made peace with his brother, Prince Andrei,' (1986: 69). Only late in 1283 did they resume hostilities, when Dmitri assassinated one of Andrei's boyars. That is, Dmitri did not return from Nogai with an army but first made peace with Andrei, and only after his return began fighting with Andrei again. Therefore, the origins of the Tatars in his retinue during his attack on Andrei cannot be unequivocally traced to Nogai, for they were not in his service on his immediate return to the Rus' lands. The possibility cannot be totally ruled out that Töde-Möngke had briefly switched his support to Dmitri, before returning it to Andrei. Alliances could shift quickly. In 1288, Andrei and Dmitri joined forces with their brother Daniel of Moscow to attack Mikhail Iaroslavich of Tver', for instance (Zenkovsky 1986a: 79).

### *3.2.b. Basqaq Ahmad*

Another example of Nogai's interference with Rus' is the episode with Ahmad the Basqaq, also recorded in the *Nikonian Chronicle*. In this episode dated to 1284/5, the voracious tax-collector Ahmad antagonized princes in the Kursk principality who complained to the khan. The khan, recorded as Tele-Buqa, took the tax rights away from Ahmad and ordered his settlements destroyed. A frustrated Ahmad, whose father was one of Nogai's emirs, received Nogai's support for a retaliatory attack on the same Rus' princes. The result was several rounds of raids, with one

[29] From the *Nikon Chronicle:* 'The same year Prince Andrei Aleksandrovich was sent a large army from the Khan, under Tura-Temir and Alyn, with many Tatars from the Golden Horde; and with them he marched against his senior brother, Grand Prince Dmitrii Aleksandrovich, grandson of Iaroslav; and they caused the Christians much harm. But Grand Prince Dmitrii […] with his druzhina, princes, children and entire court fled to the horde of Khan Nagai, to whom he told everything in order, relating it with tears, and gave him and his nobles many gifts. Khan Nagai listened to him and kept him in honour.'

[30] See for example, in Favereau 2021: 194; Pochekaev 2017: 230; Vernadsky 1953: 176–177.

[31] *Nikonian Chronicle,* (Zenkovsky 1986: 76), 'And so he [Prince Dmitrii] marched with Tatars towards Novgorod and did much harm in their land. The Novgorodians petitioned him, and Grand Prince Dmitrii Aleksandrovich became their prince.'; *Chronicle of Novgorod*, (Michell and Forbes 1914: 109–110) 'in the winter of the same year, Knyaz Dmitri came to Novgorod with his brother Andrei with an armed force, and with Tartars and with the whole of the Low Country, and they did much harm and burned the districts.'

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Rus' prince ultimately getting a small force from the khan to kill the other, whose brother then received a force from Tele-Buqa to avenge him (Zenkovsky 1986a: 71–76). The episode is detailed and often unquestioned as an example of Nogai's interference among the Rus'.[32] However, Halperin has noted its unreliability as a literal event in several aspects, from its internal contradictions and inconsistencies, its confused timeline (the events are recorded as taking place around 1284, but Tele-Buqa was not khan until 1287), to its very provenance. This tale, taking place in a rural area in the far south, is first recorded in a chronicle from Tver' in the northeast in 1305, a chronicle that hardly noted the sack of Kiev in 1240. Yet, the more local *Galician-Volynian Chronicle* gives no mention of Ahmad. Likely written down at great distance (both in time and space) from oral sources well after whatever the original incident was, Halperin (2009: 82–87) suggests that rather than be read as a literal event, it was meant to provide a moral regarding the foolishness of armed resistance against the Mongols, and how the khan was the ultimate dispenser of justice. Therefore, this evidence for Nogai's interference among the Rus' during the reign of Töde-Möngke cannot be relied upon.

### 3.3 Attacks on Hungary and Poland in the 1280s

Perhaps the ultimate statement regarding the minimization of the khan's authority by Nogai is whether he was the impetus behind the 1285 attack on Hungary and 1287 attack on Poland. Both are often attributed to him in scholarship.[33] However, I do not believe Nogai was the primary instigator of either attack: rather, both campaigns materialized out of Tele-Buqa's effort to garner legitimacy to succeed his uncle Töde-Möngke Khan.

Firstly, Nogai taking part in military operations against Europe was not unusual. His military role in the Balkans and against Byzantium was already noted, and from the late 1270s onwards he provided troops to Rus' princes to raid Lithuania and Poland. *The Galician-Volynian Chronicle* emphasizes that Nogai was not the mastermind behind these attacks: his troops were provided in *response* to Rus' complaints of incursions by the Lithuanians, or because a Rus' prince wanted to take advantage of upheaval in Poland after the death of a Polish Duke (Perfecky 1973: 90, 92; Zenkovsky 1986a: 54, 63, 69). Providing an army for the Rus' was not unusual; Töde-Möngke often provided armies for Andrei Aleksandrovich. As the raids produced slaves, loot and disrupted the powers along the Golden Horde's border –states which, in Mongol imperial ideology, were to be conquered at some point– then Nogai's involvement was hardly extraordinary. These raids took advantage of weaknesses, rather than earnest attempts at conquest. The Hungarian Kingdom suffered a large Cuman revolt from 1280–1282, causing many to flee to the Golden Horde– Cumans who had been intended as the first line of defense should the Mongols return– bringing word of strife between King László IV, his nobility and the church. Given these circumstances, it was a prime opportunity for the Mongols to take advantage of Hungarian weakness. As noted by Hautala, the immediate *casus belli* was likely King László pursuing fleeing Cumans into Horde

[32] As can be seen in Pochekaev 2017: 230 and Spuler 1965: 66.

[33] Favereau (2021: 194–195) wrote 'Töde-Möngke Khan […] did not appreciate Nogay's appetite for war. Soon enough, other high-ranking Jochids were flocking to Nogay's side. Even the khan's nephew Töle-Buqa took his orders from Nogay, participating in the Hungarian campaign.'; Pochekaev (2017: 230) wrote that 'any military activities the Golden Horde engaged in during [Töde-Möngke's] rule were carried out on the initiative and under the command of Nogai.'; Vernadsky (1953: 178) wrote that Nogai invited Tele-Buqa to campaign.

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territory in Wallachia (Długosz 1997: 228; Hautala 2017: 368–370; Hautala 2016: 487; Jackson 2018: 170, 173; Pow 2019: 244–245; Szőcs 2010: 19–20).[34]

As noted above, it seems that by the middle of the 1280s Töde-Möngke had entered the religious or mental stupor ascribed to him by the Islamic sources, leaving Jijek-Khatun to act as regent. I believe that his nephew, prince Tele-Buqa, sought to replace his uncle. Having little military experience, Tele-Buqa may have hoped to build up his reputation in this area in order to make himself a more viable candidate.[35] When Tele-Buqa learned of the weakness of the Hungarian Kingdom, a state which had remained unconquered after the famous campaign of Batu forty years prior, Tele-Buqa must have considered it an auspicious opportunity; a victory in Hungary, and loot to bribe commanders and princes, would have been ample means to boost his candidacy to replace his uncle.

Therefore, I believe the 1285 Mongol attack on Hungary was most likely initiated by Tele-Buqa, a sign of Töde-Möngke's withdrawal from governmental duties, and not indication of Nogai overpowering the khan. Furthermore, such an understanding is supported by the historical sources, as Baybars al-Mansūrī has Tele-Buqa order Nogai to take part (Cook 2020: 328; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 106).[36] While potentially conflating it with Tele-Buqa's authority as khan after 1287, if Nogai had ordered or invited Tele-Buqa to take part, as often described in the secondary literature, then al-Mansūrī would have clearly indicated it.

The outcome of the campaign famously resulted in huge losses for Tele-Buqa's troops during the withdrawal through the Carpathians, compared to seemingly light losses for Nogai. The fact that this led to a falling out between the two men is well-known. More immediately, I think it induced a sort of panic in Tele-Buqa, who could no longer rely on prestige from a great victory to legitimately succeed Töde-Möngke. As a result, he began to plot. Over 1286 he developed a conspiracy alongside his brother and most of the sons of Möngke-Temür Khan, who Töde-Möngke had previously antagonized by exiling them. In 1287, Tele-Buqa and the lead princes of his alliance –Alghui, Könchak and Togrilcha– overthrew Töde-Möngke Khan. Rashīd's emphasis in the role of these princes, as well as coinage distribution, seems to suggest that Tele-Buqa ruled as a sort of first-amongst-equals, dividing the rest of the Golden Horde between themselves in a four-way princely junta (Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 124; Reva 2014: 136–139).[37]

Tele-Buqa must have felt his status as khan, ascending the throne through a usurpation, left his authority questionable. Therefore, I believe he too, was the mastermind behind the attack on Poland that began in December 1287. Hoping to quickly gain a victory and demonstrate that he had heaven's right to rule, Poland seemed a promising target for an easy victory given the great success of the previous Mongol expeditions there. From December 1287 until March 1288, Tele-Buqa once again acted in conjunction with Nogai. Here again the primary sources directly

[34] Claims that Nogai was coming to prop up the Hungarian King can be dismissed, as Szőcs (2010: 28–32) demonstrates.

[35] I suspect similar considerations were behind Qubilai's continued campaigning against the Song Dynasty after learning of Möngke's death in autumn 1259. Qubilai did not call-off the campaign until learning that Ariq Böke was preparing a *quriltai* to declare himself qa'an, at which point Khubilai moved north and had himself declared khaan first. For more on the confrontation see May 2018b.

[36] Tiesenhausen's Russian translation misread al-Mansūrī's description as a reference to Krakow and thus conflated the two campaigns, but later scholars have corrected this reading. See Hautala 2016: 491.

[37] Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 124: 'He [Töde-Möngke] was ruler for awhile, and then the sons of Möngke-Temür, Alghu and Toghrīl, and the sons of Tartu (who was the eldest son of Toqoqan), namely Töle-Buqa and Könchek, deposed him from the Khanate on the pretext that he was insane, and [they] themselves ruled jointly for 5 years.'

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give the initiative to Tele-Buqa, as the *Galician-Volynian Chronicle* has Tele-Buqa order Nogai to take part (Perfecky 1973; 96).

The Polish campaign ended with Tele-Buqa withdrawing early and without victories (Długosz 1997: 229–230; Perfecky 96–98; Hautala 2017: 371; Jackson: 2018; Szőcs 2010: 32–34). But his military dreams did not end. Soon after his return, Tele-Buqa reopened the frontier with the Ilkhans, attacking the Caucasian territory his predecessors failed to wrest from Hülegü's heirs. Unfortunately for the new khan, here too his efforts failed, as did his follow up attack in 1290 (Rashiduddin 1998: 356, 563, 569; Amitai-Preiss 1995: 89; Mirgaleyev 2017: 363; Pochekaev 2017: 231; Spuler 1965: 70). The repeated failures of his military ventures, coupled with his illegitimacy from taking the throne through a coup, may have made it seem Tele-Buqa lacked a mandate from Heaven for his rule. Dogged by whispers of his ill-fortune imagined or real, and pushed to the edge by the great failure of the 1290 Caucasian campaign, a panicking Tele-Buqa decided to strike first at perceived rivals for the throne: prince Toqta and Nogai, who he had blamed for his military failures in Europe. It was this effort to attack Toqta and Nogai which ultimately cost Tele-Buqa and his allies their lives in 1291. Altogether, these military ventures appear as a distinct, aggressive policy of Tele-Buqa which contrasted greatly with Töde-Möngke's known actions and supports the argument that Nogai was not the master of either man.

### 3.4 Control over Toqta?

Generally, scholarship has Toqta appear as Nogai's puppet, carrying out his will but chafing under his orders, leading to Toqta dramatically overthrowing Nogai by the end of the decade.[38] As has been shown, the war between Toqta and Nogai was not a matter of the former seeking to overthrow the latter. I do not believe the traditional image describes their actual relationship even before the outbreak of war; rather, Nogai expected favours and assistance from Toqta, but did not see himself as the true master of the khanate.

It is apparent from the primary sources that Nogai's full attention over the early 1290s was not over the Golden Horde itself, but along the Danube frontier where he had spent the last twenty years. After assisting Toqta to the throne in 1291, Nogai returned to his *ordu* in southeastern Europe, where he undertook a rush of activity. He attacked and intervened in the banates along the Danube, in Bulgaria, Serbia, and possibly took part in attacks in Poland in 1292–93. By 1293, Nogai was the master of the lower Danube east of the Iron Gates (Ciocîltan 2012: 257–258; Lippard 2018: 225; Pachymeres 1999: Part 3, IX.26; Uzelac 2017a: 513; Uzelac 2018: 271–283; Uzelac 2017b: 383–384; Uzelac 2011: 11, 13–14; Vásáry 2005: 88–89, 104–105, 107). At best, Nogai could only have split his attention part time between these actions in Europe and in the Golden Horde, which would have left Toqta to his own devices. Much like *tammachi* Baiju seeing the Caucasian pastures as *his* territory after years stationed there, I suspect Nogai had by the 1290s become quite possessive over his Danube territory and was more concerned over protecting and securing his

[38] Ciocîltan (2012: 251) has Toqta 'subject' to Nogai. Pochekaev (2017: 231) wrote 'For several year[s] the new khan demonstrated complete obedience to Nogai's orders, which mostly consisted of eliminating public officials and tribal leaders in the Golden Horde whom [Nogai] regarded as his enemies.' Saunders (1971: 162), during the reign of Toqta, 'within and without [the Golden Horde], the great viceroy [Nogai] was treated as the real Khan.'

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place there than ever exercising authority over the Golden Horde (Hope 2016: 96; Yıldız 2020: 45, 47).

Meanwhile, Toqta in both Rus' sources and Rashīd al-Dīn took major actions with no mention of Nogai's involvement. In 1293 when conflict once again broke out between Dmitri and Andrei Aleksandrovich, Andrei and a group of Rus' princes went to Toqta for assistance. Toqta sent his brother Tudan with a large army, and wrought a path of devastation across the principalities, taking 14 cities and forcing Dmitri to flee (Zenkovsky 1986a: 81–83; Michell and Forbes 1914: 111–112).[39] No mention is made of Nogai, and there is no indication that Dmitri fled to Nogai as he had in the 1280s. If Dmitri was still 'Nogai's candidate,' this did not affect Tudan's campaign, despite scholarship often identifying this period as the height of Nogai's power. In spring 1294, Rashīd al-Dīn records that Toqta reached a peace agreement with the Ilkhan Geikhatu (r.1291–1295) ending the war restarted by Tele-Buqa Khan (Rashiduddin 1998: 578). Nogai is not mentioned as taking part. As far as I am aware, Nogai's only recorded diplomatic involvement during the first years of Toqta's reign was in his local sphere-of-influence in Europe.

Toqta did act with great respect to Nogai though, and carried out some of his demands, as per the agreement Rashīd al-Dīn records. In 1293, according to Baybars al-Mansūrī, Nogai sent one of his wives, Yaylaq Khatun, to Toqta with a list of over 20 emirs who had sided against them during the 1291 coup. Toqta promptly executed them, to Nogai's relief. Al-Mansūrī records further unspecified murders of 'Tatars' undertaken on Nogai's insistence through 1294 as well, likely surviving allies of the late Tele-Buqa. These demands went both ways, as Toqta in 1294 asked Nogai to kill Jijek-Khatun, a widow of Möngke-Temür Khan, and some of her supporters (Cook 2020: 361–362; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 108–109, 157–158, 383; Uzelac 2015: 232). These reprisals, which Toqta had a shared interest in carrying out, seem to be the extent of effective cooperation between them. Ibn Khaldūn indicates Nogai grew haughty after commanding the khan to carry out his orders, and both Marco Polo and Rashīd al-Dīn have Nogai spurn Toqta's embassies (Rashiduddin 1998: 357; Rashīd al-Dīn 1971: 126; Polo/Moule 1903: 484–485; Polo/Yule 1903: 497; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 109, 383). This further supports Nogai not dominating previous khans, for once he had a role of greater influence, he swiftly grew overconfident. Rather than a wily statesman deftly handling Toqta, Nogai was more concerned with his personal autonomy and removing old enemies. When Toqta made demands of Nogai in turn, the old commander felt comfortable enough to ignore them. The khanmaker ideas may find their origin in these last years, in the final stage of Nogai's career when he began to openly defy the khan and act provocatively.

## 4. CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt Nogai had influence and prominence within the Golden Horde. As early as the 1260s he was one of the senior military figures of the khanate, and from the 1280s until his death he was the *aqa*, the eldest member of the Jochid lineage. From this position he was consulted on important matters of state and the Jochid family, and indeed this was often the role he had, be it in the release of Qubilai Qa'an's captive son Nomukhan in 1283, or when the anticipation of

[39] Dmitri died the next year, his power broken. Uzelac cites this campaign as the eradication of Nogai's influence in the Rus' Principalities. See Uzelac 2015: 233.

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his advice was used to trick Tele-Buqa into his camp unarmed (Rashiduddin 1998: 432; Tiesenhausen 2005(1884): 107). I believe his initial appointment as *tammachi* to the lower Danube, and his later status as *aqa*, account sufficiently for the power he wielded within the Golden Horde and on its frontiers as depicted in the primary sources. The sources do not support the excessively powerful portrayal of the secondary literature/scholarship. The khans relied on Nogai for military and advisory roles, and most of Nogai's known actions fall neatly into these categories. While often accused of undermining the khans or taking control of diplomatic matters, there is little evidence to support claims that Nogai's efforts were done without the knowledge or approval of the Jochid khan.

Considering this, how can we explain the scholarship's insistence on Nogai as the khanmaker? My belief in Veselovskij's influence has been noted above. But the coup and civil war which Nogai did take part in may have appeared enough evidence to portray him as a figure like Mamai or Edigü, true khanmakers of the Golden Horde in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Nogai is portrayed as the forerunner, or even ancestor, to Mamai and Edigü, a connection fueled by the fact that Edigü's sons established the Nogai Horde (May 2018a: 308–309; Mirgaleyev 2017: 690–691; Vásáry 2009: 84; Vernadsky 1953: 246, 282). A desire to portray Nogai as the first of the great Jochid khanmakers requires forcing every event of his life to be filtered through this lens. As I have demonstrated here, the sources give Nogai limited influence over the khans and the successions. In contrast, the sources are extremely unambiguous on how Mamai and Edigü minimized and removed khans (Ibn Arabshah 1936: 83–87; Zenkovsky 1986a: 188, 207, 259, 261, 264–266; Zenkovsky 1986b: 117–118, 166). Presumably, more than a few scholars transposed the influence of Mamai and Edigü back to Nogai. Coupled with the common belief that Nogai's family line was excluded from power due to concubine status, Nogai like Mamai and Edigü would have needed to act through puppet khans in order to maintain influence. But as Halperin (2020: 34–35) has noted, we have no information on Nogai's female ancestors, and cannot state if he was, or was not, considered a legitimate Chinggisid. Based on the current evidence, it seems Nogai was a full Jochid prince, and not forced to act in the role of a 'great emir,' like Mamai, Edigü or Tamerlane did.

The late thirteenth century Golden Horde has generally been viewed in modern scholarship as being dominated by Nogai the khanmaker; when we remove this image, we are provided an opportunity to totally reevaluate the politics and even foreign relations of the Jochid *ulus* and reassess how the reigns of the khans Töde-Möngke, Tele-Buqa and Toqta have been understood.

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