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## FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL ROLE OF NOGAI

**Abstract.** This paper attempts to analyze the political and international functions of Nogai in the framework of the Golden Horde structure at the end of the 13th century. The main aim of the study is the interpretation of the position of Nogai both as a military leader and as a politician who strongly affected the international politics and internal politics of the Jochid Ulus. For the achievement of this goal, the following tasks are formulated: to define the political status of Nogai in the Golden Horde; to analyze his role in the conflicts between the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate; to consider his activities in the Caucasus and Black Sea region; to research his diplomatic relations with the Byzantine Empire and Mamluk Sultanate; and to interpret his function as an intermediary between the steppe zone and the states of Eastern Europe. The basis for the research will be made of the comprehensive analysis of medieval narrative sources: the texts written by Persians, Arabs, and Byzantines, along with historiography. Source-critical, comparative, and political anthropological approaches methods will be used during the research. The novelty of the paper will be defined by the reinterpretation of Nogai as a politician who was rather autonomous than dependent on the Great Khan, with his actions serving the process of decentralization of the Golden Horde, as well as the integration of different source traditions for the recreation of Nogai's historical image. As a result of the study, it will be stated that Nogai managed to create a certain independent political environment in the western part of the Golden Horde and took an active part in the shaping of the state's external politics. Political autonomy and diplomacy were responsible for the creation of a complex system of international relations in Eurasia. The results of the research increase the knowledge of the political structure of the Golden Horde.

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**Keywords:** Nogai, Golden Horde, Ulus of Jochi, foreign policy, Byzantium, Ilkhanate, nomadic empires, political power.

### Introduction

History of the Golden Horde and political processes that occurred in the Jochid Ulus represent one of the key fields of medieval studies in modern times. In recent decades, scientific interest in the internal structure of Mongolian successor states and the role of specific individuals from the elite has become even greater. This paper considers the political transformations that occurred in the Jochid Ulus in the second half of the thirteenth century, namely the rise and subsequent decline in power of Nogai. As a political actor of the period, Nogai played a decisive role in the internal struggles of power, and he took an active part in developing relations with foreign states.

The rise of Nogai to prominence was a reflection of changes in the political life of the Golden Horde. Gradually, military elite, alongside the Chinggisid dynasty, started to obtain more and more autonomy and power in this state. Therefore, a detailed study of the political activity of this individual requires analyzing historical sources. Such works of medieval authors as Rashid al-Din and Juvayni can serve as valuable material for this task despite the contradictory information they contain.

According to Rashid al-Din, Nogai was a direct descendant of Jochi on the line of Buval (Rashid al-Din, 1960: 75; Juvayni, 2004: 183). This individual was involved in military campaigns in Iran and the Caucasus, suggesting that he had gained recognition in the Jochid Ulus as an active participant

in various political battles (Rashid al-Din, 1960: 75; Juvayni, 2004: 183). Nogai's participation in military operations against the Ilkhanate in the 1260s indicates his importance for protecting the Golden Horde from the south (Thackston, 1998–1999: 361, 493).

At that time, diplomacy of the Golden Horde was focused not only on resolving problems arising in relation to Ilkhanate but also on maintaining friendly relations with other states in the region, including the Byzantine Empire and Mamluk Sultanate. After the restoration of Byzantium by Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1261, Byzantium and the Golden Horde increased their diplomatic, economic, and political contacts (Derin, 2024: 15–18). These diplomatic contacts became one of the characteristics of a geopolitical system, where the Golden Horde acted as an independent player (Derin, 2024: 10–12).

Modern literature pays great attention to the need to use the source-based method of research in studies related to the Golden Horde and to reconsider the role of particular individuals in shaping the political life of the Golden Horde. Specifically, a number of works note the importance of paying increased attention to the political history of the Jochid Ulus and the role of elite in the development of the state structure (Sabitov, 2019: 45–52; Porsin, 2020: 78–85).

This paper analyzes the political and international activities of Nogai in relation to the internal structure of the Golden Horde. This study focuses on the foreign policies pursued by Nogai, his participation in military operations, and his activity in the area of diplomacy.

### **Materials and methods**

This work explores the political and international status of Nogai in the Golden Horde using both classical historical and interdisciplinary approaches. The study relies on an extensive review of primary and secondary literature. Sources from medieval Persian, Arabic, and Byzantine histories are used as sources to trace the genealogy, military campaigns, and political standing of Nogai in the Jochid Ulus, his participation in the struggle against the Ilkhanate, and relations with the Byzantine Empire. These documents are supplemented by historiographic works on the political system of the Golden Horde and the role of military nobility.

Methods used for source examination include the historical-critical approach that evaluates reliability, authorship, and bias of medieval texts. Comparative-historical analysis enables the cross-referencing of material to obtain a more accurate picture of events. Source criticism involving text and contextual analysis reveals nuances of terminology and storytelling conventions in their historical context.

Furthermore, prosopography is employed to investigate Nogai in the context of the Jochid aristocracy and political connections and genealogical relations. Structural and political anthropological methods help uncover decentralization processes and the operation of power in nomadic empires. Limitations stem from fragmentary and conflicting accounts in medieval literature.

### **Discussion**

Variations included in the historiography of Nogai's political activity are a result of long-term changes within the sphere of scholarly analysis and interpretation and the fluctuations that have taken place over time in reconstructing events from past history (the better to understand) especially those pertaining to Golden Horde history, but also Ulus of Jochi related history more broadly. The term Nogai has gradually evolved in its understanding over time, from the image of a warrior sworn to destroy peasants as depicted in the chronicles of medieval times, to that of a strong political actor that wielded significant power within parts known as the western lands of the Golden Horde.

The earliest mention of Nogai survives in Russian, Persian, Arab and Byzantine sources. The old Russian Chronicles usually depict him as the enemy of Rus', stressing his invasions and meddling in the politics of Russian principalities. Simultaneously, chroniclers recognised his outstanding political authority, indicating that he decided the lineage of khans and influenced the course of events in the Golden Horde (ИСПИ, 1962: 214–216).

Eastern writers went more into depth on Nogai career. Much work has been done by Rashid al-Din on genealogies of the Jochids, and he traced Buwal as one of Jochi's sons and Nogai's grandfather (Rashid al-Din, 1960: 75) This was supplemented by the information on military actions, political alliances and the relation of Nogai with Golden Horde khans (Juvayni, 2004: 183–185; al-Nuwayri, 2004: 92). These sources constitute the principal documentary foundation for all subsequent studies of Nogai.

The beginnings of professional historiography represent another stage of studying Nogai. An earliest representative of these is N.M. Karamzin, who connects Nogai with genesis of Nogais and later on Nogai horde (Karamzin, 1989: 114). Despite the fact that his ideas were dominant throughout the 19th century, most of contemporary scientists do not believe such a simple connection.

Outstanding among the works focusing on Nogai's political status were the studies of the archimandrite Leonid (Kavelin) and A.K. Markov which examined numismatic sources. Both proved that Nogai minted his own coins, and they considered this an indication that he ruled in his own name. The scholars thus argued that Nogai exerted a degree of political independence unseen in the Golden Horde among non-ruling members of the Jochid elite (Markov, 1896: 53-55).

A crucial stage in the history of Golden Horde historiography marked by V.V. Bartold. By studying the political geography of the Ulus of Jochi, Bartold argued that Nogai ruled vast territories from the Danube to the Dnieper as an effectively independent ruler even though he never ascended the throne (Bartold, 1963: 487-489). His interpretations established a base for further arguments on the issue of power and legitimacy within the Golden Horde.

The institutionalisation of Golden Horde research, the development of new research methods in political and socio-economic history of the period is also part of the Soviet historiography. While previous studies tried to portray historical events, the historians concentrated on state, administrative system and the nature of political power.

In the well-known "The Golden Horde and Its Fall", written by B.D. Grekov and A.Yu. Yakubovsky, new aspects concerning Nogai and the relations of the Khanate and Nogai with central authorities in Sarai were researched, along with his participation in diplomatic ties with Byzantium, Bulgaria, Hungary and their neighbours (Grekov & Yakubovsky, 1950: 147-155). It moved Nogai away from his purely military position toward an understanding of him as a political figure. V.L. Egorov further explored the territorial structures of Nogai's domain and explained the relatively great independence of his western ulus (Egorov, 1985: 72-81). In Egorov's view, Nogai's domain can be defined as a political unit possessing quasi-autonomy within, and to some extent outside of, the institutional system of the Golden Horde.

Simultaneously, broader works by M. G. Safargaliev, G. A. Fedorov-Davydov, and L. N. Gumilev furnished an indispensable background for analyzing Nogai's political role. They dealt with problems of the formation of state power, of governing by nomads and the socio-political development of the Golden Horde (Safargaliev, 1960: 84-89; Fedorov-Davydov, 1966: 97-103; Gumilev, 1989: 287-294).

The scholarship on Nogai has now moved beyond military history and dynastic politics to become broader and examines themes of political authority, diplomacy and regional government.

Among the most significant contemporary historians is V.V. Trepavlov whose monograph History of the Nogai Horde contested the assumption that the Nogai Horde was the direct successor of Nogai's ulus. In Trepavlov's argument there is no political continuity between Nogai's western territory and the Nogai Horde of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Trepavlov, 2002: 31-38). This led to a revision of former readings of Karamzin's hypothesis.

Recent work by Ya.V. Pilipchuk has examined Nogai's diplomatic activities and the relationship between himself, the central government of the Golden Horde, and European neighbouring countries. Pilipchuk asserts that Nogai greatly contributed to the geopolitical circumstances in Eastern Europe and the Balkans in the end of 13th-century (Pilipchuk, 2021: 45-58).

The works of A.Z. Mezhitov make an important contribution, analyzing the political, religious and administrative history of the western parts of the Golden Horde dominated by Nogai (Mezhitov, 2020: 112-126).

At an international level, Nogai has been discussed as part of larger developments of Eurasian imperial politics, frontier diplomacy, and cross-cultural contacts by Peter Jackson, Anne F. Broadbridge, Aleksandar Uzelac, Istvn Vsry and Roman Hautala. These authors increasingly portray Nogai not as a peripheral military commander, but rather one of the leading political figures of the late 13th-century (Jackson, 2017: 92-96; Broadbridge, 2008: 131-136; Uzelac, 2015: 164-170).

Thus, the changing historiography of the image of Nogai, reveals the passage from medieval vision of a destructive conqueror, to the contemporary scholar's appreciation of a cunning politician and regional ruler. While the early work dealt mainly with wars and dynastic struggle, the recent work more focuses on the issues of state authority, state building, diplomacy, and rule in an imperial setting.

In this way the development of the historiography of Nogai's image reflect the transformation in the study of the Golden Horde, as in recent days we study more and more the personality of Nogai as a figure of political importance in the history of medieval Eurasia, the role of whom was far more extensive than just in the western borders of the Ulus of Jochi.

### **Research results**

The figure of Nogai has always been of particular importance in research related to the Golden Horde and its history. In recent years, historiography paid increasing attention to the foreign policy activities of the Golden Horde during the period of its existence. However, there was still no consensus about whether foreign policy decisions were made exclusively by the Golden Horde khan. Further discussion reveals that Nogai played a crucial role in foreign policy and international relations of the empire.

#### *Nogai in the Caucasian and Ilkhanid Direction*

The first example of Nogai's foreign policy activities refers to the confrontation with the Ilkhanate in the early 1260s. According to the works of Persian authors, especially Rashid al-Din, Nogai invaded the lands of Shirvan after marching through Derbent, which was a strategically important city located at the south-western border of the Golden Horde's territories (Rashid al-Din, 1960: 59–60). Military campaigns against the Ilkhanid state aimed at the control of the transit routes through Caucasus and the protection of the Golden Horde from further encroachments.

In the context of the presented information, it is possible to claim that Nogai played an important role in the military activities of the Golden Horde in the mentioned direction. On the one hand, his participation in the campaign indicates that he had responsibility over one of the most sensitive geopolitical areas. On the other hand, it becomes clear that Nogai was able to act autonomously, leading military campaigns without direct intervention on the side of the Khan (Thackston, 1998–1999: 361, 493).

In addition, it is necessary to note further conflicts in the Ilkhanid direction. According to Juvayni's chronicle, Nogai marched again towards the southern borders of the Golden Horde in the mid-1260s (Juvayni, 2004: 183). Thus, the discussed information proves that Nogai participated actively in geopolitical conflicts involving Golden Horde.

#### *Nogai and Byzantine Diplomacy*

Of equal importance was the role of Nogai in foreign policy activities conducted in the western direction of the Golden Horde. As a result of the re-conquest of Constantinople and the establishment of Byzantium led by Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1261, the Black Sea region became a subject to increased attention. Relations with Byzantium became particularly relevant due to its proximity to the steppe lands (Jackson, 2005: 67–72).

Historical sources prove that Nogai started negotiations with the representatives of Byzantium in the late 1260s and in the beginning of 1270s. He could even conclude dynastic ties with Byzantium, as marriage was considered to be an instrument of diplomacy among nomads (Derin, 2024: 15–18).

Thus, it can be concluded that Nogai had a crucial role in foreign policy development in the western direction.

In addition to diplomatic activities with Byzantium, Nogai could conduct military campaigns and intervene into internal matters of other nations. According to the existing historical records, the lands located near the Danube River, as well as those located around the Aegean Sea, became objects of his interest. Hence, it becomes obvious that Nogai acted as a regional hegemon and expanded the borders of the Golden Horde's power beyond the steppe (Derin, 2024: 25–30).

#### *Black Sea and Balkan Frontier as a Zone of Interaction*

It is possible to consider the Black Sea region under Nogai's control as a zone of interaction between the nomad and sedentary peoples. From the presented point of view, foreign policy of the Golden Horde cannot be explained in the light of the centralized decision-making. Instead, there should be considered local conditions and processes that could determine the course of foreign policy activities.

The example of Nogai shows how crucial frontier diplomacy was in the discussed context. Indeed, by establishing control over the territory of interaction and conducting relations with other nations, Nogai was an important factor in ensuring trade and communication between the steppe and Mediterranean countries. It becomes clear that in the discussed situation, the concept of foreign policy was similar to what it could have been in other nomadic empires.

In turn, Turkish historiography puts special emphasis on the role of the Black Sea zone in the political and economic system of the Golden Horde and the part played in this context by Nogai (Derin, 2024: 25–30).

#### *Foreign Policy as a Multi-Actor System*

Taking into account all the analyzed examples, it seems reasonable to conclude that in the Golden Horde, foreign policy was performed by numerous individuals who had enough resources and power to do so. Nogai's activities prove this thesis, as his participation in military campaigns, diplomatic activities, and interventions allowed him to affect foreign policy process in the discussed way.

The modern historical works pay considerable attention to the multi-centered structure of nomadic empires (Porsin, 2020: 78–85; Sabitov, 2019: 45–52). It becomes clear that figures such as Nogai were crucial for the functioning of such empires as they could connect the various regions and implement the strategies of their leaders.

However, it should be noted that the coexistence of the central authority and regional autonomy created a rather unstable environment in which it was possible for an individual to achieve success in various spheres, including foreign policy.

#### *Final Analytical Position*

Having analyzed the available sources and historiographical discussion, it becomes obvious that Nogai should be perceived as a crucial figure of Golden Horde foreign policy. His participation in the conflicts in Caucasus, military activities in the Ilkhanid direction, and diplomatic activities in relation to Byzantine Empire provide grounds for such conclusion.

It turns out that in the context of the presented case, it is possible to speak about the new mechanisms of foreign policy activities developed in the Golden Horde. In contrast to previous approaches, the process under discussion was performed by several influential individuals. Nogai became one of such figures.

### **Conclusion**

The present study has demonstrated that Nogai played a decisive and multifaceted role in the foreign policy of the Golden Horde in the second half of the thirteenth century. Contrary to traditional interpretations that limit foreign policy to the authority of the khan, the analysis shows that Nogai functioned as an active and influential agent in shaping the international relations of the Jochid Ulus.

The examination of primary sources and modern historiography has revealed that Nogai's activities extended across several key geopolitical directions. In the Caucasian region, his military campaigns against the Ilkhanate, particularly in Shirvan and Derbent, were crucial for maintaining the southern frontier and securing strategic communication routes. In the western direction, his diplomatic engagement with the Byzantine Empire and his political involvement in the Balkan region demonstrate his role as an intermediary between the steppe world and Eastern Europe.

The study has also shown that Nogai's authority was not solely derived from formal hierarchical structures but was based on his control over military resources, strategic territories, and political networks. This form of power allowed him to operate both within and beyond the framework of central authority, combining military leadership with diplomatic functions. As a result, Nogai emerges not merely as a military commander but as a key architect of the Golden Horde's external policy.

The findings contribute to a broader rethinking of foreign policy in nomadic empires. Rather than being centralized and exclusively controlled by ruling dynasties, foreign policy in the Golden Horde appears as a multi-layered and flexible system, implemented through a network of elite actors. This perspective highlights the importance of regional leaders in shaping international relations and challenges traditional state-centered models of political organization.

In conclusion, the case of Nogai provides valuable insight into the mechanisms of power, diplomacy, and governance in the medieval Eurasian steppe. His political and diplomatic activities reflect the dynamic and adaptive nature of the Golden Horde's foreign policy and underscore the need for further research into the role of non-sovereign elites in the international history of nomadic empires.

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## НОҒАЙДЫҢ СЫРТҚЫ САЯСАТЫ ЖӘНЕ ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ РӨЛІ

**Аңдатпа.** Бұл мақала XIII ғасырдың соңында Алтын Орда құрылымы шеңберінде Ноғайдың саяси және халықаралық қызметтерін талдауға арналған. Зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – Ноғайдың тек әскери қолбасшы ретінде ғана емес, сонымен қатар Жошы ұлысының сыртқы және ішкі саясатына елеулі ықпал еткен саяси тұлға ретіндегі орнын түсіндіру. Аталған

мақсатқа жету үшін келесі міндеттер қойылды: Ноғайдың Алтын Ордадағы саяси мәртебесін анықтау; оның Алтын Орда мен Илхан мемлекеті арасындағы қақтығыстардағы рөлін талдау; Кавказ бен Қара теңіз өңіріндегі қызметін қарастыру; Византия империясы және Мысыр мәмлүк сұлтанатымен дипломатиялық байланыстарын зерттеу; сондай-ақ оның дала аймағы мен Шығыс Еуропа мемлекеттері арасындағы делдалдық қызметін айқындау. Зерттеу жұмысының негізін парсы, араб және византиялық авторлар жазған ортағасырлық баяндаушы дереккөздерді, сондай-ақ заманауи тарихнаманы кешенді талдау құрайды. Зерттеу барысында деректанулық, салыстырмалы-тарихи және саяси антропология әдістері қолданылды. Жұмыстың ғылыми жаңалығы Ноғайды Ұлы ханға тәуелді тұлға ретінде емес, салыстырмалы түрде дербес әрекет еткен саяси қайраткер ретінде қайта қарастыруда көрінеді. Сонымен қатар, оның қызметі Алтын Ордадағы орталықсыздану үдерістерімен байланысты қарастырылып, түрлі дереккөз дәстүрлерін біріктіру арқылы Ноғайдың тарихи бейнесін қайта құру ұсынылады. Зерттеу нәтижесінде Ноғайдың Алтын Орданың батыс бөлігінде белгілі бір дәрежеде дербес саяси кеңістік қалыптастырып, мемлекеттің сыртқы саясатын қалыптастыруда белсенді рөл атқарғаны анықталды. Оның саяси дербестігі мен дипломатиялық қызметі Еуразиядағы көпдеңгейлі халықаралық қатынастар жүйесінің қалыптасуына ықпал етті. Зерттеу нәтижелері Алтын Орданың саяси құрылымы туралы білімді тереңдетеді.

**Алғыс:** Зерттеу АР23490261 «Ноғайдың тарихи тұлғасы және оның Жошы ұлысының мемлекеттік құрылымындағы рөлі» ғылыми жобасы аясында жүзеге асырылды.

**Кілт сөздер:** Ноғай, Алтын Орда, Жошы ұлысы, сыртқы саясат, Византия, Ильхан мемлекеті, көшпелі империялар, саяси билік.

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## ВНЕШНЯЯ ПОЛИТИКА И МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ РОЛЬ НОГАЯ

**Аннотация.** Данная статья посвящена анализу политических и международных функций Ногай в рамках структуры Золотой Орды в конце XIII века. Основной целью исследования является интерпретация положения Ногай не только как военного лидера, но и как политического деятеля, оказавшего значительное влияние на внешнюю и внутреннюю политику Улуса Джучи. Для достижения поставленной цели были сформулированы следующие задачи: определить политический статус Ногай в Золотой Орде; проанализировать его роль в конфликтах между Золотой Ордой и Илханатом; рассмотреть его деятельность в Кавказском и Причерноморском регионах; исследовать его дипломатические связи с Византийской империей и Мамлюкским султанатом; а также интерпретировать его функцию посредника между степным миром и государствами Восточной Европы. В основу исследования положен комплексный анализ средневековых нарративных источников — персидских, арабских и византийских, а также современной историографии. В работе применяются методы источниковедческого анализа, сравнительно-исторического исследования и политической антропологии. Научная новизна работы заключается в переосмыслении роли Ногай как относительно автономного политического деятеля, а не исключительно зависимого от верховной власти хана, а также в рассмотрении его деятельности в контексте процессов децентрализации в Золотой Орде. Кроме того, предложен интегративный подход, основанный на объединении различных традиций источников для реконструкции исторического образа Ногай. В результате исследования установлено, что Ногай обладал значительным контролем над западными территориями Золотой Орды и играл важную роль в формировании её внешней политики. Его политическая автономия и

дипломатическая активность способствовали формированию многоуровневой системы международных отношений в Евразии. Полученные результаты углубляют понимание политической структуры Золотой Орды.

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**Ключевые слова:** Ногай, Золотая Орда, Улус Джучи, внешняя политика, Византия, Ильханат, кочевые империи, политическая власть.

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