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NOGAI AND THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE JOCHID ULUS

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Nogai’s military command, authority in the Lower Danube region, and participation in Tokhta’s accession have led scholars to describe him as an independent ruler or a ‘khanmaker.’ These interpretations sometimes combine events from different decades and overlook changes in his relations with successive khans. *Goals and objectives.* This article examines Nogai’s role in the political history of the Ulus of Jochi from the early 1260s to the early fourteenth century. It traces the formation of his regional authority, reassesses his participation in the coup of 1291, and considers the causes of his conflict with Tokhta and defeat. The analysis compares accounts by Rashid al-Din, Baybars al-Mansuri, and al-Nuwayri in published Russian translations, distinguishing their explanations of events and the motives they attribute to participants. *Materials and methods.* This study utilizes texts from medieval manuscripts in Russian translation. The works are examined using comparative analysis. *Results.* Four phases are identified: military service under Berke in the Caucasus; the establishment of a territorial base on the Lower Danube; cooperation with Tokhta after 1291; and their subsequent war. Nogai’s decisive intervention in 1291 does not establish that he controlled earlier successions. His alliance with Tokhta enabled him to influence the khan’s decisions, but their positions remained unequal. Nogai’s initial military victory did not secure lasting support. Disputes over the advancement of his sons weakened relations with commanders who expected rewards, while defections increased Tokhta’s military strength.

Conclusion. Nogai extended Jochid influence in the Balkans and used regional resources to intervene in the struggle for supreme power. His ancestry and military strength made him a possible contender for the throne, but the sources examined do not establish a clear attempt to take it. His defeat and the subsequent disputes among his heirs show that authority depended on continued support from princes and commanders. Neither military success nor dynastic descent alone ensured that his position could be preserved and transmitted to the next generation.

Keywords: Nogai; Ulus of Jochi; Golden Horde; Jochid dynasty; political authority

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НОҒАЙ ЖӘНЕ ЖОШЫ ҰЛЫСЫНЫҢ САЯСИ ТАРИХЫ

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Аңдатпа. *Kіріспе.* Ноғайдың әскери қолбасшылығы, Төменгі Дунай өңіріндегі билігі және Тоқтаның таққа отыруына қатысуы зерттеушілердің оны дербес билеуші немесе «хандарды таққа отырғызушы» ретінде сипаттауына негіз болды. Мұндай түсіндірулер әртүрлі онжылдықтардағы оқиғаларды біріктіріп, оның бірінен кейін бірі билік құрған хандармен қарым-қатынасының өзгеруін ескермейді. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Мақалада 1260-жылдардың басынан XIV ғасырдың басына дейінгі кезеңдегі Ноғайдың Жошы ұлысының саяси тарихындағы рөлі қарастырылады. Оның аймақтық билігінің қалыптасуы, 1291 жылғы төңкеріске қатысуы, Тоқтамен қақтығысының және кейінгі жеңілісінің себептері талданады. Зерттеу Рашид ад-Дин, Бейбарыс әл-Мансури және ән-Нувайри шығармаларының жарияланған орысша аудармаларындағы мәліметтерді салыстыруға негізделген. Авторлардың оқиғаларды түсіндіруі және олардың қатысушыларға телитін ниеттері ажыратылады. Деректерді хронологиялық ретпен қарастыру Ноғайдың күшеюіне ықпал еткен жағдайларды оның хандардан үнемі үстем болғаны туралы пайымдаулардан бөлек бағалауға мүмкіндік береді. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Жұмыста ортағасырлық қолжазбалардың орыс тіліндегі аудармалары пайдаланылады. Деректер салыстырмалы талдау әдісімен зерттеледі. *Нәтижелер.* Төрт кезең ажыратылды: Берке тұсында Кавказдағы әскери қызметі; Төменгі Дунайда аумақтық тірегінің қалыптасуы; 1291 жылдан кейін Тоқтамен ынтымақтастығы; кейінгі өзара соғысы. Ноғайдың 1291 жылғы төңкерістегі шешуші рөлі оның бұған дейінгі тақ мұрагерлігін де бақылағанын дәлелдемейді. Тоқтамен одағы ханның шешімдеріне ықпал етуге мүмкіндік бергенімен, олардың мәртебесі тең болған жоқ. Ноғайдың әскери жеңісі одақтастарының тұрақты қолдауын қамтамасыз ете алмады. Ұлдарының билігінің күшеюі сыйақы күткен қолбасшылармен келіспеушіліктер туғызды, ал жақтастарының қарсы жаққа өтуі Тоқтаның әскерін күшейтті. Бұл оқиғалар Ноғайдың әлсіреуін оның төңірегіндегі даулармен байланыстыруға мүмкіндік береді. Оларды түсіндіру үшін дербес мемлекет құруға бағытталған жоспардың болғанын алдын ала қабылдау қажет емес. Сонымен қатар деректер әрбір қолбасшының қарсы жаққа өтуі соғыстың нәтижесіне қаншалықты әсер еткенін анықтауға жеткіліксіз.

Қорытынды. Ноғай Балқандағы Жошы әулетінің ықпалын кеңейтіп, аймақтық ресурстарын жоғарғы билік үшін күреске араласуға пайдаланды. Әулеттік тегі мен әскери күші оны хан

тағына ықтимал үміткер етті, бірақ қарастырылған деректер оның тақты иеленуге нақты әрекет жасағанын дәлелдемейді. Ноғайдың жеңілісі мен мұрагерлері арасындағы алауыздықтар оның билігі әулет өкілдері мен қолбасшылардың тұрақты қолдауына тәуелді болғанын көрсетеді. Әскери табыс та, әулетке тиесілік те өздігінен оның орнын сақтап, билігін келесі ұрпаққа беруге кепіл бола алмады.

Түйін сөздер: Ноғай, Жошы ұлысы, Алтын Орда, Жошы әулеті, саяси билік

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НОГАЙ И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ ИСТОРИЯ УЛУСА ДЖУЧИ

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Военное командование Ногая, его власть в Нижнем Подунавье и участие в возведении Токты на престол стали основанием для оценок его как самостоятельного правителя или «делателя ханов». Подобные интерпретации иногда объединяют события разных десятилетий и не учитывают изменения его отношений с правившими ханами. *Цель и задачи.* Статья посвящена роли Ногая в политической истории Улуса Джучи с начала 1260-х годов до начала XIV века. Рассматриваются формирование его региональной власти, участие в перевороте 1291 года, причины конфликта с Токтой и последующего поражения. Исследование основано на сопоставлении сообщений Рашид ад-Дина, Бейбарса аль-Мансури и ан-Нувайри в опубликованных русских переводах. Разграничиваются объяснения событий, предлагаемые этими авторами, и мотивы, которые они приписывают участникам. Последовательное рассмотрение свидетельств позволяет отделить обстоятельства возвышения Ногая от позднейших представлений о постоянном характере его превосходства над ханами. *Материалы и методы.* В работе используются тексты средневековых рукописей в русском переводе. Работы исследуются с применением компаративного анализа. *Результаты.* Выделены четыре этапа: военная служба при Берке на Кавказе; формирование территориальной опоры в Нижнем Подунавье; сотрудничество с Токтой после 1291 года; последующая война между ними. Решающее участие Ногая в перевороте 1291 года не доказывает его контроля над предшествующими престолонаследиями. Союз с Токтой позволял ему влиять на решения хана, однако их положение оставалось неравным. Первая военная победа Ногая не обеспечила устойчивой поддержки союзников. Усиление его сыновей вызвало разногласия с военачальниками, рассчитывавшими на вознаграждение, а переходы сторонников Ногая к Токте укрепили войско последнего. Эти обстоятельства позволяют связать ослабление Ногая со спорами

внутри его окружения, не предполагая существования единого замысла создания независимого государства. *Заключение.* Ногай расширил влияние Джучидов на Балканах и использовал региональные ресурсы для участия в борьбе за верховную власть. Происхождение и военная сила делали его возможным претендентом на ханский престол, однако рассмотренные источники не подтверждают попытки его занять. Поражение Ногай и последующие распри среди наследников показывают зависимость его власти от постоянной поддержки царевичей и военачальников. Ни военный успех, ни принадлежность к династии сами по себе не обеспечивали сохранения его положения и передачи власти следующему поколению.

Ключевые слова: Ногай, Улус Джучи, Золотая Орда, династия Джучидов, политическая власть

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Introduction. Nogai's career raises questions about the relationship between the khan and other powerful Jochid princes. He commanded armies, established a territorial base on the Lower Danube, negotiated with neighboring rulers, and helped bring Tokhta to the throne in 1291. He later fought against the khan he had supported. These activities gave him considerable influence, but the extent of his authority varied between reigns. N. I. Veselovskiy's study brought together evidence of Nogai's military and political importance and helped shape subsequent interpretations of him as a rival to the khan (Veselovskiy, 1922: 1, 51).

The main question is how Nogai acquired this influence and what limited it. His service under Berke, his establishment in the Lower Danube region under Möngke-Temür, the overthrow of Tele-Buqa, and the conflict with Tokhta belonged to different political circumstances. His role in 1291 cannot therefore be used to explain his position throughout the preceding decades. Wilson's reassessment of the "khanmaker" interpretation has drawn attention to the lack of evidence that Nogai directed earlier successions (Wilson, 2022: 614–616).

This article examines Nogai's place in the political history of the Golden Horde from the early 1260s to the early fourteenth century. It traces the development of his territorial authority, considers his relations with successive khans, compares accounts of the events of 1291, and explains why his initial victory over Tokhta did not secure a lasting political advantage. It also considers what the evidence allows us to say about his prospects of becoming khan.

The study proceeds from the view that Nogai's power depended on military command, control of territory, seniority within the Jochid dynasty, and support from other princes and commanders. These sources of authority did not always reinforce one another. In particular, the advancement of his sons could conflict with the expectations of allies whose support he needed. Comparing accounts of these disputes helps explain both the extent of his influence and the difficulties of preserving it.

The chronological scope extends from Nogai's military service under Berke to the failure of his sons' attempts to preserve his position after his death. The study focuses on the Caucasian frontier, the Lower Danube and Dniester regions, Crimea, and the Balkans. Events in these regions are examined in relation to Nogai's changing position within the Ulus of Jochi.

Materials and Methods. The study draws primarily on the accounts of Rashid al-Din, Baybars al-Mansuri, and al-Nuwayri in published Russian translations. These include the Collection of Materials Relating to the History of the Golden Horde (hereafter SMIZO), volumes I and II, containing materials collected by V. G. Tizengauzen, and the separate edition of Rashid al-Din’s Compendium of Chronicles (Rashid al-Din, 1960: 83–87; SMIZO, 1884: 107–113, 156–159; SMIZO, 1941: 69–72). Rashid al-Din’s narrative in these two editions is treated as one source in different translations. Similarities between the Arabic accounts are examined without assuming that their agreement provides independent corroboration. Evidence concerning Rus’ and the Balkans is discussed through the studies of A. A. Gorskiy, I. Vásáry, and A. Uzelac, distinguishing their interpretations from the medieval testimony they cite (Gorskiy, 2002; Vásáry, 2005; Uzelac, 2017).

The analysis follows the chronology of Nogai’s career and compares explanations of particular events. It examines who requested assistance, commanded troops, protected defecting emirs, and benefited from changes in allegiance. These actions provide a basis for assessing how Nogai’s influence changed over time. Differences between the narratives are considered in relation to their authors’ political settings and purposes, including Rashid al-Din’s favorable portrayal of Ghazan. Particular attention is paid to the distinction between motives stated in the sources and explanations proposed by modern historians.

The individuals discussed in the accounts are also summarized in a table recording their relationship to Nogai, their actions, and any reported changes of allegiance.

The terms ‘khanmaker’ and ‘co-rule’ are treated as modern interpretations whose applicability must be assessed for each period. Titles and expressions of seniority are examined in the context of the published translations, with no claim to a philological analysis of the original texts. Where the sources do not explain motives or define political arrangements, the conclusions are limited to the actions they record.

Discussion. N. I. Veselovskiy brought together accounts of Nogai’s military career, diplomacy, and conflict with Tokhta. His study helped establish the interpretation of Nogai as a rival to the reigning khan (Veselovskiy, 1922). Later research has reconsidered how far Nogai’s authority extended beyond his western territories.

A. A. Porsin questioned whether Nogai had inherited his Lower Danube possessions. He dated Nogai’s establishment there to around 1271–1272 and connected it with changes on the Caucasian frontier under Möngke-Temür (Porsin, 2010: 158–162). In his study of the 1290s, Porsin argued that Nogai’s assumption of the khanal title and attempt to establish a dynasty cost him the support of important allies (Porsin, 2014: 29–37). This interpretation raises a question: do the narrative accounts connect these defections with a claim to the khanate, or with disputes over power within Nogai’s following?

J. R. Wilson challenged the description of Nogai as a permanent “khanmaker.” He found insufficient evidence that Nogai directed the successions before 1291 or consistently controlled the reigning khans. Wilson explained his influence through military command and seniority within the Jochid dynasty. He also viewed the alliance with Tokhta as an agreement against a common opponent, followed by disagreements over what each participant owed the other (Wilson, 2022: 609–633). The present study follows Wilson on these points and examines more closely what the accounts of particular disputes reveal about Nogai’s authority.

Two episodes show both his influence and its limits. Baybars al-Mansuri records that Tokhta ordered executions at Nogai’s request, while Rashid al-Din describes the khan’s later refusal to surrender Saljiday (SMIZO, 1884: 108–109; Rashid al-Din, 1960: 84). These accounts concern different circumstances, but together they caution against treating Tokhta’s initial compliance as permanent submission. The term “co-rule” can describe their cooperation after 1291 only if it preserves this distinction.

The account of Qurmishi’s sons also allows a more specific explanation of Nogai’s loss of support. Baybars al-Mansuri connects their break with Nogai to the advancement of his sons and their own unmet expectations after victory (SMIZO, 1884: 112–113). The passage identifies a dispute over the distribution of power; it does not explicitly connect their actions with Nogai’s adoption of the

khanal title. This does not disprove Porsin's interpretation, but it limits what this account can establish. The article therefore explains these defections through the grievances recorded in the narrative, without assuming that the commanders were rejecting a new dynasty.

Results. Nogai was a son of Tatar, a grandson of Buval, and a great-grandson of Jochi (SMIZO, 1941: 57). His descent placed him within the ruling dynasty, but his political position also depended on military command and support among other Jochid princes and commanders. His ancestry alone therefore does not explain either the extent of his influence or his failure to become khan.

Nogai first appears in the sources as a military commander serving Khan Berke in the war against Hülegü in the early 1260s. He commanded Jochid forces in the Caucasus, where he suffered defeats and lost an eye. These campaigns established his military standing, but they do not show that he already held the political influence he would exercise in the 1290s. As Wilson notes, there is no clear evidence that Nogai influenced Möngke-Temür's accession after Berke's death in 1266 (Wilson, 2022: 613).

A. A. Porsin dates Nogai's arrival in the Prut–Dniester region to around 1271–1272 and connects it with the peace between the Jochid ulus and the Ilkhanate. He suggests that Nogai's transfer from the Caucasus formed part of a redistribution of territories under Möngke-Temür. This remains a reconstruction, but it offers an explanation for Nogai's presence in the region without assuming that these lands had belonged to his family since the western conquests (Porsin, 2010: 159–162).

The Lower Danube gave Nogai a base for military intervention and negotiations with neighbouring rulers. His growing influence in the Balkans, however, does not by itself establish that he ruled independently of the khan. His relations with Byzantium and Bulgaria must therefore be considered alongside his obligations to the Jochid ruler.

Nogai's marriage to Euphrosyne, a daughter of Michael VIII Palaiologos, strengthened his ties with Byzantium. His position in Balkan politics is also evident in the appeals of the rival Bulgarian claimants Ivaylo and Ivan Asen III, who both sought his support after George Terter's accession. According to Pachymeres, as discussed by Porsin, Nogai received both claimants but eventually ordered Ivaylo's execution. Euphrosyne intervened to protect Ivan Asen III (Porsin, 2010: 163–164).

These events show Nogai's influence over Bulgarian affairs, although the extent of his freedom to act remains uncertain. Porsin suggests that his delay in supporting either claimant reflected the need to await Möngke-Temür's decision (Porsin, 2010: 164–165). This interpretation is plausible, but the evidence does not establish that Nogai acted on a specific instruction from the khan.

By the end of the 1280s, Nogai's position rested on his military command, his territorial base in the Lower Danube region, and his relations with neighboring rulers. These resources enabled him to intervene in the succession struggle of 1291. His earlier activities, however, do not establish that he already controlled the khan's decisions or governed a separate state. The extent of his authority must be assessed for each reign.

Nogai in the System of Supreme Power

Nogai's role in the successions before 1291 remains uncertain. As Wilson notes, neither Rashid al-Din nor the Mamluk accounts identify him as responsible for Töde-Möngke's accession or removal. Their accounts of the latter event differ: the Mamluk authors describe an abdication, while Rashid al-Din attributes the deposition to Tele-Buqa and his princely allies. Neither version provides grounds for treating Nogai as the organizer of the succession (Wilson, 2022: 614–616).

Nogai nevertheless held a senior position within the dynasty. Wilson draws attention to a letter of 1283 from Ilkhan Ahmad Tegüder to Sultan Qalawun that refers to him as *aqā*, literally "elder brother," a respectful form of address for senior men and commanders (Wilson, 2022: 614). This designation helps explain why other princes sought his support, but it did not give him a formal right to appoint or remove khans.

Nogai participated in the campaigns against Hungary in 1285 and Poland in 1287–1288 alongside Tele-Buqa. His involvement does not establish that he initiated either campaign. Wilson attributes the initiative to Tele-Buqa and interprets these expeditions as attempts to strengthen his

position through military success. The heavy losses suffered by Tele-Buqa's forces during the retreat from Hungary worsened his relations with Nogai (Wilson, 2022: 629–631).

The coup of 1291 and the limits of Nogai's influence

The accounts of Tokhta's accession differ in the emphasis they place on Nogai's role. In Tizengauzen's translation of Baybars al-Mansuri, Nogai entrusts the kingdom to Tokhta and establishes him in power. Al-Nuwayri likewise attributes Tokhta's enthronement to Nogai and describes his intervention in arranging the new ruler's relations with his brothers (SMIZO, 1884: 108, 157). These passages provide clear evidence of Nogai's involvement in the succession of 1291. They do not, however, establish a permanent prerogative to appoint khans. The close correspondence between the two Arabic accounts also requires caution: their agreement cannot be treated as two independent confirmations without examining their textual relationship.

Rashid al-Din presents the alliance through Tokhta's appeal for protection. Threatened by his relatives, Tokhta approaches Nogai as the senior prince and promises obedience in return for his assistance. Nogai invokes his service to earlier rulers and his responsibility to restore agreement within the ulus, while secretly preparing the encounter that leads to the death of Tele-Buqa and his allies. Tokhta participates with troops of his own and carries out the killing of the captured princes (Rashid al-Din, 1960: 83–84). The account therefore gives both men an active role, although they contribute different resources: Nogai provides protection, contacts, and the means to assemble the opposing princes; Tokhta brings an armed following and a claim to the throne.

The subsequent relationship cannot be described adequately as Tokhta's complete subordination. Baybars al-Mansuri records that Nogai sent his wife to request the removal of emirs who had supported Tele-Buqa against him. Tokhta received her and ordered the executions (SMIZO, 1884: 108–109). This episode demonstrates Nogai's influence over decisions at the khan's court. Rashid al-Din, however, also records a limit to that influence. When Nogai later demanded action against Saljiday-gurgen, Tokhta refused, defending Saljiday as an elder emir who had acted as a father and guardian to him (Rashid al-Din, 1960: 84; SMIZO, 1941: 70). Nogai could invoke the obligations created by his earlier assistance, but the khan did not accept every demand arising from them.

Baybars al-Mansuri reports that Tokhta granted Crimea to Nogai. Porsin interprets this as an arrangement that gave Nogai access to part of the peninsula's revenues following Tokhta's accession (Porsin, 2014: 31). The report does not define the extent of Nogai's administrative authority or establish that Crimea became his unrestricted hereditary possession.

Nogai's influence in the Balkans expanded in the early 1290s. He supported Smilets's accession to the Bulgarian throne and Shishman's rule in Vidin. After conflict with forces associated with Nogai, the Serbian king Stefan Uroš II Milutin reached an agreement with him and sent his son Stefan, accompanied by Serbian nobles, to his court (Porsin, 2014: 31–32). These arrangements extended Nogai's influence beyond his Lower Danube territories. They do not, however, establish that Bulgaria and Serbia became part of a separate state under his rule.

The term "co-rule" can describe the cooperation between Nogai and Tokhta after 1291, provided that their different positions are recognised. Tokhta held the title of khan, while Nogai retained his western territories and could press the new ruler to act against their opponents. Baybars al-Mansuri's account of the executions requested by Nogai shows this influence, although the orders were issued by Tokhta (SMIZO, 1884: 108–109). Their cooperation depended on continued agreement over particular decisions. It did not give Nogai a recognised share of the khan's title or a permanent right to direct him.

The Conflict with Tokhta and the Reconfiguration of the Ulus

The sources differ in their accounts of the conflict's origins. Rashid al-Din emphasizes the marriage of Nogai's daughter Qabaq to Saljiday's son Yaylaq, their religious disagreements, and Nogai's unsuccessful demands against Saljiday. Baybars al-Mansuri gives greater prominence to disputes within Nogai's household and his protection of emirs who had fled from Tokhta. One of these men, Taz, became Nogai's son-in-law. Tokhta demanded their return, but Nogai refused (SMIZO, 1884: 109–110; SMIZO, 1941: 70–71). These disputes show how family ties affected each ruler's choice of whom to protect.

Baybars al-Mansuri and al-Nuwayri date the first battle to 697 AH (1297–1298). Both describe Tokhta’s defeat and the flight of his troops towards the Don. Nogai ordered his men not to pursue the fugitives or attack the wounded and returned with booty and prisoners (SMIZO, 1884: 110–111, 159). His victory did not end the war. The accounts record his decision to halt the pursuit but do not explain it.

Rashid al-Din relates that, after this defeat, Tokhta summoned Tama-Tokhta, son of Balagha, who had long guarded Derbent (SMIZO, 1941: 71). The account identifies him with the frontier forces called upon by Tokhta, not with an army sent by the Ilkhanate. Ghazan’s role is described separately: Nogai repeatedly requested his assistance, and Tokhta also sent envoys, but the Ilkhan declined to intervene (SMIZO, 1941: 72). Rashid al-Din presents this refusal as honourable conduct, consistent with his favorable portrayal of Ghazan.

Nogai’s victory also failed to secure the continued support of his commanders. Baybars al-Mansuri describes Abaji, Qarajin, and Yangi, the sons of Qurmishi, as powerful allies who had supported him against Tokhta. After the victory, Nogai’s sons gained authority, while the sons of Qurmishi did not receive what they had expected. They broke with Nogai and sought to join Tokhta. Attempts at reconciliation ended with Nogai’s sons killing Abaji and Qarajin, while Yangi escaped (SMIZO, 1884: 112–113). This account links the loss of their support to a dispute over rewards and the growing power of Nogai’s immediate family.

In Crimea, the collection of tribute led to further violence. Baybars al-Mansuri reports that Nogai sent his grandson Aqtaji to collect tribute after defeating Tokhta. Aqtaji was killed in Caffa. Nogai then sent an army against Caffa and other Crimean towns, where it seized property and took prisoners, including merchants (SMIZO, 1884: 111–112). The account connects the campaign with Aqtaji’s death but does not establish how it affected support for Nogai among merchants or local rulers.

Al-Nuwayri dates the second battle to 699 AH (1299–1300) and places it at Kukanlyk. He connects Tokhta’s renewed offensive with the arrival of commanders who had abandoned Nogai and brought their troops into the khan’s service (SMIZO, 1884: 159). Baybars al-Mansuri also records defections before the final campaign (SMIZO, 1884: 113). Rashid al-Din describes Nogai’s defeat and death, followed by Tokhta’s return to Sarai (SMIZO, 1941: 72). The transfer of troops to Tokhta helps explain the reversal of Nogai’s fortunes, although the accounts do not allow the contribution of each commander to be determined.

Nogai’s sons failed to preserve his territories under a single authority. After his death, disputes within the family were followed by fighting between his son Chaka and his former commanders Taz and Tunguz. The commanders appealed to Tokhta, who sent troops against Chaka. Tokhta subsequently redistributed Nogai’s former territories, while another son, Turai, unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow him (Porsin, 2014: 36–37). Nogai’s heirs thus retained followers, but family descent alone could not secure the support needed to maintain his position.

The following table summarizes the family connections and changes of allegiance discussed above. Dates are given only as precisely as the cited accounts allow.

Table 1. Relatives and commanders associated with Nogai in the accounts examined

Person	Relationship to Nogai	Action or change of allegiance	Chronology
Qabaq and Yaylaq	Nogai’s daughter and her husband, Saljiday’s son	Their marital and religious disagreements led Nogai to make demands against Saljiday, contributing to the dispute with Tokhta in Rashid al-Din’s account.	Before the first battle with Tokhta
Taz	Emir who sought Nogai’s protection and became his son-in-law	Fled from Tokhta to Nogai; after Nogai’s death, opposed Chaka and sought Tokhta’s	Before the war; again after Nogai’s death

		assistance.	
Abaji and Qarajin	Sons of Qurmishi; military allies of Nogai	Broke with Nogai after their expectations were not met and his sons gained authority. They were subsequently killed by Nogai's sons during attempts at reconciliation.	After Nogai's first victory
Yangi	Son of Qurmishi; military ally of Nogai	Broke with Nogai alongside his brothers but escaped the violence in which they were killed.	After Nogai's first victory
Aqtaji	Nogai's grandson through a daughter	Was sent to collect tribute in Crimea and was killed in Caffa, prompting Nogai's retaliatory campaign.	After Nogai's first victory
Chaka	Nogai's son	Claimed his father's territories, fought opponents within Nogai's former following, and was defeated after Tokhta intervened.	After Nogai's death
Teka	Nogai's son	Sought to join Tokhta but was killed by Chaka's men.	After Nogai's death
Tunguz	Commander formerly associated with Nogai	Opposed Chaka alongside Taz and appealed to Tokhta for military assistance.	After Nogai's death
Turai	Nogai's son	Joined a failed plot to replace Tokhta with the khan's brother Sarai-Buqa.	1301–1302

Comparison with Mamai and Edige helps distinguish military influence from dynastic standing. Mamai came from the Qiyat aristocracy and exercised power as beklerbeg under the Chinggisid khan Abdallah, whom he had raised to the throne (Pochekaev, 2012: 155–159). Edige, a Manghit emir, supported Timur-Qutlugh and later promoted other khans loyal to him (Izmailov, 2024: 860–861). Both could influence succession without themselves belonging to the ruling dynasty. Nogai differed from them in being a Jochid prince whose seniority carried weight within that dynasty. The three careers therefore should not be treated as examples of an identical political position. They nevertheless show that military command and support for a khan could give a powerful figure considerable influence over government. Nogai's ancestry added to that influence, but did not free him from dependence on allies or ensure that his sons would retain their support.

Tokhta's victory ended Nogai's challenge and enabled the khan to redistribute his former territories. It does not establish that the khan's authority became absolute or that regional autonomy disappeared. Nogai's defeat and the disputes among his heirs show how difficult it was to preserve his power once commanders withdrew their support. His military strength and standing within the dynasty had sustained his influence for decades, but his sons could not inherit the agreements on which that influence depended.

Conclusion. Nogai played a major role in the political history of the Golden Horde by extending Jochid influence in the Balkans and using his western territorial base to intervene in the struggle for the khan's throne. His position changed over time. Military service under Berke was followed by the establishment of authority in the Lower Danube region, participation in the overthrow of Tele-Buqa in 1291, and finally war with Tokhta. These four phases should be distinguished when assessing the extent of his power.

The description of Nogai as a 'khanmaker' applies most clearly to the events of 1291. The evidence does not establish that he directed earlier successions. His support helped Tokhta gain the throne, but their subsequent cooperation depended on agreements that neither side was bound to accept indefinitely. Nogai could influence the khan's decisions without holding the same title or possessing a recognised right to command him.

Could Nogai have become khan himself? His Jochid descent and military resources made him a possible contender, but the sources examined here do not establish a clear attempt to take the central throne. His victory over Tokhta demonstrated his military strength; it did not secure wider recognition of his authority. Commanders who had supported him later withdrew their allegiance, and disputes over the advancement of his sons weakened his following. Becoming khan would have required support beyond the alliances that had sustained his regional power. Whether he could have obtained it remains uncertain.

Nogai's defeat therefore cannot be explained by ancestry or military weakness alone. Tokhta survived the first battle, gained additional troops, and benefited from divisions among his opponent's supporters. After Nogai's death, similar disputes prevented his sons from preserving his position. Nogai had shown how far a senior Jochid prince could expand his authority through command, territory, and alliances. The failure of his heirs showed the difficulty of passing that authority to the next generation.

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