

An Empire Within an Empire? Ethnic and Religious Realities in the Lands of Nogai (c.1270-1300)

ALEKSANDAR UZELAC¹



The paper focuses on the internal conditions of the lands of Nogai, a side member of the Juchid lineage, stretching at the height of his power from the basin of the Lower Dnieper in the east to the western fringes of the Wallachian plains. The Muslim, Latin, Byzantine, and Slavic contemporaries provide enough data for the critical assessment of the ethnic, religious, and demographic realities in Nogai's Ulus. His territories included the heterogeneous urban communities in the Danube Delta and the northern Black Sea coast, and also the vast steppe areas inhabited by the descendants of Cumans, Alans and other pre-Mongol populations. Mongol newcomers were insignificant in numbers. Although Nogai formally converted to Islam, the presence of Catholic and Orthodox missionaries, Muslims, as well as a small Buddhist community, are documented in his lands. Nogai's Ulus represented a heterogeneous multi-ethnic and multi-confessional space, united by his charisma and power, as well as Chinggisid ideology.

During the last three decades of the 13th century, undoubtedly the most influential person in the Juchid ulus (the Golden Horde) was Nogai (c.1240-1299/1300), a member of the side branch of the ruling lineage.² His turbulent career and his war against khan Tokhta (1291-1312) became an object of numerous studies, but in most of them, the internal conditions in the Pontic steppes during Nogai's era have been studied marginally. Considering that this topic has not been systematically investigated so far, the aim of this article

¹ Institute of History, Belgrade

² Nogai's genealogy (he was a son of Tatar, grandson of Buval, grand-grandson of Juchi and his concubine Karachin-khatun) was recorded, with small mutual discrepancies, in Arabic and Persian sources: V. G. Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov, otnosiashchikhsia k istorii Zolotij Ordy*, T. I: *Izvlecheniia iz arabskikh istochnikov*, Sankt-Peterburg 1884, 109 (*Baybars al-Manşūrī*); Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, II, ed. Iu. P. Verkhovskii and B. I. Pankratov, Moskva-Leningrad, 75-76; *Istoriia Kazakhstana v persidskikh istochnikakh*. T. III: *Mu'izz al-Ansab*, ed. Sh. H. Vohidov et al., Almaty 2006, 43.

is to shed light on it, and to provide a preliminary overview of the ethnic and religious realities in his domains.

Before turning our attention to the main issues of this article, some remarks need to be made about the nature and background of Nogai's power. It was frequently thought that his settlement in the Pontic steppes in 1266-70 was an independent action. However, according to the reports of two contemporaries and our most important sources for Nogai's career, the Mamluk historian *Baybars al-Manṣūrī* (c.1247-1325) and the Byzantine author Georgios Pachymeres (c.1242-1310), Nogai's establishment in the region was sanctioned by the khan *Möngke Temür* (1266-1282) and his influential wife Jijak (Chichek)-khatun.³ Nogai enjoyed a complex position in the political hierarchy of the Golden Horde. He was a *beylerbey* or *karachi-bey*,⁴ also head of 'the right wing' of the Golden Horde,⁵ and following the death of the khan *Möngke Temür* in 1282 he emerged as *āqā*, or the elder of the Juchid lineage.⁶ Although he gradually managed to achieve his *de facto* independent status towards the khans in Sarai, Nogai's lands remained an inseparable part of the Golden Horde. In historiography, he was frequently characterised as a 'kingmaker', or a grey eminence, but the sources show that Nogai did not personally participate in the various political conspiracies and coups surrounding the frequent changes on the Juchid throne, except in one case. Namely, Nogai played a prominent role only in the demise of khan *Töle-Bugha* (1287-1291) and the ascendance of his successor Tokhta in 1291.⁷ It was a bitter irony that the enthronement of his young protege carried the seeds of Nogai's ultimate downfall.

The precise borders of Nogai's domains are impossible to determine, a fact that owes more to the nature of the territorial division within the Golden Horde than to the lack of sources. Nogai certainly controlled the regions

³ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 109 (*Baybars al-Manṣūrī*); Georges Pachymérès, *Relations Historiques*, II, ed. A. Failler, V. Laurent, Paris 1984, 444-445.

⁴ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 101 (*Baybars al-Manṣūrī*); U. Schamiloglu, "The Qarachi Beys of the Later Golden Horde. Notes on the Organization of the Mongol World Empire," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 4 (1984) 283-297; I. L. Izmailov, "Voisko Ulusa Dzhuchi vo vtoroi polovine XIII-XV vv: struktura komandovaniia, sposob komplektovaniia, chislennost' i roda voisk," In *Voennoe delo Zolotoi ordy: problemy i perspektivi izucheniia*, ed. I. M. Mirgaleev, Kazan' 2011, 24.

⁵ Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, II, 105; Pachymeres called Nogai the leader of 'The Western Tatars' (τοὺς δυτικούς Τοχάριους), in order to distinguish his subjects from the rest of the population of the Golden Horde, Georges Pachymérès, *Relations Historiques*, I, ed. A. Failler, V. Laurent, Paris 1984, 242-243.

⁶ With this title Nogai is attested only once, in a letter of Ilkhanid ruler Ahmad Tegüder (1282-84) to the Mamluk sultan in 1282/3, J. Pfeiffer, "Ahmad Tegüder's Second Letter to Qala'un (682/1283)," In: *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honour of John E. Woods*, ed. J. Pfeiffer, S. A. Quinn, E. Tucker, Wiesbaden 2006, 189.

⁷ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 106-108 (*Baybars al-Manṣūrī*); G. Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia*, New Haven 1953, 184-185; G. A. Fedorov-Davydov, *Obshchestvennyi stroi Zolotoi Ordy*, Moskva 1973, 72.

stretching as far as the Lower Dnieper to the east, possibly including the areas in the Dnieper-Don interfluve.⁸ He also exercised a strong influence in the Crimean peninsula.⁹ In the west, he gradually expanded his power, and around 1290 he managed to take control of the Wallachian plains, as far as the Danubian gorge of the Iron Gates, bordering the modern states of Serbia and Romania.¹⁰ The seat of Nogai's power was in the lands between the Lower Dniester and the Lower Danube.¹¹ The town of Sakchi (Isaccea), situated at the place of the ancient Roman fortress of Noviodunum in the Danube delta, served as his unofficial capital. In this place, a numerous series of coins were minted with Greek and Arabic inscriptions, but bearing Nogai's own tamgha.¹² From the Danube delta, Nogai threatened Byzantium, exercised suzerainty over the politically fragmented Bulgarian lands and, for a short time (c.1293-1298), over the Serbian kingdom.¹³ From the geographic point of view, Nogai's 'state' formed a sharp and compact wedge, nailed between the Carpathians and the Balkan Peninsula, deep within central and southeastern Europe. At the height of his power, Nogai thus managed to extend the Juchid influence further west and southwest than any of his predecessors, or successors.

The population of Nogai's lands was diverse. It included both pastoral nomads and semi-nomadic pastoralists on the one hand and urban communities

⁸ Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, II, 85-86; Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 111 (*Baybars al-Manṣūrī*); cf. B. Cherkas, "Territorial'noe ustroistvo Ulusa Dzhuchi (territoriia zapadnee Dona)," In: *Zolotaia orda v mirovoi istorii*, ed. R. Hakimov and M. Favero, Kazan' 2016, 162-163.

⁹ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 108, 111, n. 1. (*Baybars al-Manṣūrī*)

¹⁰ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 117. (*Baybars al-Manṣūrī*); V. L. Egorov, *Istoricheskaia geografiia Zolotoi ordy v XIII-XV vv*, Moskva 1985, 34, 193; I. Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars – Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans 1185-1365*, Cambridge 2005, 97, n. 42; A. Uzelac, *Pod senkom Psa: Tatari i južnoslovenske zemlje u drugoi polovini XIII veka*. [Under the Shadow of the Dog: Tatars and the South Slavic Lands in the Second Half of the 13th century] Beograd 2015, 166-168.

¹¹ Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, II, 86, mentions that 'the old yurt of Nogai' was on the banks of Dniester. On the map of the Venetian cartographer Andrea Bianco (1436), a sign 'ya nogai' stands at the mouth of Dniester, next to the port of Maurocastro. On later maps, on the same spot, it is frequently inscribed 'insula/isola nogay', A. Iu. Gordieiev, "Toponimika uzberezhia Chornogo ta Azovskogo moria na kartah-portolanah XIV-XVII stolit,'" [Toponymy of the Coast of the Black and Azov Sea on the Portolan Charts of XIV-XVII centuries] *Visnyk geodezii ta kartografii* 2 (2013), 30.

¹² E. Oberländer-Târnoveanu, "Numismatical Contributions to the History of South-Eastern Europe at the End of the 13th Century," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 26 (1987) 245-258; L. Lazarov, "Sur un type de monnaies en cuivre avec la tamgha de Nogaj," *Bulgarian Historical Review* 4 (1997) 3-12; P. Petrov, "Den'gy y denezhnaia polytyka Dzhuchydov v XIII-XV vv." In: *Zolotaia orda v mirovoi istorii*, 625-626.

¹³ P. Pavlov, "Tatarite na Nogaj, B'lgariia i Vizantiia (okolo 1270-1302 g.)," [Tatars of Nogai, Bulgaria and Byzantium (c.1270-1302)] In: *B'lgarite v Severnoto Prichernomorie*, IV, Veliko T'rnovo 1995, 121-130; A. Uzelac, "Tatars and Serbs at the End of the Thirteenth Century," *Revista de Istorie Militară* 5-6 (2011) 9-20.

on the northwestern Black Sea coast on the other, traditionally divided not only by their way of life, but also by their affiliation to various ethnolinguistic and confessional groups. The descendants of the Cumans were recognised by some prominent scholars as the main force behind Nogai's political and military power.¹⁴ They made up a large percentage of the nomadic population in Nogai's lands. Among other significant groups in the Pontic steppes, one can also include Brodniki, the inhabitants of the lands in the Dniester-Danube interfluvium before the Mongol invasion. They might have been of mixed Slavic and Turkic origin.¹⁵

In Nogai's lands, there were also Alans or As/Yas, as they were frequently called in the Slavic, Hungarian, or Arabic sources. Although sporadically present in the Pontic Steppes and Crimea in the earlier period, it is usually assumed that they were settled in a larger number after their defeat in the Caucasus, inflicted by *Möngke Temür* in 1277/78.¹⁶ Their settlement in the Pontic steppes is possibly indicated by archeological traces, such as the necropolis from the village of Kairi on the Lower Dnieper,¹⁷ and more strikingly by the local toponymy of Moldova and Western Ukraine, including *Jasski Torg* (Iași), attested since the late 14th or early 15th century, the places Jasska and Olănești on the left and right bank of Dniester respectively, and Kichkas on the left bank of Dnieper.¹⁸ On the Hereford Mappa Mundi (c.1290-1300), one of the left tributaries of the Lower Danube, probably Prut, is named 'Alanus fluvius', while on the portolan chart of Genoese cartographer Giovanni Carignano (c.1310), the name 'Alania' is written north of the Danube delta.¹⁹ For the Venetian traveller

¹⁴ See for example L. Gumilev, *Ot Rusi do Rossii*, Moskva 1995, 149.

¹⁵ After the Mongol invasion, the Land of Brodniki was mentioned only once, among the countries bordering Hungary and subjected to the Mongols, in a letter of the Hungarian King Béla IV sent to the Pope Innocentius IV, probably in 1247. A. Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, I, Romae 1859, 231; O. B. Bubenok, *Jasy i brodniki v stepiakh Vostochnoi Evrope (VI – nachalo na XIII vv.)*, Kiev 1997, 125–137; V. Spinei, *The Romanians and the Turkic Nomads North of the Danube Delta from the Tenth to the Mid-Thirteenth Century*, Leiden–Boston 2009, 159–161.

¹⁶ V. A. Kuznecov, *Ocherki istorii Alan*, Vladikavkaz 1992, 337–341; A. Alemany, "Alans contra Catalans a Bizanci (I): L'origen des Alans de Girgon," [Alans against Catalans in Byzantium (I): Origins of the Alans of Girgon] *Faventia* 12–13 (1990) 274–276; O. B. Bubenok, *Alany-asy v Zolotoi Orde (XIII–XV vv.)*, Kiev 2004, 168–169.

¹⁷ Bubenok, *Alany-asy v Zolotoi Orde*, 175–183.

¹⁸ M. N. Tikhomirov, "Spisok russkikh gorodov dal'nykh i bliznykh," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 40 (1952) 223; Kuznecov, *Ocherki istorii Alan*, 352–353; Bubenok, *Alany-asy v Zolotoi Orde*, 172–173, 232–234.

¹⁹ V. Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11th–14th Centuries*, Bucharest 1986, 144; Alemany, *Alans contra Catalans a Bizanci*, 273; V. Ciociltan, *Les Alans et le commencement des états roumains*, *Studia Asiatica* 1 (2000) 50; D. Dana-M. Radu, "Transilvania pe harta de la Hereford (sec. XIII)," [Transylvania on the Hereford Map (XIII Century)] *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 20 (2002) 258–259.

Giosaphat Barbaro (1413-1494), the whole area between the Crimea and the mouth of Dniester carried the name 'Alania'.²⁰

The sources also enumerate other peoples under Nogai's rule. In some manuscripts of the large opus of celebrated Persian historian *Rashīd al-Dīn* (c.1247-1318), it is stated that Nogai established himself in the lands of the Russians and the Vlachs.²¹ Pachymeres mentions the various inhabitants of the northern Black Sea coast, using sometimes archaic ethnonyms, in order to show the ethnic diversity of Nogai's lands. Rus', Zichians (Circassians), Alans, and Goths are specifically mentioned in his work. According to him, all these peoples who were ruled by Nogai "acquired Tatar customs, language and dresses, became their allies, and thus the Tatars became innumerable and their armies invincible".²² In a similar manner, the Catalan chronicler Ramon Muntaner stated that "Alans live after the manner of the Tartars; they always march with all their belongings and never lodge in city or town or village [...] and are held to be the best cavalry in the East."²³

In Nogai's domains, it seems that the Mongol newcomers made up an exceptionally small percent of the whole population, and that they were less present than in the other regions of the Golden Horde; only one Mongol tribe, Khadarkhin or Adargin, as they are called in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, is recorded. According to *Rashīd al-Dīn*, its members formed a *mingghan*, or regiment of a thousand that served under Nogai, but were resettled and scattered to other Juchid lands after his defeat.²⁴ Nonetheless, it needs to be mentioned that in recent decades, archaeologists have revealed the existence of necropolises in the valley of the river Ialpug, bordering Moldova and Ukraine, dated broadly to the 13th-14th centuries that indicate the presence of the populations from the East in the Danube-Dniester interfluvium, a region that constituted the core of Nogai's lands.²⁵

²⁰ *Travels to Tana and Persia*, by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini, trans. W. Thomas, London 1873, 16.

²¹ Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, II, 83; V. G. Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, II, 69, n. 11.

²² Georges Pachymères, *Relations Historiques*, II, 444-445.

²³ *The Chronicle of Muntaner*, II, trans. A. Goodenough, London 1921, 534; A. Alemany, *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation*, Leiden 2000, 302-307.

²⁴ Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, I/1, ed. L. A. Khetagurov, A. A. Semenov, Moskva-Leningrad 1952, 190; L. Bese, "On Some Ethnic Names in 13th Century Inner Asia," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 42 (1988) 17-18.

²⁵ G. Postică, E. Sava and S. Agulnikov, "Morminte ale nomazilor turanici medievali din tumulii de lângă Taraclia și Cazaclia," [Graves of Turanic Medieval Nomads in the tumuli near Taraclia and Cazaclia] *Memoria Antiquitatis* 20 (1995) 141-171; G. Postică-E. Sava, "Complexe funerare ale nomazilor medievali de lângă satul Balabani, raionul Taraclia, Republica Moldova," [Funerary complexes of medieval nomads near the village Balabani, Region of Taraclia, Moldova] *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie* 47:1 (1996) 63-89.

Keen observers, Pachymeres, and Muntaner were aware of the processes of the integration of various groups, newcomers and natives alike, into the Chinggisid system of power and government. The Turkic and Mongol personal names of Nogai's military commanders and emissaries, recorded by *Baybars al-Manṣūrī* and *Rashīd al-Dīn*,²⁶ and in the Russian chronicles (Tegichag, Kutlubuga, Konchak, Kozei, Kubatan, Eshimut and Mamshei),²⁷ are another indication of the mixed origin of his elite. The close relations established between the "conquerors" and the "conquered" are reflected in the personal names of the two most prominent associates of Nogai: Taz, his son-in-law, and Tonguz, who was the brother of one of Nogai's wives, as well as Nogai's two sons Juca (Chaka) and Tuka, who are considered to be of Turkic, rather than of Mongol origin.²⁸ The names of Turkic origin are attested in the case of the two Alan leaders, Itil (Ἰτίλης) and Temür (Τεμήρης), who emigrated to the Balkans after Nogai's defeat.²⁹ In the early 14th century, the unified Principality of Wallachia emerged in the territory that constituted the westernmost parts of Nogai's domains. Its first ruler Ivanco Basarab (c.1320-1351) and his father Thocomerius (Toq-Temür?)³⁰ also bore Turkic or Mongolian names. This is evidence of their political, cultural, and ideological background rather than their ethnic origin.

The "Tatarization" of the various ethnic and social groups in Nogai's lands does not imply that the diverse population of his domains acquired a new identity altogether. There are indications that the so-called *ulus* system of political organisation was not introduced in the western parts of Nogai's lands, and that the Cuman population in the frontier regions of southern Moldavia and eastern Wallachia managed to preserve their internal autonomy, at least until the eighties of the 13th century. A Hungarian chronicle mentions a certain Oldamur "Dux Cumaniae",³¹ who provided help to the rebellious Cuman

²⁶ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 111, 113 (Baybars al-Manṣūrī); Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, II, 85.

²⁷ *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, T. II: *Ipat'evskaia letopis'*, Sankt-Peterburg 1908, col. 876, 881-882.

²⁸ Gy. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica. Die Byzantinischen Quellen Der Geschichte Der Türkvolker*, II, Leiden 1983, 310; P. Pelliot, *Notes sur l'histoire de la Horde*, Oeuvres posthumes de Paul Pelliot, II, Paris 1949, 79-81, 95-96; D. DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, University Park PA 1994, 118-119; Alemany, *Sources on the Alans*, 252; Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars*, 92, n. 20.

²⁹ *Ioannis Cantacuzeni eximperatoris historiarum libri IV*, ed. L. Shopen, Bonnae 1828, 173; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, II, 257; Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars*, 124.

³⁰ N. Radojčić, *Zakonik cara Stefana Dušana 1349. i 1354.* [The Code of Law of Tsar Stephen Dušan from 1349 and 1354] Beograd 1960, 84; Gy. Györffy, "Adatok a románok XIII. századi történetéhez és a román állam kezdeteihez," [Contributions about the History of the Romanians in the 13th Century and the Beginnings of the Romanian State] *Történelmi Szemle* 7 (1964) 555.

³¹ "Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV," ed. A. Domanovsky, in: *E. Szentpétery* (ed.) *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum*, I, Budapest 1937, 417; "Chronicon

groups in Hungary, against King Ladislas IV (1272-1290) when they rose to arms in 1282. The allied forces of the Hungarian Cumans and their kinsmen from the other side of the Carpathians suffered heavy defeat at the hands of the army led by Ladislas IV in the battle of the now non-existent Lake Hód, not far from Szeged. Many of the Cumans were forced to flee across the Carpathians to Wallachia afterwards, and their exodus was one of the main factors that eventually prompted Nogai's attack on Hungary three years later.³² The details of that military campaign are beyond the scope of this text, but it is noteworthy that although Oldamur's actions could not have taken place without Nogai's approval, his denomination as "Dux Cumaniae" suggests that he was rather a dependant of the Chinggisid leader than an ordinary military commander in his service. Conspicuously enough, when referring to the events that took place a decade later, the Serbian archbishop Danilo II (c.1270-1337), biographer of King Stephen Uroš II Milutin (1282-1321), also made a distinction between the Cumans and the Tatars on the left bank of the lower Danube, in the lands under Nogai's rule.³³

Cities and ports on the northern shores of the Black Sea were inhabited by Italian, Greek, Armenian, Muslim, Slavic, and Tatar traders and artisans. They were connected with its nomadic hinterland through the exchange of goods and loyalty to the same master. Among these urban centres, the most significant ones lied in the Danube delta, where Nogai gradually emerged as the undisputed master of the region. Probably in 1273, Nogai made an agreement with the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (1258-1282) and married his illegitimate daughter Euphrosyne, which led to the establishment of two spheres of influence: Tatar in Sakchi and Byzantine in the neighbouring port of Vicina (its exact location is still a matter of dispute). This division was continued until 1285 when Nogai eventually broke the alliance with Michael's successor Andronikos II (1282-1328) and consequently eliminated the Byzantine political power in the Danube delta. Despite the political turbulence, Vicina remained the most important local Genoese centre of trade throughout this period. Genoese traders also visited the neighbouring port of Maurocastro (Akkerman, Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy) at the mouth of the Dniester, which appears for the first time in the notarial acts from Caffa in 1290.³⁴ In 1294, at the

Posoniense," ed. A. Domanovsky, in: E. Szentpétery (ed.) *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum*, II, Budapest 1938, 44.

³² V. Spinei, *The Great Migrations in the East and South East of Europe from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century*, Cluj-Napoca 2003, 316; Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars*, 106; Uzelac, *Pod senkom Psa*, 151-152.

³³ Arhiepiskop Danilo i drugi, *Životi kraljeva i arhiepiskopa srpskih*. [Archbishop Danilo and others, *Lives of Serbian Kings and Archbishops*] ed. Đ. Daničić, Zagreb 1866, 115.

³⁴ M. Balard, *Gênes et l'Outre-Mer*, T. I: *Les actes de Caffa du notaire Lamberto di Sambuceto, 1289-1290*. Paris-La Haye 1973, 206. See also: Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La pratica della mercatura*, ed. A. Evans, Cambridge MA 1936, 42; A. A. Kravchenko, *Srednevekovyi Belgorod na Dnestre (kon. XIII-XIV v.)*, Kiev 1986.

height of his power, Nogai decided to counter the Genoese monopoly in the Black Sea by allowing their Venetian adversaries to establish the consulate in his lands.³⁵

There is indirect, but nonetheless important, evidence that Nogai promoted cooperation between the highest circles of the urban communes and the steppe aristocracy. Georgios Pachymeres described how the Bulgarian prince Theodore Svetoslav found himself in poverty in the late 13th century. He was present in Nogai's lands evidently as a political fugitive, and not as a hostage, as is usually supposed. The prince then met a rich merchant named Pandoleon and married his granddaughter Euphrosyne. The father of the bride was a certain Mankous (the name is probably a Greek form of names *Möngke* or Mangush), and her godmother was the namesake of Nogai's Byzantine wife, which shows that the marriage must have been concluded under Nogai's auspices.³⁶ More information about the origin of the bride of Theodore Svetoslav has been preserved in the work of *Baybars al-Manṣūrī*, according to whom she was a cousin of Chaka (and his father Nogai).³⁷ Evidently, Euphrosyne, the wife of the Bulgarian prince, was related to Nogai's lineage, via her Tatar father Mankous, but she was also either of Greek or Genoese origin, via her maternal grandfather Pandoleon.³⁸ It has been supposed that her grandfather may be identical to a certain Pantaleo from Vicina, mentioned in one of the Genoese documents relating several financial transactions in Pera near Constantinople in 1281.³⁹ Be that as it may, the origin of Euphrosyne, who was destined to become the empress of Bulgaria in 1301, clearly demonstrates the existence of marital ties between the two elites in Nogai's lands.

³⁵ *Deliberazioni del Maggior Consiglio di Venezia*, III, ed. R. Cessi, Bologna 1934, 315; Ș. Papacostea, *La Mer Noire: carrefour des grandes routes intercontinentales, 1204-1453*, București 2006, 108-109; V. Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Leiden-Boston 2012, 160.

³⁶ Georges Pachymères, *Relations Historiques*, III, ed. A. Failler, Paris 1999, 290-291; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, II, 179; P. Pavlov, "Teodor Svetoslav, Nogai i t'rgovec't Pandoleon," [Theodore Svetoslav, Nogai and the Merchant Pandoleon] In: *Istoriko-arheologicheski izsledvaniia v pamet na prof. dr. Stancho Vaklinov*, Veliko T'rnovo 1994, 177-185; K. Kr'stev, *B'lgarskoto carstvo pri dinastiata na Terterevci (1280-1323)*, [The Bulgarian Empire under the Terter dynasty (1280-1323)], Plovdiv 2011, 226.

³⁷ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 117 (Baybars al-Manṣūrī); Kr'stev, *B'lgarskoto carstvo*, 109-110. The Arabic writer was not only well acquainted with the contemporary events and key participants in the internal Juchid conflict, but it also seems that his source of information came from the closest circles of Nogai's family, A. A. Porsin, "Istochnik informacii Rukn ad-Dina Beibarsa v osveshchenii im mezhdousobnoi voiny v Zolotoi Orde v konce XIII nachale XIV vekov," *Zolotoordynskoe obozrenie* 4 (2015) 29-53.

³⁸ A. Uzelac, "The Port of Maurocastro, Emperor Theodore Svetoslav and the Tatar Elite in the Pontic Steppes," *Istorijski časopis* 65 (2016) 52-55.

³⁹ Gh. Brătianu, *Recherches sur Vicina et Cetatea Albă*, Bucharest 1935, 48, 173; Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, 260.

Nogai himself was a Muslim, “a devout follower of Muhammad’s teachings”, as he presented himself in a letter to the Mamluk sultan Baybars al-Bunduqdari (1260-1277), from August/September 1270.⁴⁰ He probably belonged to those members of the Juchid elite who converted to Islam during the reign of Berke (1258-1266).⁴¹ The religious conversion is a characteristic detail from Nogai’s biography, but its importance has often been overstated. Two influential people, to whom Nogai owed his rise to power, Berke and Jijak-khatun, were Muslims, and his adoption of the new religion primarily reveals his desire to secure the support of the pro-Islamic faction among the Juchids. It also opened the door for Nogai’s affirmation on the international scene, especially for the improvement of his standing with the main Juchid ally, the Mamluk court in Cairo.

On the contrary, and similarly to other early Mongol rulers, Nogai’s policies in religious matters were characterised by pragmatism. He did not strive to impose the new religion on members of his family. One of his wives, the Byzantine princess Eyphrosyne, remained an Orthodox Christian after her marriage. Chief Nogai’s wife Yaylak was also Christian, but she embraced the Roman Catholic faith. Her baptism, performed by Franciscans in the Crimean city of Kirk-Yer (Chufut-Kale), was described in detail in a letter of Ladislás, head of the Franciscan mission of the Province of Gazaria, dated from April 1287.⁴² It has been supposed that Nogai’s oldest son Chaka was Muslim, and it is certain that Kabak, daughter of Nogai and Yaylak, accepted the Islamic faith, but not at her father’s court. She embraced Islam on her own will, after she married a prominent member of the Khongirad tribe, and despite the wishes of her Buddhist husband.⁴³

During Nogai’s rule, Islam indeed gained several footholds in his domains. The above-mentioned Franciscan letter, as well as the Arabic sources, reveal the presence of the Muslim community in Solkhat (Staryi Krym).⁴⁴ Moreover, the famous geographer Abū-l-Fidā’ from Hama (1273-1331) described Sakchi at the beginning of the 14th century as a mid-sized town, with a Muslim major-

⁴⁰ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 101–102. (*Baybars al-Manṣūrī*)

⁴¹ Vászary, *Cumans and Tatars*, 72.

⁴² G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Francese*, II, Quaracchi-Firenze 1913, 443–445; Pelliot, *Notes sur l'histoire de la Horde*, 77–79; T. Tănase, “Le ‘khan’ Nogaï et la géopolitique de la mer Noire en 1287 à travers un document missionnaire: la lettre de Ladislás, custode de Gazarie,” *Annuario. Istituto Romeno di cultura e ricerca umanistica* 6–7 (2004–2005) 267–301; R. Hautala, “Islamizacija tatar soglasno latinskim istochnikam konca XIII – pervoi poloviny XIV veka,” In: I. M. Mirgaleev–Je. G. Saifetdinova (eds.), *Islam i vlast’ v Zolotoi orde*, Kazan’ 2012, 37–38; Sz. Kovács, “A Franciscan’s Letter from the Crimea (1287),” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 69:2 (2016) 157–164.

⁴³ Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, II, 84–85.

⁴⁴ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 363, 435 (*Ibn al-Furāt*, al-Maqrizī).

ity.⁴⁵ His words are undoubtedly an exaggeration, but they should not be dismissed altogether. There were certainly Arabic merchants and traders who settled in Nogai's lands, and one of them may have been a certain Sayf al-Dīn Abū Bakr, who was his envoy in a diplomatic mission to Constantinople and Cairo in 1282.⁴⁶ Unlike the inhabitants of the maritime cities and towns, the nomadic population did not have much contact with Islam. According to *Baybars al-Manṣūrī*, after Nogai's death, many of his men were captured, sold into slavery, and ended up in Egypt. Many agreed to be converted in order to ease their conditions, but only after their arrival at the Levantine slave markets.⁴⁷

The Roman Catholic Church did not have its own seat in Nogai's lands. According to an unreliable Dominican source of a later date, the first bishop of Genoese Caffa was a member of this order, Giovanni di Roano, who was allegedly ordained as early as in 1268.⁴⁸ However, any other information about the bishopric is lacking before 1318, when its domains were delineated by Pope John XXII,⁴⁹ and its existence in the earlier period is highly doubtful. The same might be said about the so-called Cuman bishopric, established before the Mongol invasion and destroyed in 1241. According to a letter of Pope Nicholas III (1277-1280) from 1278, this diocese, with its seat in the region of Milcov (*Civitas de Multo, posita in confinibus Tartarorum*), was at the time without a bishop and Christian souls.⁵⁰ Therefore, the proselytizing role completely fell upon the shoulders of the Friars Minorites. Their activities in the Golden Horde began after the Council of Lyon in 1274, when the Vicariate of Northern Tataria was founded. It was divided into two custodies, Sarai and Gazaria or Crimea, which had under its jurisdiction the areas between Don and Danube. The letter of Ladislas, leader of the Franciscans in Gazaria reveals that, besides the baptism of Yaylak, they managed to achieve other successes. In the beginning of 1287, one of the friars, names Moyses, was welcomed in Vicina, at that time already under Nogai's control, by a Tatar *millenarius* or chiliarch Arghun and in this place he baptized several noble Tatar families.⁵¹

The Greek Orthodox Church with its two seats in Crimean Soldaia (Sudak) and Danubian Vicina had stronger foundations than its Roman Catholic counterparts. Soldaia was an old orthodox eparchy. Its bishops regularly visited

⁴⁵ *Géographie d'Aboulféda: texte arabe publié d'après les manuscrits de Paris et de Leyde*, II/1, ed. P. Reynaud, Paris 1848, 316; I. G. Konovalova, *Vostochnaia Evropa v sochinenijakh arabskikh geografov XIII-XIV vv. – tekst, perevod, komentarii*, Moskva 2009, 120.

⁴⁶ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 362 (Ibn al-Furāt).

⁴⁷ Tizengauzen, *Sbornik materialov*, I, 114-115, 122 (Baybars al-Manṣūrī).

⁴⁸ M. Canale, *Della Crimea del suo commercio e de suoi dominatori*, Genova 1855, 210.

⁴⁹ L. Waddingus, *Annales minorum seu trium ordinum a S. Francisco institutorum*, VI, Romae 1783, 549; Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11th-14th Centuries*, 124-125.

⁵⁰ Theiner, *Vetera monumenta*, I, 337; V. Spinei, "The Cuman Bishopric – Genesis and Evolution," In: *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars and Cumans*, ed. F. Curta, R. Kovalev, Leiden-Boston 2008, 413-456.

⁵¹ See footnote 42.

Juchid rulers and provided useful advice to the travellers regarding how to behave in order to stay on friendly terms with the Tatars, according to the eyewitness testimony of the celebrated traveller William of Rubruck in 1253.⁵² The activities of its prelates led to the successful christianization of the local population, as shown by numerous mentions of people with dual Christian and Turkic names from the late 13th century, preserved in a Greek Synaxarion from Soldaia.⁵³ The metropolity in Vicina was founded after Nogai concluded an alliance with Michael VIII. It is mentioned for the first time in 1285, when its metropolitan Theodore participated in the so-called Second Council of Blachernae in Constantinople.⁵⁴ Approximately at that time, the Tatars took control over his residence, but the metropolity continued to exist, albeit in a new political climate. The metropolity of Vicina is mentioned in one of the notitias of the Constantinopolitan patriarchate from the late 13th century,⁵⁵ and in 1301 the metropolitan mediated between the Byzantine authorities and Orthodox Alans, former Nogai's subjects, numbering some 10 to 16 thousand people, who wanted to enter the Byzantine service.⁵⁶

Orthodox Christianity was known to the Cumans even before the Mongol invasion,⁵⁷ and during Nogai's era it successfully spread from the Crimea and the Danube delta into the interior of Nogai's domains. The Venetian writer Mario Sanudo the Elder (1260-1338) explicitly remarked that the population of Gazaria belonged to Greek Christianity, and even the celebrated traveller Ibn Battuta admitted that the local "Kipchaks" were predominantly Christian.⁵⁸

⁵² *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. I: *Itinera et relationes fratrum minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, ed. A. van den Wyngaert, Quaracchi-Firenze 1929, 168; *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253-1255*, ed. & trans. P. Jackson, D. Morgan, London 1990, 67.

⁵³ Arh. Antonin, "Zametki XII-XV veka, otnosiashhiesia k krymskomu g. Sugdee (Sudaku), pripisannye na grecheskom Sinaksare," *Zapiski Odesskogo obshhestva istorii i drevnosti* 5 (1863) 595-628; I. Vásáry, "Orthodox Christian Cumans and Tatars of the Crimea in the 13th-14th Centuries", *Central Asiatic Journal* 32 (1988) 260-271.

⁵⁴ P. Năsturel, "Les fastes episcopaux de la metropole de Vicina," *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher* 21 (1976) 37-38; G. Atanasov, *Dobrudzhansko despotstvo (k'm politicheskata, c'rkovnata, stopanskata i kulturnata istoriia na Dobrudzha prez XIV v.)*. [The Despotate of Dobrudja (About Political, Ecclesiastical, Economic and Cultural History of Dobrudja in the 14th Century)] Veliko T'rnovo 2009, 30-31.

⁵⁵ *Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae: texte critique, introduction et notes*, ed. J. Darrouzès, Paris 1981, 386.

⁵⁶ Georges Pachymères, *Relations Historiques*, IV, ed. A. Failler, Paris 1999, 336-339; *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina Historia*, I, ed. L. Schopen, Bonnae 1829, 204; Alemany, *Sources on the Alans*, 214-218.

⁵⁷ O. Osipian, "Poshyrennia hrystyianstva sered polovciv XI-XV ct." [The Spread of Christianity Among the Polovtsy in XI-XV Centuries] *Kyi'vs'ka starovyna* 1 (2005) 3-28, *Kyi'vs'ka starovyna* 2 (2005) 3-22.

⁵⁸ *Voyages d' Ibn Batoutah*, II, ed. and trans. C. Defremery, B. Sanguinetti, Paris 1855, 357; C. Hopf, *Chroniques gréco-romanes inédites ou peu connues*, Berlin 1873, 143.

However, it can be supposed that at least part of the Turkic population in the Pontic steppes was still out of reach of the Mediterranean religions, clinging to the old beliefs. In this aspect, it is noteworthy to remember the experiences of Josaphat Barbaro two centuries later, who was told by his local guides that there were still “many Idolaters among these people, but they had to practice their beliefs secretly”.⁵⁹

A few words remain to be said about the presence of Buddhism in Nogai’s lands, a religion confessed and practiced by many members of the Juchid elite at the end of the 13th century (including khan Tokhta). The first indication is provided by *Rashīd al-Dīn*, who recorded how Nogai sent certain Buddhist relics to the Ilkhanid ruler Arghun (1284-1291) during their negotiations in 1288;⁶⁰ the second can be found in the work of Pachymeres. The Byzantine historian related the story of a certain Kutzimpaxis (Kuchin-bakshi or Khojabashi, which is rather a title than a personal name), Nogai’s confidant, who, after his death, fled with his family and followers on a ship to Pontic Heraclea (Karadeniz Ereğli), in Byzantine Asia Minor. He agreed to become a Christian and he was even ordained as a governor in Nicomedia by Andronikos II. Afterwards, he was accused of conspiring against the Emperor and ended up in prison, but he managed to escape. His fortunes and misfortunes in Byzantium have to be omitted in this paper, but it is important to note that Pachymeres decribed Kutzimpaxis as a “follower of the religion of the Persians” (that is, the Mongols in Persia, notwithstanding the fact that Buddhism fell out of prominence among the Ilkhanids at the time), and also as “the first among the Nogai’s mages”.⁶¹ This is valuable evidence not only of the existence of Buddhists in the Pontic steppes, but also of their organisation and influence in the circles surrounding Nogai.

Based on the presented preliminary remarks, it may be concluded that the territories stretching from the Dnieper-Don interfluvium to the southwest arches of the Carpathians were inhabited by nomadic and sedentary populations, who practiced various religious beliefs and represented a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional “state”. It was united by the Chinggisid ideology, as well as the power and charisma of its Juchid leader, who promoted a stronger sense of cohesion among the different groups of his domains. The reports of Pachy-

⁵⁹ *Travels to Tana and Persia*, 16.

⁶⁰ Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, III, ed. A. K. Arends et al., Moskva-Leningrad 1946, 117-118; V. P. Kostjukov, “Buddizm v kul’ture Zolotoi Ordy,” In: *Tiurkologicheskii sbornik 2007-2008*, Moskva 2009, 195.

⁶¹ Georges Pachymères, *Relations Historiques*, IV, 378-379, 602-603, 626-629, 648-649. The Tatar adventurer was also mentioned by Constantinopolitan Patriarch Athanasios I (1303-1310) in one of his letters, A. M. Maffry Talbot, *The Correspondence of Athanasius I, Patriarch of Constantinople*. Washington DC 1975, 114-117. R. Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks. 1204-1461*, Leiden-Boston 2016, 232-233, thinks that Kutzimpaxis adhered to Mongol shamanism, but cf. E. Zachariadou, “Observations on Some Turcica of Pachymeres,” *Revue des études byzantines* 36 (1978) 262-263.

AN EMPIRE WITHIN AN EMPIRE?...

meres and Muntaner, but also the notices about the origin of Euphrosyne, the Bulgarian princess of Tatar origin, are particularly important in this aspect. Despite Nogai's attempts, it needs to be admitted that the foundations of his power remained fragile. They were shaken during the war against Tokhta (1297-1299/1300), when he was faced with the rebellion of the Crimean cities and the desertion of many of his commanders who joined the opposing side. The discord weakened Nogai's army to such an extent that it eventually led to his defeat, death, and the downfall of his "empire" on the western fringes of the Golden Horde.