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The Mongol Invasion of Croatia and Serbia in 1242

The Mongol invasion of Croatia and Serbia constitutes a single, albeit extremely interesting, episode in the great western campaign of 1236-1242, so meticulously planned and executed by the armies of Batu, grandson of Chingis Khan and founder of the “Golden Horde”. Although Slavonia, Dalmatia and Serbia suffered less at the Mongol’s hands than did Hungary – the prime target of the offensive–, in each of these regions the advent of the steppe invaders caused havoc and induced unimaginable terror, as evidenced by the apocalyptic sentiment present in Christian writings of this time. The goal of this paper is to provide a narrative account of these events, one that can be used for general orientation, and at the same present new approaches and conclusions, partly based on recent scholarship not easily accessible to wider audiences.

The decision to complete the subjugation of the western steppes, which had began during Chingis Khan’s final years, was made at the quriltay (national assembly) summoned by Ögedei, the conqueror’s third son and successor, in 1235. The following year the Mongols dispatched a large army, numbering 150,000 men,¹ which quickly defeated and

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¹ The size of the Mongol army is hard to assess. According to D. Sinor, «The Mongols in the West», Journal of Asian History, 33, no. 1 (1999), 1-44, esp. 11, at a very conservative estimate this could be set between 105,000 and 150,000 men. For a much smaller force, see A. Borosy, «Történetírók a
subjugated the Volga Bulghars, the Bashkirs (settled on the slopes of the Urals) and the Qipchaqs/Cumans on the lower Volga, north of the Caspian Sea. As the last cells of Qipchaq resistance were swept away, some 40,000 warriors and their families, under their leader Köten, took refuge in Hungary, where they received baptism.\(^2\) Then, in the winter of 1237, the Mongols crossed the Volga into Russia, laying waste the land and sacking all the major towns and cities as they went, including Riazan’, Kolomna, Vladimir (1238) and Chernigov (1239). The Grand Prince of Vladimir Yuri II was slaughtered on the River Sit’, and on December 1240, Kiev, the ecclesiastical centre of Russia, was reduced to ashes.\(^3\) Within a few weeks the Mongols reached the western border of Russia and the Carpathian mountains that formed a natural bulwark around Hungary, their next target.


The purpose of the campaign against the kingdom of Hungary is a much-debated topic. While it is clear that the Mongols believed in a divine mandate to conquer the world, it would seem more reasonable to suppose that in this particular case their objectives were more limited. Ögedei probably wanted to punish King Béla IV (r. 1235-1270) for giving shelter to the fugitive Cumans and for murdering the Mongol envoys who had demanded his submission to the Great Khan. The invading forces were divided into several contingents, each entering the enemy’s territory from a different direction. In order to neutralize Béla’s Polish allies, divisions under Orda (brother of Batu) and Baidar invaded Poland, sacked several cities and on March 1241 defeated Bolesław V, duke of Cracow and Sandomir. Then on 9 April, at Legnica, the Mongols wiped out the army of Henry II of Lower Silesia, helped by a strong contingent of Templars (Henry himself was slain during the battle). Turning south, they raided parts of Moravia and

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6 Nine sacks of ears collected by the victors attest to the heavy casualties suffered by the Poles and their allies at Legnica. It is interesting to note that the 500 fighters sent by the Templars to the battlefield were not knights but peasants from Templar estates; K. Borchardt, «The Templars in Central Europe», in Z. Hunyadi and J. Laszlovsky (eds.), The Crusades and the military Orders: Expanding the frontiers of medieval Latin Christianity,
Austria and crossed into Hungary, where they joined the other three armies that had already penetrated the kingdom. Béla hurriedly mustered an army and marched to the plain of Móhi, near the river Sajó. On 11 April Sübetei’s forces, which had secretly crossed the river in the night, executed a sudden attack

Budapest 2001, 233-244, esp. at 237. For the battle at Legnica see R. von Donat, «Militärische Aspekte der Schlacht von Wahlstatt. Schlesisches und mongolisches Heer im Vergleich», in U. Schmilewski (ed.), Wahlstatt 1241: Beiträge zur Mongolenschlacht bei Liegnitz und zu ihren Nachwirkungen, Würzburg 1991, 89-108. Several other papers on that volume deal with different aspects of these events. For the primary sources dealing with the invasion, see Sh. Iwamura, «Mongol invasion of Poland in the thirteenth century», Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko, 10 (1938), 103-157; G. Strakosch-Grassmann, Der Einfall der Mongolen in Mitteleuropa in den Jahren 1241 und 1242, Innsbruck 1893, 37-52.

7 Strakosch-Grassmann G., Der Einfall, 53-67.

8 The main Mongol force under Batu and Sübetei, one of the most celebrated Mongol generals, entered Hungary through the Verecke pass in Galicia. A contingent led by Büri and Qadan, the Great Khan’s own son, crossed the Carpathians through the Bârgău pass into Transylvania, while another army separated into two divisions (one led by Böček/Büček, the other by a certain Boronday bagatur) seems to have entered the country from the southeast before converging at Alba Iulia. For a detailed discussion, see S. Tatár, «Roads used by the Mongols into Hungary, 1241-1242», Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Mongolists, vol. I: Prehistoric and historical periods of Mongolia’s relations with various civilizations, Ulaan Baatar 2012, 334-341.

9 Already before the confrontation with the Mongols, the effectiveness of the Hungarian military machine had been seriously undermined. This is partly explained by the strained relations between the ruler and the nobility, largely owing to Béla’s attempt to reinforce royal power. The arrival of the Cumans, whom he correctly regarded as potentially useful allies, but whom his subjects treated with suspicion, only deepened the crisis. As a result of these tensions, a diet that the king convened to discuss defensive measures against the Mongol proved fruitless; Jackson P., The Mongols, 62-63; P. Engel, The Realm of St. Stephen: A history of medieval Hungary, 895-1526, London–New York 2005, 98-99.
on the Hungarian camp, inflicting heavy losses on their enemy. Although Béla escaped (initially he took refuge at the court of Duke Frederick II of Austria), several of his commanders and thousand soldiers perished, while his brother Kálmán (Coloman) died shortly afterwards from his wounds.\textsuperscript{10} The following months the Mongols operated mostly in the part of the kingdom east of the Danube, terrorizing the local population and plundering the land. However, on Christmas Day the river froze, and they were able to cross to the western bank.\textsuperscript{11} While Batu and Sübetei moved against Buda, Székesfehérvár and Esztergrom, the political and ecclesiastical centre of Hungary, Qadan was dispatched in pursuit of Béla, who in the meantime had fled south-west, first to Croatia and then into Dalmatia.\textsuperscript{12}

Before we venture any further, we should pause to consider, in brief, the complex political situation in the Slavic lands adjacent to Hungary that now came under attack. Slavonia, the region between the Drava River and the Kapela Mountains, had been effectively part of the Hungarian kingdom since the 1090’s, if not earlier, forming a diocese under


\textsuperscript{11} Up to that point, the defence of the western bank of the Danube was entrusted to the \textit{iudex curiae} Paul. In a letter dated 21 January 1249, Béla credits Paul for holding the Mongols, so that the king would have time to escape; Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae, vol. IV: Diplomata annorum 1236-1255, ed. T. Smičiklas, Zagreb 1906, 382-384, no. 338.

\textsuperscript{12} H. Göckenjan, J.R. Sweeney, Der Mongolensturm: Berichte von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen 1235-1250, Graz–Wien–Köln 1985, 46-52, for a source-based narrative of these events; Göckenjan H., Der Westfeldzug, 52-59; Strakosch-Grassmann G., Der Einfall, 160-173.
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the bishop of Zagreb.\textsuperscript{13} Shortly afterwards (1102), as a result of the troubles following the death of King Zvonimir, the Croatian state, extending roughly along the Adriatic coast from Istria to Zadar and inland, was also incorporated into Hungary. This entire area was henceforth ruled by two Hungarian governors (the \textit{ban} of Slavonia and that of Croatia), but the local nobility continued to live by their own laws and customs, within an independent administrative unit.\textsuperscript{14} By contrast, Dalmatia was never fully integrated into the Hungarian crown. By the early thirteenth century, the main coastal towns (Zadar, Šibenik, Trogir, Nin, Split, Dubrovnik), governed by their own civic oligarchies, struggled to maintain some degree of autonomy in the face of Hungarian and Venetian pressure. The 1230’s were largely dominated by internal infighting within many of these towns, but it seems that Hungarian influence had been firmly established in most of southern Dalmatia.\textsuperscript{15} To the east, the greatest part of Hum (Zahumlje, subsequently western Hercegovina) and Zeta (Diokleia) were at this time under Serbian (Raškan) suzerainty. Several scholars suggest that Bosnia had also gone over to Hungary in 1102. No direct evidence of this exists however. To be sure, in 1185 Byzantium, following a brief period of nominal control over Bosnia, recognized Hungary’s claims in that region, although the political power that the Árpád kings may have excreted there


\textsuperscript{14} Berend N., Urbańczyk Prz., Wiszewski Prz., Central Europe, 247-248; Engel, The Realm of St. Stephen, 34-36.

\textsuperscript{15} Fine J.V.A., Late medieval Balkans, 149-150.
was limited to the north.\textsuperscript{16} In the mid-1230’s the Pope, alarmed by the growing number of “heretics” in the Bosnian Church (whether Bogomils or not), called on the Hungarians to crusade against \textit{ban} Ninoslav. Under Kálmán, brother of Béla IV, a Hungarian army crossed into Bosnia (\textit{ca.} 1238) and appears to have occupied a large part of its territory that remained under Hungarian authority until the Mongol invasion.\textsuperscript{17}

The political and military pressure exerted by Hungary on the lands south of the Danube posed a direct threat to the interests of its two Balkan neighbours, Serbia and Bulgaria. Serbia was particularly concerned by Kálmán’s operations in Hum (carried out in the course of his Bosnian crusade), while Bulgaria had recently lost to the Hungarians two of its most important northwestern outposts, Braničevo and Belgrade (\textit{ca.} 1235).\textsuperscript{18} In order to create a united front against Béla IV, an alliance was conceived, which was sealed by the marriage of King Stefan Vladislav I to Ivan Asen II’s daughter Beloslava, around 1234. Nonetheless, on the eve of the Mongol invasion, in spring 1240, a Bulgaro-Hungarian rapprochement may have been attempted, as indicated by the arrival of a Bulgarian envoy at Béla’s court.\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{17} For a detailed analysis see J.V.A. Fine, The Bosnian Church: Its place in state and society from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, London 2007\textsuperscript{2}, 121-130.

\textsuperscript{18} Fine J.V.A., Late medieval Balkans, 128-129, 123-133, 137.

These diplomatic maneuvers could hardly deter the invading Mongol armies, now in pursuit of the Hungarian ruler in Slavonia and Dalmatia. A number of contemporary sources provide detailed accounts of these events. By far the most important among them is the Historia Salonitana, written by Thomas, archdeacon of Split (1200/1-1268). The value of Thomas’ narrative lies in the fact that his sources included his own eyewitness observation and reports made to him by informed refugees. Several other thirteenth-century works contain important additional material for the Mongol invasion, most notably the Carmen miserabile of Rogerius, canon of Oradea, who in 1241 had fallen in the hands of the Mongols, the Chronica Majora of Matthew Paris, the Historia Mongolorum

20 The topic of the Mongol invasion in the Balkans has been previously researched by G. Cahen, «Les Mongols dans les Balkans», Revue historique, 146 (1924), 55-59. Useful material can also be found in N. Klaić, Vinodol od antičkih vremena do knežova Krčkih i vinodolskog zakona, Pazin–Rijeka 1988. I would like to thank Professor Florin Curta for drawing my attention to these references.


23 Magistri Rogerii Epistola in miserabile carmen super destructione regni Hungarie per tattaros facta, trans. and annot. by J.M. Bak and M. Rady, Budapest 2010; Göckenjan H., Sweeney J.R., Der Mongolensturm, 127-186.

of John of Piano Carpini\textsuperscript{25} and the \textit{Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh} of Rashīd al-Dīn (of the early fourteenth century).\textsuperscript{26} The information provided by these authors can, in some cases, be supplemented by archaeological evidence of widespread destruction that can be safely attributed to the Mongol armies.

While it is generally believed that Qadan’s army crossed the Danube near Esztergom with the intent of reaching Zagreb, there is evidence to suggest that the Mongols also occupied Belgrade, further south. Indeed, in his \textit{Itinerarium}, William of Rubruck, a Flemish monk who traveled to the Mongol Empire as a missionary in the 1250’s, reports that in Qaraqorum he had met a French goldsmith who had been captured by the Mongols in the Hungarian city of “Belegrave”.\textsuperscript{27} Some scholars have


subsequently suggested that the invaders forded the Danube at Kovin (a popular transit point from Banat into Serbia during the Late Middle Ages), where there is clear evidence of destruction dated to this period. Although this is not entirely unlikely, it is more reasonable to suppose that Belgrade was captured during Qadan’s retreat, while Kovin and the other settlements in the Banat area may well have been sacked by one of the Mongol contingents operating in Transylvania in the spring of 1241.

Upon receiving word that the Mongols had crossed the Danube, Béla, who is known to have been in Zagreb at least since May 1241, left that city for the Dalmatian coast, where his

but in fact, William of Rubruck may still be referring to the Serbian city, which from ca. 1235 appears to have been under Hungarian control; he also places faith in William’s remark that “Belegrave” was captured by the brother of Khan Möngke, that is Böček rather than Qadan; see J.A. Boyle, «On the titles given in Juvainī to certain Mongolian Princes», Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, 19, no. 1/2 (1956), 146-154, here at 147 n. 11. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Aleksandar Uzelac for his personal communication to me on this topic and for providing me with a copy of his book.

wife and son had already taken refuge. According to the archdeacon Thomas, the queen, having arrived at Split, was dissuaded from entering the city and instead took up residence in the neighbouring fort of Klis. Béla too refused to stay in Split, but departing with his wife, his entourage and his treasure, he moved to the island of Trogir, which was better protected. It has rightly been noted that the king’s decision must be viewed in the wider context of the Hungarian involvement in the disputes between rival Dalmatian towns. Suffice it to say that at the time of the invasion the citizens of Split were vociferously at odds with the powerful Šubić family, Béla’s allies, who also controlled Trogir. A contributing factor to Split’s resentment towards the Hungarian ruler was certainly

29 On May 18 Béla sent from Zagreb a letter to Pope Gregory IX asking for help; Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae IV, 128, no. 118. In response, the Pope proclaimed a crusade against the Mongols, although by July he admitted to the Hungarian ruler that help was unlikely until the German emperor Frederick II made peace with Rome; Jackson P., The Mongols, 65-66. From Zagreb, Béla also asked for help from the German emperor and Louis IX of France; Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis, vol. IV, 2, ed. G. Fejér, Budapest 1829, 220f; Ryccardi de Sancto Germano notarii chronica, in Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Scriptores), vol. XIX, ed. G.H. Pertz, Hannover 1866, 380 (a. 1241); Kosztolnyik Z.J., Hungary in the thirteenth century, 168-169.

30 "Sed domina regina veniens a quibusdam Spalatensium emulis persuasa noluit intrare Spaletum, sed composuit se cum omnibus regalibus gazis et consedit in Castro Clisse Sed domina regina veniens a quibusdam Spalatensium emulis persuasa noluit intrare Spaletum, sed composuit se cum omnibus regalibus gazis et consedit in Castro Clisse"; Thomae Archidiaconi, 286.

31 Thomae Archidiaconi, 290-294. The king is subsequently reported to have settled his court at the nearby island of Ciovo, further to the west.

the fact that on March 1242 Béla granted to the city of Trogir lands which Split had long claimed for itself.33

The progress of the Mongol army in Slavonia and Dalmatia over the next few weeks, in February and March 1242, can be reconstructed on the basis of the account of archdeacon Thomas, of a number of charters issued by Béla IV, and on information culled from several other, more distant sources, such as the work of the Muslim historian and geographer Abu’l Fida (1273-1331), who in turn drew much of his “western” material from the World Geography (Kitāb al-Jughrafiyā) of Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī, a thirteenth century author from al-Andalus.34 By passing along the northern shore of Lake Balaton, Qadan’s army crossed the Drava and marched quickly through Slavonia, despite the rugged terrain.35 News of their impending arrival prompted the flight of the panic-stricken local population, which is reported to have taken refuge to the

33 Fine J.V.A., Late medieval Balkans, 150-151. Thomas (Thomae Archidiaconi, 292) indicates that the citizens of Split had been unable to supply the king with a galley as quickly as he wished. Given that Qadan did not lay siege to that city (see below), Kosztolnyik Z.J., Hungary in the thirteenth century, 173, wonders whether the council of Split had previously reached an agreement with the Mongols.


mountains and forests.³⁶ The Mongols seem to have encountered organized resistance in a number of forts along the main route to Zagreb. Kalnik, a fortified town at the foothills of the mountain by the same name, was successfully defended by the count Philip Ákos.³⁷ In fact, there is some evidence suggesting the erection of defensive structures in eastern Slavonia around this time (especially adjacent to the Drava), a development that is often associated with Béla’s attempts to bar or delay Mongol access to the coastal region. These include the earthen fortifications at Mihaij, some 1.5 km north of the village of Vojakovački Osijek, by the river Glogovnica (on the eastern Kalnik Mountain),³⁸ as well as those at Torčec-Gradić (Phase III) in the Podravina region, near Koprivnica, which appears to have acted partly as a refuge for the civilians.³⁹ The presence of a cavalry force in that area is demonstrated by the discovery (at

³⁶ Thomae Archidiaconi, 294. At about this time the Patriarch Berthold of Aquileia, Béla’s uncle, is reported to have fled his see in the Adriatic coast and to have visited the emperor Frederick II in southern Italy; Ryccardi de Sancto Germano notarii chronica, 383 (a. 1242); Strakosch-Grassmann G., Einfall, 153.
³⁷ Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae IV, 190-192, no. 171; Strakosch-Grassmann G., Der Einfall, 166. For the privileges granted by Béla to the nobility of Kalnik following the Mongol invasion see O. Blagec, «Bela IV i kalničko plemstvo», Cris. Časopis povijesnog društva Križevci, 12, no. 1 (2010), 234-244.
³⁸ The defensive structures at Mihaij and its vicinity (Crkvari, Donja Glogovnica, Gradec) were reinforced and expanded in the fifteenth century, at the eve of the Ottoman attacks on the region; T. Tkalčec, «Vojakovački Osijek-Mihaij, srednjovjekovni arheološki kompleks na gornjem toku Glogovnice», Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu, 24 (2007), 453-472.
Gradić and Cirkvišče) of several spurs with small wheels. Nevertheless, it seems that the settlements in the vicinity of these forts (for instance by Đelekovec and Đakovo) were destroyed by the invaders. Indeed, archaeological investigations point to a brief discontinuity in the use of local cemeteries around the middle of the thirteenth century.

Equally interesting in this context is the discovery of a buried vessel containing a dog’s head at the cemetery of Cirkvišče—a ritual that is clearly associated with the Mongols. The closest parallel to this find comes from a near contemporary burial at Franciska, near Debrecen in Hungary.

Qadan must have heard of Béla’s escape to the coast already before reaching Zagreb. The greatest part of that city, including the Cathedral in the unfortified upper town (Kaptol),

40 Tkalčec T., The earth and wood fortification, 50.
41 In the 1230’s Đakovo became the seat of a new episcopal see that hosted the expelled Catholic bishop of Bosnia; for a discussion see I. Tóth, «Kaptol na južnoj granici», Zbornik muzeja Đakovštine, 8 (2007), 207-224.
was raised to the ground, although its bishop Stephen II (1225-1247) had accompanied the king to Dalmatia. The Mongols subsequently turned south and are next reported to have encamped by the river Sirbium (either Una or its confluent Srebrenica) in the Lika region. There Qadan ordered the execution of a large number of captives (Thomas’ vivid description of these events clearly relies on first-hand, eyewitness accounts), who apparently slowed down the advance of his army. He then proceeded towards Split, forcing the population of its countryside to seek refuge in the city, which was already crowded with refugees from other parts of the kingdom. According to Thomas, after reconnoitering its formidable defences, the Mongols turned back, not venturing to attack. A few days later they moved on Klis, some 8 km


45 Thomae Archidiaconi, 294; Klaić V., Povijest Hrvata, 225.

46 Thomae Archidiaconi, 294.


48 Thomae Archidiaconi, 294. Anticipating an assault, the citizens of Split are said to have constructed war-engines, presumably stone-throwing devices.
northeast of Split, believing that Béla was still there. The number of horsemen now deployed by Qadan was considerably smaller, a fact that was ultimately connected—as contemporaries rightly noted—with the inability to secure sufficient pasture so early in the year.\textsuperscript{49} Indeed, the grazing grounds of the Carpathian basin—not to mention the Adriatic coast—could simply not provide for the needs of a cavalry force of the size that the Mongols used in their major campaigns. These logistical difficulties would have placed very clear limits on the scope of Qadan’s operations in Dalmatia.\textsuperscript{50}

Strategically located high on a spur of the Dinaric Alps, the stone fort of Klis proved too strong to be taken by storm. The Mongols had not brought with them siege engines, but only bombarded it with arrows and spears. They are even reported to have tried to climb up between the rocks,\textsuperscript{51} a fact that enabled the defenders, led by the counts Butko and Herbert, son of a certain Osl, to inflict considerable losses on them.\textsuperscript{52} The Mongols stormed the outer city but there was no

\textsuperscript{49} “Ecce autem paucis diebus elapsis venit Caydanus cum aliquota parte sui exercitus, quia non erant herbe pro toto equitatu sufficientes, erat enim principium Martii asperis frigoribus inhorrescens”; Thomae Archidiaconi, 298.

\textsuperscript{50} For a detailed discussion of the logistical limitations imposed upon the Mongol cavalry by nature in agricultural areas, see D. Sinor, «Horse and pasture in Inner Asian history», Oriens Extremus, 19 (1972), 171-184.

\textsuperscript{51} This snippet of information must be treated with caution. It is well known that during sieges the Mongols stayed out of range of fire from the city. Instead, the prisoners or the conscripted levies usually performed the most dangerous tasks; T. May, The Mongol art of war: Chinggis Khan and the Mongol military system, Barnsley 2007, 79.

\textsuperscript{52} “Credentes autem Tatari, quod rex in Clisse presidio consideret, ceperunt undique oppugnare castrum iacientes sagittas et iacula intorquentes. Sed quia locus erat natura munitus, modicam poterant inferred iacturam. Tunc descendentes de equis ceperunt reptantes minibus ad superiora
more time to waste on a protracted siege of the fortress. Thus, when Qadan heard that the Hungarian ruler was not in the fort, he abandoned the assault and marched on in the direction of Trogir. Upon learning the news that the Mongols were marching against him, King Béla, too apprehensive to stay inside the city, boarded a ship with the intention of surveying the enemy’s movement from a distance. After reconnoitering the defences of Trogir, Qadan’s horsemen tried to approach the walls, only to discover that the narrow strip of land separating the city from the mainland was impassable due to the mudflats. This was followed by an unsuccessful attempt to obtain Béla’s surrender by addressing the citizens of Trogir “in the Slavonic tongue”.

What happened following the Mongol withdrawal from Trogir remains unclear. A clue is provided by a number of royal charters granting privileges to members of the nobility in reward for their role during the Mongol invasion. Some of these chapters, including one donating three villages to baron Ernye

coscendere. Castrenses vero ingentes lapides revolventes in ipsos aliquot ex eis neci dederunt”; Thomae Archidiaconi, 298; Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae IV, 349, no. 313; 352-353, no. 315.

53 Although he did sent some of his men against Split. These news provoked panic within the city: Thomae Archidiaconi, 298; Sweeney J.R., «Spurred on by the fear of death», 51-52.


55 “Qui veniens prope pontem, exclamavit voce magna Sclavonice dicens: «Hec dicit vobis divinus Caydanus, invicte militie princeps. Nolite reatum alieni sanguinis vobis apropriare, sed tradite adversarios ad manus nostras, ne forte involvamini vindicte eorum et pereatis frustra””; Thomae Archidiaconi, 300.
Ákos, ispán of the Varaždin county (dated to 17 November 1251), refer explicitly to military action in the coastal area. This information seems to be corroborated by Abu’l Fida, who, as noted already, relies for most of his material on the geographical work of Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī, a thirteenth-century author from Muslim Spain. On his treatise on Geography (Taqwîm al-buldân), Abu’l Fida states that “when the Tatars approached the fort of Sebenico [Sibenik, some 35 km northwest of Trogir], Hungarians, Germans and Bashkirs united their forces, inflicting defeat on the invaders, who were forced to return to their land”. To be sure, if any of the victories over Qadan’s army which are reported by the Hungarian charters or the Muslim authors are authentic, they

56 Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae IV, 463-464, n. 403. Ernye Ákos had also fought at the battle of Mohi, in the course of which he was wounded. See also Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae IV, 229-234, no. 205; 442-444, no. 383; 274-276, no. 240; 245-247, no. 214; 284-286, no. 250; 305-308, no. 270; 466-468, no. 405; 468-470, no. 406; 608-610, no. 526. A number of charters issuing privileges in favour of Croatian nobles (among them the Frankapans, counts of Krk) for fighting the Mongols have been dismissed as forgeries. See the detailed discussion in Soldo A., Provala Tatara, 381-383; L. Margetić, «Vijesti iz vjerodostojnih i krivotvorenih isprava o provali Tatara u hrvatske primorske krajeve (1242)», Radovi, 25 (1992), 5-14.

57 This is evidently a reference to a contingent of Templar Knights in the service of the Hungarian ruler; see B. Stossek, «Maisons et Possessions des Templiers en Hongrie», in Z. Hunyadi and J. Laszlovsky (eds.), The Crusades and the military Orders: Expanding the frontiers of medieval Latin Christianity, Budapest 2001, 245-251.

58 According to Saʿīd al-Maghribī, the Hungarians were divided into two different nations, the al-Bashkir (Bashkirs), who are Muslim Turks and live south of the river Dūma (Danube), and the al-Hunkar (Hungarians) who are Christians; T. Lewicki, «Madjar, Madjaristan», The Encyclopedia of Islam. New Edition, eds. C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, B. Lewis and Ch. Pellat, vol. 5, Leiden 1984, 1010-1022, here at 1013. For the Muslim population of Hungary in general, see Berend N., At the gate, 64-68, 242.

59 Géographie d’Aboulféda, 309-310, 312.
would have been minor affairs, won over small reconnaissance or raiding parties. Qadan’s decision to withdraw from Dalmatia was clearly not a response to military defeat at the hands of Béla’s forces.

By the end of March or the beginning of April 1242 the Mongols are reported to have entered Bosnia and Serbia, eventually pushing towards the coastal cities of southern Dalmatia and Zeta. According to Thomas, they bypassed Dubrovnik, where they were only able to inflict limited

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60 Margetić L., Vijesti, 13-14.
61 There were several factors at work that may have contributed to the sudden Mongol retreat from Hungary and Croatia. Besides the logistical problems mentioned already (the fact that the Hungarian plain could not support them any further), scholars have pointed to the divisions of the Mongol high command during the campaign and the continuous Hungarian resistance that may have prevented them from consolidating their power in the kingdom; G.S. Rogers, «An examination of historical explanations for the Mongol withdrawal from East Central Europe», East European Quarterly, 30 (1996), 3-26; Csorba Cs., A tatárjárás, 63 (Hungarian resistance); Sinor D., The Mongols in the West, 18-20 (lack of pasture); Saunders J.J., Mongol conquests, 87-88 (lengthened lines of communication, dissensions among the commanders). The traditional explanation is that the withdrawal had been prompted by news of Khan Ögedei’s death on December 1241; according to this line of thinking, Batu decided to break off the campaign and reassemble his army at a place where he could exert greater influence on the election of the new Khan in Qaraqorum. Some historians, however, argue that the invasion had far more limited objectives (most probably to punish Béla for offering shelter to the Cumans) – a task had been completed when Batu decided to retreat; Jackson P., The Mongols, 71-74; Berend N., At the gate, 35-36.
62 “Igitur relinquentes Chroatie regionem transierunt per ducatum provincie Bosenensis. Inde descendentes abierunt per regnum Servie, que Rasia nuncupatur veneruntque ad civitates maritimas superioris Dalmatiae, Thomae Archidiaconi, 300; “Videns Cadan rex, quod eum habere non posset, destruxit Boznam, regnum Rascie et indie in Bulgariam pertansivit”; Magistri Rogerii, 214; Rashīd al-Dīn, The Successors, 71.
damage, but set fire to Kotor and raised to the ground Svač and Drisht (Drivasto), further south. A number of other towns and forts seem to have suffered a similar fate, among them Sappa (southeast of Lake Scutari), which was rebuilt by its inhabitants several decades later. Most of the area now plundered by Qadan’s horsemen was under Serbian (Raškan) suzerainty, yet nothing is known about the reaction of Đordje, governor of Zeta (and son of Vukan Nemanjić) or Stefan Vladislav, the Serbian ruler. It seems reasonable to suppose that they dared not confront the invaders in open battle. Instead, there is evidence that Đordje, whose relations with the Raškan authorities had never been cordial, may have tried to take advantage of the chaos caused by the Mongol’s passing through Serbia and rid himself of Vladislav’s suzerainty. Much the same way, ban

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63 “...et pertranseuntes Ragusium, modicam enim illic potuerunt lesionem inferre, venerunt ad Catariensem civitatem, quam ignibus concremantes processerunt uterius hasque civitates aggressi: Suagium et Drivosten depopulati sunt eas in ore gladii non reliquentes in eis mingentem ad parietem”; Thomae Archidiaconi, 300-312. For the medieval settlements and fort at Drisht, in the mountains above the Kir valley, some 10 km northeast of Shkodra, see. K. Jireček, «Skutari und sein Gebiet im Mittelalter», in L. von Thallóczy (ed.), Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen, München–Leipzig 1916, vol. I, 94-124. For archaeological investigations at Svač, situated on a small hillock about 20 km east from the Adriatic coast (although in the Middle Ages the settlement was probably much closer to the sea), see Е. Зечевић, «Резултати истраживања средњовековног Свача», Гласник Српског археолошког друштва, 5 (1989), 112-117.

64 In 1291 the inhabitants of Sava civitas, “que iam longi temporis spatio destructioni succubuit”, asked for a bishop, which Pope Nicholas IV eventually accorded to them; A. Theiner, Vetera monumenta slavorum meridionalium historiam, Rome 1863, vol. I, 111. By contrast, Ulcinj may have been spared destruction, as in April 1242 its delegates concluded a pact of friendship with the authorities of Dubrovnik; Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae IV, 149, no. 134; Узелац, Под сенком Пса, 54 and p. 94.

65 Fine J.V.A., Late medieval Balkans, 138.
Matej Ninoslav was able to reassert his authority over most of Bosnia, including the Vrhbosna region, as the Mongol invasion led to the withdrawal of Hungarians from the territories conquered by Kálmán in 1238.66

The surviving sources provide no information about the Mongol advance across Serbia. We are only told that Qadan eventually joined forces with Batu in Bulgaria.67 It has been suggested that the invaders followed the road that run northeast from the Adriatic coast and thence along the Drin valley to Prizren and Niš, before reaching Serdica and the Lower Danube region.68 The Mongol thrust into the heart of the Serbian realm must have been swift. Towns and settlements en route were certainly attacked, but the destruction brought in the process has left no traces in the archaeological record.69 As noted already, it was probably at this time that Belgrade, located north of Qadan’s line of march, was stormed. Nevertheless, there was little Stefan Vladislav could do in response to the Mongol threat, partly because he was distracted by serious internal upheavals. Although the broader political background to these events remains obscure, it is clear that

67 “Iterum autem totam Serviam percurrentes in Bulgariam devenerunt. Ibi enim uterque dux Bathus et Caydanus conixerant suarum turmarum copias recensere”; Thomae Archidiaconi, 302.
68 Узелац, Под сенком Пса, 56; П. Павлов, Г. Атанасов, «Преминаването на татарската армия през България (1241-1242 г.)», Военноисторически сборник, 63, no. 1 (1994), 5-20, here at 7. The two Bulgarian scholars claim that during their advance, the Mongols destroyed the old Serbian capital Ras, though it has been shown that the coin hoard found there is of earlier date; М. Поповић, Тврђава Рас, Београд 1999, 306. I would like to thank Dr. Aleksandar Uzelac for sharing this information with me.
69 Узелац, Под сенком Пса, 54.
Vladislav’s authority was challenged by members of the Serbian nobility. Some scholars have claimed that the position of the ruler was greatly affected by the death of his strongest supporter (and father-in-law), Ivan Asen II of Bulgaria, in June 1241.\textsuperscript{70} Indeed, Vladislav’s overthrow, in 1243, should probably be viewed in this light. The Mongol invasion may well have generated resentment among his subjects, but there is nothing to suggest that it brought about his downfall.

By the end of spring of 1242 Qadan’s forces had crossed into Bulgaria, where they remained for several months. The invaders left a trail of destruction throughout the country, most visible archeologically in the central and northeastern areas.\textsuperscript{71} Yet, it has been argued that the enfeebled Bulgarian regency accepted Mongol suzerainty, thereby avoiding the same terrible destruction that took place in Hungary as a result of Béla’s resistance.\textsuperscript{72} The Lower Danube subsequently became the western frontier of a new political power founded by Batu in the Pontic and Caspian steppes. The “Golden Horde”, a product of the invasion of 1241-2, remained a dominant force in

\textsuperscript{70} Fine J.V.A., Late medieval Balkans, 137; Узелац, Под сенком Пса, 55.
\textsuperscript{72} I. Vásáry, Cumans and Tatars: Oriental military in the pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185-1365, Cambridge 2005, 70; Павлов П., Атанасов Г., Преминаването, 14.
the region for the next one hundred years, fundamentally altering the course of political history in southeastern Europe.73

The impact of the Mongol invasion in Croatia and Serbia is hard to assess. Undoubtedly, the scale of destruction inflicted there was considerably smaller than in Hungary, particularly in the eastern part of the kingdom (the Great Plain and Transylvania), where loss of life due to the war and the famine that followed has been estimated to as much as 50% of the total population.74 In the towns and strongholds that fell in Croatia and Serbia the slaughter was clearly widespread, and a large number of men and women –among them craftsmen– must have been carried off as slaves. However, overall, these areas do not appear to have been severely affected. There is no evidence that the invasion caused disruption of the population and the productive capacity of the countryside, nor that it brought about significant changes in settlement patterns, as was the case, for example, with the Great Hungarian Plain.75

73 Curta F., Southeastern Europe, 414.
75 For the transformation of the settlement structure in the Great Plain, from a network of small villages to larger settlements, each having an extensive area belonging to it, see Engel P., The Realm of St. Stephen, 102-103; T. Almási, A tizenharmadik század története, Budapest 2000, 100-101.
Nevertheless, after his return from Dalmatia, King Béla introduced a series of measures, aimed at improving local defences and stimulating economic growth. Thus, several stone fortresses were erected in Slavonia and the Adriatic coast, replacing older, wooden or earthen structures.\textsuperscript{76} The number of walled towns was also increased, and to ensure their loyalty the Hungarian ruler granted them extensive privileges. The effects of this policy can be traced mainly in Slavonia, the most important example being Zagreb, which acquired the status of a “free royal town” on 16 November 1242.\textsuperscript{77} Land and fiscal privileges were also granted to members of the local nobility,

\textsuperscript{76} Z. Hovrat, «Pozicije burgova tijekom 13.-15. Stoljeća», Prostor. Znanstveni časopis za arhitekturu i urbanizam, 16, no.1 (2008), 23-39, esp. 24, 35; Tkalčec T., Vojakovački, 462. It should be noted that numerous castles were built on private initiative; in most cases, the founders of these castles belonged to the ruler’s “inner circle”; E. Fügedi, Castle and society in medieval Hungary (1000-1437), Budapest 1986, 50-63, esp. 57.

\textsuperscript{77} Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae IV, 172-176, no. 155; N. Klaić, Zagreb u srednjem vijeku, Zagreb 1982, 73-85. The “Golden Bull” of Béla IV provided for the foundation of a new settlement in Zagreb, at Gradec Hill. This was encircled by a wall built at the cost of the citizens; V. Bedenko, Zagrebački Gradec. Kuća i grad u srednjem vijeku, Zagreb 1989. Royal privileges were also granted or confirmed to Petrinja (August 1244), Samobor (October 1242), Varaždin (October 1242), Dubica (1244), Vukovar (May 1244), Vitrovica (1248), Križevci (April 1252) and Jastrebarsko (January 1257); Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae IV, 157-158, no. 142; 164-166, no. 149; 167-168, no. 150; 227, no. 203; 264, no. 228; 374-376, no. 332; 489-490, no. 426; Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae, vol. V: Diplomata annorum 1256-1272, ed. T. Smičiklas, Zagreb 1907, 51-52, no. 577; K. Szende, «Power and identity: Royal privileges to the towns of medieval Hungary in the thirteenth century», in M. Pauly and A. Lee (eds.), Urban liberties and civic participation from the Middle Ages to Modern Times, Trier 2015, 27-67, esp. 41-42; I. Petrovics, «Hungary and the Adriatic coast in the Middle Ages. Power aspirations and dynastic contacts of the Árpádian and Angevin kings in the Adriatic region», Chronica. Annual of the Institute of History, University of Szeged 5 (2005), 62-73.
whose power appears to have grown considerably during the second half of the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{78}

In Serbia, the reign of Uroš I (1243-1276), who came to power right after the Mongol invasion, is generally viewed as a period of considerable growth and prosperity. Despite the continuing internal divisions and the existence of tensions with neighbouring powers, there is clear evidence of rapid economic development, driven mainly by the opening (or re-opening) of the rich silver mines in the Kopanik region and along the Upper Lim River. Particularly important in this respect was the advanced mining technology introduced in the country by the Saxons (“Sasi”), who probably came from Hungary.\textsuperscript{79} The first mine to be mentioned in the sources was Brskovo (near Mojkovac on Mountain Tara, in present-day Montenegro), which operated at least since the mid-1250’s, although an important market-place seems to have existed there as early as 1243.\textsuperscript{80} It is still not clear whether these Saxons arrived as

\textsuperscript{78} For the privileges bestowed by Béla on some members of the Croatian nobility for their services during the invasion see Kosztolnyik Z.J., Hungary in the thirteenth century, 184; Fine J.V.A., Late medieval Balkans, 151-152. In this connection see also H. Kekez, «Bela IV. i jačanje kraljevske vlasti u Lici, Bužanima i Krbavi nakon provale Tatara 1242. godine», in Ž. Holjevac (ed.), Identitet Like: Korijeni i razvitak. Zbornik radova, vol. I, Zagreb 2009, 197-220; M. Rady, Nobility, land and service in medieval Hungary, Houndmills–New York 2000, 49; Blagec O., Bela IV. i kalnicko plemstvo, 234-244.


\textsuperscript{80} As shown by a document from the archive of Kotor (later included in the city’s statute), which prohibited the export of wine to all neighbouring areas with the exception of Brskovo; Д. Синдик, «О Првом помена Брскова»,
refugees from Transylvania during the Mongol onslaught of 1241-2,\textsuperscript{81} or if they were invited by Uroš, who granted them numerous privileges.\textsuperscript{82} To be sure, the thriving mining industry, fuelled by the growing demand for silver in Europe in the thirteenth century, generated an ever-increasing commercial activity and urban growth, which formed the basis for the beginning of Serbian ascendancy in the Balkans.

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\textsuperscript{82} For their own mining laws and in general their privileges, see Динић М., За историју рударства, 1-27; С. Ћирковић, «Саси», Лексикон Српског Сред Лексикон српског средњег века, eds. С. Ћирковић and Р. Михаљчић, Београд 1999, 649.
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